



Press Release

“I never knew there were people like me at university”

Knowledge communication can improve education opportunities for children with a migrant background

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Surveys of participants in the “Native Schools” project show that knowledge communication may be a key to overcoming social injustice, inequality and exclusion. In particular, direct interactions between researchers and disadvantaged groups have the potential to increase knowledge about and enthusiasm for research in all parts of society. The Native Scientist organization designs workshops with researchers for children and young people from migrant communities. The workshops match up researchers and children with the same cultural background and who can communicate in the respective native language. The effectiveness of the program is currently being tested in a randomized controlled evaluation study at the Hector Research Institute of Education Science at the University of Tübingen.

“The goal is not only to increase students' motivation to engage with scientific phenomena, but also to strengthen their sense of belonging and self-confidence,” explains Joana Moscoso, co-founder and director of Native Scientist. Surveys of more than 1,000 participants showed that both the children, teenagers, and the scientists seem to benefit from the workshops. The latter even said it improved their communication skills, creativity and adaptability. The concept of the workshops has now been presented in the journal *Trends in Cell Biology*.

Issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion have long been debated in knowledge communication research. Yet academics and the target groups for knowledge communication tend to represent the characteristics and values of the dominant groups. In order to bring academic issues closer to children and young people with diverse backgrounds in particular, the Native Scientist organization has created a format that can be used to reach these young people in a very targeted way.

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Researchers are encouraged to talk about their work to the children and teenagers in workshops, relating their personal motivation to work in academia and how they reached the position they are now in. More than 1,200 researchers have now spoken to children and young people in the workshops in a total of eleven different languages in 28 cities in eight European countries.

A crucial aspect is the focus on natural sciences and language. Children and young people from ethnic minorities or with migrant roots are often not fluent in the national language, so they do not understand science lessons properly due to the high number of technical terms. Therefore, the workshops take place in the students' native language. This gives them a sense of belonging, enables them to experience competence, and strengthens their self-confidence.

"The Native Scientist Workshop was important because I didn't know there were people like me at university," one student reported after participating. But the workshops were also a profitable and positive experience for the researchers, who are often skeptical about knowledge communication because it is time-consuming, because they think it is too complicated to explain their research to lay people, or because they are afraid that they will not be able to answer questions.

"In subsequent interviews, they have reported that they themselves have gained new perspectives, that their self-confidence has also increased or that their passion for research has been rekindled," says Jessika Golle, a professor at the Hector Research Institute of Education Science, who is collaborating with Native Scientist. "On a professional level, if one's research becomes more visible, it can also increase the chance of accessing new funding for projects, and make it easier to participate in interdisciplinary projects."

About Native Scientist

What began in 2013 as an adventurous idea with a workshop in a London school for Portuguese-speaking children has since evolved into an award-winning Europe-wide program targeting migrant communities. Native Scientist's vision is a world where every child's potential can be fully realized, regardless of their background.

Publication:

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