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MARIA ISABEL POZZO

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# Foreign Students as a Tool for Promoting Intercultural Learning in High School: A Case Study in Argentina

María Isabel Pozzo, National Scientific and Technical Research Council, Argentina

*Abstract: In the present paper we focus on the attitudes that Argentinean high school teachers have towards the educational benefits of foreign students in the classroom. In this regard, we have carried out a survey in a Rosario city private school which is constantly attended by exchange students. By means of a half-structured questionnaire, we elicited how important they consider these students in their conversations with other members of the school community, which activities have already been implemented or will be in the future, their opinions about the role of schools in the social integration of foreign students, the students' previous knowledge about Argentina, and other similar topics. The article concludes with some guidelines for the teachers to acquire a greater command of cultural diversity as a tool for enhancing learning in various subjects.*

*Keywords: Foreign Exchange Students, High School, Intercultural Education, Argentina*

## Introduction

Currently in Argentina, the multicultural high school classroom is composed of immigrants<sup>1</sup> and exchange students. Foreign exchange students come from other countries for a certain period of time searching for academic growth and new life experiences. As they are sent and received by an institutional program, they have a social advantage from immigrant students, who come from abroad without any institutional support or program in charge of the arrivals. Furthermore, the latter come for an uncertain period of time, escaping from unemployment, poverty, hunger, religious and/or political problems. Although it is clear that immigration represents a more conflictive reality and it is thus more challenging, in both cases, however, the arrival in the new country is not always easy. Foreign students have to learn the new culture and language -in cases where it is different from their mother tongue- and have to tackle cultural shock and follow new social rules. It is in these situations that intercultural education emerges. Exchange students represent a possibility to start shaping interculturalism in the classrooms, as it is set up in the National Educational Law N° 26,206 (National Ministry of Education 2006). For these reasons, the purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes that Argentinean high school teachers have towards the educational benefits of foreign exchange students in the classroom. As it will be described, a long line of inquiry suggests that faculty play a central role in the integration of foreign immigrant students. However, few studies examine the impact of foreign exchange students on teachers' performance in class. Therefore, this study asks the following research questions:

- 1) What kind of attitudes do high school teachers have towards foreign exchange students as a source of educational benefits for their classes?
- 2) In which way do Argentinean high school teachers apply their perceptions on foreign exchange students in their classes?

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<sup>1</sup> In the whole country, the amount of people born abroad is 1,805,957 out of a total of 38,311,139 inhabitants born in Argentina, according to the National Census of People, Home and Houses (National Institute of Statistics and Census - INDEC- 2010).

The hypothesis for those questions are:

- 1) Teachers do not have a definite perception about foreign exchange students as a source of educational benefits for their classes.
- 2) Teachers do not always apply their perceptions about foreign exchange students to enhance the development of their classes.

## State of the Art

Research on the object of this study in Argentina has mainly focused in higher education, due to the growing number of foreign students who come attracted by the public Argentinean University (Ugarteche, Rodríguez & Pozzo 2012). In this educational level, research has mainly dealt with students and institutional programmes. In the first case, Tosi (2009) and Tosi, Ballerini, Suárez & Molina (2011) have focused on the impact of the condition of migrant students. Other studies are interested in the difficulties suffered by foreign students in the command of academic skills (Lanzoni 2011). On the other hand, there are analyses of higher education programs from the perspective of educational internationalization (Veneranda 2012 for Universities in the province of Buenos Aires; Albertti and Ferrari 2007 on a national scope). This orientation is based on the conclusions of the Regional Conference for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (2008) presented in Argentina, which invoke the central role of the Universities in the promotion of inclusion policies.

The same predominance of the University is present in studies of other countries. Similar interest for educational internationalization is noted in the study of Rodarte and Vanderve (2009) for Durango –Mexico- and Bostrom (2010) in Turkish Higher Education. Klineberg and Hull (1979) carried out an international study of adaptation of students, faculty, and administrators involved with foreign student exchanges using data obtained in eleven countries: Brazil, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Japan, Kenya, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In Spain, the research carried out by Lebrero Baena and Quicios García (2010) seeks to identify the difficulties of immigrants to succeed in public Spanish Universities. The studies centered in students' exchange programs have been assessed in other national contexts (cfr. Sowa 2002 in the USA; Heater 1982 in Britain) and the results cannot be generalized to Argentina.

Many studies focusing on the relation between teachers and foreign students take an attitudinal perspective. They focus on possible implicit or explicit discriminative acts by teachers. The study conducted in Spain by Salas Rodríguez et al. (2012) poses the necessity to develop an intercultural competence in the whole citizenship through education to eliminate racism and xenophobia. Also in Spain, Ortiz Cobo (2008) carries out an ethnographic research in primary and secondary schools in the Spanish province of Almería. Her purpose is to analyze teachers' perceptions about foreign students in order to prevent prejudices and ethnic and cultural stereotypes at schools. The author concludes that foreign students are perceived as a threat, showing a covert racism. In the same country, Kaben (2009) reflects on the role of native teacher of Spanish as a foreign language as a 'bridge' and mediator between the culture he is teaching -his own- and the culture of his student.

Intercultural bilingual education constitutes another research stream which, although centered in the aboriginal people, can make an important contribution to the analysis of multicultural sceneries. In this sense, the research in Bolivia by Ipiña Melgar (1997) studies the ideal teacher profile needed for bilingual intercultural education, with the objective to provide tools for proper teacher training.

