

**Librarians Without Borders: 10 years of connecting with students and teachers in Guatemala (transcript)**  
**March 2019**

In April 2018, 12 really excited librarians set off to Quetzaltenango, Guatemala and we were part of a volunteer team from libraries in the U.S. and Canada as part of a service trip to the Miguel Angel Asturias Academy. In 2019, it will be the 10th year that librarians and library science students have visited this school.

The project is really exciting and involves collection development, program planning, teacher training, activities for the kids and liaising with our friends in Guatemala.

Part of our project this year was to introduce new resources and new activities for the students. Every year, the trip does an event called "Library Day" where every grade in the school comes through the library for activities curated by our volunteers. And this year, for the younger children the activities were centred around the theme of colours, so our volunteers created a beautiful, theatrical, colourful stage. They did a puppet show centred around the book *The day crayons quit*. They had colour-based activities and just a whole lot of fun with the kids.

The great part of this trip was that we had Spanish speakers in addition to English speakers, so we were able to offer some bilingual programming as well.

For the older students, the activities were focused around the theme of plate tectonics and earthquakes to correspond with what they're learning in school. We had some great structure and building challenges for the students where they have to test the strength of what they've created on an imaginary earthquake that we've created, using a sheet across a table. It was a lot of fun and the kids loved the challenge of trying to build something that withstood the volunteer-created earthquake.

Another aspect of our trip was teacher training. This involved talking about puppetry and how that can be used in the classroom. Not only can puppetry be used for drama but we talked about other ways it can be used as a character when you're teaching all kinds of subjects. The teachers gave very positive feedback on this training and said it was really interesting for them to be exposed to something that may encourage them to think of that topic in a new way.

One of the biggest joys of this trip is just to see the excitement of the students at the new books and the new resources that have come to their library. And even the simple interactions of practicing a phrase in English or us practicing a phrase in Spanish with them and just seeing the excitement on their faces of getting to meet with us and learn from us and learn from each other.

The teachers in the school are really committed to the experiential learning that happens in the school and the director of the school, Don Jorge, actually founded this

school in 1995 in his home with only 80 students. The school since then has grown immensely, it now has its own building and a beautiful library space that is really treasured by the community. It's like a living room, all the students take off their shoes, put on slippers and walk in like it's their living room and it's a really, really special, sacred place in this building.

Talking to the teachers helped us understand some of the challenges they face. They are really focused on exposing the kids to topics like gender equity and women's rights, and environmentalism. They are very committed to running the school in a non-traditional Guatemalan way. Don Jorge's big message is to teach children to critically think and to transform your own thinking and beliefs. So that the skill of critical thinking is really important in this school community.

I know all of us volunteers had an incredible time, just getting to know the students and the teachers and supporting them, in the short-term through our trip but hopefully in the long-term in the resources that we were able to provide and just the empowerment that people feel from having skills that they can teach to their own colleagues and teach each other.

This is my second time going on this trip and it really is an opportunity to invite connection and to be able to create a space that facilitates learning and growth and opportunities for kids in a community where a public library doesn't exist and school libraries are really aren't the norm either. So it's an exciting and very fulfilling project, to be able to contribute to this school and it was incredible to see how it changed over the last five years. The first time I attended was 2013 and then again in 2018 and I just hope it continues to grow and be sustainable and supportive to all the students at Miguel Angel Asturias.