

My Life in México

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### Reflection

During my time in México, I took so many pictures. I wanted to capture every moment that I could. The longer I was in México, though, the more I realized the importance of setting the camera down. Taking pictures was important to keep memories and to finish this project, but by the end, I refused to take a picture when I was in a moment that I knew would only last for a short time. I just wanted to experience it all. I think that is the important part of this assignment. It is crucial to not just get the work done; we are so used to playing the game of “schooling” to get the job done. This internship was about experiencing and gaining real knowledge—not just taking pictures, not just doing the work. I tried to embody my experience through pictures without forgetting the real-world aspect of enjoying and living. My selection of pictures demonstrates the amazing experience I had, but it leaves you wondering. It makes you want to experience México for yourself. Every time I look at my pictures, it makes me want to go back because of the experience I had—not just because of the pictures I took.



Where: El centro, Querétaro

When: Day 3

Reflection: Day 3 was when I realized how much I love México. My host family was already so accepting, and I felt so comfortable with them. My first outing in Querétaro was to El centro where there are many kiosks, cathedrals, and street markets. When I saw the letters of Querétaro, my face lit up. I knew this was my new home.



Where: La vista de los arcos, Querétaro

When: Day 5

Reflection: This was the first time I went out without my host parents in México. One of my host father's employees asked if I would like to go explore a bit. We walked around town, and then he took me to see the Arcs of Querétaro from above. There is a myth that says a man who was madly in love with a nun said he would do anything for her to show his love. She told him to bring water to her people because helping others is love. Thus, he created the Arcs of Querétaro. It was beautiful sight. With a light breeze and a few fireworks going off in the distance, I felt like I was in a dream.



Where: San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato

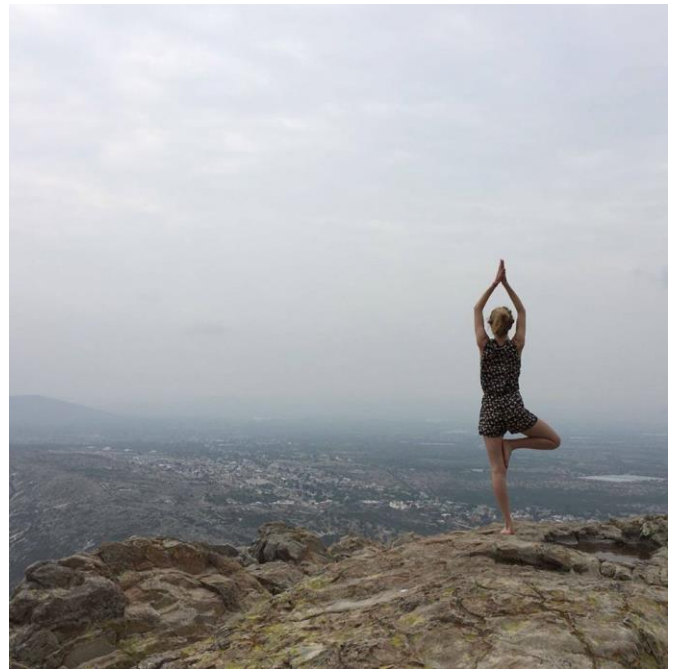
When: Day 10

Reflection: Sometimes you have to be a tourist. On Day 10, I went with my host family to San Miguel de Allende. San Miguel is filled with many international restaurants and cobble stone pathways. This town is known for housing many retired Americans. I think this picture is important because I enjoyed going to San Miguel, but it was not my favorite place. I much rather enjoyed visiting non-tourist locations in México. I was there for the culture, not just a good plate of pasta.



Where: Bernal, Querétaro

When: Day 12



Reflection: Bernal is a town in México that is home to La peña, the third largest monolith in the world. I am not afraid of heights, but we hiked up La peña, with rocks sliding beneath our feet and having to walk using our hands and knees, and it was a bit intimidating. On the way up, I was tired. I did not understand the importance of this rock. When I got to the viewpoint, I understood. I felt so small. It was peaceful. I remembered the beauty of nature. After our hike, I explored the town of Bernal. Of course, I had to try their gorditas, a corn, dough shell filled with various meats and vegetables; Bernal is famous for them. They were my favorite traditional food that I ate.



Where: JFK American School of Querétaro, Querétaro

When: Day 13

Reflection: I started observing in my second class on Day 13. This was an English class.