Meanwhile, some studies try to show the value of intercultural experiences for both teachers and students. Wilson (1982) explores the value of cross-cultural experiential learning for

teachers, while Shieh (2004) focuses on transcultural experiences in international exchange programs; specifically on Taiwanese graduate nursing students in the United States. Agueda Gómez and Pozo Vicente (2009) assess the development of communicative and telematic competencies in Erasmus German students in Spanish Universities. Zorn (1996) studies the long-term impact of study abroad experiences on American baccalaureate nursing graduates.

Besides the possibilities offered by physical mobility, the development of information and communication technologies has opened a wide new perspective for the implementation of educational activities. Rossmundo and Alonso (2009) examine the role of virtual interchanges based on the web between University students in the United States of America and Costa Rica to foster intercultural and linguistic competencies.

Beyond the overwhelming approval of intercultural experiences, there is scarce diagnosis on how and to what extent teachers appreciate cultural diversity in the classroom and the actual uses they make out of it in order to contribute to the learning process. A remarkable study which responds to this matter is one of Tsokaktsidu (2005), which develops the implications of having exchange students in teaching translation in higher education. Her hypothesis holds that “the presence of exchange students implies a series of adaptations, changes of attitude, methodological changes, etc. on the side of the faculty, since a change in one factor in the class, like the one that refers to students, affects all the other aspects” (p.132). Her research confirms the hypothesis (p. 230) with an optimism greater than the one held in this article. Moreover, Villalpando’s (2002) longitudinal study examined positive level of satisfaction of a range of college diversity initiatives on American college and universities students. They comprised: attending cultural awareness workshops; socializing with students of different racial/ethnic groups; taking courses with content on ethnic/racial issues; and campus policies and practices that promote diversity initiatives.

As can be seen from this review, research about the encounters between teachers and students of different nationalities has received predominant attention as regards: immigrant students more than exchange students; attitudinal aspects above conceptual ones, and university level above high school. Therefore, it is necessary to approach those gaps considering the huge number of exchange students that every year attend Argentinean high schools (Pavesich, Moscoloni and Pozzo 2010).

## **Conceptual Framework**

### ***Intercultural Education***

We refer to intercultural education as the teaching and interaction of different cultures, with a focus on integration and valuing them. Aguado (1991) defines it as an educational approach based on the appreciation of cultural diversity, which aims to offer equal opportunities to everybody, tries to overcome racism and foster intercultural competence both in students and teachers. These educational goals require a governmental acknowledgement and political strategies to the variety of cultural groups. In a similar sense, Martínez-Otero (2003, 14) defines it as a “theoretical and practical training leading to an enriching interchange between cultures”. In this respect, intercultural education seeks to develop human potentialities so that they can respond satisfactorily to multicultural situations. This means we have to reflect on reality and acknowledge cultural diversity, trying to improve the educational practice both personally and socially. To do so, it requires a commitment to foster communication between coexisting cultures.

There are two major pedagogical trends which refer to an educational proposal in a plural society: multiculturalism and interculturalism. Although these terms are usually used as synonyms, the first one has been mostly used in American pedagogical literature, whereas the second one has been preferably accepted in Europe. Besides the scope of usage, there is a

difference in meaning. *Multiculturalism* is a descriptive concept which emphasizes the co-existence of two or more ethnic groups in the same territory. It depicts a very frequent reality nowadays, which can lead to a conflict between them. On the other hand, *interculturalism* appears as an approach that attempts to go beyond the mere geographical coincidence among cultures, showing the way for an enriching interchange between them. This goal, however, presents a great challenge for teachers, which is faced everyday at the classroom but starts back in their initial training (Domínguez 2006).

### *Teachers' Perceptions, Representations and Attitudes*

Borg (2003) uses the term 'teacher cognition' to refer to the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching –what teachers know, believe and think. Educational research carried out during the last decades has showed the impact of teachers' cognition on their professional lives (83).

In the field of culture learning and English language teaching, Young and Sachdev (2011, 82) conclude that "culture and cultural difference seem to be approached by teachers more as problems, or constraints, than as resources to contextualise and enhance motivation and learning. Teacher orientations that took full account of apparent sociocultural difference, and which sought to relativize the familiar and the different, seemed to be successful in terms of encouraging learner engagement.

Séré (2006) carried out a study on university exchange students in Europe in order to assess the experience effectiveness to achieve multicultural training and linguistic development in the students. The study was carried out throughout biographic interviews to students who participated in exchange programs. The author concludes that, although these programs show positive results, they are still little socially profitable. She believes they will change social representations toward a more integrated view of diversity. However, these actions have an undefined framework and therefore, the interchanges are felt as individual experiences. At the same time, the fact that host universities are unaware of these students' presence at the classrooms and the lack of specific teacher training to deal with them in the classrooms leave them unprotected, making the exchange only accessible to the most mature students.

The numerous research projects carried out by the Intercultural Studies Laboratory of Granada University, Spain, address how foreign students are seen by native students and teachers. Although they do not focus on exchange students but on immigrants, it is interesting that García Castaño y Granados Martínez (2002) conclude that schools strategies tend to make cultural diversity homogeneous: once the differences are shown, schools try to adapt immigrants' identity to the culture of the host country. Martínez-Otero (2003) coincides with these authors and criticizes Spanish educational policies and lack of intercultural sensitivity to different habits, traditions, languages, beliefs, etc. He declares deep changes have to be done in order to give place to educational progress. Breen et al. (2001, 490) mention several practices to accomplish "the principle of accounting for individual differences" that can be applied to the needs of teachers with exchange students. Some of them are: to accept all students' responses without saying they're wrong, to make worksheets on same topic but at different levels, to integrate within lessons items needed for competencies to be covered in the term, to link vocabulary/concepts back to students' culture/experience.

