# A New Model of Linguistic-Cultural Immersion: The Pedagogical Reform in the CASA-Seville Program

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# A New Model of Linguistic-Cultural Immersion: The Pedagogical Reform in the CASA-Seville Program[1]

# Un nuevo modelo de inmersión lingüístico-cultural: la reforma pedagógica del programa CASA-Sevilla

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## Abstract

The importance the Spanish language has acquired as a tool for international communication has led many American academic institutions to include Spain as one of the preferred destinations for their study abroad programs. The aim of this work is to explain the functioning of one of these programs, the Consortium for Advanced Studies Abroad (CASA-Seville), and describe its innovative pedagogy. The program is based on the application of ethnographic techniques to study abroad, the use of the European Reference Framework for Languages, and on experiential learning as a strategy to deepen linguistic-cultural immersion.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical innovation; Study abroad programs; Linguistic and cultural immersion; Teaching and learning a second language; Ethnography; Experiential learning.

**Resumen**

La importancia adquirida por la lengua española como herramienta de comunicación internacional ha propiciado que muchas instituciones académicas estadounidenses incluyan a España como destino preferente en sus programas de estudios en el extranjero. El propósito de nuestro trabajo es dar a conocer el funcionamiento de uno de estos programas, el Consortium for Advanced Studies Abroad (CASA-Sevilla), y describir su pedagogía actual. Ésta se basa en la aplicación de las técnicas etnográficas, la utilización del Marco Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas y el aprendizaje experiencial como estrategias para la inmersión lingüístico-cultural.

**Palabras clave:** Innovación pedagógica; Programas de estudio en el extranjero; Inmersión lingüística y cultural; Enseñanza y aprendizaje de una segunda lengua; Etnografía; Aprendizaje experiencial.

**Sumario:** 1. Introduction. 2. Transition to a new intercultural immersion model: the example of CASA-Seville. 3. Pedagogical propositions. 4. Conclusions. 5. References.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the late 1970s, most US universities began to enhance their studies abroad as a key element in promoting the learning a second language. At that point, the options were limited and the majority of students studying outside the country did so independently, without an institutional support framework.

However, the end of the Cold War changed the understanding of international relations and democratized the study abroad experience, creating a wider range of opportunities for students. To support these initiatives, specific university programs were established abroad in the form of Study Abroad Offices. These soon began to draft and implement guidelines about academic excellence in the target programs. Most of the centers that universities created during this period were known as "island programs" and functioned as organizations without a close link to local society. They had their own teachers from the United States and in the programs, the instruction was in English and students lived together in residences.

By the mid-1990s, university leaders were concerned with achieving a more inclusive knowledge of the language in relation to the specific socio-cultural environment in the foreign location. This framing took as a basic premise that the teaching and learning of a language must always be linked to the social, political,

economic and cultural context in which it takes place. This meant, among other things, rethinking the very meaning of these programs, which abandoned their character as mere copies of their departments of origin and replaced them with native teachers and staff (Díez Fuentes and Sánchez Quero, 2007; Velandia, Ussa and Waked, 2008). Not only did language teaching change, but also a broad cultural spectrum of topics, including art, economics, history, politics, society, etc. were taught. In some cases, agreements were also signed with the target universities and American students began to share classrooms with local students.

In this period, a whole series of strategies and working tools were developed to combine the knowledge acquired by students both inside and outside the classroom - as shown by Ausin and Lezcano (2014). This involved involving not only the student, but also all educational agents (teachers, study centers and host families) who, in one way or another, were involved in this learning process. This spirit and approach was for years the pedagogical base of the academic program created by the Universities of Michigan, Cornell and Pennsylvania in Seville, founded in 1984, based on an exchange agreement with the University of Seville.

