CREATING A STRONGER MODEL FOR INTERNATIONAL YOUTH EXCHANGE: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract
Youth exchanges across national boundaries can be powerful learning experiences. Both 4-H and FFA have experimented with different types of group exchanges. This article reviews the tour group model, the work team model, the 4-H ambassador model, and an improved model developed between 1991 and 1993 through a W.K. Kellogg funded project. Through collaborative planning, implementation, and evaluation between Land Grant institutions in the United States and partner universities in Mexico, this new model was developed to strengthen the educational value of youth exchanges and to give participants experience in community development.

For the first time in history, a majority of the Latin American nations have democratically elected leaders. Also for the first time, national education planners in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe can seriously focus on long-term educational goals including youth development through non-formal educational programs.

On too many occasions, during the last thirty years, the author has witnessed the failure of non-formal educational programs for youth and the demise of effective programs. Some of those failures have been due to political turmoil, national priorities which favored military spending, or economic recession. Programs that were started during the 1960s and seemed to be working have been terminated or absorbed into bureaucratic structures in a "watered down" form.

One effective international non-formal education program was the International Farm Youth Exchange (IFYE) which was started in 1948 under the direction of the National 4-H Council. This program placed young adults, ages 19 to 25, with host farm families to live and work together for six months while learning a language and culture and promoting world peace. Subsequently, IFYE was changed to International 4-H youth exchange and expanded to include non-farm families. Due to the success and popularity of IFYE a group exchange called IFYE Ambassador was added. This was a short term exchange (4-5 weeks) for youth 14-19 years old. These youth traveled in groups of approximately 15 with an adult chaperon. They combined touring with a host family experience in the host country. In 1992, the National 4-H Council decided to terminate their administration of both IFYE programs. IFYE alumni were able to find a private group based in Phoenix, Arizona, to assume administration of the IFYE program and resume the IFYE Ambassador program a year later.
Many types of work or study exchange programs have been initiated over the years. Some of these are very successful. Since they are usually individual exchanges, however, the effectiveness varies greatly from one participant to another and for the specific conditions in the country visited. For many individuals these experiences are positive and life-changing. For others they are little more than tourist experiences that lead to misconceptions and limited positive learning.

International group exchanges for youth can be powerful learning opportunities. Most international travel opportunities, however, have several problems. (1) They are so expensive that many families cannot afford to send their youth. (2) The educational quality is difficult to control. (3) They seldom address development issues at the local level. (4) They are often conducted by travel agencies whose commercial interests supersede educational considerations.

**The Tour Group Model**

An illustration of these problems can be found in the tour group model (Figure 1). A travel agency plans the tour as a business venture. The agency hires a guide (i.e., a teacher of vocational agriculture) who is identified with the target client group (i.e., FFA youth). More emphasis is placed on publicity and recruitment than on selection and orientation. Typically selection is determined by the first 25 youth to pay the trip deposit which is set high enough to discourage withdrawal from the program. The guide might hold one orientation meeting which will mainly focus on documents and logistics. Travel is one-way. Participants stay in hotels (and only rarely with a host family for a few days). Sometimes the local young farmer organization helps arrange tour stops at members' farms. Evaluation, if any, is limited to a brief questionnaire, on participant satisfaction, at the end of the tour. Even at this low level of educational programming participants learn much from the non-formal learning experiences (planned, organized, and intentional but not a part of the participants' school work) and even more from the informal learning experiences (unplanned observations, conversations, and interactions). Little effort is made to conduct "debriefing" of participants at the end of their tour so that they may put their experiences in perspective.

A variation of the tour group model is the "work team." This concept is used particularly by church organizations to provide volunteer labor, usually church related, in another country. The work team can also be an effective learning experience. This varies greatly depending on the participants, the organization, the purpose of the trip, orientation, and many local conditions.

![Figure 1. Tour Group MODEL.](image-url)
The 4-H Ambassador Model

The National 4-H Council improved the tour group model. Its model (Figure 2) was developed over several years and involves collaboration among the national, state, and county levels in the United States as well as cooperation with organizations similar to 4-H in other countries.

The National 4-H Council negotiated with organizations in other countries to determine destinations, cost, and subject matter focus for the outbound delegations. The range of destinations was then announced to state 4-H coordinators and county 4-H agents. In 1992, the destinations and foci included Spanish language study in Spain, equestrian experience in Brazil, environmental issues in Costa Rica, food preparation in France, natural resource study in Australia, literature and culture of England, and marketing local products in Italy. Costs ranged from $1,975 for Costa Rica to $3,995 for Australia. The programs in the European countries averaged about $3,100.

