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Spanish Portfolio
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Esta es una cancha de baloncesto en Antigua, Guatemala. La cancha de baloncesto es viejo. Muchas otras cosas en la ciudad parecieron viejas como esto.
This basketball court represents what Guatemalan society looks like, even from this aspect, such as areas of “play” for children and other youth in the area. The basketball hoops did not even have nets on them. When we drove by this site, no one was using it. That does not mean that no one ever uses it, but this was a clear representation of the type of society we were going to be seeing. I chose this photo because there are many meanings underlying a simple basketball court. Even the wire that is wrapped above the fence that borders the court represents the type of society that we were going through. However, there is no doubt in my mind that children indeed use this court. These children do not know any other way though. They probably do not even know what a typical basketball court looks like. This is all they even know. When we walk around the towns in the United States, public basketball courts are usually filled with children, especially during the day, which is when we drove past this area in Guatemala. The economy of Guatemala does not allow for some funding to go towards updating or even up-keeping the basketball court. We learned in Spanish 258 that the economy in Guatemala is nothing like ours in the United States (Glittenberg, 1994).

I would have never thought twice about the symbolism of this picture if we had not taken Spanish 258 prior to our trip. This picture epitomizes the state of the economy and the society, but the typical tourist or traveler might not interpret it this way. Seeing a basketball court like this made me change my outlook on the United States culture and state of economy as well. Whenever I see a basketball court filled with “trouble” kids in the areas of town that are not as great as others, I used to look down upon it. However, at least the youth in the United States have a place to go to that is in a relatively decent state.
Occupational Therapy without Borders?
Este es un mosaico en el camino. Lo que significa que la carretera es accesible para discapacitados. El camino era difícil para las sillas de ruedas porque no era lisa.
This simple tile on the cobblestone sidewalk represents so much more than the public eye would probably even realize. With our occupational therapy and Guatemalan culture background through Occupational Justice I: Foundations and Spanish 258, we as students on the trip were able to find a deeper meaning behind this underlying social issue. I chose to include this picture in my portfolio because it portrays the conflict and issues that individuals with disabilities have in Guatemala.

The wording on the tile translates to “Antigua without barriers”, and it is trying to promote the fact that this road in Antigua is handicapped accessible. The group of students that was walking around the city with me all realized what this was, and we instantly began to discuss how contradictory it was. The cobblestone roads were most definitely not accessible for wheelchairs, due to the lack of curb cuts and smooth driving opportunities. Any individual who has to use a wheelchair to get around would have significant difficulty trying to maneuver around the city. The cobblestone roads are just the way that Antigua is, and this can limit areas and places that these particular individuals can go to. We watched a video in Spanish 258 that illustrated this negative aspect of the Guatemalan roads and way of life. One man who was in a wheelchair had such difficulty getting around the city because of these roads, and it was hard for me to watch. At one point, he was only on one part of one of the wheels of his chair while attempting to make a turn on the road, and it was incredibly dangerous as well. This then can result in occupational deprivation because if those individuals want to get to the other side of the town to go visit a friend or even just to see family, for example, then they are deprived of participating in meaningful occupations. This limitation is due to something out of the individuals’ control, which is the underlying definition of occupational deprivation (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010).
Este hombre joven está vendiendo las cajas del teléfono. Había aproximadamente 50 en su tabla. Este hombre vende las cajas del teléfono para hacer dinero.
This picture depicts the economy in Guatemala very well in my opinion. The young man selling the phone cases relies on his sales to make a living and provide money for himself and his family. Granted, I do not know this specifically, but from what we learned about money possessions and making money to provide for life necessities, I can make this assumption. The downside of trying to make money this way is that it is not very reliable, because not everyone in Guatemala needs a phone case, or even has a phone to buy a case for. However, this young man is determined to sell these phone cases on the sidewalks, in hopes of making some pocket change to buy something or to support his family. We learned in Spanish 258 that the family unit is the most important and powerful structure of the Guatemalan culture (Benz, 1996). This young man’s family might be relying on the small number of phone cases that he can sell, and he wants to do anything he can to support the other members of his family.
This picture enabled my eyes to be opened to the differences in how people around the world live and make money to support themselves and their families. This is the cultural norm regarding family. Contrary to the United States, the Guatemalan economy affects all members of the family who are trying to earn money for their family. It is common for not all teenagers and young adults to have a job. The majority of people in the United States who do work at that age are saving up money for something that they want or to have money to spend on the weekend with some friends. Granted, this is not every single case, but it is common. The Guatemalans are so much more hardworking than individuals in the United States, and this picture is just one example of how that is a true and evident observation. This does not mean that individuals in the United States are not hard working, but I think that Guatemalans do not know any other way to live.
Esta es María y vimos a los misioneros de la carretera. María está enferma a menudo y no recibe una nutrición apropiada. La madre de María nos dijo esto. La familia de María no consigue servicios de la salud.
This case was one of the most difficult stories that I heard all week at our service site, Missionaries of the Highway. Maria’s mother told us that Maria often picks up stomach viruses, and many times, these viruses are so bad that even her throat is affected. This causes Maria to be unable to take her mother’s milk; therefore, Maria becomes malnourished very easily. Maria has eight siblings, and her parents have trouble making enough money to support their entire family. The mother was explaining to the occupational therapist and I that there are some days that the children do not have clean clothes to wear. This family’s story broke my heart and made me realize the circumstances that some of these citizens are dealing with due to the economy and cultural lifestyles.
Maria’s case is not uncommon in Guatemala, but we do not hear about it as often in the United States. Maria came to Missionaries two or three times a week to receive therapy. On the particular day that I saw her, she was there to receive sensory therapy, a form of occupational therapy. In Guatemala, therapists view sensory therapy as something different than occupational therapy, whereas in the United States, the occupational therapist implements sensory techniques into therapy sessions. It was interesting to learn that they view these two areas of occupational therapy as different therapies all together.

