An Example of Total Immersion

at California State University, Long Beach
Some Common Principles

- Language itself must be considered the instrument we need to explore the content, and not the content itself.
- Language teaching is thematic, based on topics meaningful for learners.
- Learners must assume an active role.
- Learners must be encouraged to produce language actively.
Premises

- Language as a discourse: signs, metaphors and symbols
- The left and right functions of the brain are complementary and linguistic expression results from this interconnection
- The environment must present sufficient visual and auditory stimuli
- We learn better when we do not realize we are learning!
Description

• I tried to recreate an environmental situation the most conducive to learning a foreign language, as close as possible to study in the country of the target language.

• First time: a two-day class of full immersion and the second time one full day, two weekends, and two evenings.

• We took 20 students of intermediate level to an Italian private villa, where just about everything you can consider “Italian” was available to us: this presented ideal conceptual and linguistic stimuli.
Some Activities

- The place itself constantly helped us to combine visual and verbal components
- We kept in mind individual students’ interest and expertise
- Examples: dancing the tango, a yoga session, cooking
- House opportunities:
  - Setting the table
  - treasure hunt (inside and outside in the garden)
  - auctions
  - bocce
  - *tabu* and dating game
Creative Activities

- Skits
- Stores
- Fashion show
- Kitchen: preparing meals
- Magazines: reading examples and creating ads
- TV News casts
- Elements of surprise and possibilities to reflect
Theatrical Activities

- Telephone conversations in a chain (improvising)
- Short plays and theatrical scenes
- Aristotelian rule of “real” time
Methodology and results

- Brainstorming sessions to prepare
- Specific pre-activities preparations
- Use of the “Italian” environment
- Instructors: guides and directors always at the margins
- Students: active participants, protagonists, actors
- Familiar and friendly atmosphere
- Independency of learners
- Spontaneous linguistic production
- Sense of belonging to homogenous groups
the future

- Rooms dedicated to language teaching
- Rotation between languages
- Concept of environment