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Lumos Travel Award
Guatemala 2013-2014
Final Report





In order to set the stage for the findings and adventures I experienced over the past year, I would like to put a little context around my daily life. I teach English to three grades, 7th, 8th, and 9th every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, my job title shifts to business advisor as I develop our all-natural body care start-up, Queen Bee. I also work in the creation of a private English academy, TEACH, which will open its doors in January 2015 as an additional income-generating arm for Centro Monte Cristo (CEMOC).

CEMOC is broken down into three main areas: Education, Health Services, and Production. A unique aspect of the educational model used by Monte Cristo is that the students receive workshop classes in the areas of carpentry, metal arts, tailoring, catering, or technical agriculture. In addition, students receive classes in accounting with the intention of giving them all the tools they need to graduate and go on to a trade school in order to receive a certificate in their field and start their own small business.

These classes are accompanied by opportunities such as citizen participation, values class, and personal development workshops. Every student at Monte Cristo receives two free, nutritious meals a day because of the belief that a healthy brain is a learning brain. In short, these students receive every resource possible to break the cycle of poverty and become leaders in their communities and nation. After 12 years of existence, CEMOC's director often says that the center is still only a child and that as it grows and matures, its output of leaders and entrepreneurs will transform the entire country of Guatemala.



Learning Spanish

To be honest, the first month or so on the ground, I kept silent almost the whole time. I listened and observed everything I possibly could in my new surroundings. We spent around 4-6 hours a day just studying Spanish. We claimed one of the tables in the corridor of the school and spread out with textbooks, notebooks, and dictionaries. I made countless flashcards and vocabulary lists every day. My progress felt slow for the first few months, like I kept hitting a brick wall where I couldn't explain stories in the past or clearly express my emotions outside of basic happiness and sadness.



Then in December, while on a trip to a beach on the Pacific Ocean called Monterrico, we were around other foreigners for the first time in months. I recognized how much more developed my language skills were in comparison to my new North American friends. This discovery gave me the confidence I needed to open up in daily conversation once we returned home to Chimaltenango.

Now, after speaking in front of a classroom in my newly adopted second language for eight months, I have mastered the words I use on a day-to-day basis and have begun thinking and dreaming in Spanish. I still learn new words almost everyday and look forward to everything there is left to learn. I think that learning a new language is a lifelong discovery of the endless nuances and surprises that language holds. I can't wait to continue in that discovery.

Exploring Guatemala and a New Culture

Eric and I had the time of our lives traveling around our beautiful new country. We visited Mayan ruins in Iximche and explored Lake Atitlan several times. We spent Christmas in Monterrico and Holy Week in beautiful Antigua. We accompanied the Belmont study abroad group to the highlands of Chajul. I also lead an Enactus team to Jalapa, Guatemala to visit the "Be a Blessing" orphanage in March. Guatemala is geographically the same size as my home state of Tennessee, but its diversity and beautiful landscapes are simply astounding.



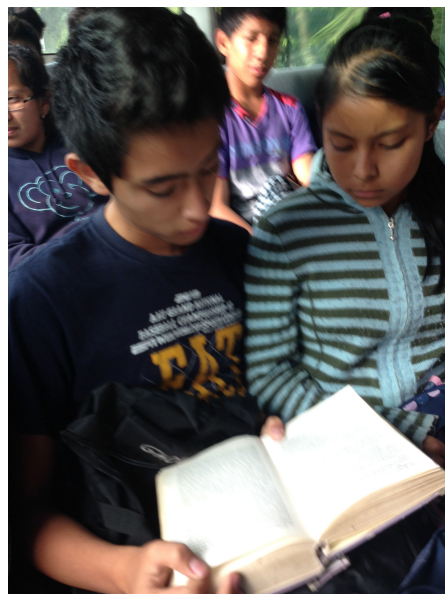
Teaching English



I work alongside an experienced Guatemalan English teacher to develop challenging and fun curriculums specialized to each grade and their abilities. My role as full-time teacher requires me to engage in discipline and personal guidance with my students. I spend an additional two hours daily with my students in my role as school bus monitor. This time with them allows me to get to know them outside the classroom and develop strong relationships with them individually. I have even lead or assisted in self-esteem workshops with my female students.