Right away, I noticed the differences in students' mannerisms, behavior, and respect. This English class focused on the variances of students around the world, and it embodied the diverse community of JFK American School of Querétaro. In every aspect, the students were taking in other cultures just like I was. In class, they were able to put a pin on a country that they lived in. The students really enjoyed exploring the world through their classmates and through literature.

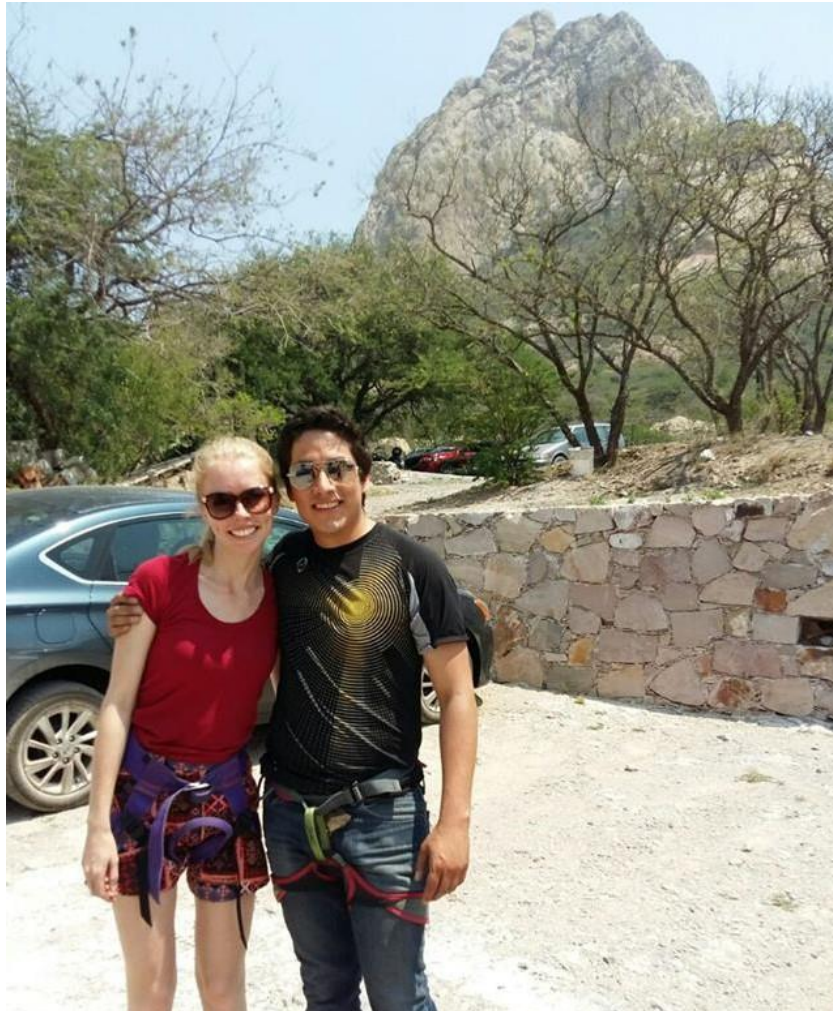


Where: San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato

When: Day 17

Reflection: A week later, I was in San Miguel again. Although I mentioned that it was not my favorite city, when I had the opportunity to return, I decided to go. Sitting on the rooftop of a quaint summer home, I was able to take in the beauty of nature that is often forgotten. For over an hour, I watched the sunset in front of me and the moonrise behind me. It was so tranquil, and it made me realize that the little stressors in life are not such a big deal—that the world is so much bigger than that.