Heir to this long-running agreement, CASA-Seville was founded in July 2015, as the first representative in Spain of the Consortium for Advanced Studies Abroad (CASA).[1] This institutional transition coincided temporally with a profound program reform aimed at achieving deeper and more effective cultural immersion. It had the full support of the offices of Cornell Abroad (Cornell University is now the institutional leader of CASA-Seville), Penn Abroad, and generous funding from two grants, the Podell Emeriti Awards Scholarship Program for Research and the International Curriculum Committee of Cornell University' Internationalizing the Curriculum grants.

To face the challenge of promoting intercultural immersion better, we wanted to know what other specialists had recently published about cultural immersion and the new pedagogical and experiential proposals applied to study abroad programs. We soon realized that there was a significant bibliography in English, on which we base our work, but also that there was a vacuum of this type of publications in Spanish[2]. This encouraged us to write the article to share our experiences, to explain the reforms we have developed, describe their implementation and make the initial results known. We have developed a model in which all the strategies employed to promote the linguistic and cultural progress of our students complement and support

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1    CASA is a non-profit organization consisting of ten leading universities (Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, Trinity College, Pennsylvania and Vanderbilt), which aims to create high quality programs in advanced study abroad.

2    A co-authored monograph in Spanish reflecting on the reform and its challenges is available in Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/project/Intercultural-Learning-Strategies-for-the-21st-Century-Revitalizing-a-Long-Standing-Study-Abroad-Immersion-Program-through-Active-Pedagogy-and-Action-Research.

each other, and where the ethnographic method, an adaptation of the European Framework of Reference for Languages, and implementation of a philosophy of experiential learning have become our core tools in the process of promoting intercultural immersion.

## 2. TRANSITION TO A NEW INTERCULTURAL IMMERSION MODEL: THE EXAMPLE OF CASA-SEVILLE

As already mentioned, CASA-Seville is a program based on a formal agreement with the University of Seville. Our students are enrolled as official students at the university, where they attend their classes during a semester or an academic year. All of them live with host families and receive personal and academic support during their stay in Spain through the CASA-Seville center, which has a permanent full-time staff and a set number of additional teachers and tutors.

In the past, to make it easier for students to immerse themselves in local society, the program gave them a series of opportunities in their hands, among them living with a local family, enrolling in classes at the University of Seville together with local students. In addition, students had access to all the services available to the university community. Among the most used were language exchanges, voluntary work, team sports, and the university choir. On arrival in Spain, they also received information on the wide range of cultural and sporting activities (such as dance or guitar classes, yoga, rowing courses and horse riding) and leisure activities in the city. With all these tools at their disposal, the students were expected to be proactive and establish their own contacts with local society.

During the spring of 2015, the teachers, tutors and program staff initiated a process of participatory action research (Greenwood and Morten, 2007), led by Cornell University Professor of Anthropology Davydd Greenwood[3]. On the basis of the initial arduous phases of reflection, we detected a series of problems in the existing pedagogical design.

### 2.1. New patterns of socialization

The resources offered by the program were quite effective until a few years ago when the use of information technologies and social networks began to change the social behavioral patterns o of the students. Instead of talking to the host family, students began to spend their free time online chatting with family and friends, or watching American TV series and movies in the solitude of their bedrooms. Instead

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3    Greenwood is the Goldwin Smith Professor of Anthropology Emeritus of Cornell University, an expert in participatory action research.

of attending office hours to discuss academic matters with their professors at the University, they began to communicate with them via e-mail. They began to rely on the support of the other students in the group in facing cultural differences or avoiding them. As a result, they ended up creating a comfortable bubble that met all their needs of socialization and communication. Their linguistic progress suffered and their knowledge of the local culture and life became anecdotal and superficial.

Added to the technological revolution the increasing gap between residential university life in the United States and the Spanish university system (Moffat, 1989, Nathan, 2006, Armstrong and Hamilton, 2013). Increased campus management and overprotection regarding all aspects of their university life dominates both personally and socially. Being admitted to an American residential university institution means entering not just entering a field of learning, but also entering into a circle of social relations sponsored and favored by the university management. Residential life is now a core element in private and public university and liberal arts college life. This is the period and context in which most of the social relationships are developed between members of the same generation (student-student). Entrance in the university marks the end of the residing with their families, since in many cases, returning home after college is tantamount to being a failure.

