

Versión en INGLÉS



Dissemination and training activities from the International Course on Paper Conservation in Latin America: Meeting East

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Abstract

This article aims to share the experiences of the dissemination and knowledge transfer activities carried out by participants of different editions of the International Course on Paper Conservation in Latin America: Meeting East, given in Mexico between 2012 and 2019. It also aims to share the reflections generated from the group exchange on various aspects related to the planning and implementation of the activities carried out by each participant. These reflections include the personal motivations that led us to carry out these activities, the challenges and difficulties faced along the way, the reasons that led us to decide on the chosen topics, the response of the participants, and the results obtained during these experiences.

Keywords

Dissemination knowledge; courses and training; paper conservation.



This article is based on our participation in an online seminar held in December 2020 to reflect on the International Course on Paper Conservation in Latin America: Meeting East, an event held in Mexico, which allowed us to exchange views and experiences among colleagues from Latin America who attended different editions of the course.¹

The journey through the multiple and dissimilar training activities, motivated by the personal need to share the knowledge acquired in our work and academic environment, shows the relevance of this course in our professional lives and the scope of the topics addressed in Latin America. It also highlights the collaboration through professional networks to share concerns and information in a generous way to face professional challenges.

Most relevant activities

As a result of the commitment and responsibility assumed for having been selected to attend the International Course on Paper Conservation in Latin America: Meeting East, a significant number of dissemination and training activities of different kinds were organized in various Latin American countries.

Many of the attendees shared the need to devise activities with the purpose of communicating the knowledge acquired, such as: the organization of training sessions in our own work teams, with the personnel in charge or with other colleagues in the work environment. One of the main motivations was, on the one hand, to transmit and implement this knowledge and introduce improvements and updates in the processes and techniques used in daily work and, on the other hand, to raise awareness among colleagues regarding the proper handling, use and maintenance of tools and materials, as well as the care to maintain order and cleanliness in workspaces, good practices, and to encourage reflection during restoration treatments.

Other activities were academic presentations and broadcast to encourage other colleagues to participate in the course, or to sensitize the authorities of the institutions to organize or manage training projects and for the acquisition of specialized conservation materials and supplies for the conservation projects.

Over the years, the experiences learned in Mexico gained visibility in various forums, meetings and international seminars on conservation and restoration, for example those organized in Chile, Argentina and Brazil, such as the International Meeting on Preventive and Interventive Conservation in Museums, Archives and Libraries;² the International Seminar on Paper Conservation in Santiago, Chile;³ or the International Seminar of Written Culture in the Early Modern World in Brazil.⁴ These events, which had high levels of attendance and were regionally based, were essential to publicize some of the experiences and disseminate the contents of the course in Mexico.

¹ In chronological order, starting with those who attended in 2012 until now: Sonia Merizalde from Ecuador who participated in the course in 2012; Ana Masiello from Argentina in 2013; Maria Toninetti, also from Argentina, in 2014; Richard Francisco Solís from Chile who attended in 2015; Adriana Gomez Llorente from Mexico in 2016; Dara Araceli Valencia Hernandez, also from Mexico, in 2018; and Ina Hergert from Brazil in 2019.

² Organized by the Museo de Cabildo y de la Revolución de Mayo, in conjunction with the Biblioteca Esteban Echeverría of the Legislatura de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, between 2014 and 2017.

³ Seminar whose first edition was in 2016 and in 2020 had its fifth edition virtually.

⁴ Organized by the Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto (UFOP) and the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in 2019.



In addition, the knowledge acquired began to permeate to students in the careers of conservation and restoration of cultural heritage in Argentina and Mexico, Ecuador and Chile; countries where several trainings and internships were carried out with students in which the techniques learned in the course were implemented. As an example of the internships, we can mention the case of the restoration of the Collection of Early Chilean Printed Materials in 2016 for which three specialists and 15 interns who were students in the area were summoned at the Archivo Central Andrés Bello of the Universidad of Chile, also the workshops and worktables for students of the restoration and museology career at the Universidad Tecnológica Equinoccial, in Ecuador in 2017.

