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Children's International Summer Villages

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In the face-to-face relationships of camp life, children from many lands gain the concept that all countries are parts of one world. Doris Twitchell-Allen is associate professor of clinical psychology, University of Cincinnati.

THE STORY of the Children's International Summer Villages, Inc., will, I believe, cause you as school people to share with me an awareness of the discrepancy between the potentialities of young children for friendly social relations and the reality of suspicions and hostilities of adult behavior as reported in the daily papers.

What is the usual outlook of our children toward people of other nations? Do they not think of them merely as "foreigners"? Even learning facts that we teach about other peoples in our current social science classes does not seem to eliminate the barriers that make the children of our country look

upon other peoples as "different" and "separated" from us.

It was to break down these barriers and to have not only our children but all children perceive their countries as sub-parts of one world that Children's International Summer Villages, Inc., (CISV) was founded. Developmental psychology indicated that if a plan were to be effective, it should include face-to-face contacts at early ages. A program providing for a series of Children's Villages was conceived. A research plan was organized under a National Advisory Committee.²

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² Members of the National Advisory Committee were: Robert C. Angell, University of Michigan; Eugene Hartley, College of the City of New York; Arno Huth, New School for Social Research; Otto Klineberg, Columbia University; Robert Leeper, University of Oregon; Ronald Lippitt, University of Michigan; Margaret Mead, American Museum of Natural History; J. L. Moreno, Sociometric Institute, New York.

The First Village was held in Cincinnati, Ohio, last June. Austria, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Mexico, Norway, Sweden and the United States participated.

Cincinnati Sponsors First Village

Fifty-five eleven-year-old children and seventeen adults constituting delegations from one city from each of nine countries and representing seven languages met at a camp site on the outskirts of Cincinnati. For one month six children from each of the nine countries lived together happily, following a camp program of arts and crafts, sports, swimming, daily chores, council meetings, evening entertainments and other activities. Citizens of Cincinnati through voluntary contri-

butions raised \$40,000 to support this First Children's Village organized by CISV. This was the first of a series of such Villages, one or more of which will be held every year in different cities around the world.

CISV is a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Ohio in March 1950. Its purpose is to promote international understanding among children around the world, who are young enough to be deeply influenced, and to conduct research for assessing results and techniques. The program is based on the following theses:

- International understanding has to be learned. It involves insight into the dynamics of different peoples as related to other peoples, and to their common membership in one world.



Courtesy, Louisville Courier

Language is no barrier. Few words of instruction are needed when there is an interest—something to do and someone to show you how.

- Preadolescents are more educable than older persons in whom prejudices are more firmly set; hence special programs should be established for these early ages.

- Face to face contacts are the most potent approach to the learning of social relations.

- In work with children, representatives of the home and school should also be reached inasmuch as these two institutions significantly determine the milieu in which children grow up.

- A science of human relations in international situations needs to be built up. A research program should constitute an intrinsic part of the CISV plan.

Research Is Integral Part of Plan

As will be seen from these propositions this movement differs from international scout work, Experiment in International Living, and other such projects, by setting up research as an integral part of the plan, by including an adult program along with the child program, and by reaching younger children. Characteristically CISV activities are non-competitive and are not organized on national lines. Delegations meet not to present skills of one national group in competition with those of other groups, but for a common purpose of demonstrating that children from whatever nations can live happily together regardless of differences of language, manners, value systems and other aspects of culture.

Children are selected as delegates on the basis of their own stability, the deep roots of their background, and the respect they have already achieved in their communities. They are chosen as outstanding in potentialities for in-

fluence now as children, and in the future as adults.

A FIVE-FOLD PROGRAM

Upon the five basic propositions, a five-fold program was organized: the children's camp; the adult institute; the pre- and the post-camp program; and the research studies.

The Children's Camp was set up like any well organized children's summer camp. It included a variety of creative and sports activities. The Adult Institute ran concomitantly and set as its task an analysis of the significance of such camps and of techniques for organizing others around the world. The pre-camp program aimed to interest not only the six children from one city of each country but hundreds of children. For example, the exchange of arts and crafts between the school children of Cincinnati and those of schools of the participating cities of other countries brought direct relationships between children of several different countries before the camp opened.