The implementation of teaching strategies that involve exchange students as a device to promote learning depends on the conceptions of the teachers about the students, and the relationships between them. Without such information, the plans to implement innovative teaching practices may seem forced, or may not come to reality. For that reason, our research begins with a diagnostic study of teachers' conceptions about exchange students as a tool to promote intercultural learning in high school. In that sense, we made up a half-structured survey (see Appendix) which elucidates these teachers' conceptions in different aspects. In the following

sections, we will describe the method we have followed in order to see to what extent the studied group of teachers are willing to such openness.

## Methodology

### *About the Project*

This research project is carried out as part of a broader action-research project named “Exchange students and intercultural education: bridges for reciprocal learning”<sup>2</sup>. As its title suggests, the project attempts to enhance the encounter between high school exchange students in Argentina and the host community (host students, teachers and families) as an opportunity for learning. The present article constitutes a subsection of the framework project which focuses on local teachers perspectives. In this way, it aims to fill the existing research gap as regards Argentinean high school teachers’ perception towards foreign exchange students.

### *About the Subjects*

The subjects-objects are high school teachers in their natural environment, the school. Out of the high schools of the city of Rosario, Argentina, the research was implemented in a small private school located in downtown. The school is located in a middle-high class neighbourhood and both students and teachers enjoy an advantageous socio-economic and cultural position. The selection was based on two reasons: its tradition<sup>3</sup> in the acceptance of exchange students, and the excellent disposition of its authorities from the beginning of the experience. As every official institution, the school follows the current provincial Curriculum. Its programs and courses do not include any entry point referred to foreign students’ knowledge. However, it is expected that in some subjects (like Language and Social Sciences) interaction could become easier. At the end of 2011, there were 105 high school students concentrated in one division of the morning shift. As mentioned, the school receives exchange students constantly. In the school year 2011 there were two: one from Denmark who left in April, and another from Sweden who arrived in July.

The diagnostic survey was employed on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the beginning of a plenary faculty meeting. Of the 22 teachers that make up the teaching staff of the secondary school, those 17 who were present answered the survey. Since it includes questions on general matters, even those who had never had an exchange student answered the survey. As can be expected, these teachers did not complete the questions which referred to situations with those students. As often happens, other teachers who had actually had students left some questions unanswered.

Since we dealt with a small number of respondents, we have kept the absolute values instead of expressing the percentages. In addition, we have assigned codes to the teachers to be able to identify their personal criteria throughout the different responses. These personal codes are put in brackets to distinguish them from the absolute values of the answers. The code number assigned to each teacher was established at random.

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<sup>2</sup> The Project is carried out in the Rosario Institute of Science Education Research (IRICE-CONICET) and in the Center of Studies on Spanish as a Foreign Language of the National University of Rosario under the supervision of Dr. María Isabel Pozzo. The charts were filled in by Greta Lüerssen as part of her research stage at IRICE-CONICET.

<sup>3</sup> Since July 2006 the following exchange students attended this school, under the responsibility of *Interculturals* Foundation-World Education Program (WEP) Argentina.

July 2006: Corinna (Germany) and Tine (Belgium)

February 2007: Lena (Germany)

July 2007: Indrek (Estonia)

July 2008: Marvin (Germany)

July 2010: Emil (Denmark)

July 2011: Björn (Sweden)

## Results

This section compiles the answers to the surveys supplied to the teachers of the selected school to implement the project. The answers are presented in two groups: personal information, which contributes to building up the teachers' profiles, and the answers themselves, which show the specific information from the investigation.

### *Teachers' Profiles*

The group of teachers exhibits the following features in regards to **age, teaching experience and gender**: it is a group of mainly young and female teachers, with unequal teaching experience (Tables 1-3).

Table 1: Number of Teachers in Regards to Gender

Gender	Total	Teachers' Codes
Female	14	(1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), (9), (12), (13), (15), (16), (17)
Male	3	(10), (11), (14)
Total	17	

Table 2: Number of Teachers in Regards to Age

Age	Total	Teachers' Codes
25-34	9	(1), (2), (3), (5), (8), (10), (11), (12), (17)
35-44	3	(4), (9), (14)
45-60	5	(6), (7), (13), (15), (16)
Total	17	



Table 3: Number of Teachers in Regards to Number of Years Teaching Experience

Teaching experience	Total	Teachers' codes
1 year	2	(5), (12),
2–5 years	3	(1), (2), (17)
6–10 years	4	(3), (7), (10), (11)
11–15 years	3	(8), (9), (14),
16–20 years	5	(4), (6), (13), (15), (16)
Total	17	

They make up a very heterogeneous group with regard to the subjects they teach. They are: Social Studies (1, 17), Psychology (2), Studying techniques (2), Physical education (3), Artistic and technological education (4), Management and administration theory (5), Economy (6), Geography (7), English (8, 9, 10), Mathematics (11), Portuguese (12), Computer science (14), Biology (15), Language and Literature (16). One teacher did not answer the question (13).

Out of the 17 teachers who answered, 12 had had an exchange student and 5, none (Table 4).

Table 4: Number of Teachers in Regards to Contact with Exchange Students

Had/Have an exchange student	Total	Teachers' codes
Yes	12	(1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (8), (10), (11), (12), (14), (15), (16)
No	5	(6), (7), (9), (13), (17)
Total	17	

Those who answered that they had, referred to students from 2009 to the present, with the exception of one that dates back to 2003/2004.

