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## Measuring Intercultural Sensitivity in International Service Learning

An Evaluation of the Impact of CISV International's Short-term Service Programme

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### **CISV Statement of Purpose**

“CISV educates and inspires action for a more just and peaceful world.”

Our Educational Principles:

- We appreciate the similarities between people and value their differences.
- We support social justice and equality of opportunity for all.
- We encourage the resolution of conflict through peaceful means.
- We support the creation of sustainable solutions to problems relating to our impact upon each other and the natural environment.

For a full version of CISV's Educational Principles, please visit <http://resources.cisv.org/docs/main?action=document.view&id=455>

**A complete report of this study will be available at [www.tntdevelopment.org](http://www.tntdevelopment.org) fall 2009.**

# Measuring Intercultural Sensitivity in International Service Learning

## An Evaluation of the Impact of CISV International's Short-term Service Programme

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*"By encouraging respect for cultural difference and the development of self-awareness, CISV empowers each participant to incorporate these values into their lives as they become global citizens and strive for a more peaceful world."*

CISV's newest program is its' service learning program, **the International People's Project (IPP)**. The IPP is a way to learn while actively contributing to the community. In partnership with local organizations, groups participate in hands-on work involving a specific theme or project. They also research the issue in their own countries and lead educational activities on the subject. Each IPP can include up to 20 volunteers, for people aged 19 and above representing a minimum of four countries for two to three weeks.

The educational goals for IPPs are to:

- Develop and learn intercultural perspectives,
- Learn to use knowledge and skills within and beyond the project,
- Develop knowledge of the theme, community and partner organization, and
- Carryout a project that benefits the local community.

CISV's objective for the IPP is to promote intercultural interaction and cooperation through service. Service learning is "an educational approach that integrates service in the community with intentional learning activities... both educational institutions and community organizations work together toward outcomes that are mutually beneficial"(Canadian Alliance for Service Learning, 2008). The IPP's service learning approach allows adult CISV participants to be a part of the peace education process and support CISV in achieving its organizational purpose.

### Research Context

In July 2008, CISV hosted an IPP in Toronto, Ontario for three weeks. The theme was intergenerational understanding, and the partner organization was a long-term care centre. Goals for this partnership included increased intergenerational understanding, respect for elders and a better understanding of aging. The partner organization expected the long-term care residents to have a life-enhancing experience through their interaction with volunteers. This IPP included 17 volunteers and 5 staff from 11 different countries: Belgium, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, Portugal, Sweden and the USA. Eight individuals participated in the research project, representing 5 of the 11 countries and ranging in age from 19-59 years.

### Research Goals

The overarching goal was to provide a systematic measure of the programmes' intercultural learning outcomes. The specific aims of the research were:

- To assess changes in intercultural sensitivity and competence,
- To evaluate intercultural interaction and cooperation, and
- To understand the impact of international service learning programs.

## Research Method

This research includes the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data comes from pre- and post-programme questionnaires. Each questionnaire includes three open-ended questions that relate to participant's view of living in an international community and their attitudes and behavior with elders. The questionnaire also includes 12 "Likert" rating scale questions related to their intercultural competencies, attitudes and behaviors toward the elderly and the value of service.

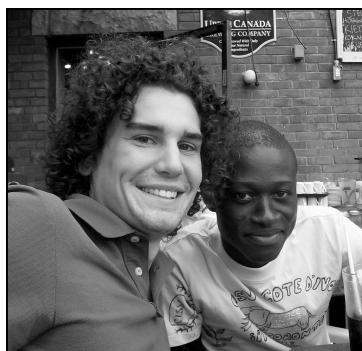
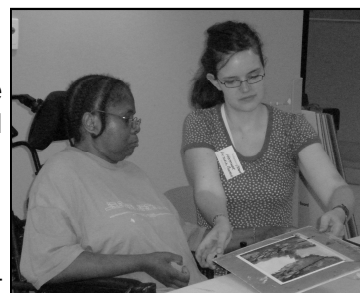
Quantitative data comes from pre- and post-programme Intercultural Development Inventory© (IDI) profiles. The IDI© is a valid and reliable instrument that measures intercultural sensitivity. The IDI© provided a profile for both individual participants as well as for the group. The IDI© provides a measure of orientation toward cultural difference, and, thus, the capacity for intercultural competence.

