



**INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING: A PEACEMAKING  
EXPERIENCE IN CYPRUS**

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**Presented at:  
NACSW Convention 2012  
October, 2012  
St. Louis, MO**

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## **International Service-Learning: A Peacemaking Experience in Cyprus**

### **Abstract**

*In May 2011, University of Indianapolis students participated in an interdisciplinary, international service-learning project in Cyprus to help prepare youth there to become better citizens through conflict resolution. This article provides details of course development as well as the partner engagement with Highgate School in Nicosia, Cyprus. It also provides an overview of the training the university students received for this project, their experiences in Cyprus, and what was learned from the project. Brief insights into the unique culture and challenges of this Mediterranean nation are presented as well as the rationale for the initiative and the impact on Highgate School.*

**Keywords:** Cyprus, service-learning, international partnerships, interdisciplinary, partnerships, evaluation, conflict resolution, peace education, peacemaking.

### **University of Indianapolis**

Founded in 1902 with the motto, "Education for Service," the University of Indianapolis has proven to be a leader in efforts to bring together diverse communities, spur educational opportunities, and increase economic and commercial stability in the community through service-learning. While much effort has been traditionally focused on local neighborhoods, the University located in Indianapolis, Indiana has increasingly expanded its service-learning initiatives to include national and international partnerships. With over 5300 students, University of Indianapolis offers more than 80 undergraduate degree programs, 27 master's degree programs, and five doctoral programs.

## **Introduction**

The University of Indianapolis has been proactive in developing and enhancing partnerships in a number of Mediterranean countries. It has a longstanding institutional relationship with the University of Nicosia in Cyprus and maintains a University of Indianapolis campus in Athens, Greece. The institution is committed to enhancing its current partnerships and creating new ones. The University seeks to provide its students with opportunities to be exposed to cultures and traditions different than their own and integrate international service-learning experiences into its courses. It is also committed to providing faculty with scholastic development opportunities abroad and to offering initiatives to its international partners that have value to them as well as to University of Indianapolis students.

Through its international efforts, the University of Indianapolis has forged many strong partnerships including several in Nicosia, Cyprus. At the encouragement of the University's Provost and the Associate Vice-President of Community Relations, a focused effort was initiated in the summer of 2009 by the director of the Community Programs Center to identify a potential partner in Cyprus for a first time service-learning project there. With an interdisciplinary focus in mind, the director of the Community Programs Center began working with the director of the Phylis Lan Lin Program in Social Work to identify potential partners. After a number of contacts and an exploratory visit to Cyprus late in 2009, Highgate School was selected as the service-learning partner. Highgate School, a private school which serves the educational needs of children from pre-school to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, is located on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, just south of

Turkey. The students who attend Highgate School represent thirty-two different cultures though most are of Cypriot, Turkish or Greek heritage.

The idea for a peace education project emerged from the recognition that conflict and violence are abounding worldwide with few solutions for countering the problem.

Recognizing that conflict often arises from such differences as culture, backgrounds, perspectives, interests, and goals; peace education or conflict resolution training has shown promise as a means of reducing conflict in schools, families, and the workplace (Thompson, n.d). Advocates of peace education espouse that when individuals learn the skills for resolving conflict in a successful or “win/win” manner, it positively impacts interpersonal relationships and promotes a more harmonious environment. After additional research, a peace education program was proposed by the authors as a proactive means of helping reduce conflict among the culturally diverse student body at Highgate School while also complementing the school’s mission to break down barriers between cultures and promote reconciliation between people groups (Highgate School, 2012).

### **Literature Review**

Although much has been written on the topic of service-learning in general, comparatively less has been written about international service-learning specifically. Definitions of service-learning vary somewhat between authors but most parallel the definition provided by Bringle and Hatcher (1995) which states:

“ Service-learning is a credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of curricular content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility" (p. 112).

Similarly, Campus Compact describes service-learning as “an educational methodology which combines community service with academic learning objectives, preparation for community work, and deliberate reflection" (Campus Compact, 2001).

Research points to the versatility and creativity inherent in service-learning and endorses its adaptability to multiple areas of study and its applicability for addressing a vast array of needs. As students apply what they learn in the classroom to a community need, it impacts outcomes such as “complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development” (Moore and Lin, 2009).

