

2018 Student Media Grant Program – Final Report

Photo with Coffee

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Photo with Coffee – SMGP Program

1. "What shall we do, miss?"

Learning about the project and how it started

What was my Student Media Grant Program about?

Photo with coffee: Guatemala children telling their stories was a project in which Guatemalan children could tell their own stories through photographs. They produced, took photos and developed their films using *Caffenol**. I am Maryanna Nascimento; the tutor. The children were the directors, actors or whatever they wanted to be during the project.

**Caffenol* is a photographic alternative process that is easily found in coffee, Vitamin C, sodium carbonate (used in aqueous solution). The coffee is the main raw material used in the project, and besides of being in the basic food basket of Guatemalans, is one of the leading export products in the country.



Guatemala City - María Concepción School; Self-portrait

How did it start?

In August 2017, I read a story on the website of the Associação Brasileira de Jornalismo Investigativo (Abraji) announcing a photojournalism scholarship available through Texas A&M University's Center on Conflict and Development for students to conduct a photojournalism project in a conflict-affected area. The program was:

- Open to undergraduate and graduate students from all over the world
- No restrictions on project location, except for countries under travel warning
- No requirement to speak the native language

At the time, I was working in a project to conclude my studies. I was using as reference a book full of reports from Brazilian journalists who covered the Syrian war. In the turmoil of this production, I decided to dedicate a month to produce the Photo and coffee Project. I saw it as an opportunity to take a first step towards the study of human rights in journalism.

After reading and re-reading the instructions offered by the funding organization, the Center on Conflict and Development (ConDev) at Texas A&M University, I began to brainstorm ideas about the project. The initial idea was to produce something directed to Syria context that I had some knowledge of. However, I changed my mind after I had spoken with Miguel Pachioni, senior public information assistant at the UN Refugee Program (Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para os Refugiados (ACNUR-BR). After some emails asking for help to enter in the refugee camp in Za'atari, Jordan, he wrote about another issue: The Central Triangle of North America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador). So I researched the topic and after reading the Children on The Run report, I was fully convinced to conduct this program in Central America.

So, why Guatemala?

ConDev had no restriction of places to conduct an SMGP project, except for countries that were under a US government travel alert. Honduras and El Salvador were on the list. It left me with Guatemala.

But what was Guatemala like? At first, a colorful country (from traditional dresses to colorful buses), 'the cradle of Mayan civilization'. Also, a country with a history of exploitation and struggles. A country where children are responsible for 20% of national GDP (PIB- Pesquisa Nacional de Condições de Vida, 2011); a country where unionizing often means being murdered; a country where malnutrition affects more than half of the population - but, of course, those same workers feed families across the border. A country of history, and of resilience. A multilingual country- more than twenty languages, although the size is five times smaller than Bahia (the state in Brazil I am from). A country where Sonia, the cook of a restaurant that I usually go, receives me with a smile on her face and every day she sits down in front of me to ask how I am, even though she has been working 12 hours in a row.

What were the challenges?

Until March 2018 my Spanish began and ended in 'Hi, how are you?' also pronounced wrong. So, I started to study the language daily through: lessons, books, apps, movies, series and songs. I studied hard for two months until the day of the trip. Meanwhile, I was a little hesitant about what I had written in the proposal. I had never worked with the proposed innovative photography technology. Photo development? With coffee? It came from an idea that a stranger gave to me. Offering photography workshops? I had done this only once for about 2 hours. I wanted to get experience in the methods I had proposed, so I tried my best to learn fast.

What were my expectations?

Two months was not going to be enough for me to experience the daily life of a Guatemalan, so I decided to have kids tell their own stories. I used funds from the grant to buy cameras for them. As a recent graduate in journalism, I believed that my profession had the power to provoke discussion and show awareness. I was not going to be a super-heroine-colonizer-savior who would change the children's' life, but I decided that one of my 'powers' would be to give voice to those kids, and so I did!

"Do you mean that behind every picture there is a story?"

Let them become visible to you on the other side.