During this period, parental custody is replaced by university custody. Universities make many of the decisions that have to be made for students as young adults. In addition to teaching them, the university takes on significant legal responsibilities, academic advising, social and psychological counseling, career counseling, health care provider and liaison, and leisure-time social and cultural events coordinator. Everything is done for the students who see these services as entirely necessary and normal.[4]

Seville is a city that has two public universities, but it is not a university city with two inclusive and residential campuses. This is the first cultural shock our students experience upon arrival. The University of Seville is a teaching institution through which students can participate in a series of activities that serve only to complement the already very rich social and cultural life of the city. At the same time, the City of Seville can be viewed as a university in itself, filled with vestiges of the vast historical legacy of the peoples and cultures that have lived here. American students, however, deprived of the comforting environment of their home university campus, feel disoriented and find it difficult to develop their own strategies to establish relations with the local society. Their logical reaction is to take refuge in the bubble of American students or Erasmus students who share the same situation. This reaction causes them to lose touch with a society that seems "closed" and enigmatic to them. Young people seek protection among their peers, avoiding any

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4   Here we are referring to the average student from elite private universities and liberal arts colleges.

situation that may make them uneasy. By the end of the many had not succeeded in establishing even minimal contact with Sevillana society and, therefore, without having had opportunity to challenge their biases regarding the culture in which they seem to have lived during a few months or an academic year.

## 2.2. The previous methods used in the program

Progress in language skills and deepening the knowledge of a culture appear in prominent places (always separately) both in the formulation of student hopes about their study abroad experience and in the design of study abroad courses. However, in most cases, the achievements do not meet the formulated desires nor are they well supported by the pedagogical and social means used to achieve them. On the one hand, students' wishful thinking about improvement is rather imprecise and thus does not give rise to any specific commitments for them to meet. On the other, programs tend not to focus on favoring or ensuring meaningful linguistic and cultural progress (using objective indicators) that are systematic (using effective methodologies and didactic approaches) and that can be evaluated. We came to realize that both students and organizers have usually entrusted the task of significantly improving the language skills of students to the inertia of an imagined cultural and linguistic immersion.

During the process of analysis and reform, we also found other problems in our pedagogical design:

1. We lacked an evaluation system that allowed us to know the results of the individual learning process of each student and to diagnose their problems. We did not carry out an initial detailed evaluation of their linguistic level on arrival nor did we evaluate their intercultural competences. At the end, there was no final evaluation to determine the progress they made during their experience abroad.

2. The program was based on content transmission from faculty, staff, and tutors to the students. Students were not given tools to further investigate and learn from their own academic and personal experiences outside the supervision of the program.

3. There was insufficient encouragement to continue linguistic and cultural progress throughout the whole program and a lack of follow-up throughout the term. The students felt pressured to write and speak Spanish during the orientation classes. In addition, students worried if their lack of reading comprehension would prevent them from getting a good grade on a history paper. But they felt that their linguistic and cultural challenges during the rest of the semester were limited to surviving or achieving academic success in their classes and to being able to communicate with their host family to meet their daily needs. We realized that 75% of the students' international stay was being wasted.

4. There was an insufficient presence of linguistic and cultural objectives in the "non-linguistic" classes CASA-Seville offered. We mean that the classes were

not used as a means of supporting linguistic and cultural progress. The teachers (and therefore the students) were focused on imparting the contents of their subject (anthropology, history, history of art, etc.), not on the linguistic or cultural challenges facing the students.