## **Answers**

### ***Importance***

In the body of the survey, the first question aims at highlighting at which point having a student of a different origin emerges as a special matter as to be mentioned in a conversation. All the teachers who had an exchange student have talked about his/her origin with the student and with other students. However, a lower number of teachers (5 out of the 12) answered that they have talked about the topic with other teachers and with school authorities (6 out of the 12). These numbers indicate the reduced spread of the topic outside the classroom (Table 5).

Table 5: Number of Teachers in Regards to Conversations about the Exchange Student's Origin

Teachers who had talked about the exchange student's origin...	Total	Teachers' codes
...with the student	12	(1), (2), (3), (4), (7), (8), (10), (11), (12), (14), (15), (16)
...with other students	12	(1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (7), (8), (10), (12), (14), (15), (16)
...with other teachers	5	(2), (4), (6), (8), (16)
...with school's principal	6	(2), (4), (5), (8), (10), (16)

### Topics

Apart from knowing who the speakers are in the conversations concerning the exchange students, it is also of interest to know which topics they have discussed (questions 5a – d). Although the difference in place of origin of the students may motivate a greater reflection in the Social Sciences<sup>4</sup> and Linguistic subjects (national language and foreign language), other ones may establish relevant connections between their curricular contents and some aspect or situation of the country of origin of the foreign student.

In the following chart we set down the indicated topics, preserving the exact expressions used by the teachers. We group together the topics based on general criteria: personal and place of origin (Table 6).

Table 6: Number of Teachers in Regards to Topics of Conversation

TOPICS	Total	Teacher's code
<b>Personal</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>(3), (8), (10), (14)</b>
His/her lifestyle	2	(3)
His/her daily routine	1	(8)
His/her daily life	1	(8)
His/her activities	1	(8)
His/her food	1	(3)
His/her family	2	(8), (10)
A relative's job	1	(14)
Daily life in Argentina	1	(8)
<b>His/her place of origin</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>(1), (2), (3), (4), (8), (10), (15),</b>

<sup>4</sup>Simon and Six (2012) refer to the cultural contents like the raw material for the intercultural communicative competence.

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		<b>(16)</b>
His/her culture	1	(2)
His/her traditions	1	(3)
His/her town	2	(1), (8)
His/her country	2	(1), (8)
His/her continent	1	(1)
Sports	1	(3)
Abortion in the students' home country	1	(15)
Government	1	(10)
Education	1	(10)
His/her role as a student	2	(4), (16)
To plan meaningful learning, considering his/her previous knowledge.	1	(16)
The student's performance, participation in institutional activities, the integration in his/her group	1	(4)
<b>Without response</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>(5), (6), (7), (9), (11), (12), (13), (17)</b>
They did not answer due to not having had exchange student	3	(6), (7), (9), (13), (17)
They did not answer	3	(5), (11), (12)

Some of the mentioned topics are, in fact, activities. Therefore, we did not include them in the chart. They are:

- Educational project “Model United Nations’ model”, which they have at school and in which the student also participated. Apart from that, they have been comparing his place of origin with the one of his schoolmates in *Google Earth*®.
- One teacher asked the student to write papers about drainage basins, cartography, population, demography, economic conditions, poverty, etc.

Out of 17 teachers, 8 did not respond, while 9 did. Of the ones who did, only 1 (teacher code 14) just talked about personal information. All the rest went further to talk about the students’ place of origin as well.

**Difficulties**

Another question asks for the relationship between the difference of origin and the student’s achievement at school. In other words, we want to know if the first affects the second. The question was formulated this way: “Do you think that the difference of origin causes any difficulty at school?” The great majority answered negatively, as it can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Number of Teachers in Regards to Their Opinion on the Difference of Origin as a Cause of Difficulties at School

Answers	Total	Teacher’s code
Yes	1	(11), (14)
No	10	(1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (8), (10), (12), (15), (16)
Did not answer (without exchange students)	5	(6), (7), (9), (13), (17)
Total	17	

The supporting arguments are of varied nature. Two teachers associated the origin with the linguistic capability. In that sense, one of them expressed that “the exchange students should have a minimal command of the language that is spoken in the country they go to” (11). Another teacher said that the student attracts his classmates and that the majority of them speak English, “so they have a fluent relationship” (1). A third teacher said that being in a group helps the exchange students and that they always “adapt in a very favorable way” (12).

One teacher said that the difference of origin causes difficulties on a conceptual level since the student cannot handle the softwares used at school, even though “they are in daily use all over the world” (14). In a similar sense, one teacher answered that in her subjects it would be useful to have “an informative guide from the company in charge of this exchange program that [...] lets them know to which learning they have to give priority to and in which way” (2).

***Aspects of the Argentinean Culture that the Student Knows and Aspects that he/she does not Know***

The following question attempts to elucidate which are the aspects of the Argentinean culture the exchange students know and which they do not know.

Table 8: Topics about Argentina Known by the Exchange Students According to their Teachers

<b>Known topics</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Teacher's code</b>
The city in a tourist way	1	(1)
The daily life, very similar to that of his classmates, sports, music, nightlife	1	(1)
The country's habits and language	1	(16)
Teenagers' culture (music amongst others)	1	(5)
Sports and Argentinean cooking	1	(12)
Geographical places of Argentina	1	(4)
He/she is in the process of getting-to-know	1	(2)
<b>Unknown topics</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Teacher's code</b>
"A lot of the topics of local interest nowadays, principally because of his age" ... "He/she does not seem to be too interested in the current problems".	1	(14)
"The social aspects related to marginality and poverty".	1	(15)
<b>Without any answer</b>		
He/she did not answer because of not having had an exchange student.	5	(6), (7), (9), (13), (17)
Did not answer the question.	1	(11)

As we can see in Table 8, there are more answers alluding to the known topics than to the unknown ones. Within the first, and even preserving the textual expressions used by the teachers, one can notice that the known aspects are basically those of immediacy. The most remote one refers to geographic spaces, probably because of the trips the exchange students have done with the host family and/or the institution in charge of the exchange.