From the exchange between Latin American professionals in academic forums arose the opportunity to share aspects of the course that were considered relevant to the reality of Latin America. This is the case of the specialized workshops held in 2019 in different parts of Brazil as part of the Seminário Internacional Cultura Escrita no Mundo Moderno, which dealt with specific topics related to the use of Klucel® G adhesive, or the Workshop on Updating Conservation Methods for Documentary Heritage held in 2017 at the Biblioteca Mayor in the city of Cordoba, Argentina. In both cases with professional instructors from Mexico, among them Adriana Gomez Llorente.



Figure 1. Restoration students from the Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto attend the training course to prepare and use paper with Klucel® G for reactivation. *Image: ©Marcia Almada, UFMG*

In some of these workshops, for example, the obtaining of starch from wheat flour was disseminated, taking into account the lack of this product specially manufactured for restoration purposes and the possibility of building one's tools. Likewise, it was possible to share techniques for preparing the paper with Klucel® G adhesive to reactivate it with alcohol as an additional tool to the Eastern techniques, particularly for cases where it is not possible to carry out aqueous treatments. The Mexican course dealt with these different aspects related to adaptation to local realities and difficulties.

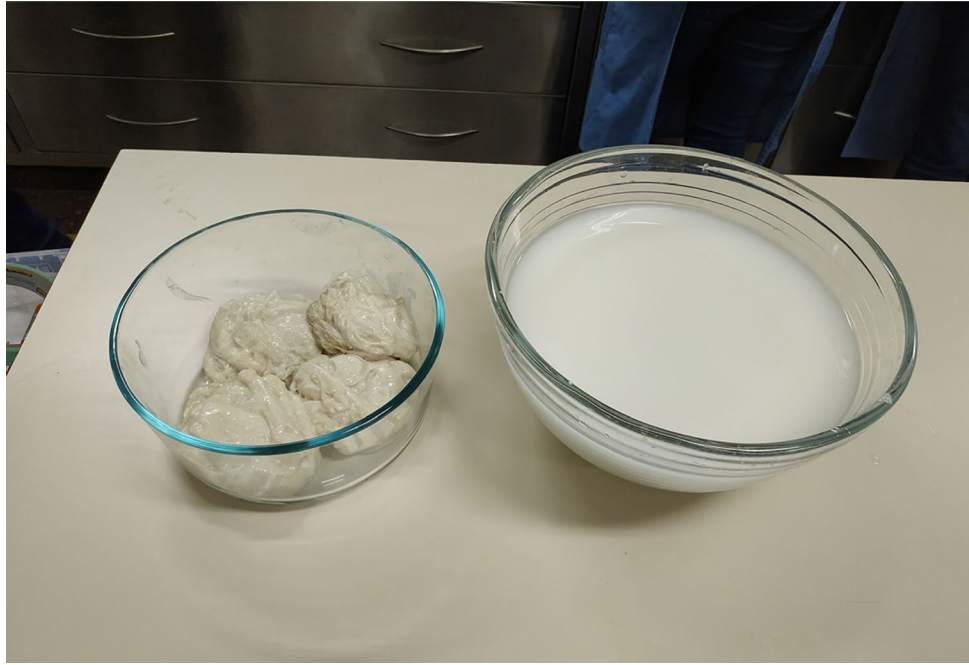


Figure 2. The extraction of wheat starch from flour is one of the contents learned in the Mexico course, selected to be disseminated in training. *Image: ©Ina Hergert.*

A specialized article was also prepared for *Icon News* in collaboration between Brazil and Mexico representatives to inform curators and researchers from that association about the work carried out by the teams from Mexico, Japan, and ICCROM. The article emphasized the course's organizational characteristics, its history, its impact, and the relevance of the team of teachers from different parts of the world, highlighting the importance of international collaboration (Heger and Ponce, 2020: 27-29).

The meeting with professionals from various Latin American countries and the teachers from Japan was an essential aspect for us since the links created between professionals and institutions and the exchange of knowledge allowed for a broader cultural exchange. Because of this collaborative work, the networks strengthened among the participants and the cooperation ties generated colleagues' invitations to give workshops in other Latin American countries.

The profile of the participants in the various activities

As mentioned above, the workshops organized around the international seminars in Latin America, whose impact is of great relevance given the number of participants, made it possible to disseminate part of the learnings from the course in Mexico.