5. The students felt comfortable attaining a level of linguistic and cultural competence that would allow them to achieve their "real (but unstated)" goals: to live abroad for a semester without major problems and achieve the objective of having good grades in their classes. This attitude was coupled with a lack of commitment to the explicit obligation to use Spanish as a communication tool at CASA-Seville, during the home stays, and in interacting with all other students in the program.

In conclusion, cultural immersion and linguistic improvement are not automatic. Despite the efforts of the teachers and the staff of the program, the average student was not able to take advantage of the opportunities available, due to their lack of initiative or their lacking the necessary tools to be able to deepen their experiences. It was necessary to intervene in the learning process in new ways, so that at this point, the CASA-Seville program decided to change its pedagogical approach, as we will explain below.

## 3. PEDAGOGICAL PROPOSITIONS

To alleviate the problems mentioned above, CASA-Seville converted the orientation course previously called "Cultural Seminar" into a four-month envelope course with a new title: "Beyond Stereotypes: Encounters with History, Society, Language and Culture of Seville".The mission of this new course is described as follows:

> Spain in general and Seville in particular are a combination of sometimes overlapping and sometimes integrated cultures, aesthetic and religious traditions, oligarchies and democratic governments, conflicting histories, and class identities, neighborhood, region, and nation. This amalgam can be seen in architecture and art, in struggles for power, in socio-centrism of families, neighborhoods, cities, and regions, and moments of confrontation between parts of Spain, between Spain and its former colonies, and between Spain and the rest of Europe. The upper level of this complex reality is the European Union. It is necessary to reach an advanced level in the domain of the different linguistic competences and a basic level in the basic techniques and information of the socio-cultural, political-historical and artistic analysis to understand these Spanish realities. Our goal is to contribute to the students becoming researchers of their own reality and equip them with the tools and strategies that permit them to take better advantage of their classes in the university and to deepen their intercultural experiences during their stay in Spain.

The course uses the eight main components that are explained below:

## 3.1. The ethnographic method

Our reflections on how to help the students progress - not only linguistically aspect, but also in the knowledge of the culture they are in - led us to promote the teaching of ethnographic methods. These methods have a long history and can be found in many disciplines, such as applied linguistics, anthropology or cultural studies.

Ethnographic research is defined by Rodríguez *et al.* (1966) defines ethnographic demographic research (1996) as the method by which one learns the way of life of a particular social unit, which may be a family, a class or a school. Some of the basic principles of this method such as that learning is favored by contact or interaction in a real cultural environment, are fundamental to showing students that learning about culture involves learning the language and vice versa (Roberts *et al*, 2001). This is especially true if we recognize that the contemporary local societies to which the students arrive are themselves multilingual and multicultural.

However, it is not just that students need to learn how to learn and take responsibility for their own learning. Also the teachers must change their teaching system to move beyond the boundaries of the classroom context and focus on the broader context of immersion (Rivera, 2009: 72)[5] To this end, the teaching staff and the program staff had to change their position and conceive of the students not as passive receivers of knowledge, but as participant observers who play an active role in their own learning process. It was necessary to apply a more active pedagogy in which the students have to use ethnographic methods. We now understand that one of the most significant contributions of this method is that it provides both conceptual and technical elements that fundamentally alter our teaching strategies. In this we have come to think of a class as a learning space centered on practical experiences and reflections and that tries to articulate learning the language with learning of culture. Therefore, it seemed proper to take advantage of the variety of interaction situations that the students live in to teach them to value these experiences and show them how to become the protagonists of their own learning. To this end, classroom teachers must get to know the students, and during their teaching, they must fight against reigning cultural stereotypes and arouse the students' curiosity. The teacher has to be able to select topics that will help students to make comparisons and enable them see the usefulness of their work by implicating in researching their own experiences. After all, ethnography is a method of research based on experience.