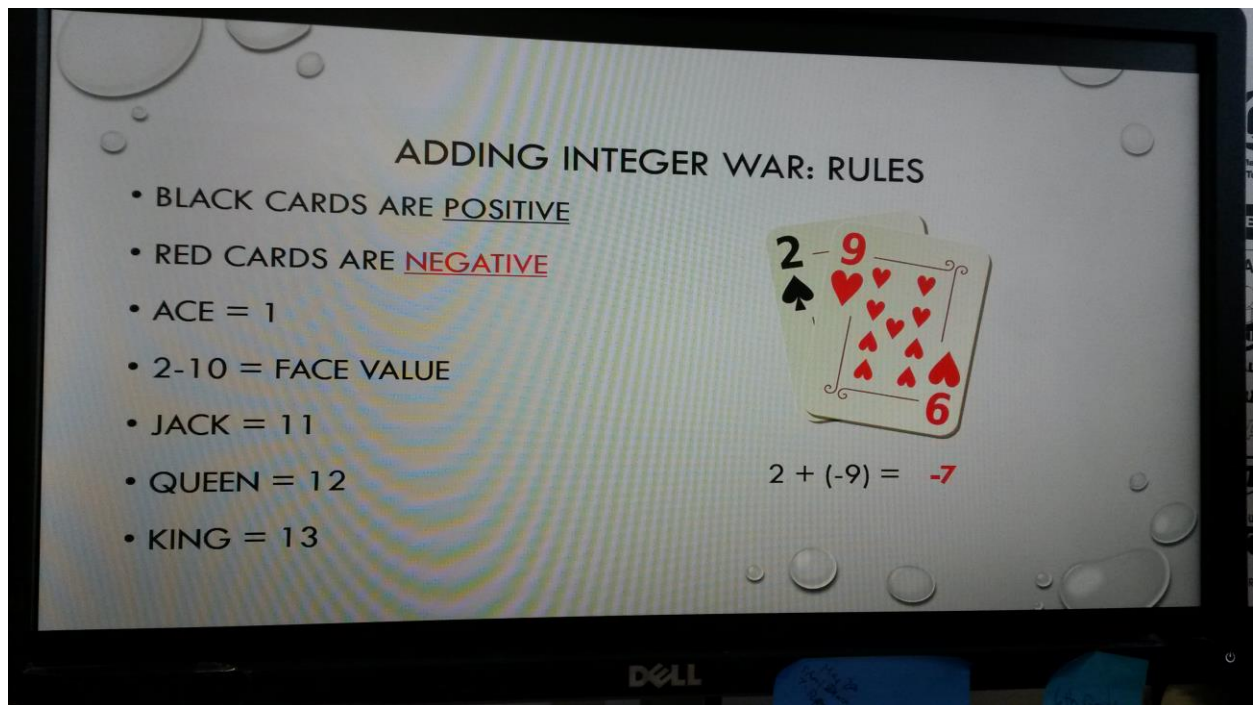




Where: Bernal, Querétaro

When: Day 19

Reflection: Back in Bernal, I decided, once again, to face my fears. A brother of my host father's employee has a license to take people climbing up to the peak of La Peña. We hiked all the way up to the point I was at last time. Then, we started climbing. I will always remember the brother, saying, "Find your footing, Amber." It wasn't scary until we couldn't find our footing because it forced us to look down. Even though the view from the top seemed similar to what I previously saw, I was so proud of myself when I got there. The climb was amazing. The experience is what I will never forget.



Where: JFK American School of Querétaro, Querétaro

When: Day 21

Reflection: Day 21 was the second day that I spent in my math class, and I taught for half of the day! Even though I had only been with my students for a few weeks, they were very respectful and appreciative of what I had to say. After the school day ended, I must say that I was a bit sad. The students made such a big impact on me in the short amount of time that I was there. I only had a week left of being able to teach at this wonderful school.



Where: Troncones, Guerrero

When: Day 24

Reflection: This picture was the kick-start to our three-day journey in Troncones. I was so happy in that moment. The Pacific Ocean was crashing into the sand behind us. The sun was hot, but the breeze was perfect. Rather than this just being a weekend vacation for my host family and I, it was a bonding experience—even though only one of my host brothers was able to make it. Later that night, my host brother lost his camera; and I stepped on a crab. These were the worst events that happened on Day 24, but after waking up at 4am, sitting in the car for six hours, and dealing with not-so-fun experiences together, I don't think any day could live up to this one. I will never forget the moments we shared.



Where: Troncones, Guerrero

When: Day 26

Reflection: Dreams really do come true. My weekend in Troncones was filled with the most amazing memories. Not only did I try many new activities, but I was able accomplish some of my goals. One of my dreams has always been to learn how to surf. After only three attempts, I was able to catch a wave and stand up on the surfboard. Feeling the power of the water beneath me was invigorating. This experience reminded me of my love for water. Even though I left the beach on Day 26 with a few cuts and bruises, I had the biggest smile on my face. Surfing was one of my favorite experiences of the weekend.



Where: My host family's house, Querétaro

When: Day 30

Reflection: This picture perfectly depicts my experience with my host family. Every moment that I was with them, I was laughing and learning. In this picture, I am learning how to make a Dutch appetizer using olive oil, garlic, figs, ham, and basil. Even though I was not the best at cooking compared to anyone in my host family, it was still a fun time in the kitchen. We were preparing these appetizers for my host father's birthday; every event—whether big or small—concluded with a fun get-together.