The post-camp program is directed toward sustaining the interest of the delegates and disseminating accounts of the camp experience to a wide group of children and adults in their own countries. Children give talks at school and on the radio; adults speak on the radio, and give personal reports to educational and other groups, and write articles. Children have spontaneously contributed to this program through their self-initiated correspondence with other children. A month after the camp closed, a delegate from Cincinnati reported to a counsellor that she had received fifteen letters and one card from delegates in seven different countries.

An interesting feature has been the children's spontaneous use of the CISV symbol. Several have added this after their signatures. Wide use of a symbol of world citizenship is a most important phase of educating for international understanding. An important part of the post-camp program is the quarterly publication of the *CISV News*, the first issue of which appeared in October. The editor-in-chief is Ingolf Stahl, a 12 year old boy from Stockholm who was a delegate to the First Village.

Research Program Is Unique

The research program is a unique feature of the total plan of CISV. Though other programs of personnel exchange from one country to another at the adult and youth levels have been in operation for years, essentially no assessments of results have been made. Consequently no measures are available of the successes and failures of these many attempts to promote international understanding. The new approach of CISV emphasizes work at the child level and equally emphasizes a research program to determine individual and group dynamics in the international situations which CISV sets up. Data were collected at the First Village in Cincinnati last June to measure changes in attitudes; interpersonal relations among the children, such as choices of contacts, and feeling tone of these contacts; group structure into sub-groups; and ways in which the heterogeneity of nine nationalities and seven languages grew into an organic whole. These data are under analysis at the present time, and detailed results will be forthcoming within a year. At

present some basic general statements can be made:

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- First of all we learned that eleven-year-old children, boys and girls in equal number, can travel thousands of miles from their homes, remain away as long as four weeks, and live happily in one camp with as many as nine different nationalities and seven languages. This was possible even though only about a third of the children had a language in common (the United States delegation, the English and about seven other children could speak English; the three Scandinavian delegations could understand one another's languages fairly well).

- We learned how much easier it was for children than for adults to make friends quickly. Members of the Adult Institute constituted something of an informal experimental control group with which to compare the behavior of the children.

It was reported by one of the adult delegates how in London when the bus was announced bringing four delegations from the Continent, the English children rushed to greet the new arrivals. "There was a surging of the two groups toward one another without any thought of nationalities; they were just children."

It was otherwise with the adults. One Danish delegate said: "When I learned in April that I had been chosen as a delegate I began to work on myself to be ready to meet the Germans; I had not met one since the War and did not know how I would behave." A Norwegian adult delegate explained: "I want to be friends with all. But at first

I cannot. My mind can, yes, but my heart remembers my horrible experiences in a concentration camp." These obstacles were overcome by the adults by the end of the month. Tensions were handled, not in a "polite," superficial way but by frank, sometimes painful, discussions and by other shared activities in search for emotional understanding. In contrast, the children characteristically tumbled into activities with a verve, accepting companionship with essentially no attention to differences of nationality. Adults were aware of and somewhat hampered by differences in manner of eating. It seemed important to discuss these differences and understand them before proceeding with committee work to plan for future Villages. With the children, no evidence of awareness of these overt cultural differences was noted. The children just ate together with common enjoyment.

- Children of this age can make close friendships without a common language. They can learn skills in crafts, sports and swimming from counsellors who speak only one language (English). They can transact business in council meetings even in seven languages, waiting for one remark to be translated six times before a reply is given. In singing, the whole camp went through printed folk songs of the nine nations, changing from one language to another without hesitation,—from French to Spanish, to English, to German, to Danish,

and so on. As one boy said, "I discovered that we think alike even though we speak differently."

Within two days of arrival, the children were exchanging coins and other objects, even in the absence of a common language. Sometimes one of their group would translate. Often gestures were used. In any case children did not run to the two counsellors who could speak several languages for translation. Children usually handled communication among themselves.

- Food habits are not a stumbling block at this age. We admit that this finding was contrary to expectations. Whereas on the first three days the children ate cautiously, accepting small servings and smelling food before placing it in their mouths, and whereas they did not all drink milk at first, by the fourth day they were all eating the usual diet of children in any United States camp group. Within the first week, the milk order was tripled.

- Children of eleven can readily grasp the concept of one world. For example, when a discussion of future plans came up in a Children's Council meeting, the children made such remarks as "Next year we should have all countries of the world" and "I will tell my friends and they will tell theirs until all around the world. . . ."

Plans are under way for similar Villages which are to be held in Stockholm, Paris, and in a United States city in 1952.

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