In addition, the new pedagogical design emphasizes the value of the experience and knowledge of the teachers and the staff of the program. In many cases, students

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5    The need for contextual analysis arose mainly from the decade of the 80s, when they begin studies on foreign language teaching and research on the acquisition of second languages. In those same years, Ellis (1987) raised the hypothesis called "class context" in which the student learning was influenced by the different situations that arose in the classroom when communicated. However, this hypothesis was later completed with the so - called "context of appropriation" in which learning situations where both institutional education, i.e. classes, such as non-institutional envisaged would be included.

are unclear about what they want to investigate. However, through our classroom and tutorial interventions, we can use our local knowledge to encourage the students to reflect on their place in Sevillana society, and help them demonstrate complementary, transversal skills such as interpersonal communication, negotiation skills, or the ability to present their ideas clearly.

In any case, teaching centers on enabling students to act as ethnographers. To do this, it is necessary to enable them to carry out research in everyday social situations in naturally-occurring contexts, through direct observations that allows them to collect data and conduct interviews. In this way, students are encouraged to become interested in what people do, how they behave, how they interact, in trying to discover their beliefs, values, motivations, etc. This is how we encourage them to develop their understanding of the phenomena they experience.

With this method, students have to integrate themselves into the life of a cultural group, trying to gain their acceptance and rapport, all the while learning via these interactions (Roberts *et al*, 2001). To this end, ethnographic techniques of data collection such as participant observation or in-depth interviewing have played a key role in the development of the students' own required research projects during the semester.

Using participant observation as the main strategy gaining information allows students to observe the way things happen in their natural state. In the same way, they become aware of how to act appropriately in the places where people live and work, places where they will gain significant information over the semester. The students learn how to become interested in other people's views and the ways others understand and organize their lives. It is about living in the first person the social reality of the group and interpreting the social phenomena "from within" the perspective of the social context of the local actors. All this allows the student researcher to gain internal knowledge of social life, to understand the different behaviors that occur in a given context, and gain a more comprehensive view of the social field seen from different points of view. Among these, we emphasize the distinction between the *emic* or internal point of view (those of the members of the local group) and view *etic* or external view, created through the interpretation made by the student researcher.

In addition, we encourage the students to carry out a "key informant interview" conceived as a conversation with people familiar with relevant information on the subject the student has chosen to investigate in detail. In this regard, more modest interview with members of the host family with whom the students live play a fundamental role in the process. Doing briefer interviews with family members not only creates new learning but helps students develop their interviewing skills.

The application of the ethnographic approach has proved to be an enhancement when it comes to studying language, history and culture in context. The application

of ethnographic techniques has helped us to evaluate its utility and to create new methodological spaces that support new student learning experiences beyond the classroom context.

## 3.2. Linguistic progress

Our students need to become more competent users of the Spanish language. To accomplish this, our work focuses on designing and promoting tasks, processes and activities where they use and improve their communicative skills as language students. We must not lose sight of the fact that this linguistic progress serves to help them to become competent language users capable of meeting the communicative demands of the personal, academic and professional fields. To achieve these objectives, it is necessary to strengthen their linguistic and sociolinguistic competences in Spanish, based on knowledge, skills and attitudes. We face, therefore, the challenge of supporting the linguistic progress of each student as part of the overall program objective of improving their communicative and intercultural competences. The formative assessment of language progress is not limited to the achievement of language objectives, but also contributes valuable information - both for students and for teachers - to the common goal of improving intercultural skills and competences.

The semester begins with the evaluation and self-assessment of the language skills of the students. We use a simplified and adapted version of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2002). The CEFRL provides with a very useful tool to detect the needs of each student and to be able to design an individualized work plan. In addition, thanks its required student self-assessment component, students are aware of those skills that need improvement.

Our adaptation of the CEFRL is based on a simplification of the statements of each objective in the five skills in terms that the student can understand and use as descriptors for their own use. We accompany the statements with examples of communication situations where they can iden tify their competencies or deficiencies. Skills are assessed (by the students themselves and by the program's faculty) using a rubric, which helps quantify their level mastery of competencies and their progress over the course of the semester. Both teachers and students use the same evaluation tools, so comparing the results provides us with accurate information to help the student and a useful shared understanding of what is needed.