Similar to service-learning in definition, *international* service-learning combines academic instruction and community-based service in an international context (Crabtree, 2008). Its objectives he states, include “increasing participants’ global awareness, building intercultural understanding, and enhancing civic mindedness and skills.” (p. 1) Although one might be tempted to assume that the benefits of service-learning to

students, educators, and community partners are the same for domestic efforts as well as international efforts, limited research makes it difficult to either support or refute the hypothesis. In his article, Crabtree does however, point to a growing body of research on international service-learning and references more recent quantitative and qualitative studies of international service-learning confirming “student development of civic and research skills, effect on diversity, and positive longitudinal impact on students.” (p. 21)

Much has been written on the subject of conflict and teaching children skills for conflict resolution but no research was found on conflict resolution training in the context of international service-learning. Review of literature revealed that most authors generally agree that conflict is both natural and unavoidable, provides opportunity for positive change, and can produce a sense of empowerment (Peace Education Foundation, n.d). Furthermore, most research agrees that if children are taught appropriate skills they can “find creative and constructive ways to settle conflicts before they escalate into violence” (Peace Education Foundation, n.d). Proponents assert that conflict resolution training is an effective tool for decreasing violence, improving relationships, increasing the value of diversity, and promoting a more peaceful environment (Jones, 2004). Jones contends that peace education promotes the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about changes in behavior that allow people of all ages to prevent conflict and violence, to peacefully resolve conflict, and to create conditions conducive to peace (Jones, 2009). A few articles suggested that teaching children to resolve conflict peacefully can

impact schools, families, and ultimately nations (Foraker-Thompson, J. and Edmunds, M. (2001). A search of literature revealed a limited amount of research examining the effectiveness of teaching children skills to resolve conflict peacefully. Johnson et al offer perhaps the most comprehensive look at the effectiveness of such programs. They conducted multiple studies in eight schools and two countries and found that “students learn the conflict resolution procedures, retain the knowledge throughout the school year, apply the procedures to actual conflicts, transfer the procedures to non-classroom and non-school settings, use the procedures similarly in family and school settings, and, when given the option, engage in problem-solving rather than win-lose negotiations” (Johnson, 2001)

These research findings were significant for informing the peacemaking project in Cyprus. For children who regularly encounter diverse philosophies and ideas in their school and community and who are surrounded by visual and other reminders of their divided nation, research seemed to point to the value of conflict resolution training as a means of promoting peace and reconciliation among the students at Highgate School. The review brought recognition of a need for additional research regarding the value of international service-learning to university students, educators, and host partners. In addition, it pointed to a gap in research regarding the transferability of peacemaking skills across cultures, the value of teaching conflict resolution in the context of international service-learning, and the extent to which conflict resolution training influences relationships beyond the school setting. While the outcomes of the international service-

learning project in Cyprus offer insights for future endeavors by University of Indianapolis, they also help address some of the gaps in existing research.

### **Project Identification**

In developing a project in Cyprus, ideas were considered that aligned with Bringle and Hatcher's definition of service-learning. Based on their definition, the selected project would provide University of Indianapolis students with an organized service activity, meet an identified community need, and enhance the student's sense of civic responsibility (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996). The decision to provide a peace education program at Highgate School met this criteria based on knowledge of the country's history, the school's diversity and mission, input from the school's director, and the value it offered to University of Indianapolis students.

### **The Context for a Peace Education Program**

A peace education program focusing on conflict resolution training seemed especially appropriate to undertake in Cyprus in light of the island's relatively recent history and the philosophy of Highgate School. In the midst of international discord, Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974 and seized a portion of territory in northern Cyprus. The invasion and ongoing occupation has had significant political, economic, religious, and human rights implications for the nation (Press and Information Office, 2005). Informed by this history, students at Highgate School embrace diverse political, religious, and cultural beliefs. At times conflict has arisen as a result of these diverse beliefs as well as the espoused beliefs of students representing numerous cultures who attend the school. Apart from their cultural differences, the students also experience interpersonal conflicts

that are inherent in almost any setting. These factors, coupled with the school's mission and informed by the authors' inquiry-based research made a peace education program a good fit for Highgate School students (Highgate School, 2012).

### **Rationale for the Project**

For the project, the authors purposed to actualize Schmidt's definition of conflict resolution training which she states is, "A process used to change attitudes and behaviors by teaching skills that equip youth with the ability to use a nonviolent approach when dealing with conflicts" (Schmidt, 1994b). It was reasoned that if Highgate students and their resident instructors learned about what causes conflict and the skills for resolving it, they could utilize their new knowledge to reduce conflict in the school setting. In addition, because the skills are also life skills, these same students could utilize them in other settings and become catalysts for change promoting peace in their families, in their communities, and perhaps in the future with more training, on a more global level. Johnson and Johnson's (1996) premise provided additional rationale for the project purporting that, "Training every student how to negotiate and mediate will ensure that future generations are prepared to manage conflicts constructively in career, family, community, and national and international settings" (Barnett, 2001). Training Highgate students and teachers in basic conflict resolution skills therefore, was seen as an opportunity to help the school community become an increasingly more peaceful environment with potential for impacting other systems.

