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SPA 280

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Cultural Event - Zapotec

On Friday, May 10th I attended a cultural event regarding the Zapotec language and identity in San Jerónimo Tlacoahuaya, Oaxaco, Mexico. The event included a documentary project screening followed by a panel discussion with several members of local indigenous communities. The film was a joint project between Film and Linguistics Students and explored the importance of Zapotec language/identity through various community members. Zapotec is a family of indigenous languages spoken in Mexico and is danger of dying out and children are not being taught it. This project and event as a whole has served as an attempt to shed light on a culture and struggles like discrimination. The film was broken into several parts including talking about Language Access, and interviewing persons during their daily life. One common theme among Zapotec people was that they identify as Zapotec because they speak the language and they were taught it from their ancestors. Other factors regarding identity included being able to speak their language with others and feeling connected with their culture through playing traditional music. Identity centers around ancestry and traditional practices.

It was very interesting to watch the documentary and learn about a different language and culture. I had never heard of “Zapotec” in any regard nor the extent of the issues Indigenous people face which I learned about through the discussion with the

Panelists. It is also very helpful and informative to learn something that may not be already on the forefront of one's mind. Events like these can help bridge cultural barriers and lead to a more inclusive community. I also think identity is something that we are always reconfiguring. Some aspects that the Panelists contributed to the ingredients of identity are language, arts, food, and dance; I also add religion because it is another important formative aspect of identity.

I am able to connect this experience with a few other experiences that I have had. In a Spanish class at Gustavus (SPA 250), we learned about Negotiating Differences in the Hispanic World. Among other things, some takeaways from the Language Buddies opportunity included learning the importance of interpersonal communication with those who may be different than us, especially in regards to language and culture. Through Language Buddies and Amiguitos, we were able to be involved in the community and help bridge some language barriers that are present in our community. Likewise with any community service, this is a step towards a more inclusive and amicable society.

I was surprised learning about the different issues that Indigenous people still face, especially racism. It upsets me that people can't just get along or they make it very difficult to. Watching the film and listening to the panelists confirmed how unique each person and culture is, and we can all stand to learn and gain something from interacting with others. I am thankful I was able to hear and be more educated about problems that other people have to face on a daily basis and that I don't. Learning about this, in all

walks of life helps people to work together to create a better and more dynamic community.