Based on the early results of these assessments, small-group tutorials are created to help students progress in the two skills they need most. At the end of the semester, the evaluations are repeated to confirm the result of the work done during the course. Our goal is for students to advance at least one level in the two skills they focus on.

The application of this methodological approach has produced satisfactory results and has helped us to detect deficiencies and to correct them. On the one

hand, we consider it essential for students to acquire full and documented awareness of their communicative skills and deficiencies. This awareness makes it easier for them to plan their own work to progress in the different skills. On the other hand, knowing in detail the competencies and shortcomings of each one of them helps us concentrate efforts, attention and resources to contribute to their progress. Also, the information provided by the use of the CEFRL provides flexibility to the program to adapt and improve contents, materials and methodological approaches in our activities. The goal we set ourselves of having students improve by at least one level of competence (CEFRL) has been met by a very high percentage of our students.

## 3.3. Balance between content transmission and learning of research tools

In the academic world of the humanities and social sciences, the transmission of content often is often treated as more important than the learning and practice of skills that could make students independent researchers of their own realities. This approach leaves students without the tools to continue learning for themselves once they finish their university studies. To mitigate this problem, "Beyond stereotypes" combines content learning with the introduction of research tools. Students receive the basic information necessary to understand Spanish realities in three modules:

- Understanding the History and Impact of the Past in the Present

- Understanding Society and Culture

- Understanding Art and Art History

In these modules, they also receive an introduction to ethnographic research techniques such as participant observation and interviewing, as well as how to do good bibliographic searches on the internet and various techniques of artistic analysis. During the first weeks of the program, students perform tasks involving practice using these techniques.

As a complement, they are given a critical reflection model - the DEAL model - with which they can describe, examine, and articulate the learning they are developing for themselves (Ash and Clayton, 2009). This model helps them connect their past experiences with their observations about Spanish culture and encourages them to project this learning towards future experiences. By connecting the past with the present, students have the opportunity to question whether their analytic framework (brought from their own culture) is appropriate for understanding the new context, a task that leads them to recognize preconceptions and formulate new interpretations.

## 3.4. Experiential learning

Two core ideas drive experiential learning. First, students should not only learn by sitting in class but from direct contact with real situations outside the classroom.

Second, they must learn to establish links between the concepts and theories they study and their personal experiences. Experiential learning provides a context where they can contrast and compare information, as well as the subjects they can observe and interview to find answers to their questions. Last but not least, experiential learning puts students in touch with members of local society, helping them to establish connections outside their "technological bubble".

This type of learning takes place in three types of situations:

a) Community Organizations

CASA-Seville has collaborative agreements with some local community organizations in which students participate in a supervised way for two hours per week throughout the course. In addition to these tasks, agreed on between the tutor in the organization and the program, students must describe and analyze their experiences throughout the course.

b) Host families

In addition to the valuable experience of living with a local family, students carry out small research projects through interviews with members of their host families and participate with them in activities in the neighborhood where they live.

c) Cultural visits

The program organizes a series of cultural visits in Seville, its different neighborhoods and neighboring towns so that students not only know the political, economic and social realities of the city, but so they can also experience them in person in an active way. Visits require prior preparation by students including reading articles or viewing videos on the internet on topics relevant to the places they visit. During the visits, they are assigned tasks and at the end, share with their peers what they have learned, contrasting their different perspectives.

## 3.5. Active and independent learning

During the semester, students take responsibility for their own learning process. With the help of teachers and program staff, they must decide their own paths based on their interests and personal motivations. On the one hand, as a final assignment for the course, they are asked to conduct a research project on using the tools learned during the cultural modules. On the other, they are asked to make a "List of personal goals", which set some goals for both linguistic and cultural learning and develop strategies to achieve them. These lists are revisable throughout the course as students learn and adapt to their increasing understanding of Seville and their awareness of time they have available.

