



## Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

**Report Title:** Bringing the Spanish Language and Mexican Culture into the Classroom to Forge Strong Family Partnerships

**Name:** Robert Sautter

**Other Team Members:**

**Program:** San Francisco Program

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

**Location Visited:** Guanajuato, Mexico

**Post Fellowship Reporting Template:** PFR Template 02

**Project Summary:** How can an English language speaker who teaches in an English language kindergarten classroom best support his Spanish-speaking students in maintaining their home language and culture? By learning their home language and culture, that's how!

As a teacher of kindergartners, I know that supporting my students well means working in partnership with their families; and forging a bond with families – that is, creating a relationship characterized by trust and respect – becomes easier and more meaningful when people understand not only the actual words being spoken but also the cultural context within which those words are said. Out of this desire to better serve my Spanish-speaking students by strengthening my linguistic skills and by deepening my understanding of the culture from which the majority of my Spanish-speaking students come, I spent my four week fellowship immersed in the language and culture of Mexico in the city of Guanajuato.

My students' success in school is linked to their sense of security and belonging. I have found that conducting home visits goes a long way in fostering this sense of belonging, this sense of trust – not only between me and my students but also between me and my students' families. My fellowship, therefore, was focused on the goal of getting even more mileage out of my home visits – of strengthening the bonds between home and school and thus creating the conditions for the academic success of my Spanish-speaking students – by improving my cross-cultural and Spanish language skills.

**Career Impact:** The learning goal of my fellowship was to increase my Spanish language skills and the depth of my understanding of Mexican culture in order to answer the question of how to better serve my students for whom Spanish is their home language. Through many conversations with my teachers and new friends in Guanajuato, I came to realize that better serving my Spanish-speaking students means increasing the status of Spanish in my English language classroom.

The reach of US culture and the English language is far and wide – Mexicans in the heart of their own country cannot help but be aware of both; therefore, the challenge that I gave to myself through my fellowship was to increase my efforts in the classroom with my young and impressionable students to ensure that I help – not hinder – my Spanish-speaking students maintain pride in their home culture and language despite the influences of mainstream English language culture. Since returning to the classroom, I have had to think even more creatively regarding ways in which to infuse the Spanish language and elements of Mexican culture into my classroom and curriculum.

**Classroom/Community Impact:** Working hard to improve my Spanish skills while immersed in Mexican culture and surrounded by the Spanish language had the effect of reminding me of the challenges that my English language learners encounter in my English language classroom. At times during my fellowship, I found myself unsure of my comprehension, for example, or dissatisfied with my ability to express myself. Living this experience, however briefly, deepened my sensitivity to my students for whom English is a new language.

Despite occasional linguistic blunders, my Spanish skills and my cultural understandings improved greatly in Guanajuato. My ability to converse flexibly and with greater detail has given me confidence to use Spanish in my classroom with those students for whom a few words in their home language help clarify directions or provide comfort. Moreover, with my increased skills and confidence, I have been forging stronger alliances with my Spanish-speaking families and have noted increased family participation in my classroom. With increased family confidence comes increased students confidence – and with increased student confidence comes increased student success.

**Open Response:** My fellowship has given me the confidence to pursue with renewed vigor the home visits that I conduct each school year with my students and their families. This school year, as a consequence of my fellowship, I am visiting the homes of my Spanish-

speaking students better prepared to address – in Spanish and with cultural competence – the questions that families have about how best to support their children in school.

In addition to creating stronger partnerships with the families of my own students through the improved structure of my home visits, I am working with grade level colleagues to devise and implement a series of family workshops open to all Spanish-speaking kindergarten families about how to support early literacy skills at home.

**Quote:** Teaching is all about modeling. By modeling a love for and an awareness of my students' language and culture, I am saying to them: 'I see you, I understand you, and I appreciate you.'

Photos:



The history and culture of Guanajuato unfolds below.



Off to class through the historic callejones of Guanajuato!



Teatro Juárez: A great place to chat with local people.



Whiling away an afternoon while wine tasting with friends.



The history, culture and magic of Mexico.



The local market: The colorful fruits are for sale but the conversation is free!



Cultural insights through history and art.



Cooking class: A tasty way to practice a language!