One of the main challenges with my students is the stark difference in challenges that I face with my students from the city of Chimaltenango and those from the rural towns of Monte Cristo and San Marcos Pacoc. I also see many difficulties in the relationships between boys and girls in their teenage years as they interact with friends, the opposite sex, and authority figures. As I never saw myself being a schoolteacher, I am proud of the respect I receive from my students and the impact I have been able to have on their lives in the past year.

Tangibly, my students have increased their English knowledge at an exponential rate. On the diagnostics test they were given at the beginning of the year, the vast majority of students were unable to write in the simple present verb tense nor identify basic parts of speech such as articles, plurals, or pronouns. At the end of August, they were able to write in full paragraph form in present, past, and future verb tenses. I estimate that they have learned over 700 new vocabulary words from January-August alone. This newfound English knowledge opens so many doors for these students. With English as a second language they are able to apply for higher-paying jobs, travel internationally, and study at higher education institutions.



Queen Bee

Within the production area of Monte Cristo, they offer goods ranging from metalwork, woodwork, artisanal handicrafts, catering, hospitality, tourism, fresh produce, and organic coffee. When we originally wrote our Lumos grant, we were under the impression that CEMOC was self-sustainable from the profits of these various enterprises. However, upon arriving, we realized that the center was only around 40% sustainable and relying on donations to cover the remaining 60% of costs. Within the first month of joining CEMOC, we were tasked with evaluating the current business and their viability as well as researching possible new ventures to achieve the goal of sustainability.

Based on experience with our prior trips to Guatemala with Belmont Study Abroad, we started investigating honey harvesting as a possible new venture. We traveled nine hours to visit a honey co-operative in Jacaltenango as a part of our research. During that trip we recognized that because of the limited amount of land owned by CEMOC and the proximity of Monte Cristo to both factories and livestock we would not be able to scale the business beyond 80 bee boxes. Also, it would take us almost three years to recover the initial investment with minimal profit the following years.



Fortunately, we had already begun investigating other possible bi-products of the honey and beeswax. We stumbled upon all-natural lip balms and lotions with beeswax bases. In November we made our first batch of beeswax lotion and it turned out pretty well. We continued modifying and improving the recipe until we had a good enough sample to bring to CEMOC's leadership. They loved the product and we began working with their graphic designer to develop a brand for our new creation. We finally launched the product at the end of July and are currently developing relationships with storeowners to sell and promote Queen Bee. Thus far, we have achieved around \$500 in sales and expect to be in multiple stores by the end of 2014.

Personal Growth + Future Plans

Over the past year, I have gained confidence in my ability to be a person who adapts. I am proud of the level of Spanish I achieved in a short amount of time. I treasure the friendships I have made in the past year both personally and professionally. I know that I have grown in relating to those around me regardless of language, race, or personality. I have discovered that I want to live abroad for the indefinite future and continue getting to know new cultures and countries.



I hope to eventually go on to receive my Masters degree in International Development, but I am incredibly thankful the Lumos foundation for giving me the opportunity to realize that on the ground field work is where I want to be right now. In the immediate future, my capacity with CEMOC will consist of three main roles: CEMOC English teacher, Queen Bee Director, and Co-founder/ Advanced Instructor of The English Academy of Chimaltenango.



I can truly say that Belmont University 100% prepared me for my year in Guatemala. My business classes taught me how to develop sound entrepreneurial practices and how to evaluate business ideas. My language classes and study abroad experiences prepared me for a year of studying the Spanish language and living in a new culture. My Enactus experience taught me how to lead others and think creatively about the opportunities around me related to social enterprise. Thank you, Lumos and thank you, Belmont University.