*Aspects of the Student's Culture that Could Most Affect his/her Performance at School*

In Table 9 we enumerate those aspects of the student's culture of origin that -according to the teachers- could especially affect his/her performance at school. As we did with the topics of conversation, we preserve the textual expressions of the teachers, grouping these topics together according to general criteria that we formulated after reading the answers.

Table 9: Aspects of the Student’s Culture of Origin that -according to the Teachers- could Especially Affect his/her Performance at School

Answers	Total	Teacher’s code
<b>Personal</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(2), (3), (4)</b>
Responsibility	1	(2)
Respect	1	(3)
Insistence on understanding	1	(3)
Idiosyncrasy of his/her classmates	1	(4)
Classmates’ warmth	1	(4)
<b>Cultural</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>(12), (14)</b>
The question of how to act in specific situations	1	(12)
The question of how to “interrelate with classmates”	1	(14)
<b>Linguistic</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>(12)</b>
The language register used when “establishing contact with different social groups”	1	(12)
<b>Academic</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(19), (15), (16)</b>
The student “went to a public school where he was responsible for his education. The teacher only guided him but did not teach.”	1	(10)
“The method of teaching in his country is more independent, with less structured norms, which hinders him from accepting some regulatory stipulations”	1	(15)
Some usages and habits, requirements and regulations	1	(16)
<b>Without answer</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>(5), (6), (7), (8), (11), (13), (17)</b>
Did not answer the question due to not having had exchange students	4	(6), (7), (13), (17)
Did not answer the question	3	(5), (8), (11)

It is interesting to note that teachers who did answer consider only one kind of factor, either personal, cultural, linguistic or academic. They do not seem to conceive more than one factor in combination. Personal and academic (institutional) differences are the leading ones, although

with not much difference between them. The only reference to linguistic factor refers to register, so knowledge of the foreign language does not appear as an obstacle.

***Special Actions for the Exchange Student***

In relation to the difficulties that can be caused by the difference of origin or some aspects of the student’s culture, question 9 investigates if the teacher implements any special actions to overcome them. The question clarifies the wider sense of 'acting' with some examples: explanation in private and/or in addition to regular content, on topics that require knowledge about our culture.

Table 10: Number of Teachers who Implement Special Actions to Overcome Exchange Students' Difficulties

<b>Answers</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Teacher’s code</b>
Yes	8	(1), (3), (4), (8), (12), (14), (15), (16)
No	1	(10)
They did not answer (without exchange students)	5	(6), (7), (9), (13), (17)
They did not answer	3	(5), (11), (14)
Total	17	

Table 11: Special Actions Implemented by Teachers to Overcome Exchange Students' Difficulties

Special actions	Total	Teacher's code
<b>Linguistic</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>(1), (2), (3), (8), (12), (15), (16)</b>
Private explanations (in Spanish or English) so that the student can follow the class	4	(1), (3), (8), (12)
There are students who translate what the teacher says	1	(2)
The student has to find out the meaning of unknown words when reading the same texts as his classmates	1	(2)
The teacher allows the exchange student to use a dictionary and do the exams with an open folder in some cases	1	(15)
The Spanish teacher said that she focused "on that he learns what is practical for him, especially in grammar"	1	(16)
<b>Other</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>(4), (8)</b>
Exercises and research papers	2	(4), (8)

In spite of the fact that in the previous question the linguistic factor was not considered too relevant, the majority of "special actions" displayed by teachers involve linguistic aids. Except for one teacher (2) who asks for the other students' collaboration, the rest take a one-to-one relation with the foreign student.

### *Differences*

Question 10 asks for the differences and similarities between the foreign exchange student and the rest of the class.



Table 12: Differences and Similarities between the Exchange Student and the Rest of the Class According to Teachers' Perceptions

Answers	Total	Teacher's code
<b>Personal differences</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>(1), (2), (10)</b>
More introverted, less excited and participatory	1	(1)
"Extremely formal" and interested in learning	1	(2)
Responsible	1	(10)
<b>Linguistic differences</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>(4), (5)</b>
Did not answer due to not having had any exchange students	4	(6), (7), (13), (17)
Without answer	2	(11), (16)

In all cases, some teachers referred to the similarities instead of the differences. Three of them said that the student resembles his classmates "in behaviors and values" (4), "preferences" (10) and in their "general thoughts" (14). One teacher said that "he is just another teenager with typical characteristics of a teenager" (15), and another one, that there are differences but that they "managed to include him favorably in the class" (12).

### ***Integration***

Question 11 investigates the exchange student's integration into the rest of the class, always from the teacher's point of view (Table 13).

Table 13: The Teacher's Point of View on Exchange Student's Integration into the Rest of the Class

Answers	Total	Teacher's code
Very good or excellent	10	(1), (2), (3), (4), (8), (9), (10), (12), (15), (16)
Good	3	(7), (11), (14)
Successful	1	(5)
They did not answer due to not having had any exchange student	3	(6), (13), (17)
Total	17	

*The School's Role in Fostering the Local and Foreign Students' Interaction*

Question 12 investigates if the teacher considers that the school should foster the interaction between local and foreign students. In this sense, it was important to keep the teachers' exact expressions, as transcribed in Table 14.

