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The Children of the Dream: Postwar Planning for The First Camp of the Children's International Summer Villages Organization

James L. Green, College of Mount St. Joseph

Abstract

Established in the Midwest in the late 1940's by Dr. Doris Allen of the University of Cincinnati, Children's International Summer Villages (CISV) is a worldwide youth organization dedicated to peace and better global understanding. This article focuses on its creation and the ideas behind CISV, plus it documents the organizational work undertaken to open the first international children's summer camp in suburban Cincinnati, Ohio in 1951. Although multiculturalism is a contemporary expression, it can be seen historically that CISV represents a precursor to our current efforts in multicultural education.

Established nearly half a century ago in the Midwest, Children's International Summer Villages (CISV) is an international youth organization dedicated to peace education and global understanding. With an annual budget in the U.S. alone approaching one million dollars, CISV has grown from a small midwestern association to a world-wide organization with international headquarters located currently in England, that has served over 100,000 people, mostly children, with its various international programs.

Prompted by the fifth anniversary of World War II, recent regional historical scholarship has focused on the role of schools during that conflict, as evidenced by several articles in the 1995 issue (Volume 22) of the Journal of the Midwest History of Education Society. This article examines the role of American education in the immediate postwar period. Within that context, CISV represented a group of educators who felt that internationalism should be a part of education. Their efforts and idealism were mirrored domestically by a postwar movement known as intergroup, or intercultural education, which in the Midwest was made known through the work of progressive educator Hilda Taba, director of the Center for Intergroup Education at the University of Chicago from 1948-51. Intergroup education represents both a precursor to and an early form of current multicultural educational programs; likewise CISV can be seen as an early form of multiculturalism.

In his history of CISV, the late William P. Matthews, connected with the organization for nearly thirty-five years in various leadership positions, chronicles the birth of the CISV idea. According to Matthews, Dr. Allen conceived of the idea in 1946 as a reaction to a proposal by Alexander Meiklejohn, who recommended creating "a sort of international graduate school for Ph.D. level students of philosophy, history, political science, economics, physics and the social sciences." According to Matthews, this school was to produce the nucleus of a leadership group which would be predisposed toward world peace. As a specialist in child growth and development, Allen thought that Meiklejohn had targeted the wrong age group. For Allen, effective peace education needed to begin at a younger, more impressionable age, specifically preadolescent children.

Founded in the 1940's, CISV was developed by Dr. Doris Twichell Allen, then associate professor of psychology at the University of Cincinnati and chief psychologist at nearby Longview State Hospital. Noting the negative postwar climate of international tension and distrust, she thought international summer camps for children (called villages) would teach children to live in peace with people of other nationalities, a lesson that would carry into their adult lives and provide a seed for developing better international relations.

In retrospect, Allen's conceptual idea was idealistic and optimistic for its time and place. Internationally, the late Forties were dominated by an American foreign policy which stressed the containment of Communism. Deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union had resulted in the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Tensions in Europe were heightened by the Berlin Blockade. By the time CISV had launched its first summer village in 1951, the U.S. was deeply involved in the Korean Conflict. Throughout this time period, the threat of nuclear war hovered. Against this backdrop, Dr. Allen developed and presented her concept of CISV, perhaps encouraged by the fact that in the immediate postwar period many Americans had rejected isolationism. As noted by William Chafe in The Unfinished Journey, "Nearly 80 percent [of the American public] endorsed U.S. involvement in the United Nations" in late 1945 (Chafe, 1991, p. 31).

CISV was sponsored by the city of Cincinnati, with just over one half million inhabitants in 1950, for its conservative social and political climate. From this perspective alone it might seem surprising that such an apparently liberal organization as CISV, dedicated as it was and is to world peace and understanding, would have originated there. That it did so must be credited to the vision and charisma of Dr. Allen and to a small group of internationally minded citizens. This paper focuses on the creation of CISV, its objectives, and its organizational efforts in establishing its first summer camp.

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Later in the fall of 1946, Allen was prepared to spread her idea of an international youth organization dedicated to peace education. While attending the annual conference of the American Psychological Association, she promoted the idea before her professional colleagues. Shortly afterwards she repeated her efforts before a meeting of social scientists in Bar Harbor, Maine. Professional support was visible, including that of anthropologist Margaret Mead and sociologist Gordon Allport.

One year later Allen attended the 2nd General Conference of UNESCO in Mexico City. According to Matthews, Allen was disappointed by her reception. Hoping to receive professional support, as well as financial support, she repeated her efforts before a meeting of social scientists in Bar Harbor, Maine. Professional support was visible, including that of anthropologist Margaret Mead and sociologist Gordon Allport.