On the other hand, other types of training carried out in several days and with smaller groups allowed for a more in-depth study of the topics taught. In general, the profile of the participants was defined by selection criteria that favored specialized professionals in terms of the type of studies, experience, and insertion in institutions with heritage collections. Under this modality, an exchange of experiences was carried out, and the needs for updating intervention criteria and practices were covered, as well as specific treatments to deepen their application and research.



An example worth mentioning is the Seminar-workshop on restoring documents with Eastern techniques carried out in a specialized forum in Quito, Ecuador, sponsored by ICOM-Ecuador and the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores y Movilidad Humana of the same country, in 2017. The central axis was the transmission of knowledge of Eastern materials and techniques, in charge of Sonia Merizalde.



Figure 3. Call for participation in the Seminar-workshop on restoring documents with Eastern techniques in Quito, Ecuador. Image: ©ICOM Ecuador.

Some intensive training was held so professionals from different institutions and distant locations could attend, like the Workshops on conservation and restoration of books with the participation of Ana Laura Masiello as the teacher, organized by the Taller de conservación y restauración⁵ of the Biblioteca de la Legislatura Porteña⁶ in Buenos Aires, since 2016.

Occasionally, courses were organized focused on the personnel who carry out restoration activities in the institutions, even if they did not necessarily have an academic background. In those cases, the main objective was the need to standardize general concepts of conservation and restoration and criteria and ethical principles of treatment. In general, these courses were also given to small groups for a longer timetable to allow the participants to carry out practical work. Examples of these are the one organized by Dara Araceli Valencia Hernández for the staff of the Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca (AGEO) in 2018; the updating course for the staff of the Departamento de conservación y restauración⁷ of the Biblioteca Nacional de México,⁸ in 2017 by Adriana Gómez Llorente; and the course for employees of the Archivo General de la Función Judicial of Ecuador, held between 2015 and 2018, taught by Sonia Merizalde.

⁵ Conservation and Restoration Laboratory.

⁶ Library of the Port Legislature (note from the translator).

⁷ Conservation and Restoration Department.

⁸ National Library of Mexico (note from the translator).





Figure 4. The construction of a model of the cellulose molecule during the training for technicians of the Archivo General del Estado de Oaxaca. *Image: ©Dara Valencia.*



Figure 5. Personnel from the Departamento de conservación y restauración of the Biblioteca Nacional de México in starch extraction from wheat flour during an updating training. *Image: ©Adriana Gomez Llorente.*



Figure 6. Course for officials of the Archivo General de la Función Judicial of Ecuador. *Image: Personal archive ©Sonia Merizalde.*



In the academic field, thesis emerged addressing topics such as the research of local materials for the treatment of works with paper support or for the implementation of some of the Eastern techniques applied to local heritage, which shows the existence of production of knowledge influenced by the experience in the course in Mexico. Like the work of students carried out in Museo de Química y Farmacia Profesor César Leyton Caravagno of the Universidad de Chile, one of which includes the restoration of medicine containers with the application of Eastern lining techniques whose direction was in charge of Richard Solís (Cit. in Becerra, 2016).

It is also worth mentioning the insertion of dissemination and practical activities in professional conservation and restoration programs, through the inclusion of course contents as part of their planning. An example is the presentation made by María Toninetti as a guest lecturer in the subject Methods and techniques of conservation and restoration of flat works on paper, of the Bachelor's Degree program in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage at the Universidad de San Martín (Unsam), in Argentina.

Thus, from 2012 to date, it can be said that many of the topics taught in the International Course on Paper Conservation in Latin America: Meeting East have influenced in various ways a considerable number of professionals who attended the course directly or not, given the multiplicity of dissemination, training, and exchange activities generated.

Topics addressed in the activities

Although the topics covered in the different activities varied depending on those who attended, there was a need to select those that could have a possible application in our surroundings, taking into account the local realities in the different Latin American countries. Thus, the most carried out activities were the ones related to: obtaining wheat starch from flour (through demonstrations and practice by the attendees when conditions made it possible); the preparation of wheat starch adhesive and its applications, such as lining; the construction of the work tools for paper intervention; the preparation of papers with Klucel® G adhesive for reactivation with solvent as an additional technique for specific cases such as brittle industrial papers or those that cannot be subjected to aqueous treatments.

