

Angie Bode

### Study Abroad Experiences

Choosing to study abroad in Spain was one of my best decisions. I had never been to a place before where the primary language spoken was not English. I am also not a fluent Spanish speaker by any means. I took Spanish in high school like many other people but I never had to use it much outside of the class. Thankfully, in the schools we were teaching in all English. I think something very interesting about this trip was being able to teach my native language to students who do not need to know the language for everyday use. I observed in many of the classes and caught errors in the teaching of English on multiple occasions. For the teachers and students in Spain, they are learning English as a foreign language. They do not need to know English to live their everyday life in Spain and many of them do not speak the language at home. There were words that the teachers spelled wrong on the board (such as 'enough' and 'thought') and words that they were not pronouncing correctly. The great thing about us being in the classroom was that the teachers could ask us how we pronounce or spell a word and we could help them out. That was what I enjoyed most. We were given time to have conversations in small groups with the students but it had to be in English only. I worked with primary students who did not know perfect English but were definitely working hard to learn it. When talking with the children, I felt like I was giving them a purpose for learning English. They had a reason to use it, because I could not communicate with them in Spanish. From my perspective, it seemed like a light bulb moment for many of these students. They realized that not everyone will know Spanish and being able to speak another language other than Spanish, especially English, is going to be very useful in their future life.

This experience, I believe, has made me more culturally responsive and caring of students who are different from me. When in Spain, for the first time in my life, I was part of the minority. I know how awful it was to not know how to communicate with those around me and to feel completely misunderstood. But the people in Spain, including teachers, waiters, parents, cashiers, never once made me feel bad because I could not communicate in their language. They would all slow down and try to communicate with me in what English they knew or with pictures. That was so eye-opening to me because often times in America I see workers and teachers become frustrated with people and students who cannot speak fluent English. Most of the time they just look for someone to translate instead of finding other ways of communicating. I hope that when I come across people who speak different languages or when I have students who do not speak English, that I can find others way to communicate. I never want a child to feel left out of my classroom because they come from somewhere different or speak another language. This experience has opened my eyes and showed me the kind of teacher and person I want to be.