



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: Learning to Communicate in the High Andes **Name:** Marla Kamiya

Other Team Members:

Program: Oakland Program

Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001 **Location Visited:** Peru

Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 02

Project Summary: A desire to be able to communicate with the Spanish-speaking parents of my kindergartners lead me to the high Andes of Peru this summer. With the support of Fund for Teachers, I spent two weeks in Cusco, living with a family and studying in a Spanish language school. I spent an additional week traveling in Peru and another week in La Paz, Bolivia. As I re-read my application to Fund for Teachers, my request to study Spanish seems very elemental. A teacher that cannot converse with the parents of her students? It should be unacceptable. Yet, thousands of teachers in California and across the United States face this challenge, or to put it more harshly, are profoundly limited in our ability to be truly effective teachers. We are indeed, in the words of educator Lisa Delpit, "teaching other people's children".

This summer, I did achieve my objective of "making a leap in my Spanish language skills". I was fortunate to have an excellent teacher at the Excel Language Program in Cusco; to share the life of a lovely, interesting Peruvian family for two weeks; and, to stumble across individuals who paused to share their experiences, opinions, and question me about life in the United States. All of these experiences helped to improve my Spanish language proficiency. More important, through this experience, I gained a deeper appreciation of the struggle of my students and their parents to navigate a new language and different culture. I gained a deeper commitment to help make their journey a success

Career Impact: As well as making a significant improvement in my Spanish language skills, I learned a tremendous amount about the historical and political context that has shaped the lives and options of the people of Latin America. In the ruins surrounding Cusco and in the Sacred Valley, I saw many, many examples of the ways in which a flourishing, highly developed culture was abruptly destroyed by European colonialism. And, after experiencing the marked differences between life in Cusco, Peru and La Paz, Bolivia, I am now very interested in the different paths of development for the countries of Latin America and the current struggle of the indigenous people of this region for political power. This trip helped to renew my sense of curiosity about the world and my sense of responsibility for the policies of my country in this region of the world.

I hope I will also be a more skilled teacher of English as a second language for my kindergarten students as a result of this trip. Now when I teach, in the back of my head, I can hear the soft, patient voice of my teacher, Beni, who did not accept incorrect Spanish and continually corrected me, yet responded to the meaning I was trying to convey. I remember her patience with repetition, making me use and reuse the same vocabulary over and over in many different forms. And I remember the number of times I needed to review, use, and practice new vocabulary and new structures before I could retain them.

I also remember the sense of security I had when conversing with the mother of my Cusco family. I knew she genuinely liked me and was interested in finding out more about me. I was willing to chat freely with her in Spanish because I trusted her concern and our mutual respect for each other. I hope that I give my own students that sense of security when they talk with me in English. And, I remember the importance of humor in allowing a second language to flow freely. A very special day of my trip was spent with two Quechuan teenagers who included me in their day off from school. They shared their very funny observations about tourists, their questions about life in the United States, and their feelings about religion, boys, school, and los ricos (the rich) of Peru. We laughed until we cried. I hope we can remain connected through email, but I'll remember them as I try to laugh more with my kindergartners this year than I did last year.

Classroom/Community Impact: My improved Spanish language skills have already helped me this year and will continue to help me in conducting meetings with my classroom parents in both Spanish and English. I will be holding four class-wide meetings with the parents of my students this year, including 1) a discussion of the California state standards for kindergarten; 2) a discussion of the first major language arts assessment, the strengths and weaknesses of the class, and how parents can help their children at home; 3) a discussion of the mid-year math assessment results and how parents can help their children at home with math skills; 4) an end-of the year review of the students' progress in English language development and ways that children can continue to improve over the summer.

My improved Spanish language skills help me to do more effective “scaffolded” instruction in English for second language learners. While teaching in English, I can draw upon my now expanded knowledge of students’ primary language vocabulary and grammar. I am better able to use instructional strategies such as “preview/review” in which students are able to utilize content knowledge in their primary language to understand information presented in their second language, as well as “contrastive analysis”, in which the differences between English and Spanish grammar are explicitly compared and discussed.

I am particularly looking forward to utilizing my improved Spanish language skills when I conduct home visits this year. Last year I visited the homes of more than half of my students in the course of the year. I learned that these visits help to bridge the gap between home and school culture for my students. Parents are much more likely to approach me with questions or problems if I have visited their homes. Students are delighted to have their teacher see their pets, favorite toys, and photos. They often refer to this visit throughout the year. I am looking forward to more effective home visits this year with my improved ability to communicate.

Since I teach kindergarten, my new interest in development issues facing Latin America is not particularly relevant to my daily curriculum. I do hope, however, that having a better understanding of the broad context that has shaped my students and their families makes me a more effective teacher in my school’s community.