Allen was disappointed by her reception. Hoping to receive financial support, as well as support for her idea, she received neither from this United Nations organization, even though she felt "that UNESCO was the proper home for the CISV idea" (Matthews, 1991, p. 24). Her disappointment was tempered when her seven-year-old son unexpectedly asked her one day if she would have to ever fight in a war similar to the one which had just concluded. His youthful concern provided the incentive for her to continue to promote the CISV idea and work for its realization. By May of 1947, her renewed efforts had been noticed in an article in the *New York Times* (Kaempffert, 1947, p. E11).

Throughout 1948 and 1949, organizational work continued. Because Allen envisioned psychologists and social scientists studying the children at this first camp to see how the children would react to their many cultural differences, she developed the Twitchell Allen Three-dimensional Personality Test for assessing personality dynamics within a multicultural setting. During 1949, she visited Europe and surveyed various international youth programs, including The Pestalozzi Children's Village, the Junice Red Cross Headquarters, and the International Voluntary Work Camps, all located in Switzerland (History, CISV Papers, Box 1, File 1). While in Europe, she visited the UNESCO headquarters in Paris and once again requested financial support for both operating the first camp, as well as the psychological and social science research connected with it. The first request was denied, but the latter was granted $3,000. UNESCO's response was a turning point for the planning of the first camp. With UNESCO's refusal to provide operating funds, Allen and her growing supporters felt that local communities would be the best way to raise money, rather than seeking state or federal government funds which might compromise CISV's neutral stance regarding political ideology during this Cold War era. There was some concern that federal funds, in particular, might lead to the State Department using the first CISV village for propagandaistic purposes. Corporate sponsorship was relatively minor with a $1,000 gift from Coca Cola, plus complimentary soda for the month-long camp (Correspondence, CISV Papers, Box 2, File 1), and a $3,000 donation from WLW, a part of the Crosley communications business (Financial, CISV Papers, Box 7, File 13). Most of the needed $40,000 came from private donors with the largest single gift, $15,000, from Mary C. Johnston, a member of the Procter family with historical ties to Procter and Gamble, Cincinnati's most well-known company. The depth of Dr. Allen's commitment was measured by her own $5,000 contribution to this first camp (Financial, CISV Papers, Box 7, File 13). Concurrent with their fund-raising efforts, the fledgling CISV organization waged a public relations campaign with thirty-five press releases published in Cincinnati's three daily papers in 1951.

By early 1951, the year of the first summer village, CISV had organized national committees in England, France, Denmark, West Germany, Norway, and Sweden, charged with the responsibility of selecting child and adult delegates for the first camp. Each nation was to send only six children, usually selected from a single city. For example, in West Germany, six children were chosen from the schools in Hamburg.

The selection process reveals much about the CISV philosophy and its objectives. Eleven year olds were chosen as campers, or child delegates as they were labeled, because they were mature enough to spend a month away from home and would also be able to communicate their experiences with their peers when they did return to their home countries. Yet this age group was still young enough that their cultural and racial prejudices had still not solidified. It was also felt that children at this age were relatively stable psychologically and emotionally, plus adaptable to new experiences (CISV Handbook, 1967, p. 5). Working with children this young was a unique feature of CISV, which has distinguished it from nearly all other international youth exchanges. The inspiration for choosing this age group came from Dr. Allen and was endorsed by Margaret Mead. The criteria for selecting the first CISV child delegates were also developed by Dr. Allen and included "the ability to learn quickly, an outgoing, friendly nature, acceptance by other children, good health, a stable emotional makeup, the ability to transmit the experience to others after camp, and a real desire to be friends with children from other countries." (Matthews, 1991, p. 30-31).

Meanwhile a finance committee had already determined that a total of $40,000, a sizable sum of money in 1950, would be needed to sponsor the first village. The committee decided that individual contributions would be the best way to raise money, rather than seeking state or federal government funds which might compromise CISV's neutral stance regarding political ideology during this Cold War era. There was some concern that federal funds, in particular, might lead to the State Department using the first CISV village for propagandaistic purposes. Corporate sponsorship was relatively minor with a $1,000 gift from Coca Cola, plus complimentary soda for the month-long camp (Correspondence, CISV Papers, Box 2, File 1), and a $3,000 donation from WLW, a part of the Crosley communications business (Financial, CISV Papers, Box 7, File 13). Most of the needed $40,000 came from private donors with the largest single gift, $15,000, from Mary C. Johnston, a member of the Procter family with historical ties to Procter and Gamble, Cincinnati's most well-known company. The depth of Dr. Allen's commitment was measured by her own $5,000 contribution to this first camp (Financial, CISV Papers, Box 7, File 13). Concurrent with their fund-raising efforts, the fledgling CISV organization waged a public relations campaign with thirty-five press releases published in Cincinnati's three daily papers in 1951.