2. The Workshop

Day one

That was the day of the first glances, questions, and discoveries. Kids were wondering 'Who is this girl with curly hair who was speaking Spanish with a strange accent?' The answer came through photos that told my story: childhood, animals, university, family, festivities. They were in charge of telling what they were seeing and together we discovered that we had a lot in common. Their story, on the other hand, was not told on the first day as expected. They started talking about their lives on the fourth day of the workshop, when they had their own pictures.

It was an introductory day, so the moment was more focused on understanding photography and what pictures mean. I selected the following historical and funny photos. Each child had to choose one to tell a story. It was amazing to hear their thoughts. I have always found that children are adults in small bodies, but a little less worried about social codes such as, embracing strangers or sharing their snacks, which they often did with me. Today this idea seemed even more concrete: If we want to dialogue with kids, there is no need to talk about difficult topics by using titles such as democracy, sexism, racial discrimination and more.



Margaret Hamilton, computer scientist, along of a software that she had produced for Apollo 11; MIT Museum

- “She is a secretary.” (About 70% of the class shared the same opinion).
- “I don’t think so. I think this image is from a time when men were very powerful and did not let women do great things. But this one did the opposite and achieved something important.” (Diego Adolfo Pérez, 11 years old)



Subtitle: Boy playing on a swing next to a house destroyed by a bombing, Syria; Almer Almohibany/AFP

- “Is it a photo from war? Maybe from the Syrian war. Did you know that Russia and the United States were involved?” (Kevin Daniel Real, 11 years old)



The Beatles on the Abbey Road pedestrian track; Iain Macmillan

- “I know who they are. It’s the Beatles, one of the most memorable bands. And this picture is worth billions of dollars.” (Justin Cañas Diz, 12 years old)



Lula, ex-president of Brazil, being carried in front of the “Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos” before being arrested; Francisco Proner Ramos

- “I think this is a funeral of someone very famous. There are people holding flowers and others with cameras.” (Zaide Dayana Martínez, 11 years old)



A chimpanzee who had escaped from a zoo in Northern Japan being rescued above an electric grid; REUTERS/Kyodo

- “They were doing experiments with a man in a laboratory. He became evil and wanted to kill all the people in the world. He became a mutant.” (Eduardo Jose Paz Alonzo, 8 years old)

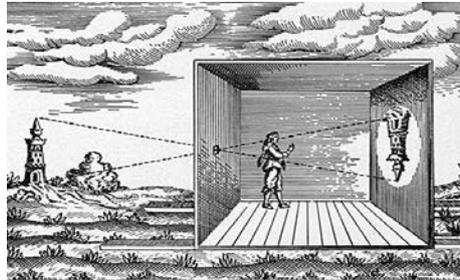
- “So, do you mean that behind every picture there is a story?” (Kathia Rivas Yuliana Rixabaj, 9, before leaving that day)



After so much interpretation and creativity, we set out to practice. We built a giant camera with a large washer and a stove box. The idea was for the children to feel that they were inside the picture. They entered the darkroom and discovered how the image was formed. "Oh my God, it's all upside down," they said, impressed.

How does it work?

Have you ever heard about the “camera obscura”? The logic is the same and that's how photography was discovered. Playing, children also learned a physical principle, propagation of light. If you have a laser, ask them to point somewhere and ask them if the light travels in a straight or curved manner. The answer is straight. That's why the light rays that hit the object and enter through the hole are projected in parallel. The image is inverted precisely by the principle of rectilinear propagation. Does it seem confusing? Look at the image below.



Camera obscura/KID MUSEUM

Second Day

Curiosity and bonding increased on the second day. 'Miss' and 'seño' (short for Mrs.) were the names I listened the most during my workshop with kids. Sometimes, with discouraging phrases following those names... 'Miss / Seño, I forgot the box!'

The previous day I had asked everyone to look for shoe boxes because we would make a camera for each person. Among the four classes, which had over thirty-five children, only five children completed the task. I had a plan B: I had all necessary material to accomplish the activity.



Guatemala City, Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzman School, Zone 6

Third day

Throughout the workshop, all children had the opportunity to take home an analog camera. It was a matter of encouragement at first, but later they started questioning about it. What am I going to take a picture of? Anything! The children did not receive a specific topic, the only instruction was: What do you want the world to know about you? Take pictures that tell something about your life. Some kids were planning exactly what they would photograph while others were thinking about different ideas. Some were excited and some were discouraged.