Table 14: Teachers' Perceptions about the Role of School in Fostering the Interaction Between Local and Foreign Students.

Answers	Total	Teacher's code
<b>Yes. It is the school's responsibility.</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>(1), (2), (4), (5), (6), (7), (8), (10), (12), (15), (16)</b>
It is a school's task	7	(4), (5), (7), (8), (10), (12), (16)
It is not an obligatory task, but -as it is an enriching experience- the school help is very valuable and good"	1	(15)
It is a joint task between the school and the institutions in charge of the exchange programs.	1	(2)
The school can do it, but it would be better if it was "managed by a public and state institution. Like educational governmental politicians"	1	(1)
"Instead of foreigners, one could think of or propose an exchange with young people from other places of the country, so that they can have a vision of [...] society's reality." She thinks about "kids of aboriginal origin, which could tell us more about our origin."	1	(6)
<b>No</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>(3), (9), (11), (14)</b>
No	3	(9), (11), (14)
It is "the task of the institutions in charge of the exchanges"	1	(3)
<b>Without answer</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>(13), (17)</b>

Whereas 11 teachers out of 17 consider that the school should foster the interaction between local and foreign students, 4 of them express a relativization of their answers; that is to say, it is not complete responsibility of the school.

***Educational Benefits***

Question 13 states: Do you think that foreign exchange student’s presence brings or could bring any educational benefit for the rest of his classmates? As we can see in Table 15, the majority answered affirmatively.

Table 15: Teachers' Opinions about the Role of Exchange Students as a Beneficial Presence for the Rest of His Classmates

Answers	Total	Teacher’s code
Yes	9	(1), (2), (3), (4), (9), (10), (11), (12), (15)
No	1	(14)
They did not answer	7	(5), (6), (7), (8), (13), (16), (17)
Total	17	

For those who answered affirmatively, the question asked for indicating which are or could be those educational benefits (Table 16).

Table 16: Educational Benefits Exchange Students Could Bring to the Rest of the Class

Answers	Total	Teacher’s code
“The relationship with the ‘others’ always allows us to look at ourselves”	1	(1)
It allows the classmates to get to know another culture, other forms of life, other realities, other customs and to learn about other places	10	(3), (4), (6), (7), (9), (10), (11), (12), (15), (16)
It allows classmates to share other experiences, both personal and educational.	3	(8), (15), (16)
It teaches them to accept differences	1	(15)
It lets them know and practice another language	4	(3), (4), (8), (11)
<b>Without answer</b>	<b>4</b>	(5), (13), (14), (17)

All the explanations to the positive answers refer to the benefits of intercultural education, as expressed in the conceptual framework. It is strange, however, that the majority of actions -as shown in Table 11- only involves the student and the teacher, and not the rest of the class, as intercultural education implies.

*Passing of Information about the Exchange Student’s Place of Origin*

The penultimate question asks: Do you think that this student could transmit to his classmates any information about his/her place of origin? If so, in which way?, have you already made any of these proposals before? As we can see in Table 17, there were no negative answers.

Table 17: Number of Teachers Who Believe Exchange Students Could Transmit to his Classmates Any Information about his/her Place of Origin

Answers	Total	Teacher’s code
Yes	13	(1), (2), (3), (4), (6), (7), (9), (10), (11), (12), (14), (15), (16)
No	0	
Did not answer	4	(5), (8), (13), (17)
Total	17	

Once again, for a detailed analysis, we transcribe the original expressions, grouping them together according to their similarity (Table 18). In this case, what makes the difference is the planned or spontaneous nature of the actions taken.

Table 18: Ways in Which Exchange Students Could Transmit to His Classmates any Information about his/her Place of Origin

Answers	Total	Teachers’ codes
<b>Planned actions</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>(1), (2), (3), (6), (7), (8), (10)</b>
Diverse methods	1	(3)
Videos	1	(3)
Expositive Classes	1	(3)
Reports	1	(3)
Stories	1	(7)
Practical papers	1	(8)
Oral expositions	2	(8), (10)
To tell them about peculiarities of his/her lifestyle, his/her country, his/her city, his/her family, the government and the education system in his/her country	1	(6)

<b>Spontaneous actions</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>(1), (9), (11), (12), (15), (16)</b>
Interacting, daily talking, telling anecdotes or describing situations and making comments. (“Always asking “How would it be in your country?”)”) )	5	(1), (9), (11), (12), (16)
Talking about topics related to the subject, the way of receiving and working with the information in his/her country	1	(15)
<b>Without answer</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>(5), (13), (14), (17)</b>
Did not answer due to not having had any exchange student	2	(13), (17)
They did not answer	2	(5), (14)

The responses involve spontaneous and planned actions, almost in the same amount, although the second ones show a greater variety.

### *Evaluation of the Experience*

The last question gives the possibility – if the teacher wishes to- of making some additional comment about the exchange students’ presence in their institution. At this point, some teachers expressed personal opinions about the experience of having exchange students in general. First of all, we group the answers together in: positive, mixed, negative, or neutral (Table 19).

