Spain is the Same
by Chris Kelly

When I spent my junior year of college in Madrid, there was one phrase that all Americans had to learn. It was supposed to get us through all that high voltage culture shock. The day we arrived in Madrid our program directors gave us a little yellow book entitled “Spain is Different.” “Spain is different,” one of them said. “Don’t expect anything to be, well, as you expect it to be. You aren’t going to get things your way here. You’ll need to learn not to shop during siesta, not to ask for the nonsmoking section in restaurants, not to arrive on time. Spain is different and in more ways than can be listed in this book.”

It was useful to accept what he said but also very dangerous. The words protected us from shock, inhibited our instinct to judge quickly and loudly, and let us blend more quickly into each new situation, but it also robbed us of those same experiences. It is precisely when we are most shocked, or most embarrassed or most conspicuous that we learn the most. “Spain is Different,” was the answer to all our cultural difficulties, yes, but always having the answer meant we never need search for it, never need learn.

As we move gingerly into the next century, wondering if the trend of increasing communication throughout the world will lead us toward confrontation or away from it, it is essential that we decide what attitude we will bring to the international table. Will we say, “The world is different from us,” and preach tolerance? Or will we say, “The rest of the world is much like we are,” and then strive with all nations to reach our common goals? The answer is, of course, to a certain extent both, but which attitude will have primacy? The first way lends itself to isolationism, the second to strengthen the bonds of the world community.

After meeting and coming to know more Spaniards, I realized that Spain was not different. Spaniards had the same wishes and fears as I did. They expressed them differently, just as everyone does, but underneath the black jeans and the littered restaurant floors, they...
wondered why they were alive, where they were going, what it was all for, just as I did. The differences between us are arbitrary, arising from the history of cultures, but our similarities are profound, arising from the essentials of human nature. It is only when we recognize the essential similarity of someone else that we can be moved to care about him or her. When we see a person is confronting problems just like ours, then we are willing to learn from them, to teach them. True comprehension of our differences will grow forth from the recognition of our fundamental sameness.

The summer after I went to school in Spain, I traveled by train through Europe. One day after three weeks of traveling, I sat next to a middle-aged man wearing an Indiana University baseball cap. Predictably we started talking. We marveled that we were both from Bloomington and that we should meet so far away in France. Together we went from Paris all the way to Prague. I would go to the bathroom and ask him to watch my stuff. He bought me lunch. We told each other secrets and fears. How did such communication come about? We were neighbors. The simple arbitrary similarity of our hometown, seemingly so important because we were so far away, made us fellows. There was a sense of community that enveloped us both. Yet, if we were to have sat next to each other on a train going from Indianapolis to Bloomington, we probably wouldn’t have even said hello.

To promote global understanding, we need to understand that we are all neighbors. In the vastness of this universe, we are all from the same hometown: Earth. We are all immigrants of consciousness packed into a thirty-second floor, two-bedroom apartment deep in this empty City that is the physical universe. “This earth,” said Milton in Paradise Lost, “a spot, a grain, an atom.” One atom, one home. We six billion are the angels on the head of a pin. It is a precarious place to be, and we are all in it together.

Global understanding will increase only as each of us comes to make these metaphors real in our lives. All community is made of individuals, and all of the individuals together create the community. When each of us acts toward our fellow neighbor on the assumption that we are all fundamentally the same, we will see how superficial our differences are.

Asian Languages Pedagogy Workshop

In early April, IU Bloomington’s East Asian Studies Center held its sixth annual Language Pedagogy workshop for K-12 and university level language teachers of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Fifty-seven teachers attended the two-day workshop, “Different Skills, Different Backgrounds: Teaching the Multilevel Classroom,” and heard presentations by Sara Saz, professor of Spanish & Portuguese and director of language instruction, and Sohn Sung-ock, a professor at UCLA who coordinates their Korean Language Program.

The workshop, coordinated this year by graduate student Colleen Berry, also included classroom observations, sessions on teaching techniques, and demonstrations of currently available software programs. Language specific workshops were organized by IUB faculty Yasuko Ito Watt for Japanese, Jennifer Liu for Chinese, and Hyo-sang Lee for Korean.

The Center sponsors two language pedagogy workshops each year. For information on future workshops, contact the Center at Memorial Hall 207 West, IUB; tel: (812) 855-3765.