Two days before school ended, all the cameras returned to me so that we could develop the photos together. The innovative process I chose was low-cost products, which enabled the children to produce the chemical by themselves. Everybody helped! I divided a class of nine students into three groups, and each group was responsible for one camera roll.

After giving directions and the recipe, the mess started: Coffee fell on the table, kids had dirty hands, a lot of chatting was going on, and music was playing. That was not a laboratory, but it was in that fun environment, they discovered that chemistry could be fun. An hour and a half later, we opened the tank and the film was developed, or burned! That happened a few times. For the surviving films, I set up a rustic

reflector (a shoebox with a lamp inside) and we watched the images that were in the film. 'Look, I took that one,' one of them shouted and all enjoyed that moment.



3. Experiences

Guatemala City - María Concepción School, Zone 8



I had visited the María Concepción School a week before the workshop and dozens of children surrounded me with hugs and questions. My Spanish was rusty and sometimes I did not understand what they were saying. At that time, I felt butterflies in my belly. I had never taught a workshop like this one in my life. I did not know if the kids would behave well, and I also had the language barrier.

The fear passed on the first day of class. I will not say that it was easy to make them sit; I will not deny that sometimes they started running in the middle of the room and I needed to say 'Who wants to leave, can leave' to calm down the pre-teens (they were between 11 and 14 years) but as soon as I showed the analog cameras they got excited and agreed to participate in the activity. As the days went by, I put effort to learn their names and was able to describe the profile of each student. Those children were very special and always made me meditate about life every time I went home.

I handed forms out to get signatures from parents, authorizing me to take photograph of their kids. One day I found an authorization form on the floor. The signature was clearly counterfeited, and I was not happy with that. The little boy explained that he had asked his mother for the authorization and she gave him permission to sign because she was illiterate.

Last Day

The power of having a camera in their hands!

On the last day, I handed them the pictures that they had taken and talked to each one individually in a dusty little room on the second floor of the school. It was the moment they looked at the images that they had produced that I was certain of what those pictures reminded them of: Silenced stories surfaced. I asked what was behind the view of those photographers and they told me personal stories. Most were experiences of pain. In that fifteen-minute monologue they would share, reflect, and wonder about their situation. There were no pauses or interventions. They seemed to be talking to themselves.

At the end of a conversation, one of the children left the room and sat in the middle of the courtyard alone, crying. One of the teachers waited for her to calm down and then approached to find out what had happened. The child replied that he had told me sad things and discovered that I had been in a similar situation. She never imagined that it was possible. She did not think we could have anything in common. She cried for herself and cried for me. I connected with each of those children.

María Concepción Workshop



After the workshop at María Concepción school, I was invited to do the same work at the Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzman school, in zone six of the capital. After the first experience, I felt safer and calmer for the first day of school. My mistake. I came across a class of only boys ... accompanied by their parents. If activities were planned for children, how could I include adults in the dynamics? I tried to follow the same script, but I did not have the easiest audience. The children were silent. The presence of the adults was intimidating, and they always resorted to their parents to help them during the activities. After a few minutes talking about the reason I was there, I

tried talking about soccer. I mentioned Santiago Bernabéu and Camp Nou, which are the stadiums for the Real Madrid and Barcelona teams, and finally they felt more comfortable. We built a darkroom with a stove box, and even the parents participated with the exception of a boy and his mother.

On the last day of class, after refusing to participate in most activities, the boy with black hair and deep looking eyes finally began to participate. I asked if he had any suggestions for me to improve the project, since he did not look excited during the first days. He did not suggest any changes and said that he wanted to have participated. The reason for his isolation was the presence of his mother: She did not know me and therefore she did not want to leave her child with me since the parents participated only in the first session.

The comment reminded me of a conversation with a teacher- an expert in educommunication, before my trip. "Maryanna, do you look like them?" He teased. In that class, very little. Our hair, color, speaking, clothes, eyes ... everything was different. I reflected again on the image I built in that classroom and the possible barriers and openings that it caused: The tattoo I have in my arm, which I gave up covering because of the heat made me look strange; being Brazilian and laughing with my funny accent made one of the moms play samba on her phone. One more lesson: Being a foreigner and venturing to do such work on the other side of the ocean requires humility to ask permission and know that the exchange will only happen if they accept to participate without impositions, with open minds, and with a sense of belonging.