These topics have been disseminated largely, along with the invitation to reflect on one's daily practice in the workspace, by covering points such as cleanliness, order, and the need to generate spaces for reflection and analysis of the treatment before they are carried out. This was inspired by the philosophy with which Japanese teachers approach professional tasks.

It is also important to mention that many of the educational resources used in training take their inspiration from the course in Mexico or were adapted from personal experience. Elements such as the workshop's structure, educational materials offered, demonstrations, and the execution of procedures experienced in the course served as support and starting point for the design of the training activities, where these resources were used or adapted according to the profile of participants and the characteristics of the activities.

Analysis of activities and experiences

One of the main motivations to carry out the training, as mentioned earlier, was the need to share the knowledge and experiences acquired in the International Course on Paper Conservation in Latin America: Meeting East with colleagues, which became fundamental for the work and management of collective criteria to promote our continued professional development. Likewise,



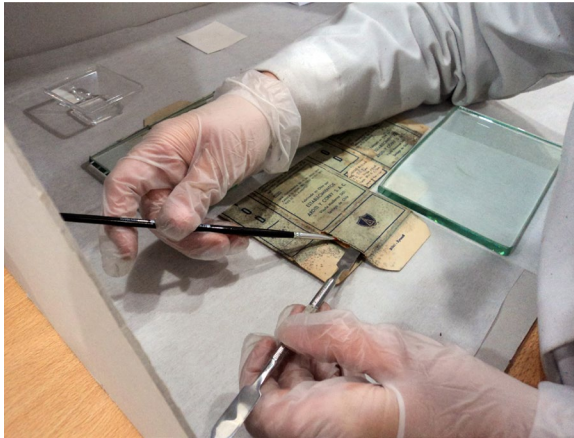


Figure 7. Restoration of secondary medicine containers as part of a thesis work carried out at the Museo de Química y Farmacia Profesor César Leyton Caravagno of the Universidad de Chile. *Image: archive ©Richard Solís.*



Figure 8. Students of the Licenciatura en Conservación y Restauración del Patrimonio Cultural at the Universidad de San Martín in a training course in which practices are carried out based on the contents of the Mexico paper course. *Image: ©Luciana Fels, Unsam.*



Figure 9. The construction of one's tools adapted to the needs of restoration work is part of the contents of the training that was given in various institutions. *Image: ©Ana Masiello.*



having obtained the benefit of a scholarship⁹ of this magnitude entails the commitment to disseminate and share what we have learned so that more people may benefit from this knowledge. The techniques learned materialized in introducing modifications and improvements in our work and the restoration treatments. For this reason, sharing some of these techniques through various training activities made it possible to share them with other people both in the work centers, institutions, and other Latin American countries. These are some of the aspects that were considered most relevant and valuable for preserving documentary heritage. On the other hand, participating in these activities and providing the possibility of sharing these experiences has allowed us to reinforce and strengthen our own knowledge.

We also consider that the Mexico course meant a change in our lives beyond the knowledge acquired. Being introduced to the Eastern vision and its ways of working, and encountering a culture so dissimilar to our own, were aspects that constituted a turning point in our professional careers, marking us in many aspects related to our daily work. Trying to pass on these experiences, even though we are aware of the task's difficulty, was also a motivation for each of us.

In this sense, it is of great importance to promote activities with students who are starting a university career in restoration, in order to emphasize some points related to how they will approach the profession and the task of restoring, like respect for materials and tools, working times, heritage assets that are in our care, as well as our colleagues.

On the other hand, in some Latin American countries, it is still necessary to reinforce the existing professional training in the educational spaces, since some of the teachers in charge of imparting that training do not have updated knowledge regarding treatments or techniques or there is a scarcity of academic options to fill those gaps. For these cases, it is even more essential to organize complementary training activities that contribute to the professional training of those interested. However, considering the quality knowledge obtained in Mexico and the commitment acquired for its retransmission, we consider that it has been possible to share what has been learned and thus contribute to overcoming this deficiency.

