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Elements of a successful and stress- free physical exchange

The Covid-19 pandemic halted all student exchange trips, and for many schools, international trips (be it whole school or student exchange) are yet to be reintroduced. The value of international exchange trips for students studying a second language cannot be underestimated. Here, Esmeralda Salgado shares her tips for successful exchanges.

Physical exchanges are core to any language department, but they can take time (and money) to organise. However, the exposure to real life language use and cultural understandings is so important in helping students to succeed in language learning.

From a student's point of view, it is always nerve-racking to stay with someone they hardly know. My experience is that this can result in unpleasant/ homesick situations that can ruin an exchange. Somehow, homesickness is infectious! This are my tips to avoid this situation:

1. Create experiences via which partners have the opportunity to get to know each other prior travelling. Do this by creating learning, collaborative projects involving your partner school, in the classroom.
2. Use the technology at your disposal for real, periodical class communication before travelling. This could be part of homework tasks.
3. Use public holidays to communicate with partners via the creation of video messages. Christmas is a perfect opportunity for this!
4. Create a purpose for the visit: an outcome, something tangible that students will have to produce by the end of the exchange. This should be strongly linked to the collaborative tasks/ project initiated by both schools before travelling. In one Spanish exchange I organised, British students had to complete a workbook which included interviews to the host family and the creation of an online diary in conjunction with their Spanish partners.
5. Have the right balance of school based and outdoor activities when the exchange takes place. Having excursions every day can be exhausting when

students have to practise their linguistic skills all day long. Similarly, just following hosts throughout their school for the whole exchange and relying on host families to do the entertaining, can be extremely awkward and frustrating for a teenager! I try to plan a good selection of in-school and out-of-school activities.

You can use this example of an exchange itinerary of activities.

6. Use social media while you are in your host country. Opening a Twitter account or using Sway on Microsoft, it is a great way to keep parents informed at all times, and it helps not only to raise the profile of your exchange but also to keep anxiety levels down from the parents' point of view, which help towards a smooth exchange trip!



7. Make a big fuss of your visitors at school: organise a school disco, a dinner party, a cream tea party, a Spanish tapas party or a Valentine's French party or why not take part in a carnival!

It is important however to recognise that physical exchange trips are not always feasible for schools and families. If a physical exchange is not possible, you can still integrate these by partnering with schools across the world. Why not try a virtual exchange: arrange a mini project with your partner school and using Breakout Rooms and an application such as Zoom, Teams or GoogleMeet, students can work collaboratively with their partners.

Check out this blog

article I wrote for Global School Alliance about how to set up a **virtual exchange**. Collaborative projects, social events, workbooks are all elements that can be incorporated in this way.



About the author

Esmeralda Salgado

Esmeralda is an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) and a former Head of MFL and Digital Lead. She has taught languages for over 20 years from KS2 to KS5 in different school settings: in state and independent schools. Her GCSE and A Level results are excellent with a 100% success pass grade (9-4) at GCSE in the summer 2022 and 56% 9 to 8 grades. Esmeralda is passionate about the use of digital tools and collaborative projects among schools and has extensive experience in using eTwinning and Erasmus projects as tools to enhance the teaching and learning experience in the MFL classroom. Esmeralda is a Silver Pearson National Teaching Award winner for Secondary School teacher of the year and has collaborated to write one of the Language Gym Books: Spanish Verb Pivots with GianFranco Conti. Currently a MFL consultant, writer, blogger and CPD provider Esmeralda is going back to the classroom as Head of MFL from September.

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