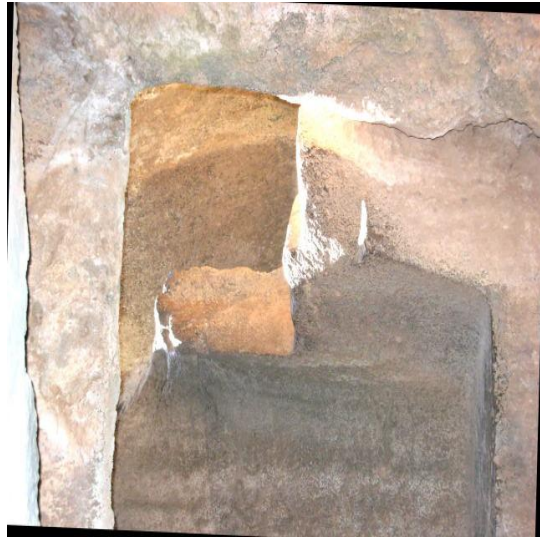
Open Response: I will be doing a report-back to teachers at my school regarding my trip, to share my experiences and photos, with the goal of encouraging other non-Spanish speaking teachers to work on their Spanish language skills and apply to Fund for Teachers for support. I look forward to implementing the plan of conducting four class-wide meetings of parents this year with the parents of regarding student achievement, conducting home visits, and having many hundreds of individual interactions with parents in Spanish.

Quote: I gained a deeper appreciation of the struggle of my students and their parents to navigate a new language and different culture. I gained a deeper commitment to help make their journey a success

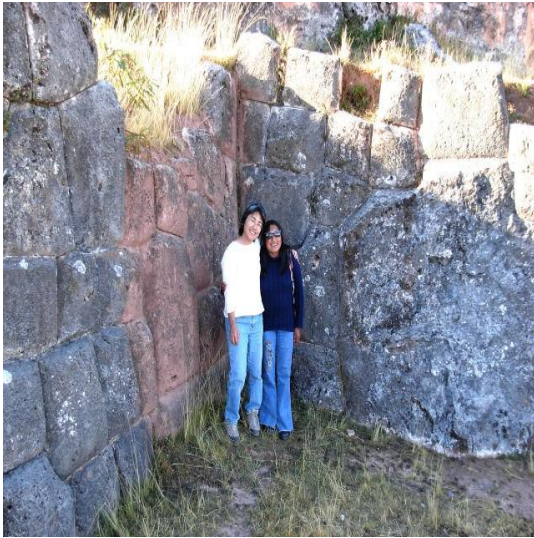
Photos:



Machu Picchu



An underground Incan altar at Q'enqo, with carefully designed natural lighting.



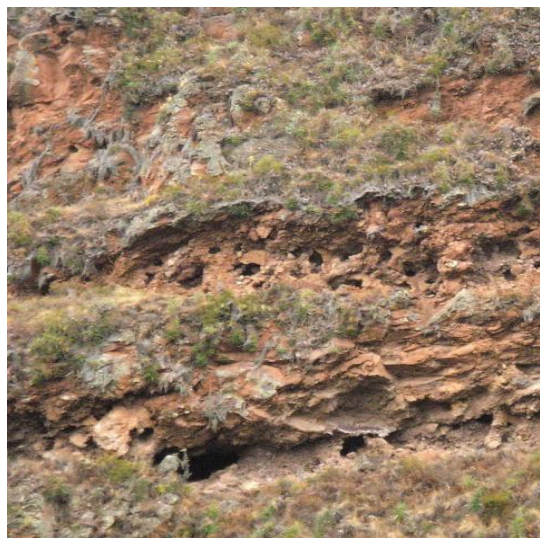
My new friend, Roxana, and I. (Roxana is one of the two Quechuan teenagers who adopted me for an afternoon.)



Rocio and Arak, the mother and son of my host family in Cusco.



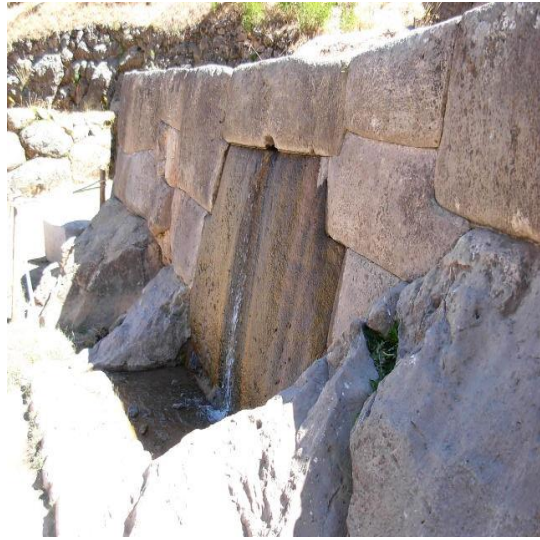
One of thousands of examples of extremely precise Incan stonework.



A post-conquest Incan burial site at Pisac. The Incas were forced to bury their dead on high mountainsides to prevent the Spanish from plundering the graves.



The terraces of Ollantaytambo, a major Incan ceremonial site in the Sacred Valley and the site of one of their few victorious battles against the Spanish.



A bathing site for the Inca royalty at Tambomachay. The water system still works beautifully.