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I participated in the Puentes Program for several reasons. The first was to improve my Spanish-language skills. The cultural immersion aspect of this program was also of great importance so that I could make my lessons more culturally relevant. I thought that immersing myself in Mexican culture would help me better understand popular foods, food shopping, food production practices and the traditions and attitudes around food, which, in turn would make me a better nutrition educator for the Latino community. For this same reason, I felt a great need to better understand the issues surrounding immigration, employment, documentation and family separation. I also applied for the trip with the intention of returning and helping to plan future immersion trips as well as share my experience with my Extension co-workers and our partnering community organizations.

As a result of the language classes, I did improve my Spanish skills immensely. Being immersed in Mexican culture, especially in the homestay, did give me many opportunities to make observations and talk to people about food and nutrition in Mexico. I also had the opportunity to teach a nutrition lesson at the Buenavista School for Handicapped Children with fellow nutrition educator, Christina Grazia-Parente, which was a unique, eye-opening and powerful experience. We had the chance to meet with families of Mexican farm workers in Wisconsin. Through this I saw the impact of immigration and family separation not only on Mexico but on the United States, as well. We also had the opportunity to listen to several experts on the topics of contemporary Mexican social problems, United States/Mexico relations, indigenous peoples of Mexico and indigenous medicinal practices.

I plan on using what I learned, first of all, in my classrooms to better communicate with and more effectively teach my students as a result of my improved language skills and deeper cultural understanding. I also will give a presentation about my experience and what I learned to my Extension co-workers in Dane County. I am pursuing sharing my experience with MMSD and MSCR professionals.