Where: Cumbres de Juriquilla, Querétaro

When: Day 34

Reflection: I looked at this picture frequently after it was taken. I do not have many words to describe it. Juriquilla became my second home on my trip. It is where I formed so many memories.



Where: Xochimilco, México

When: Day 39

Reflection: No matter what the situation was, my host mom always had a smile on her face. Truthfully, she is the reason why I learned so much on my trip. She taught me the importance of being positive and laughing even in the most difficult times. She taught me the purpose of hugging because showing someone you love them is often more personal than just telling them. She taught me that you can have everything going against you, but as long as you have someone by your side, you can do anything. Without my host mom, I would not have changed so much on my trip. She is a second mom to me.

Interested in seeing what other adventures I encountered in México? Join my Facebook group to read about my daily experiences at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/989925964426046/> ☺

### **Responsiveness**

The first few days that I spent at John F. Kennedy American School of Querétaro (JFK), it was difficult to pinpoint many social injustices. It appeared as though most of the students come from a high socio-economic background, are of the same race, and are able-bodied. After a few weeks of working with the students at JFK, I realized that the social injustices in their community may not directly involve the students who attend JFK. The main social injustices that I experienced involved the students at JFK and their interactions with the community surrounding JFK.

Every bimester, the sixth grade class at JFK—the class that I worked with—holds a service day. During this service day, the sixth graders work with students at a school in the community. This schoolyear, the JFK students worked with the fifth- and sixth-grade students who attend Jackson School [pseudonym]. Jackson is an impoverished public school. This bimester's service day included a field day where the students at JFK created activities so that they could hang out and mingle with the students at Jackson. The JFK students created this service day in hopes of building new relationships, and they wanted to help a school in need, as well.

After the service day took place, the sixth graders at JFK gathered to reflect upon how well their activities went. Although I was unable to participate in the service day project, I was still able to sit in on the sixth grade reflection of the event. I must say that I was a bit surprised by some of the comments that arose during the period of reflection. More specifically, Marcelo [pseudonym] said, "I think the students from Jackson felt uncomfortable here." My cooperating teacher asked Marcelo why he thought the Jackson students felt that way. Marcelo responded



that the children from Jackson probably deal with a lot. Marcelo, clearly recognizing the social injustices that the Jackson students face—whether considering the lack of school resources, fresh water, or sustenance at home—was sincere in his comment. Maximiliano [pseudonym], another student, shouted out, “We have problems, too!” Other students around the room nodded and cheered in agreement. My cooperating teacher nodded in acceptance of the comment. He said, “Yes, so we are not so different from the Jackson students.” Marcelo looked away in disappointment.

The aforementioned situation is one that I will never forget for several reasons. First, Marcelo’s comment was dismissed by the class. The other students who spoke up were unable to see the situation from the perspective of the Jackson students like Marcelo. Second, Marcelo’s comment was not acknowledged by my cooperating teacher in any way. In my opinion, this was a missed opportunity to deeply discuss the variances between the lives of students who live in the same state and are the same age. Third, I feel as though the students did not take the idea of social injustices into consideration; therefore, the students at JFK do not fully understand the magnitude of their privilege. Although every person deals with difficult situations, the students at JFK are privileged because their family has the means to send and transport them to a private school. Due to the resources that JFK provides its students, they are privileged with a better education, as well. They do not need to worry about their basic needs or schooling because these things are readily provided to the students at JFK. I cannot say the same for the students who attend Jackson.

Marcelo viewed the period for service day reflection as a time to bring about change. He realized that, even though the JFK students share some attributes with the Jackson students, their lives may be quite different due to the social injustices that they face. Even though the discussion

did not touch on these social injustices, it was a moment when I realized the importance of bringing this to the student's attention. Even though every student is entitled to his or her own opinion, explaining the varying social injustices that one may face is extremely important; this is something I strive to do in the classroom.

### **Resourcefulness**

There are many techniques that I learned while interning at JFK in which I wish to utilize as a teacher. Quite honestly, there are too many to write down. Although some of the methods were as simple as classroom management strategies, the most prevalent techniques involved culturally relevant pedagogy which aims to make students feel more comfortable in an academic setting by relating the work to their culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995). At JFK, many of the students come from a family where their home language is not English. At school, the students attend classes in English for half of the day. This way of teaching can be stressful for students who are not accustomed to learning in the English language. Although, students were only allowed to speak English in classes that were facilitated in English, the teachers tried to accommodate students who struggle by relating the class work to their home language. This way, students who grew up predominately in another culture, felt more comfortable in the American school (English) setting at JFK.