Santo Domingo School Workshop, Rabinal, Baja Verapaz

Before traveling to Rabinal I told the school coordinators that I wanted to conduct the workshop with children that were 11-13 years old. The last two experiences showed me that this was the ideal age range for activities. On the first day of school I noticed that the request had been ignored: they were between 7



and 10 years old. I did not know how the dynamics would work. Early on, when I asked them to describe some photos, an 8-year-old boy saw the image of a monkey on a wire and said the animal had been genetically mutated. He continued the story without pauses, without breathing, with an enviable mood and quickness of thought. It was only interrupted when a friend, two years older, asked sarcastically, 'What have you been watching at home?' He did not respond to the provocation. The script on that kid's head was really worthy of a science fiction series. At that moment I realized that in Rabinal everything would be, once again, totally different.

As the days passed, there were always dilemmas commonly experience by kids of that age group. If a classmate did something wrong -according to their point of view- everyone would burst into laughter and the child would cry. Seeing the tears of a boy who sat in the middle of the courtyard, in a scorching sun, encouraged me to do something about it. I wanted to make the sadness disappear. I had already talked to him, but he felt that I was interfering. So, I explained to his friends that people do not usually interfere when we are happy, only when we are sad. Everyone reflected on that and gave up on the idea of making the boy smile while he was sad and disappointed in the backyard. Some students apologized. Shortly afterwards, everyone was playing together once again.

The jokes kept happening throughout the workshop. Even when some needed to be serious while developing the films. I resorted to conduct the activities without my direct participation. I told them the rules

and explained what could happen if something was done wrong. Because some ignored my instructions, the result was that some of the films burned. The boys loved that part of the project because of the chemical reactions and the expectation that something would explode. They were a curious and creative group.

Llano del Pinal - Asociación Pop Wuj, Quetzaltenango

Before traveling to Guatemala, I contacted a community center in the City of Quetzaltenango (Xela). After I arrived in the city, I went to visit them. The location was in a rural area, Llano del Pinal, 1h from the center of town, using public transportation. The site welcomed families daily and provided guidance on nutrition, health and other issues. During the afternoons the spaces become classrooms and the children get guidance on household activities. The atmosphere is very welcoming.



On the first day of school we transformed the kitchen into a photo lab. I suggested that children of a certain age group should be participating, and the carpet was soon filled with curious boys and girls. But someone was missing; the number of students was incomplete. Minutes later a teacher entered the room holding hands with a little girl and asked me naturally, 'Do you speak sign language? She is deaf.'

I thought of previous experiences I had: The construction of a room with plywood on the ground floor of my college (three stories high and without a ramp or elevator) for a student who used a wheelchair; a friend who lost his leg movements and studied until the day of his graduation in the only room without access by stairs - and cried that he could not play on the top floor where we had the ping-pong table; a fellow journalist who graduated last year, who is blind and did a course-completion work on tackling disability in the press. But I did not know any deaf people so no, I did not know sign language.

I told the teacher that there was no problem and she could attend the class. I introduced myself - I learned my name by reading one of those papers in signs, and I did not know how to go any further. I asked for help from a girl of 8 or 9 who had some knowledge of sign language. She was incredible but she could not translate the rain of thoughts of so many children. I got frustrated.

During the break, a boy approached me and stared at me. I asked his name, age, and he introduced himself. He was eighteen years old, but he seemed to be half that age. He could not express himself so well but he made it clear that he wanted to attend the workshop. The teacher explained that it would be difficult to have him in the class, since I didn't have experience. I understood the concern -although I did not know why he was special. The hours passed, and I gave him a private class. Every click on the analog camera was a shrill scream. Sometimes he would run around in circles as he jumped. I could not communicate verbally, fully with him, but we communicated very well through photograph.

Would you like to know how to make a giant camera, a camera shoe or how to develop photos with Caffeno!?
All this information you can find on our website www.medium.com/photowithcoffee. You will also learn more about the children who were part of the project. :)