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In retrospect, and from a modern multicultural perspective, choosing children from primarily Northwestern European countries, three from Scandinavia alone, hardly seems multicultural. Racial differences were nearly non-existent; and religious, linguistic, and ethnic differences seem small when viewed from a contemporary global or even national perspective. Even the early leaders of CISV by the mid-1950’s were cognizant of the need for a more diverse international participation in their organization. Yet to minimize the cultural differences within this first group of child delegates would overlook the then recent experiences of World War II. Such a critique would miss the sharp divisions which still existed between different European nationalities as a result of the war. In fact, Allen hoped that these differences could be reduced by CISV participation, when children of diverse backgrounds began to discover their likenesses.

A closer examination of the background of the selected children reveals personal wartime circumstances in their lives that could have been potentially very divisive at that first camp. For example, at least one of the German and Austrian children had lost a father in the war. Likewise, one of the French children, who was Jewish, had lost several family members to the Holocaust (St. Edmund’s Camp, CISV Papers, Box 13, File 1). All of the European children, except the Swedes, had at least some direct memories of the war, since they were five at its close.* Thus, recent historical events heightened whatever cultural differences might have normally existed amongst these children.

Several countries felt the need to internally diversify their own child delegations. France and Austria, both overwhelmingly Catholic, purposely selected Jewish and Protestant children as well as Roman Catholic. Likewise, West Germany, Austria, and Great Britain consciously diversified along social class lines. For example, the West German delegation chose children whose fathers included two white collar clerks, one teacher, one postman, and a factory worker (St. Edmund’s Camp, CISV Papers, Box 13, File 1). In the United States, planners specifically chose one African American child delegate as well as hired one Black camp counselor for the staff, because they felt it was important for the foreign delegations to witness U.S. racial diversity. This was done during the early years of the civil rights movement and when Cincinnati, itself, was still overtly segregated. In fact, evidence of such segregation is noted in the first entry of a diary kept by the director of this first summer village. Written during June of 1951, camp director Ted Wuerfel wrote, "On trip to Glendale [the suburban location of this camp] group was refused service at one ice cream shop and had to patronize another.

By spring of 1951, the children had been selected with their adult chaperones. As conceived by Dr. Allen, this first summer village would consist of four components including the children’s camp itself, an adult institute, a research program, and a public relations campaign (Matthews, 1991, p. 31).

In many ways the camp was like any other summer camp. Activities planned involved sports (highlighted in this instance by recreational swimming and other non-competitive sports), arts and crafts, folk dances, daily chores, and parliamentary meetings. The camp was unique in that the children came from nine different nations, delegations of six children each about to embark on a one month long experiment in international living. As part of the planned camp, each delegation was to entertain the whole group with a show of skits, songs, and dances demonstrating their national heritage. Sightseeing in Cincinnati would be limited so that the time these children could intermingle at the camp setting would be maximized.

The chaperones, or adult delegates, camped at a separate, but nearby site. Allen thought this would be best in that their lingering prejudices and wartime memories would be kept somewhat at a distance from the children. In retrospect, her decision was wise. In a 1994 interview with Dr. Allen, she noted that the children on their own were able to surmount their cultural differences much more easily than the adults.

The research component was to be led by Dr. Allen herself, who worked with a team of eleven social scientists. There was also one resident psychologist at the camp.

The fourth and final component was publicity, which reflected the hopes of the founders of CISV that there would be future summer villages, based on this CISV model. Consequently, Look magazine, the Voice of America, and the U.S. State Department were all permitted to generate news items about CISV.

On June 3, 1951, the children arrived and the first CISV summer village was officially opened at a church camp in suburban Cincinnati. Dr. Allen’s idea had become a reality. All the pieces were in place for her to test the effectiveness of her experiment in peace education and global understanding.

1. These figures are taken from the 1993 Annual Report of the Children’s International Summer Villages, Inc. (United States Association).
2. Technically, CISV officially labeled their summer camps as villages. In this paper, both terms are used interchangeably.
3. By early 1951, Allen had recruited the active support of Cincinnati council member, Potter Stewart, later to be Justice Stewart of the U.S. Supreme Court. Outside of Cincinnati, she had also enlisted the support of the late Senator Margaret Chase, who represented Allen’s native state of Maine.
4. In addition to these seven European countries, there were also delegations from the United States and Mexico.

5. See Ingvild's Diary by Ingvild Schartum-Hansen for the war memories of a Norwegian girl delegate as she described the German invasion of her homeland.

References

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