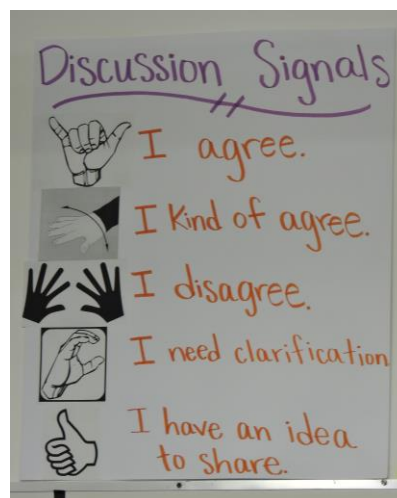
One of the most helpful strategies that I observed regarding culturally relevant teaching at JFK involved educators who were willing to help students understand English. For example, one of my cooperating teachers incorporated background information in Spanish before beginning a new lesson. Specifically, she clarified or connected new vocabulary terms with words in Spanish. One time, the students were learning about the social hierarchy of Ancient Rome. The lowest

social class that the students learned about was the plebeians. In Spanish, the word plebeyos signifies slaves. My cooperating teacher related these two terms to help make a connection. Plebeians was a new word to the students and plebeyos was a term they already knew. This helped familiarize the new term to the students through something that was more comfortable for them—through something that they were used to. This is an example of culturally relevant pedagogy.

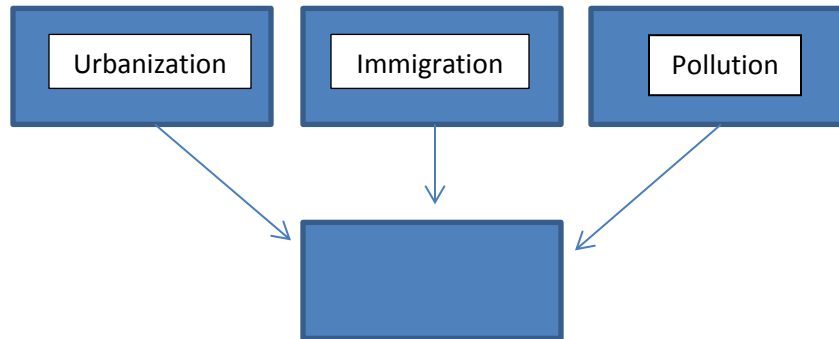
By demonstrating culturally relevant pedagogy, the students feel more accepted and understood in the classroom even when they are learning in a language they may not be accustomed to. This is something that takes a lot of practice, but I think it was very helpful to observe the teachers at JFK because they were easily able to incorporate it into their curriculum.

### Other techniques

- Agree/Kind of Agree/Disagree/Clarification (Discussion Signals)
  - During a discussion, the teacher can engage all by asking for the students' opinions.
  - This is great for students who are not verbal learners.



- Cuing
  - In order to give students enough time to refocus, count back from 10 seconds. The students should have their eyes on the teacher when the teacher reaches zero.
- Emoji Grading
  - When the students peer edit, they must give their partner an emoji to describe how they feel about their partner's work.
  - This is a fun way for the students to peer edit, and it is a relevant application for students. It is something they are accustomed to seeing and using.
- Model students
  - When students are following the instructions, announce their good behavior to the class so that the other students can follow the model student. For example, say, "I love how Amelia has her Bell Work out and is ready to start the class."
- Warning/Silent Seat
  - Although this method of discipline might not work at every school, it worked very well at JFK. When a student was misbehaving, they received a warning. If the student continued misbehaving, the student was sent to the silent seat—a chair in the back of the room where the student remained in class and could not talk.
  - The student was not missing out on class time, but the student was still being disciplined.
  - If the behavior continued, the student was sent to the office.
- Word Work
  - The students must know the definition of each word, find out what they have in common, and find the word that goes in the last box.



*Clue:*

*Word must end in -tion*

*Answer:*

*Industrialization*

### **Conclusion**

I never thought that a month and a half in another country would change the perspective that I have of other people and our world. My internship in México was not just requirement that I needed to fulfill for school. It was an opportunity for me to grow academically—by becoming my reflective, resourceful, and responsive—and personally. I would not trade the experience I had for anything. I am so grateful for all that came out of this trip.

References

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), p. 159-165.