Table 19: General Evaluation of the Experience of Having an Exchange Student in Their Class

<b>Answers</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Teacher’s code</b>
Positive	4	(4), (10), (12), (16)
Mixed	1	(15)
Negative	0	
Neutral	0	
Did not answer due to not having had any exchange student	6	(6), (7), (9), (13), (14), (17)
Without answer	7	(1), (2), (3), (5), (8), (11)

Though 7 teachers gave no answer (besides the ones who did not have exchange students), no one gave a negative one. Those teachers who gave a positive opinion (5 in total) used the following qualifiers: enriching, productive and valuable. One said that it is “a fundamental experience for the student’s and the teacher’s personal enrichment” (12), and another one said that the “students feel that it is ‘natural’ to share their school and [that] they enjoy” (4). In a mixed sense, one teacher said that “integration does not always turn out to be easy” (15).

## **Discussion**

The results can be summarized as follows:

### ***Importance***

All the teachers who had an exchange student have talked about his/her origin with him/her and with other students. However, a lower number of teachers answered that they have talked about the topic with other teachers and with school authorities. These numbers indicate the reduced spread of the topic outside the classroom. Therefore, having a student of a different origin does not emerge as a special matter at an institutional level.

### ***Topics***

Of the teachers who answered which topics they have discussed, only 1 talked about personal information. All the rest also went further to talk about the students' place of origin, no matter which subject they teach.

### ***Difficulties***

The great majority answered that the difference of origin –associated with a different mother tongue- does not cause any difficulty at school. That is to say, the difference of origin does not affect the student's achievement at school. What helps them is –teachers say- the convenience of being in a group and the fact that the majority of his/her classmates speak English. Some teachers complain about some educational contents which are unknown by the exchange students.

### ***Aspects of the Argentinean Culture That the Student Knows and Aspects That He/She Does Not Know, according to Their Teachers***

There are more answers alluding to the known topics than to the unknown ones. The first ones are basically those of immediacy. The most remote ones refer to geographic places, probably because of the trips the exchange students have done with their host family and/or the institution in charge of the exchange.

### ***Aspects of the Student's Culture That Could Most Affect His/Her Performance at School***

Teachers who answered this question considered only one kind of factor, either personal, cultural, linguistic or academic, instead of showing a complex idea of more than one factor in combination. Personal and academic (institutional) differences are the majority, although with not much difference between them, whereas knowledge of the foreign language does not appear as an obstacle.

### ***Special Actions for the Exchange Student***

In relation to the difficulties that may be caused by the difference of origin or some aspects of the student's culture, the questionnaire investigates if the teacher implements any special actions such as private or additional explanation. In spite of the fact that in the previous question the linguistic factor was not considered too relevant, the majority of "special actions" displayed by teachers involve linguistic aids. Except for one teacher who asks for another students' collaboration, the rest take a one-to-one relation with the foreign student.

### ***The School Role in Fostering the Local and Foreign Students' Interaction***

Most of the teachers consider that the school should foster the interaction between local and foreign students; however, they consider extra institutional help as necessary.

### ***Educational Benefits***

The majority of the students thinks that foreign exchange student's presence brings or could bring any educational benefit for the rest of his/her classmates. It is strange, however, that most actions as expressed previously only involve the student and the teacher, and not the rest of the class, as intercultural education implies.

### ***Passing of Information about the Exchange Student's Place of Origin***

All respondent teachers think that foreign exchange student could transmit to his classmates any information about his/her place of origin. The responses involve spontaneous and planned actions. Among the first ones they mention: daily talking and interacting, telling anecdotes or describing situations and making comments asking "How would it be in your country?", talking about topics related to the subject, the way of receiving and working with the information in his/her country. Planned actions comprise diverse methods such as videos, expository classes, reports, stories, practical papers, and oral presentations about his/her lifestyle, family, city, country, government and education system.

### ***Evaluation of the Experience***

As an overall conclusion, some teachers evaluate the experience of having foreign exchange students as enriching, productive, natural, enjoyable, and valuable for both the student and teacher, although not easy.

This study followed two research questions. The first one was: What kind of attitudes do high school teachers have towards foreign exchange students as a source of educational benefits for their classes? The hypothesis for this question was: Teachers do not have a definite perception about foreign exchange students as a source of educational benefits for their classes.

The answers show that teachers value the presence of a foreign exchange student, in spite of the fact that his/her integration in class may imply some extra work. They think it is school's responsibility and therefore it is their job to do it. Conversations about his/her place of origin seem to show the chance to articulate them with school contents. However, the way they act does not have a wider effect in other students and the rest of the institution, which results in a poorer effect of the effort they make. Their perception of an exchange student's low knowledge of the host society may condition a restrictive empowering of the experience.

The second research question asked in which way Argentinean high school teachers apply their perceptions on a foreign exchange student in their classes. The hypothesis for this question was: Teachers do not always apply their perception about a foreign exchange student to enhance the development of their classes.

The results show that the presence of an exchange student has a slight effect in their way of teaching. It consists on private and additional explanations to the foreign exchange student, without much participation of the rest of the class in these interchanges. The changes teachers may introduce due to the presence of foreign exchange students only attempt to help his/her integration instead of promoting a wider interaction with all members of the class. However, language difficulties are not adduced as the main factors that obstruct the integration of these students to the class, and therefore, the chance to exploit their presence as a mean of teaching and learning. The factors that, according to the teachers' perspective, obstruct the integration of an

exchange student to the class is not so much the language difference, but personal characteristics and institutional styles of the schools he/she come from.

As it can be deduced from the questionnaire and the answers obtained, the exchange students' presence gives rise to social, institutional, domestic, and academic matters, due to several intervening factors such as the characteristics of the place of origin and the host society. In spite of this variety and the unanswered questions, the majority of answers tend to positively value the presence of exchange students in school classrooms. This trend facilitates the possibility of implementing activities that involve foreign exchange students in a more structured way, as this project proposes in the next phase. However, the achievement of this goal requires to move forward through several steps: a) to select contents that can be associated with some aspect of the culture of origin of the foreign student present in the classroom, b) to define an activity in which this content may emerge, c) to articulate it within the general syllabus, d) to plan its steps and e) -finally- to evaluate its results.

