



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: Explore the language and culture of special education in Mexico

Name: Cortney Fritz

Other Team Members:

Program: Oakland Program

Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001

Location Visited: Mexico and Costa Rica

Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 01

Project Summary: Teaching in an urban middle school where upwards of 60% of the student population is Latino, the ability to speak Spanish is a crucial asset. Furthermore, as a Special Education teacher, I face additional demands to communicate effectively and clearly with families and students. Facilitating many meetings at school, I generally was the only Spanish speaker representing the school and, despite years of Spanish study, did not feel I had the appropriate vocabulary and understanding of cultural practices to communicate complicated educational concepts to students and families. Thus, the primary purpose of my fellowship was to master special education specific vocabulary, proper grammar, fluent speaking and a comprehensive understanding of cultural sensitivities with regard to learning disabilities. Additionally, while in Central America, a secondary purpose was to study earth science as a means of preparing to co-teach 6th grade science. With these improvements, I hoped to be a better prepared and more effective teacher. Thus, I selected to first travel to Costa Rica to explore topics related to earth science. Through the study of volcanoes, weathering and erosion, oceans, and weather and climate, I significantly improved my understanding of and ability to teach sixth grade science, a subject I support as a Special Education teacher. Next, I traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico to study at a language school, explore historical sites, participate in cultural activities and learn about the Special Education system in Mexico. Improving my Spanish skills, participating in Mexican activities all helped me to create stronger connections with the families I work with. Additionally, studying the Mexican Special Education system and interviewing teachers provided me with the insight needed to better communicate with families about the culturally sensitive topic of learning disabilities and identify incoming students who may have previously diagnosed learning disabilities. Although it surprised and saddened me that the Mexican Special Education stopped after middle school, I was encouraged by recent surge in inclusive practices for students with learning disabilities.

Career Impact: *Provided an opportunity to improve cultural understanding related to my English Language Learners by spending time in different cultures

*Gained new perspective on Education in Central America

*Created a guide for Special Education teachers with students from Central America

*Improved Spanish language reading and communication skills

*Learned Spanish vocabulary for Special Education terms

*Improved understanding of earth science topics

Classroom/Community Impact:*Collaborated with school community on identifying new students previously in Special Education

*Improved connection with students and families from Mexico and Costa Rica

*Created new curriculum on Mexican cultural activities (e.g. salsa, cooking)

Open Response: *Guide to Mexican Special Education system and Spanish Special Education vocabulary

*Presentation on Mexican Special Education system

*Slide show of images from Mexican Guelaguetza festival in Oaxaca

*Interdisciplinary curriculum on Mexican History and Culture

Quote: "This grant provided a once in a lifetime opportunity to explore the home country of most of my students. Hopefully my increased knowledge and excitement about Mexican culture and language will translate into increased motivation of my students. "

Photos:



Traditional Oaxacan Weaving



Traditional Oaxacan Rugs



More Traditional Oaxacan Rugs



Oaxacan Festival



Oaxacan Festival



Exploring Mexican Ruins



Cooking Class Trip to Mexican Markets



Mexican Ruins