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It was important to participate in the Puentes professional development opportunity because of my current and potential programming. The past year I taught two Hispanic women, originally from rural Mexico, vegetable and herb production and marketing. My Spanish language skills, from high school, needed enhancement and practice. I hoped to better understand the background and culture of both the families with which I work and the majority of Hispanics of Kenosha County.

The experience was very interesting. With my background in horticulture and botany I found the abrupt changes in ecosystems with the topography fascinating. I was stuck by the lack of environmentalism and, although I expected it in Mexico City, the significant air pollution in other urban areas. I was surprised by the small number of “backyard” vegetable gardens. Especially in towns and cities, fresh produce is grown on small production plots and sold at markets or by street vendors. Another surprise was few people used a kitchen oven. Baked goods, like leavened breads and pastries, are purchased at commercial bakeries.

There was a fascinating and distinct difference in rural women’s’ roles between the “traditional” Mexican village and the indigenous village we visited. The people of Spanish descent were very patriarchal and the native culture more equal.

At least two presentations will be developed in the next couple of months to share the observations and cultural knowledge I’ve gained. I plan to use these presentations locally, regionally, and possibly statewide with colleagues and other people working with or interested in Mexican immigrants. I have a much better understanding of the cultures, traditions and language of Mexican immigrants. I believe this will improve my programming directly to Hispanic audiences and in communicating their culture and issues to non-Hispanics.