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Survey of Professional Education Background in Guatemalan Speech-Language Pathologists

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This project was developed after completing the Summer 2015 WWU Global Learning Program, Guatemala: Building Cross-Cultural Connections. The program was a service learning trip that included house building for families in need, volunteering in a clinic for malnourished infants, and teaching language and literacy to primary school children through the Asociación Nuestros Ahijados.

In Guatemala, we met a speech-language pathologist who is also the Founder and Executive Director of Asociación Brillo de Sol—an organization that serves special needs children in La Antigua, Guatemala. Founded in 2005, Brillo de Sol provides educational and rehabilitation services to students with a variety of disabilities, including learning disabilities, emotional problems, autism, deafness, blindness, and speech-language difficulties (Asociación Brillo de Sol, 2016).

In 2013, the Executive Director of Brillo de Sol organized The First National Congress of the Guatemalan Institute of Language and Communication with the aim of increasing professional development for speech-language pathologists in Guatemala. Brillo de Sol is also partnered with Universidad Rafael Landivar’s new speech therapy “licenciatura”, or four year degree program, which is an expansion of the previously offered three year “technica” speech therapy program (Asociación Brillo de Sol, 2016).

The survey was developed based on the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s “Big Nine” areas of clinical practice for American speech-language pathologists. The survey aims to elicit the following: what subject areas were taught in Guatemalan speech-language pathology programs, what subject areas speech-language pathologists would like to receive more education in, and any situations that speech-language pathologists have come across in professional practice where they have felt they wanted, or needed, more knowledge to treat an individual. This survey was translated into Spanish and was sent via the online survey platform, SurveyMonkey, to the Executive Director of Brillo de Sol. The Executive Director will then distribute the survey to speech therapists in Guatemala. Data from the survey can be analyzed online from the survey platform, SurveyMonkey, in order to determine areas of interest and need for professional development within the field of speech-language pathology.

The present survey aims to gain insight into the educational background of Guatemalan speech-language pathologists in order to promote and provide access to professional development in the field. A survey of professional education background in speech-language pathology was developed and distributed to Guatemalan professionals at Brillo de Sol as a response to concerns expressed by the Executive Director of instances when her fellow colleagues and herself lacked the professional knowledge to best treat individuals with speech and language difficulties.

“Development is about transforming the lives of people, not just transforming economies” (Page 50, Stiglitz). The data collected from this survey can be used to provide a continuing education workshop, or to provide related materials, for Guatemalan speech language pathologists working at Brillo de Sol during the Summer 2016 WWU Global Learning Program, Guatemala: Building Cross-Cultural Connections. The survey can also be used more broadly to assess the educational background and further educational needs of professional speech therapists in other parts of Guatemala and Central America.

According to a survey done by Wagner and Fagan, Guatemala has a scarcity of professional training, services, and clinicians in the field of speech-language pathology in comparison to the United States (2013). Therefore, there is an unmet need for trained professionals to provide speech and language services in Guatemala—especially to indigenous populations and in rural areas. Further support of Guatemalan speech-language pathology professional development could assist advancement in the field, and further forge connections with American speech-language pathologists.