The analysis with regard to the teachers' perceptions about these topics is of great importance in moving forward to a stage that leads to a more active consideration concerning the presence of foreign exchange students. This objective implies a diagnosis at different levels: a group of teachers, certain school/s or district/s. Even with institutional support and professional advice, an active engagement will depend on the teachers' willingness to rehearse innovative strategies involving foreign students to make the teaching of their subjects more dynamic and to achieve a cultural exchange in both senses.

Once it is found that faculty is willing to engage international students (as it can be seen in Table 16) and positively evaluates the experience of having an exchange student in their class (Table 18), it is necessary to move forward on "how" it can be done. The findings in Table 17 are valuable and they can be used to inform educators on what strategies can be used. Planned actions in the classroom comprise a wide scope of activities ranging from expository classes, watching videos, writing reports and practical papers, and telling stories. As they are everyday school activities, further research should provide ethnographic descriptions of these activities in the classroom to assess in which way and to which extent intercultural exchange takes place. Teachers also referred to spontaneous actions: comments or anecdotes which may be brought along with daily explanations or activities. These suggestions complement practices enumerated by Breen et al. (2001, 490) to accomplish "the principle of accounting for individual differences", mentioned in the Conceptual Framework. As Tsokaktsidu (2010, 33) states, both teachers and students have to face some difficulties that emerge with the encounter of different academic cultures. Therefore, it is necessary that both parts get prepared for the encounter. As the teachers concern, they should be trained to deal with heterogeneous groups. A methodological proposal can be found in Tsokaktsidu and Kelly (2006), which tends to develop the appropriate competencies to attend to the needs of exchange students.

At this point, it would be necessary to elucidate if faculty is empowered to adjust the teaching strategies and classroom interaction, and if so, in what extent. Non-participant observations would, then, be the next methodological step to take.



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## APPENDIX: Survey

Dear colleague:

In the Rosario Institute of Education Science Research (CONICET) we are developing a study about the interaction between teachers and students of different origins in educational institutions in Argentina. With this goal it would be a great help to count with your opinion completing the survey below. Feel free to use the space you wish to for each answer.

With many thanks in advance,

Dr. Ma. Isabel Pozzo, research director (pozzo@irice-conicet.gov.ar).

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### PERSONAL INFORMATION (tick the correct answer/s):

APPROXIMATE AGE:  25–34 years  35–44 years  45–60 years  more than 60

GENDER:  M  F

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

SUBJECT AND COURSE WHERE YOU WORK (for which you answer the survey):

INSTITUTION:

TYPE OF INSTITUTION:  private  public  
 primary  secondary  tertiary  university  other

CITY AND PROVINCE WHERE THE INSTITUTION IS LOCATED (refer to the one you are answering the survey about):

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### SURVEY:

Do you have any student who comes from another country or another city in the current school year?

Yes  No

If not, you can answer about any previous course, indicating the year here:

If so, how many?

Are all in the same course?

Where does he or she come from?

### For each of these students, answer the following questions:

#### Student 1:

1) Place of origin:

2) Condition (immigrant, refugee, descendent, exchange student):

3) How long has he/she been in town?

4) How well can he/she communicate with the Spanish language?

5.a) Have you talked to him or her about his/her place of origin?

5.b) Have you talked about him or her and his/her place of origin with other students?

5.c) Have you talked about him or her and his/her place of origin with other teachers?

- 5.d) Have you talked about him or her and his/her place of origin with authorities of the establishment?
- 5.a-d) If the previous answers are “yes”, comment on the topics and the circumstance/s.
- 6) Do you think that the difference of origin causes him/her difficulties at school? If so, of what types?
- 7) Indicate which relevant aspects of our culture the students know and which her or her do not know.
- 8) Which are the aspects of the student’s culture that could affect his/her performance at school? (positively or negatively)
- 9) Have you ever implemented any special action with this student? (individual and/or additional explanations about topics that require certain knowledge about our culture)
- 10) In which aspects does the exchange student differ from the rest of the class and in which one does he or she resemble the Argentinean students?
- 11) How is the exchange student’s integration with the rest of the class?
- 12) Do you consider it a school’s task to promote the local students’ interaction with the foreign ones?
- 13) Do you think that foreign exchange student’s presence brings or could bring any educational benefit for the rest of the classmates? If so, which ones?
- 14) Do you think that foreign exchange student could transmit to his (her) classmates any information about his place of origin? If so, how could he or she do so? Have you already done any of these proposals?
- 15) Do you wish to add any additional comment on the foreign students’ presence in your institution?

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Dr. María Isabel Pozzo:** Professor and Doctor in Science Education (National University of Rosario). Master in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (University of Barcelona, Spain). Professor at the National University of Rosario, where she teaches Research Methodology. Researcher at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council of Argentina on topics related to teaching Spanish as a foreign language and intercultural education. Visiting scholar at University of Girona, Spain (granted by Spanish Agency of International Cooperation); Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium (granted by Coimbra Group); Douglas College and Simon Fraser University of Vancouver, Canada (granted by the Canadian Government). Author of the books: *Foreign language learning. A psychological perspective*, *The basics for Spanish as foreign language teacher*. Editor of *Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language in Argentina: Experiences and Reflections*; *Migrations and teacher Training. Contributions for an Intercultural Education*.



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