In addition to the value such a program offered to Highgate students and staff, it was also premised that University of Indianapolis students would also benefit. Teaching the university students about the history of Cyprus and immersing them in the country's culture offered the potential to enlarge their knowledge about demographics and increase their general sense of civic responsibility (Hunter and Brisbin, 2000). These opportunities would also provide them with the chance to explore their own biases and beliefs. It was further surmised that as the university students learned the concepts of conflict resolution to teach them to Highgate students, they themselves would internalize the skills and utilize them in their own lives as well as gain leadership skills through teaching.

### **Goals of the Project**

The primary goals of the project were twofold. One goal was for University of Indianapolis students and Highgate students to learn about conflict and the skills necessary for resolving it. The other goal was for University of Indianapolis students to understand the international applications of service-learning while expanding their cultural awareness and their knowledge of the people and history of Cyprus.

### **Participants**

In addition to the authors who initiated the project and served as course instructors, six female students participated in the project. No male students applied. Students were selected based on their completed applications and personal interviews. The student's declared major was not a consideration in the selection process and in fact, no two

students had the same major. The instructors included the director of the Community Programs Center, the director of the Phylis Lan Lin Program in Social Work, and a community social worker. The director of the Community Programs Center, who is a native of Cyprus, provided a unique understanding of the country and its history. She was also instrumental in planning educational and recreational excursions for the students, and served as a liaison between the authors and the director of Highgate School throughout the process. The director of the Phylis Lan Lin Program in Social Work provided an understanding of youth, group dynamics, interpersonal relationships, communication, and conflict resolution. He helped students prepare for and process their daily interactions and helped them apply classroom knowledge to their experiences. The community social worker, experienced in teaching conflict resolution, designed a curriculum specifically for Highgate School and trained the university students prior to the trip. She also provided daily lesson plan reviews and educational support to the university students while in Cyprus.

### **Preparation and Project Delivery**

After being selected, the students attended required pre-trip meetings where they became acquainted with one another through icebreakers and other activities that would also be incorporated in the peacemaking curriculum. In addition, they learned about the country of Cyprus and its people, the students at Highgate School, and about the two host families with whom they would be living during their stay. Students were assigned readings about Cyprus and about service-learning which were discussed during the pre-trip meetings. They also learned about conflict resolution and techniques for teaching the concepts.

During the pre-trip meetings, questions and concerns were addressed and students had the opportunity to sample foods similar to what they would eat in Cyprus. In addition, students also designed materials to be used in their Highgate classrooms including a peacemaker poster, a peacemaker pledge card, and a peacemaker certificate which would be awarded to each Highgate student at the end of the experience. The materials were professionally printed prior to the trip and transported to Cyprus along with books and other materials that were used to reinforce concepts.

Once in Cyprus, the students were assigned to individual classrooms at Highgate School. Each classroom teacher was provided with a packet of information that explained conflict resolution training including the purpose of the program, goals, skills to be taught, and the benefits of a peacemaking curriculum. They were also given copies of materials the university students would be using to teach key concepts and a list of ideas for integrating the concepts into daily classroom activities after the university students left. University students taught students the skills for resolving conflict and peacemaking during 50 minute classroom periods daily. Utilizing the pre-established daily curriculum, they taught skills that built upon one another. The students laid a foundation that started with identifying and understanding differences. Upon this foundation, concepts about perceptions, feelings, and beliefs and how these contribute to conflict were added. The notion of choices and personal responsibility for choices as well as communication skills including talking, using "I statements," and active listening were added to the knowledge base. Finally, methods for negotiating to achieve win-win solutions provided Highgate students with an overview of conflict resolution and the basic skills to establish a more

positive, tolerant, and peaceful environment. Every concept was reviewed daily to reinforce it and to help students better understand how each concept fit together as a whole. Daily activities and icebreakers also helped reinforce the concepts in multi-sensory ways.