## Research Outcomes

The data was rich and offered insight into the participants' experience with the target issue, intergenerational understanding, and cultural differences.

### *Intergenerational Understanding*

- Participants' fears and insecurities about aging changed as a result of their experience volunteering in the long-term care centre. At the programme's end the majority of participants expressed more hope for their elder years and a better understanding of the potential for a quality life.
- The data did not provide a new or more complex perspective or reflection of attitudes and behaviors towards elders in their home culture.



### *Intercultural Sensitivity and Competence*

The qualitative data shows participants expected to learn and experience cultural differences, and enjoyed their experience living and working with people from different cultures. However, neither qualitative nor quantitative data reflects a deeper experience of cultural difference, or a more complex or sophisticated examination of culture.

The individual pre- and post-programme IDI© profiles indicate a change in orientation for two of the eight participants, increasing their intercultural competence by advancing to the next stage of intercultural development. The other IDI© profiles indicate that their orientation towards difference did not change, but was reinforced by their experience in the IPP.

The IDI© group profile indicates a developmental stage of Minimization before and after the programme. Minimization is a mono-cultural mindset, individuals are aware and recognize difference, and accept those differences while holding on to the idea that all humans are essentially the same. At this stage relying on "similarity" is a viable solution for adapting to difference.

The groups orientation towards difference was reinforced by their experience in the IPP. The post – IDI© indicates that as a group, participants relied on similarities to adapt to cultural differences within the group and at the programme's end the group was "more likely to assume people are like us".

## Research Conclusions

Participants' intercultural learning is either transformative or developmental. The qualitative responses provide information about participants' transformative learning experience, while the IDI© measures developmental learning based upon the Intercultural Development Continuum (formerly the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity). Key concepts used to interpret the data are:

*Intercultural Competence*: "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts." Intercultural competence requires a mindset (knowledge), a skill-set (skills), and a heart-set (attitudes) (Janet M. Bennett, Ph.D., 2008, 2009).

*Transformative Learning*: the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (Jack Mezirow, 2000).

Based upon the analysis of their intercultural experiences, the conclusions are:

- The experience of living in a different cultural context and working with people from different cultural backgrounds did not have a developmental or transformative impact on participants.
- The participants' orientation towards cultural difference was reinforced by their experience living and working in an international context.
- Participants relied on cultural similarities to live and work with one another, rather than exploring difference in more complex ways.

Based upon the analysis of their intergenerational experiences, the conclusions are:

- The program effectively increased empathy for and awareness of issues facing elder people and others in long-term care.
- There was transformational learning on the "target issue" of aging and intergenerational understanding.

*Therefore:*

The international context alone does not provide the necessary learning interventions to support both transformative and developmental learning in intercultural competence and sensitivity.

International service learning programs must invest as much time exploring cultural differences as they do on the target issue to achieve measurable increases in intercultural competence and sensitivity.

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## References

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## About the researcher:

Tamara Thorpe is an Intercultural and Leadership trainer, coach and consultant in Victoria, B.C. She specializes in bringing a global vision to non-profit organizations and educational institutions. Tamara has been an active member of CISV since 2003, and a member of the Evaluation and Research Committee since 2006. This is her second CISV research project. For more information visit [www.tntdevelopment.org](http://www.tntdevelopment.org) and for CISV visit [www.cisv.org](http://www.cisv.org) or send an email to [tamara@tntdevelopment.org](mailto:tamara@tntdevelopment.org) or [tamara.thorpe@ca.cisv.org](mailto:tamara.thorpe@ca.cisv.org)