## 3.6. Mentoring and collective learning

Throughout the semester, students are supported by tutors, teachers and program staff as they designing their own learning paths (in research and their lists of personal goals) and they also supported in achieving the best possible results in their linguistic and cultural progress. This mentoring is done collectively through the learning platform Blackboard, which also provides the opportunity for them to share what they learned with the other members of the group. Another way we work at collective learning is through a set of small of group projects. The results are shared several times during the semester in meetings where which students, faculty and staff share knowledge, make comments and discuss the topics.

## 3.7. Continuous assessment

Each semester, all participants in the program (teachers, staff and students) meet on several occasions to monitor the operation of the course and propose adjustments for the subsequent semesters. As a result of the evaluation process of the fall term of 2015, the program produced a monograph in which the reform process and the results of the first attempt were analyzed. This is a document that serves as the basis and example for further evaluations. The aim is to achieve a 360 - degree assessment, but also honesty in pointing out the problems and use them as an impetus for program improvement.

## 3.8. Integration of all program elements in this philosophy

Although the efforts of educational reform focused initially only on the orientation course, once we committed to the reform, we came to understand that the other components of the program (for example, extra-curricular activities and the regular courses at CASA-Seville) should also be consistent with the same philosophy. Since then, the whole program has begun to operate as an integrated open system in which every element plays an important role in achieving the final result.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

None of these changes could have been accomplished without the commitment and collaboration of teachers, tutors and local staff of CASA-Seville. They have used their experience with the program and have made their personal experiences and expertise available to this ambitious new pedagogical approach, one that produces very satisfying learning results.

We must not, however, hide the difficulties that all members of the program have faced since the beginning of the reform. Through the process of participatory

action research, teachers, tutors and staff members have learned to see themselves as protagonists of the changes and were able to contribute their own ideas to address the problems identified. However, the transition to active pedagogy and the inclusion of experiential learning has not always been easy. Numerous meetings to exchange views and exercising great honesty was needed to achieve not only a satisfactory pedagogical design, but also one that was practically workable.

In our reform, we have had to overcome several practical obstacles. We have had logistical challenges with many part-time participants. We have had to deal with budgetary constraints, the limited availability of teachers (most employed only part-time for the program) and the requirement that the changes do not exceed the course hours agreed to by the universities in CASA-Seville.

However, the biggest challenge we faced in the offering of the new pedagogical design was a great divergence between what the students had expected to operate in Seville and how the program managers thought the students could take advantage of the opportunities offered. We came to realize that the average American student views cultural immersion as almost synonymous with tourism. Even when their "personal goals lists" expressed the desire to immerse themselves in the culture and progress in the language, their behavior did not embody those goals. One of the first conclusions emerging from our ongoing evaluation process was to address these issues in the first sessions of the course to make them aware of the pedagogical approach of the program, quite different from the one most of them experience at their home institutions. On this basis, we hoped that they could make better decisions and take care of their learning over the semester.

We learned that one key obstacle to this active pedagogy is the tendency for students to avoid uncomfortable situations and to turn their discomfort into complaints about the program. Because active and experiential learning confront students with real situations outside the classroom, cases of uncomfortable situations do multiply in this course. We understood clearly that failures, mistakes, and discomfort, properly handled, can be converted into meaningful learning opportunities. Transmitting the value of failure, discomfort, and surprise as a valuable opportunity to learn is a challenge and one that has direct consequences for our way of helping the students to move forward toward better and more ambitious learning outcomes.

Thanks to the continuous assessment and the efforts of the teachers, tutors and staff members, our program has become a more dynamic open system that evolves and adapts to the changing needs of students and emerging challenges. It is therefore evident, as we have tried to show throughout this article, that this new era and these new generations of students require new teaching approaches and new ways of confronting the difficulties of intercultural learning.

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