Throughout the day, the university students assisted teachers in their classrooms which allowed the Highgate students and their teachers and the university students to get to know one another better. Assisting in the classroom also allowed the university students to reinforce concepts, help students practice their new skills when conflict arose, and model the conflict resolution process for teachers. At the end of each school day, University of Indianapolis students and the three instructors processed the lesson and events and reviewed curriculum for the following day. After school, university students either participated in a planned group activity or joined their host family for the evening. Each morning the group convened to prepare for the day's lesson and review the day's schedule. To culminate their time at Highgate School, university students presented each student with a peacemaking certificate at a ceremony to which parents were invited. University students were required to reflect daily on their experiences in a journal which Campus Compact considers to be a significant component of service-learning (Hutchinson, 2001). The journals were reviewed by the instructors post-trip and were considered for part of the students' grade. The journals also provided insight regarding the impact of the experience on students and feedback that will help inform future endeavors. Post-trip, University of Indianapolis students met to process the experience

and also to prepare posters for the twice yearly Service-Learning Expo which highlights students' service-learning experiences.

### **Challenges**

Time was perhaps the greatest challenge of the project. Barnett et al provide a paradigm for ideal methods for teaching conflict resolution which asserts that “the best educational strategy is to teach more complicated and involved methods of conflict resolution as students advance in grade. Rather than train one class or grade, these lessons must be repeated and built on over the years to have long term effect” (Barnett, 2001). With only nine instructional days over the 17 day trip, it was not possible to engage in best practice strategies for teaching conflict resolution therefore making it impossible to draw conclusions about the long-term impact of the project. An additional challenge was one of linguistics. While the students at Highgate School are fluent in English, a number of words had different meanings for the Mediterranean students and the North American students. As a result, some terms that are foundational to a peacemaking education in the United States were not fully understood by the Highgate students. Terms such as “conflict” and “resolution” for example, were unexpectedly not understood by the Highgate students. These language difference required lessons to be readjusted in order to help Highgate students better understand the concepts and had implications for the data results of the project.

## **Data Collection**

Two instruments were used to measure the impact of the project on University of Indianapolis students. One instrument was a standardized service-learning evaluation through the Community Programs Center which the University uses with every student participant to measure their service-learning experience. The other instrument was a one-group pre-test/post-test design intended to measure change in the university students' understanding of cultural diversity and concepts of peacemaking (Attachment 1 shows the instrument). Students were asked to rate their agreement to each statement on a scale of one to five, with one indicating least amount of agreement and five indicating most amount of agreement. Students completed the assessment both before their trip and upon their return (Attachment 2 shows the data results).

An additional pre-test/post-test instrument was used to assess goal attainment for the Highgate students. The children were asked to answer true or false to 12 written statements about conflict and conflict resolution that reflected their knowledge and understanding of the concepts. Student responses were anonymous but were grouped according to grade level. Direct observation of the Highgate students also provided an informal tool of measure regarding the impact of the project.

Because the assessment and data gathering methods used for this trip do not meet the regulatory definition of human subject's research, no review of the assessment or data gathering methods was required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of Indianapolis. The purpose of the data collected was to be used to assess the quality of

services and were for internal purposes only and are not, intended to be generalized to populations outside this specific experience.

### **Findings**

Data analysis, student evaluations, and student journals served as the primary measures of goal attainment for the project. Ongoing interaction with the students throughout the project and informal interviews conducted and recorded for use in preparing a DVD of the experience also provided input used to evaluate the project. Based on these measures, it appears the university students effectively internalized the concepts of conflict resolution concepts and gained the skills to teach them to others. Their cultural immersion experience expanded their understanding of the people and history of Cyprus and gave them a perspective of how service-learning can have international impact. Students articulated the impact of their experience in the following ways:

“I think it’s interesting to perceive the... ‘Cyprus problem’ and look and see how it would be perceived if I read that in a history book or a lecture in one of my classes...but to be able to see the people who have experienced it, that’s been meaningful to me. Going forward, whenever I look at a political situation or a current event or even looking back in history, I know this is not just a dash on a timeline; this event really affected people” (E. Gahimer, personal communication, May 16, 2011).

“It’ all history. Their current events are in their faces. It seems our wars, our

things are so far away that we never see them like this—it's all history to me. We never really got to experience it like this but just standing at that point, at the 'Green Line'\*, it was like, WOW! they see their history every day” (M. Scudder, personal communication, May 17, 2011).

