

Celine McLaughlin – Study Abroad in Alcala, Spain

I have changed as a person as a result of this program because it made me realize how much happiness can be found by seeing a new place and meeting new people. There is so much joy in creating connections with people who are excited for you to discover their homeland. I am grateful for the way my experience has shaped me into a better person.

I have changed as a teacher as a result of this program because I have been in situations that I would have never been exposed to in the United States. No lesson plans? Never would have seen that here. Teachers being able to wing classes right from the tip of their brain? Never would have seen that here. There was so much beauty and technique that I was exposed to that will give me insight to how children prosper best. Spaniards truly live in the moment and embrace every beauty of life.

Post abroad, I feel confident in being on my own and ready to take on new adventures. I am also able to be in the shoes of my future students. I know how they feel when they are asked to work and speak in a foreign language. It can be so intimidating. I have the empathy and experience to give them a welcoming, effective classroom that embraces all cultures.

I will make sure to give cues in both languages so that students can recognize key words. I stay informed on education policy and advocate for future changes that support bilingualism, rather than reverse the advances our schools have made. I have seen how advanced Spain is in bilingualism and I want the same for my classroom.

I will intentionally work toward making my classroom a safe, equitable space for all students. It's crucial for students to feel safe and capable of authentic self-expression at school, especially in a political climate where ELL students are constantly being told they don't belong. I will be curious about the cultures that come into my classroom and embrace them with my full

heart. It makes the students feel special when people care and are curious about their history. Showing your students they care is the best way to connect with them on an educational level.

That feeling of being an American with all Spaniards has never left me, and no student should feel this way at school. I knew I was going to feel this way and I was so happy and grateful for the experience. As educators, we should be aware of what our students experience outside of school, so we can ensure our classrooms are spaces where they can learn, share, and become the best versions of themselves. Being in the schools made me realize that children are very intelligent and they are the future of our world. We must educate them about the truths of our sometimes evil world so that they can work to reverse the damage that past generations have made. Seeing these intelligent children has made me realize that the world is such a beautiful place and I am so excited to teach our future.