The state coordinators of international programs then screened applicants and sent their application files to the designated staff member at the National 4-H Council. When 15 applications (from any combination of states) were received for a particular destination, a chaperon would be selected (by National 4-H Council using a similar application form) and the delegation would be complete.

The state 4-H coordinator would provide some outbound orientation for the participants in that state and recruit host families for inbound delegations from other countries. Further orientation was provided just prior to departure for all delegations meeting at the National 4-H Center in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Orientation covered information on the country, information on 4-H in the U.S., role plays on cross-cultural effectiveness and communication, hints on packing and photography, and assistance with all of the documents needed to travel. A standard "code of conduct," defining acceptable behavior while traveling, was signed by each delegate.

Each exchange lasted four or five weeks and included a combination of tours and host family experiences. Funding for delegates was the responsibility of the delegate's family. In many cases state or county 4-H funds or fund raisers were used to assist the delegates.

From the perspective of the National 4-H Council, these exchanges were reciprocal. Once the Council sent a delegation to Spain, it was committed to host a delegation from Spain in a subsequent year. From the delegates' point of view, however, they were involved in a one-way exchange. Very rarely did a delegate to Spain subsequently host a delegate from Spain.

Delegates were encouraged to give public presentations on their 4-H ambassador trips. Some delegates, who received state scholarships to travel, were required to give a number of talks which served as a form of education for local 4-H members who were not able to travel abroad as well as publicity and recruitment for future exchanges. Preparing and presenting these talks also gave the traveler an opportunity to summarize and conceptualize the travel experience and its implications to his or her life. In this way the public presentations served as a debriefing step for the travelers.

Evaluation of the exchanges varied by year and by state. Most state coordinators evaluated participants' responses to their orientation program. In many cases a "trip report" was required by the state coordinator four weeks after returning to the United States. The National 4-H Council evaluated its orientation and asked chaperons for anecdotal information to indicate problems encountered on the exchange. A longitudinal study of the cost effectiveness was conducted by accountants at
Figure 2. 4-H Ambassador MODEL.
the National 4-H Council. In 1992, this exchange was terminated by the National 4-H Council because of fiscal losses over the last several years. The educational value of these exchanges, however, was clearly superior to the tour group model. The 4-H ambassador model has had considerable impact since it was successfully employed by many states for several years.

A New Approach

In 1990, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation awarded almost $398,000 to the National 4-H Council to strengthen linkages between land grant universities and universities in Mexico in order to develop creative youth exchanges which would involve youth in community development. This grant enabled the National 4-H Council to develop a new model for youth exchange which would provide opportunities for youth who had not been able to afford exchanges under the 4-H ambassador model.

Purpose

The overall purpose of the exchanges was to develop an improved youth exchange model which would overcome the problems of models currently used by 4-H and FFA. The objectives of the project and each of the five partnerships were to: (1) strengthen linkages between the partner institutions, (2) further cross-cultural understanding and friendship between people in Mexico and the United States, (3) promote international development through study and the exchange of human and technical resources, and (4) build a model for a low-cost international exchange for youth that emphasized educational impact and contribution to community development.

Procedure

The National 4-H Council selected five partnerships each comprised of a U.S. land grant university and a Mexican university. Each partnership (University of Arizona - National University of Mexico, University of Minnesota - University of Oaxaca, Penn State University - University of Monterrey, Texas A & M University - University of Coahuila, and University of West Virginia - University of Guanajuato) implemented its projects in slightly different ways. In general, however, the same process was followed.

1. In the first year of the grant, institutional linkages were built. A program planning process was used to define needs and priorities, and a written plan was developed. This was done by: (a) developing and refining the joint project proposals, (b) meeting with all universities and representatives of the National 4-H Council in Guanajuato to facilitate face-to-face contacts and beginning planning for a 1992 summer exchange, and (c) completion of the planning process by exchange visits of faculty and volunteer leaders to each other's campus, and exchange of letters and telephone messages.

2. Participants were selected and oriented (budgets determined that the delegation size would be about 20 participants).

3. Community development projects were selected for the delegations in each of the Mexican and U.S. sites.

4. The exchange was implemented with the Mexican delegation visiting its U.S. partner state for two weeks to live with host families and work on the designated community development project. Then the U.S. delegation followed its Mexican guests back to Mexico. The roles of guests and hosts were reversed for the last two weeks while the delegations worked on community development projects in each Mexican state.