“The trip was amazing. It was my first time out of the country and I couldn't have picked a better place. The Highgate School and the families we stayed with were better than we could ask for. We learned so much about the people, culture, food, and the conflicts of Cyprus. Not only did we try to help Highgate and teach them but they also taught me about myself. It was an experience of a lifetime” (S. Seman, personal communication, May 16, 2011).

On the DVD produced about the service-learning experience in Cyprus, one of the article's authors observed that, “For them to be exposed to something like this was a totally different kind of education for the University of Indianapolis students” (M. Foulkrod, personal communication, May 18, 2011).

Goal attainment for the Highgate students was largely based on direct observation as the pre-test/post-test instrument was deemed unreliable due to the linguistic issues. Student and teacher feedback however, also provided insight into what the Highgate partners learned about conflict resolution and peacemaking.

\*The Green Line: Where the clock stopped in 1974, 2003. Retrieved from <http://www.cyprusgreenline.com>

\*The Green Line divides the island of Cyprus, 112 miles from east to west. The northern area largely plundered and left desolate after the Turkish invasion and subsequent occupation in 1974, is marked with barbed wire and patrolled by military border guards. The Green Line is an ongoing reminder of the invasion that resulted in 37% of the island coming under Turkish rule, approximately 200,00 Greek Cypriots being exiled to the south, and thousands being “killed, ill-treated or disappeared without a trace” (The Green Line, 2003).

One Highgate student stated, “I’ve always wanted to learn about peacemaking and now I have the chance and I’ve really learned a lot.”

Another student indicated they learned, “Peacemaking helps people really communicate with each other better.”

Several Highgate teachers acknowledged that they appreciated the peacemaking activities and planned to continue using them and even expand on them.

A teacher of seven-year olds also stated, “I think any age is important to understand about conflict but this age group particularly benefited from it.”

(E. De-Schoolmeester, personal communication, May 16, 2011)

Summing up the experience, the director of Highgate School said it this way,

“The main hope is that the children take this as a journey and celebrate everything that they’ve learned...Long-term I would very much like to further develop this and continue with different projects; an ongoing project would be of great value”

(M. Theochari, personal communication, May17, 2011).

Observationally it appears the primary school students made greater gains in understanding the concepts of conflict resolution than other groups. A number of factors may have influenced this including the level of teacher participation and teacher confidence in reinforcing concepts, the instructional style and confidence of the university students, the amount of time university students had with their students, and the Highgate students’ willingness to be vulnerable. Older students were participating in mandatory exams which limited classroom instruction, requiring that the lessons be abbreviated. As a result, these students did not practice the skills as fully as the primary school students. In addition, it appeared that the older students were more guarded about self-disclosure and less willing to share their feelings or opinions with others making instruction and learning more challenging.

Although more study should be done, it appears from this experience that peace education has adaptability across cultures and has potential for positively impacting the students. The experience also adds to the body of knowledge about best practice methods for international service-learning and conflict resolution training in the context of international service-learning. While it is hoped that Highgate students will continue to

use their conflict resolution skills and even transfer those skills into other settings, there was intentionally no plan for measuring such outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

Thorough planning and frequent communication with the host partner were imperative for providing an exceptional experience for all involved. Because this was the instructors' first international service-learning effort, they intentionally kept the number of students selected for participation small. In doing so, it allowed them to provide a more personalized experience for each of the participants. Because the experience also included living with host families, the instructors were easily available to address any issues that arose. Developing a well constructed project that met expectations for the host partner as well as the university students and adequately preparing and supporting the university students in carrying out their project were key to the success of the endeavor. By also providing the university students with numerous educational and recreational excursions in addition to living with local families, the university students were able to experience full immersion into another culture as they embodied the University's motto of "education for service."

Feedback from the university students and the host partners involved in this project along with observational and pre-test post-test data has yielded beneficial information for discussions about future international service-learning experiences. Not only have they helped identify elements that contribute to successful goal attainment for both the university students and their host partners but they also inform university administrators

about factors that are conducive for mutually beneficial international partnerships. The outcomes from the Peacemaking Experience in Cyprus were significant to the University because of the high value University of Indianapolis places on service-learning and developing exceptional international opportunities for its students.

The perceived success of this project points to the value international service-learning offers to all its partners. For university students, international service-learning provides unique opportunities to explore other cultures as they expand their academic and personal knowledge base. Additionally, international partners benefit from the cultural exchange it offers them as well as the chance to learn new skills, gain knowledge or receive services offered by the university students. In the end, service-learning ultimately enhances the quality and depth of a university's educational offerings making it a more enriching environment for both students and faculty.

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