



## How does an exchange complement school learning?

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A few years ago, I had the luck to participate in a basketball coaching training. It lasted 4 months, with classes and assignment every week. It was something taken very seriously, we had over 20 subjects to cover ranging from tactics to adapted sports (for handicapped children), from sociology of sports to first aid trainings. **While extracurricular activities are not yet seen as non-formal education in schools, there is a widespread love for them** -at least in sport activities- all around Spain. In this course there were mainly two issues all of us were worried about: we would be training children from 4 to 14 years old, and this new generation is characterized for two things, 1. having lost -or not having received- any physical skills trainings; these kids are overwhelmed by colourful intake information in technology, they lose interest in going to parks, running around, and that can be perceived in their motor skills; 2. with the same cause, children's concentration, mainly until they were 8 years old, could only be kept for 45 minutes to do more complex things, afterwards it was best to engage in easy games.

These were issues that we had to take into account for children that we would be seeing at the most three times a week, for an hour or hour-and-half. **How can schools keep kids attention for 8 hours a day, 5 days a week, for as long as 18 years?**

Perhaps, we should start applying the term 'programmed obsolescence' to the average school nowadays too. *Bridgeland, Dilulio and Burke Morison* (2006) wrote the study *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, and the things they found to be the cause of high school dropouts in USA were:

- Classes not being interesting (47% of the dropped-out students)
- 69% were not motivated or inspired to work
- 32% said they had to get a job and make money
- 26% became a parent
- 22% had to take care of a family member
- 35% said that failing in school was a major factor for dropping out
- 45% said they started high school poorly prepared by their earlier schooling

**School alone is no longer able to fulfil people's education needs.** The need of schooling is undisputed, maths, languages, sciences, history... conform people's knowledge, their personalities and innovation is many times based off previous acquired knowledge. Furthermore, school is usually where people first actively socialize with people from very different ages and background without help from their families.

However, and **this is where the exchange programme comes in**, this last point is of very limited efficiency if people keep socializing to just their schools since nowadays we live in an extremely globalized world. Going on a long-term exchange is extremely beneficial for the development of children. Just to cite a few reasons:

- First of all, **it brings a change in environment**, these children, or teenagers, might be, for the very first time, living outside their homes and families for a long-term. They still receive the support of a family, but they have to learn to move around an unknown city -which they never had to in their hometowns, since families introduced them to it-, move around unknown people and get to know them, despite any language and culture barriers there might be.
  - ✓ This helps children and teenagers develop **confidence in their own selves**.
  - ✓ **Motivation** to try new things.
  - ✓ (Further) Development of **proactiveness**. Nothing will be handed to them; if they want to make friends, learn the language, and get to know the host-families... they will have to put the intent on their side.
  - ✓ Helps the development of **positive attitudes** when facing challenges, since it would be too easy to give up against the first language barrier (e.g.).
  - ✓ Testing and sometimes, **surpassing their comfort zones**.
- Second of all, **it combats boredom**, both for the exchanger and the hosts. The exchanger gets new non-technological stimulation and so do the hosts.
- Third, **it opens up possibilities** for both exchangers and hosts -in their minds-, about travelling, living in other places, even following up their education in other places.
- **Creating connections** between people all around the world increases the empathy and understanding one can have towards other cultures, which is one of the main global objectives in order to maintain peace.
- **Learning a new language** not only helps these students access better future possibilities, but also different languages bring different knowledge and different ways/perspectives of looking at things.
- Exchangers become more aware of what it means to come from their particular culture, they test the limits their culture has, they innovate and adopt things from other cultures. **They learn to express themselves with and despite cultural differences**.

Furthermore, all of this newly acquired knowledge is brought back to their communities. An exchange is in all its ambits a shared experience, for example, those children who have experienced a different education system bring back suggestions on how to improve their own, motivation to change things or even motivate their peer with new perspectives on what they already had.

**Exchange students become change makers, critical thinkers, mediators** and so many more things. They keep innovating on their own selves once they have learnt that this is a possibility. The exchange shows children and teenagers that their world is not limited to their schools and families, and all it takes to expand is a bit of initiative.