I also learned that due to poor health care, there are many situations like Maria’s. The health care does not cause the infections or issues, but it cannot help the health status of individuals in Guatemala get any better. This situation reminded me of one that we read about in chapter three of To the Mountain and Back about the malnourished baby who ended up dying because of lack of nutrients and antibodies to fight against infections (Glittenberg, 1994). Luckily, Maria has not gotten to that level of severity, but it was definitely an eye-opening experience to see how detrimental this can be not only to the child but also the parents and family members.
The Unit of Women

Este es un foto del sistema de agua que las mujeres utilizan. Trabajan juntos en esta estación. Se lavan ropa aquí. Algunas mujeres pasan mucho tiempo aquí durante el día.
While we were driving through the town on the way to hike the volcano, we saw a group of about seven women at this particular water-washing area. The interpreters that were in our van were telling us about the system that these women have. The area is split into different “sections”, with some that are meant for washing and some that are meant for rinsing. These women worked as one unit, and they put their efforts together in order to be the most time-efficient. Some women were doing all of the washing, while some were stationed at the areas meant for rinsing. Even though they all brought their own clothing that needed to be washed, they worked combined their efforts in order to maximize the effects of the time they spend at this washing station.

I chose this picture because it really brought the culture and work ethic ideals into realization for me. We learned that the women work together for things, but I enjoyed being able to actually see this take place. It was interesting to me to see that this station did not have a roof on it either, which means that this action takes place in all types of weather. Also, as this picture depicts, the children of one woman are sitting in the wheelbarrow next to her. They have to come with her for the day, which means that they will have to be their own source of entertainment and such. From an occupational justice viewpoint, these children are not able to participate in meaningful occupations of their choice because of the state of poverty that their family is in as well as the economy of Guatemala (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010).
Culturally, I learned so much from this one picture. It put my research and studying to life when I saw how diligent these women were working as a team just to get their clothing washed. The value of hard work is so much more prevalent in Guatemala than in the United States. Here in the United States, there are people who put effort into the work they do, but definitely not to the extent that Guatemalans do. In addition, it is typical that we do it just to have some sort of outcome that we desire, whereas Guatemalans have this way of life to survive, and they know no other way to live and prosper.
Excursion Day: La Vega

