Liesel Theusch

Guatemala Orphanage Volunteer & Host Family Experience

Week 2

Competency: Global Citizenship ~ Communication Level 3: Recognizes and participates in cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication.

This week I have become adjusted to my volunteer working in the orphanage and life with my host family. Similar to meal time in the US when all family members or friends are present, each meal is shared. Lunch takes place after the kids return from school at 2pm, and supper is held once everyone has returned from their nightly activities. At times, everyone is unable to fit at the 6-foot table, but everyone still eats at the same time. With the family of five, any volunteers in the households, and the occasional friends or family members, this is no small feat. It’s usually accomplished by members taking turns at the table and sitting to the side once they have finished eating so others can sit down, but everyone usually remains in the dining space and kitchen after they have finished. It is a cozy and welcoming feeling to sit with the family after the meal and listen to what everyone has been up to throughout the day. With the hustle and bustle of the college life and even a busy family life while I was in high school this dedicated time for family to gather on a regular basis was a welcome change.

At meal times, I noticed one word being used that I had not learned in class. At the end of every meal, as each family member gets up to leave the table and say thank you or “Gracias”, the entire family still at the table says “Provecho” instead of “De nada” which is the usual response to thanks. In Spanish-speaking cultures, “provecho” means that you hope they enjoyed their meal and a thank you for sharing it with us. Even if I stop in the kitchen for a cup of coffee, Mom responds with “provecho”. It makes each family member know that they were appreciated at the meal, snack, or simple cup of coffee. I haven’t had the chance to observe an argument at the table, if it ever occurs, so I am curious if the entire family will still use this salutation if everyone is not on the best of terms.