Challenges and difficulties faced

One of the main obstacles some Latin American countries face is the possibility of acquiring certain materials, supplies, and tools for the restoration of paper. A problem that increases in those areas farther away from the capital cities. Therefore, in the training and courses, it was necessary to consider this situation to implement the knowledge acquired. On numerous occasions, it was necessary to investigate if the required materials could be obtained in the local market before training.

In this sense, the information received in the course on the adaptation of tools and materials to the needs and realities that exist in many places in Latin America, where it is difficult for institutions to afford materials that often must be purchased in other countries at very high prices, was crucial.

⁹ The application comprises a limited number of slots, and applicants come from all over Iberoamerica. Within the application to participate in the course, in addition to requesting information about professional activities, applicants are required to state their motivations, expectations, and relevance for their professional development and the potential impact and benefit for the institutions where they collaborate. It also requires information from the institution about the support to the applicant and the institutional and personal commitment to be chosen as a beneficiary of the scholarship. It is a commitment that implies a great responsibility concerning the institution that is represented and intended to have a positive impact on the activity and environment of the participant.





Figure 10. Exhibition of tools in the Mexico course. The adaptation of tools to the needs and possibilities of our reality was one of the most relevant points in our training. *Image: ©Ina Hergert.*

When reflecting on the difficulties in the organization of activities in the reality as mentioned above, it is inevitable to think about the situation of personnel working in institutions with heritage collections, who often face precarious hiring systems or are subject to projects that expire for reasons unrelated to their performance, reasons that impede labor continuity and often hinder the possibility of investing resources and time in organizing training or research activities. It is essential to point out that trained professionals are often too busy with management tasks in institutions with numerous collections and do not have the necessary time to implement their knowledge of intervention in the collection. Technical work is often delegated to interns or contract workers.

Another challenge for organizing and teaching activities is the lack of specialized restoration personnel within the institutions that safeguard documentary heritage. Due to a lack of updating in techniques and materials, the technical staff often find it challenging to achieve the expected results. This reality, which can be solved through constant training, requires great care and responsibility when transmitting knowledge to avoid misinterpretations or failure to faithfully transmit the context and criteria that support the decision-making process that leads to the application of certain practices.

The professional responsibility as restorers obliges us to keep ourselves in constant training, which is a commitment to benefit our daily work and the heritage itself. The possibility of organizing and providing training requires the continuous updating and incorporation of those who organize these activities.

The response, application, and impact of the activities

In general, the response of those attending the workshops and courses has always been gratitude and willingness to practice and apply what they have learned in their workplace, to the possible extent and with their limitations, especially those related to materials and tools.

Receiving comments from the trainees on the use of certain materials or techniques and the results they have had in implementing some treatments has made it possible to follow up on the workshops given.



An example of the impact generated by the Mexico course is that in some Latin American countries, the use of wheat starch as an adhesive over the use of methyl cellulose has become generalized, as it has been adopted by colleagues who are teachers and mentors in the area. Therefore, the technique was shared with a more significant number of people who work in paper restoration, a fact that resulted in a relevant advance in their work's results over the years.

Another aspect that we have observed is that, on occasions, it has been possible to increase the sensitivity of the authorities within the institutions to acquire supplies and tools specialized in restoration.

It is worth mentioning that many colleagues who took the course in Mexico or who were trained directly in Japan have woven a collaborative network in different spaces (work, academic, and research) that are intertwined in many ways, as new approaches to conservation, as well as in the way they see our professional activity.

Final considerations

The links generated among those attending the courses in Mexico have fostered the construction of a collaboration network with colleagues that also contributed to creating a space for consultation and exchange related to decision-making or the treatments. From the contact with professionals whose experiences are diverse, it is possible to get to know other workspaces in other institutional or professional environments, allowing us to share the application of specific treatments and how the problems we face daily are solved. We consider that this constitutes a significant advance in the work of Latin American restorers.

The International Course on Paper Conservation in Latin America: Meeting East was essential to promote this exchange, not only because it brought Eastern experts closer to Latin America, but also because it favored the articulation of concrete and fundamental topics that became adapted to the needs and possibilities of our countries, where in many cases we do not have the economic or material resources to have a training of this nature. All this meant enrichment and learning from a professional, cultural, and personal point of view, which was reflected in the various training activities implemented afterward.

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