Estos son los estudiantes en la escuela de La Vega. Los estudiantes nos mostraron muchas danzas Guatemaltecas. Llevan ropa típica Guatemaltecas en esta foto.
Our excursion day was packed full with education about the culture from the children at La Vega and people in that city as well. To our surprise, when we arrived, we were welcomed so graciously by the students, and they were so happy that we came to visit their small school and town. It did not take long for the students to show and teach us about the culture and history of Guatemala. There was even an alfombra on the ground that we learned about in class! My research topic was the religious ceremonies, so being able to actually see an alfombra in person was an amazing experience. We were able to see Guatemalan dances that were full of symbolism. All of the students were dressed in the cultural clothing, and we were able to see many different versions and styles of it as well, including huipiles (Glittenberg, 1994, p. 13). The teachers and students prepared lunch for us. They told us that this meal was typically served at special occasions, and it consisted of a beef stew, tamales, vegetables, and horchata, which is a rice-based drink. While we were eating lunch, the children were playing on the marimba, which is the national instrument. We also learned about this in Spanish 258. They even showed us how to play it, which was so nice of them because they definitely had to be patient with our learning skills.

After our time at the school, we walked around the very small town with the mayor, and he showed us the typical housing in the town and the mountains as well. Everyone who we passed was so friendly and wanted us to stop by to their house. When we returned to the school, the children performed a traditional Mayan ritual for a chicken that was very sacred. At the end, the chicken was sacrificed over a small fire. The children told us that they sacrificed the chicken to wish us safe travels on our journey home. That was so incredible to watch and hear, because sacrificing something like a chicken is very sacred, and it is not an every-day event. They wanted to wish us safety while we travelled, and we just met them a couple hours ago. I know that we all felt that we had this connection with these school-children, staff, and people in the village.
This particular excursion day opened my eyes to how the culture is so important to everyone, including the school-aged children in Guatemala. To us, it seemed as if they planned this day for months, from the intricate dances to the meal. We felt so important that they took the time out of their day to show us things about their culture. I learned that even though we can study and research aspects of a country’s culture, being down in that country and talking to citizens and children there is the best form of education. They were all so happy to show us about their culture, and I enjoyed seeing them so excited. I do not think that it would be the same if people came to the United States from another country, hoping to learn things about the American culture.
Service Day: Missionaries of the Highway

Esto es Susie. Susie necesitaba una silla de ruedas mayor. Vimos a Susie en nuestro último día de servicio a Misioneros de la carretera.
At Missionaries of the Highway, one of the rooms was stacked full with supplies and tools necessary to make proper wheelchair adaptations. We adapted children’s current wheelchairs to make them more appropriate and sufficient, but we also brought down several new wheelchairs to choose from if we needed one.

We knew that Susie was going to be coming to see us at Missionaries because she was the “case study” that we were given at the in-service prior to leaving for Guatemala. The chair that she had been using was definitely not a good fit for her nor a chair that was helping her get around easily or properly. As Susie was a small and petite girl, we had to find a chair that would be better suited for her size. We were able to plan for Susie’s wheelchair adaptations because we knew that we would be seeing her. While packing and planning for the trip, we brought some fun duct tape hoping that we would be able to brighten up her new chair and make it more kid friendly.
However, bringing a new wheelchair into Susie’s life was not an easy process. She came into the clinic very set on her current chair, even though it was clearly not the best one for her. As a result of the chair being way too large for her, it was difficult for her to self-propel herself by wheeling herself with her arms. She was over-extending her shoulders every time she reached back for the wheels because they were too high and tall for her stature. We showed her the chair that would be a better fit for her, but it seemed as if she did not realize how detrimental her current chair really was. With the help of our interpreter, Rolando, and the physical therapist, Flor, we were able to show her the benefits of the new chair. It opened my eyes to something that we had learned in Occupational Justice: client-based practice (Kronenberg & Pollard, 2006).

Even though we all knew which chair was better fit for Susie, she was not budging with her attachment to the chair that she came in with. We have to keep in mind what the client wants, even if it is not the best option or decision. If we fail to keep our practice as occupational therapists client-based or client-centered, then we are not being true to the holistic puzzle known as occupational therapy (Galheigo, 2005).
Esta foto fue tomada en la ciudad donde La Vega estaba. Esta es la familia del alcalde. Todos estaban tan amables y felices. Esta es una casa típica en el pueblo.