5. Extensive evaluation took place at various points of the projects. Pre- and post-evaluation questionnaires were prepared by the National 4-H Council to assess changes in skills, knowledge, and
attitudes of participants. These were supplemented by quarterly reports from each university, interviews and site visits by independent evaluators hired by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, questionnaires sent by National 4-H Council to the parents of participants, and focus group interviews conducted with participants a few weeks after the end of the exchange. Local activities such as orientations, community development activities, and host family reactions were also evaluated.

6. Each of the project coordinators from the ten institutions submitted an end-of-year report and met in Monterrey, November 18-20, 1992, to compare notes on successes and shortcomings of the 1992 exchange, and plan for the 1993 exchange.

An Improved Exchange Model

From the discussions among the ten project coordinators in November, 1992, a new model emerged. Since it was first proposed by the representatives of Penn State and the University of Monterrey to describe the process that they used, it is called the UDEM-PSU Model. The experience of the other four partnerships, however, was similar and their ideas were incorporated into the model described in Figure 3.

Collaboration was emphasized from the beginning. Constant communication meant that partners agreed on most of the decisions related to the exchanges. The Mexican institutions always had the last word concerning activities in Mexico and the U.S. institutions always had the last word concerning activities in the U.S. Collaboration was also included in the local planning for this exchange. Interested youth, their families, and county agents assisted in planning and policy development.

A thorough program planning process was followed beginning with needs assessment and continuing through the determination of priorities, objectives, organization of resources, specific plans, implementation, and evaluation. Unlike the IFYE Ambassador model, planning for the UDEM-PS included county 4-H agents and local volunteers and youth. Those who were involved in hosting and traveling were involved in planning, determining dates, and setting policies.

The grant enabled each partner to recruit lower-income participants and representatives of diverse ethnic groups. Orientation was done locally and at the state level. Local orientation was led by county agents and chaperons who had experience in Mexico and with other 4-H international exchanges. At the state level orientation was done during two day-long meetings. In addition to paperwork and logistics, the orientation included the culture of the other country, and information and skills in community development principles and techniques, and helped build teamwork among participants.

A board game similar to Trivial Pursuit, called "Living in Mexico," was designed at Penn State to help introduce youth and chaperons to Mexican culture. This game requires players to answer questions about currency, meals, etiquette, travel, shopping, safety, survival Spanish, religion, geography, weather, and everyday life at home. Copies of the game were given to each county delegation for use, when they chose, to help in preparations for the exchange.

County 4-H agents helped participants choose an appropriate community development project for the two weeks that the Mexican delegation was in their state. In Mexico the exchange
Figure 3. UDEM-PS MODEL.
coordinators helped their youth to choose an appropriate community development project for the binational teams while they were in Mexico. During the exchange schedules were developed at each site. These schedules balanced participant involvement in four important activities: (1) the local community development project, (2) participation in family activities and time to get acquainted with the host family, (3) interaction in social situations with youth from the new culture who were not a part of the host family, and (4) individual reflection. Each participant was asked to keep a personal journal of reflections, questions, and observations.

The last component of this new model is "debriefing." Upon return home each participant was invited to a state meeting for evaluation and debriefing. During the debriefing delegates were led, through group discussion, to put their experiences and their new attitudes toward the other country in perspective. They were helped to see that visitors to another country typically experience four stages of perception: (1) the euphoric stage where everything is new, fascinating, and wonderful; (2) the culture shock stage where the charm wears off and the new country is compared to one's home country with the result that the new culture appears to be inferior; (3) the survival stage where the foreigner realizes that stage two is oversimplified and that survival depends on a more objective and accepting response to the positive and negative aspects of the new culture; and (4) the assimilation stage, usually after the visit has been completed, where the traveler is able to reflect on the experience and to decide which of the new skills, knowledge, and attitudes acquired will be retained and become a part of one's life incorporating a new world view.

Results

The extensive evaluations provided ample evidence that each objective had been met. Linkages between each of the partner universities were clearly strengthened. Project coordinators were named at each site. Each coordinator formed a committee to plan and implement the exchanges. In four of the U.S. universities the project coordinator was an extension specialist whose duties included the administration of international youth exchanges. For the Mexican institutions, no convenient faculty position existed. In each case an individual was named coordinator; but most of these individuals experienced an overload of responsibilities. Sustainability of the new exchange model, therefore, was threatened. Due to the position of most of the Mexican coordinators this exchange needs continuing financial support at the Mexican end. At any rate, a cadre of Mexican educators has gained experience in conducting youth exchanges.

