



## How to Create Individualization in the Classroom

### New Ways of Teaching Foreign Languages

**W**hen talking about learning foreign

languages, it is clear that nothing compares with immersion programs abroad. Constant exposure to the day-to-day life with native speakers in their culture creates both the atmosphere of constant discovery and the need for communication in the new language.

#### **What is the closest experience to that ideal of immersion?**

A fundamental feature in immersion programs is individualization. In a foreign country, you - the visitor - are on your own and you are the one who takes control of your own use of the language. You learn at your pace according to circumstances that, for the most part, you create for yourself.

On the contrary, in the traditional classroom setting the student learns quickly that he has no control over the class: the student's learning pace is restricted to that of the group, and to that of the anonymous student imagined by the author in the textbook. Thus, you -the student- must listen to your in-progress classmates' pronunciation, must follow the same vocabulary as your classmates; and must study the grammar linearly, with no sense of which concept is important now and which one can wait. This is because the class time and tests are intended to be shared. In other words, the traditional method fails to provide individual choices. We believe that this is not the way to learn to speak a foreign language.

#### **How to replicate immersion conditions in a classroom?**

We believe that the key to learning a foreign language is to maximize individualization and this is the teaching philosophy we use. In our individualized classes we structure each session so that each individual is guided and learns at his own pace—without disrupting the group—from the teacher to the student. Each student learns at his own pace as if he were in an immersion program abroad—not in a classroom in the USA.

#### **Why does our system work?**

When students start a new Spanish course we assume that they know nothing about the language itself; nor do they know how to study it. We provide effective introductions to the new language, not only in the beginning, but also throughout the course; we must help students recognize, among all sounds and words, all grammar rules and irregularities, those essentials that allow them to go to the next level of communication, and to identify those errors that affect communication.

Without method, students take control:  
- They always know at which point of the whole process they are, - They know what is next and its level of difficulty, - They can postpone studying certain topics to focus on others, - They can advance from their out-of-class experience

Once our students have a sense of what learning Spanish means, they can make choices with our guidance. They can perfect their pronunciation at their pace, learn the vocabulary they are going to utilize, or decide how deep in the grammar they are going to go in each chapter of our individualized textbook, Spanish for Californians. It is true that a language is as is, and the student can't learn just what they want, but they can certainly learn most of what they want first and the rest when a foundation is already built.

We strongly believe that students who learn how to study learn faster and with less effort. The choices they make are not only an advantage in terms of time and leisure, but also an advantage in their learning itself since a faster and less effort learning process generates more self-encouragement.

#### **How do we implement individualization in a classroom?**

First, to achieve individualization the class format itself must assign time for one-to-one guidance, testing, and feedback. In addition, during the time assigned for the group, the activities must be one-directional, from the teacher to the students. These activities can be, among others: intensive question and answer sessions, teacher readings, dictations, and other activities aimed at getting students

to use the language for practical communication.

Secondly, the textbook must be adequate for individualization. The best options are normally the books for self-education. This name can be misleading. Although they are intended to avoid a class, they yield better results when accompanied by some tutoring. This type of book is easy for studying at home. They anticipate many answers to the reader, who can leave the teacher for more intricate and particular questions. This is the kind of book we use.

#### **There are a lot of computer-based and on-line courses out there. Do they allow for individualization?**

We don't think so, and we have hands-on experience with many of the programs currently available, and a background of applying individualization to the teaching of Spanish. We've found that computer-based programs, as the Rosetta Stone (which claims to be both a textbook and classes all in one) lack the human feedback so necessary for success, and despite their multimedia capabilities, don't address the specific needs of each individual student. Nor do on-line courses with videoconferencing. These were created so students could avoid commuting to the classroom. These courses try to emulate the traditional class, but don't provide individualization

#### **What is individualization for professionals?**

Finally, two other considerations guide us when it comes to individualized teaching to professionals.

One, the common language of work, in business and industry, is specific. The teacher must be able to guide students according to the needs of their particular industry using industry-standard conventions for effective communication.

Two, in addition, professionals in technical fields may want to focus their new language skills on their area of expertise. Our teachers also bring to class a technical background that can orientate the terminology and help find other resources as specialized literature.