Things that Matter
This picture illustrates many aspects of Guatemala, including money and material things, family, and poverty. To this family along with many others that we interacted with in Guatemala, money and material things are not top priority. Even when we were just walking past this house, we were able to see the poor quality of housing and roofing; however, they were some of the happiest people I have ever seen. In reality, the most important thing to this group of people is each other, the family unit. The ages of people in this particular family ranged from about one year to approximately seventy or so, yet they still function as a strong family unit that can rely on each other and support one another.

This family’s house is a clear depiction of poverty in Guatemala, from the lack of complete walls to the roof that is partially complete and made of stone. There is not a real foundation to the house, but many houses in the country are just like this. The children were outside playing with each other, and they looked genuinely happy and like any typical children. They do not need expensive toys or fancy houses to be happy and satisfied with life. Simplicity is key for them, and I realized how different the Guatemalans’ way of life and outlook on happiness are from ours in the United States. Not only did I realize how different the two cultures were from this one experience and captured picture, but it made me understand how fortunate we are to live in the United States with all of the opportunities that we are given.
Interview with Andrés

While in Guatemala, I interviewed one of our translators, Andrés, about the issue of religion. I wanted to interview someone about religion because that was my research topic for Spanish 258, and I was interested to hear a Guatemalan’s opinion and viewpoint of not only the religious celebrations but also the rise of Evangelicalism. I was not sure when would be the best time to talk to someone about this. However, it happened to be when we were driving through Antigua on the way to our service site on the first day. While we were looking around the city from inside our van, I caught a glimpse of what looked to be an enormous sculpture-like piece of art of one of the stations of the cross. It was behind a large stone wall of a building in town. I turned to Andrés and asked if that was what I thought it was. Sure enough, it was exactly that. He explained to me that those are the stations of the cross that are displayed during Corpus Christi, the feast that I researched during Spanish 258. Being able to see things that I learned about was really amazing actually. The stations of the cross were so elaborate and beautiful, and we definitely would never see something like that here in the United States.

Andrés then went into detail about the procession in and around the streets of the neighborhood. He explained that it is probably one of the most popular yet beautiful scenes of the entire year. Alfombras are laid down on the streets early in the morning, and he said that there have been a few years now that he is able to see them before everyone walks over them in the procession. He said that you really have to appreciate the beauty of these intricate art pieces, but until you see them in person, you most likely will not truly understand how much work is put into them. Andrés went with us to La Vega, and when I saw the alfombra on the ground, I made sure to find him and tell him that he was right on the appreciation factor of those beautiful pieces. I think it seemed even more stunning to me because I knew that the school-children made this one.

I wanted to get Andrés’s opinion about Evangelicalism in Guatemala, because when I researched the religion, that was one of the biggest “issues” I read about. In his opinion, he has not seen or experienced it first hand, but he knows that it exists. Catholicism is still the prominent religion in the neighborhood that he lives in. He explained Evangelicalism is the “white elephant” in society, and I think that describes it perfectly. Everyone knows that this religion is beginning to take over, but no one really talks about it.
Lessons Learned

While preparing for our trip to Guatemala, we were told many times that the best resource is someone from that country, and the best way to learn is to live in that country and embrace the culture and way of life. Between Spanish 258 and all of the preparation we had from Occupational Justice I, I thought that I was relatively well-prepared for our service learning trip. For the most part, I believe that I was, but in the end, I learned more about the Guatemalan culture from Andrés, other interpreters, and our drivers than I ever thought I would. Those first hand connections truly are the most valuable resources that one can have while studying or living abroad.

I learned that interacting with Guatemalans can broaden my understanding of the culture than any article, research project, or book can. They are living the culture and way of life every single day. Throughout the trip, I grew as a person, and I know that I did because I became more confident with not only my Spanish-speaking skills, but also my confidence as a whole. There were so many things that I took away from this trip to Guatemala, and I know that I will never forget this experience.
References