Multiple evaluation approaches documented improvements in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of participants. A simulation game was developed by Penn State faculty to teach the community development process to 4-H audiences. This game not only provided knowledge during orientation of participants but also helped youth gain community development skills by leading them through the planning process. The game was used again when the Mexican delegation arrived and met with their hosts to learn about the community development projects which they would collaboratively pursue in the U.S. Subsequent evaluation proved that participants learned the community development process from playing the game, then applied the knowledge to their community development activities.

The local community development projects provided experience in international community development with all of the accompanying differences in language and culture. Projects included large scale operations like the day camp in Monterrey for poorer neighborhood kids. In addition to the 46 participants in the Penn State/Monterrey team, this camp involved over 100 faculty and university students who planned and conducted the day camp for three weeks for approximately 3,000 campers from
ages six to twelve. The camp was repeated in 1993 with similar numbers of participants involved.

At the other extreme were individual projects such as the U.S. high school student and her Mexican counterpart who organized and led a two-week workshop for inner-city youth in a "city parks and recreation" class on cross-cultural understanding through dance, drama, and food. They carried out their project alone with the only assistance coming from the local 4-H agent and an adult who volunteered to chaperon the Pennsylvania group to Mexico. In between those extremes were projects by county teams of four U.S. youth and four Mexican youth on environmental awareness, urban landscaping, constructing culture kits, and organizing mini-fairs and workshops on 4-H projects and Mexican culture.

Cost of the exchange was kept low. Some of the adult chaperons paid their entire airfare ($300-$600) and hosting expenses for their Mexican guests. Most of the youth paid half of the airfare. A few of the youth and chaperons had all fees paid by the grant. Ethnic and economic diversity of participants was achieved through recruitment and selection criteria which were enforced by the National 4-H Council in selecting the states to receive grants. These criteria were also used by some of the states in the selection of youth participants and chaperons. Even though Kellogg funding through the National 4-H Council ended after the 1993 exchange, four of the five partnerships planned exchanges for 1994.

Conclusions

The objectives set by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation as a condition for their grant were met. The pre- and post-assessments of participants documented changes in skills, knowledge, and attitudes related to Mexico, international issues, and community development. Focus group interviews of participants, upon their return, clearly indicated strengthened friendships between citizens of the two countries. The new youth exchange model developed addresses the weaknesses of previous youth exchange models. Lower income youth can afford this type of international experience. The model provides a much stronger non-formal educational opportunity without reducing any of the opportunities for informal learning. The educational aspects of the exchange are not allowed to be diluted by commercial (travel company) considerations. Development issues are directly addressed by bicultural teams who work on community development projects in both countries.

In an increasingly multi-cultural world, learning about other cultures and developing cross-cultural survival skills is a critical need for tomorrow's world citizens. International group exchanges for youth are one of the most effective means of multi-cultural education. The disadvantages of expense and lack of quality control must be overcome if these exchanges are to be made possible for all youth. This paper describes a systematic attempt to address the problems with current international youth exchanges and find a stronger model.

A model for a low-cost youth exchange was developed which is unique. This model can be easily duplicated at the state, county, or community level for exchange groups to international destinations. The funds provided by the grant can be replaced by local fund raising. More than 15 community development projects, which were planned and conducted by youth, were successfully piloted. Educational quality was maintained by careful selection and orientation of participants, by collaborative planning among U.S. and Mexican educators, and by providing one chaperon for every eight participants.

This youth exchange model also addresses important issues of cross-cultural communication, jobs, and marketing. The community development skills which youth learned are directly relevant to vocations and professions. Workers of all types need to be aware of the global implications of their work.
and lives. Workers need to understand the importance of planning (analyzing a complex situation, determining priorities, setting goals and objectives, assessing resources, writing a plan, implementing the plan, and evaluating the plan). Citizens of the world need to understand that they can contribute to the local, district, state, regional, national, and global communities, to which they belong, in a concrete way--that they can make a difference individually and in groups.

These skills, knowledge, and attitudes are particularly important in Mexico and the United States at a time when Mexicans and U.S. citizens are exploring the implications of the "North American Free Trade Agreements." They are important world wide as conditions constantly change--as new problems and opportunities continually emerge.

Finally, global citizenship through 4-H, FFA, and other non-formal educational programs for youth must continue to receive support from the organizations and institutions on which they depend. Economic difficulties mean that educational institutions will cut programs. They must have models of successful programs which can address the long term economic pressures. Otherwise they may eliminate the very programs that provide the long term solutions to the short term economic pressures.