

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION: MAKING POTENTIALS REALITIES

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In so many ways, our world is a global village and our profession reflects our amazing multicultural and multiethnic world. Opportunities for international collaboration among and between children and youth in care and professionals are increasing in exciting and diverse ways. If we are wise, child and youth care can serve as a model for strengthening individuals and programs through a broad range of international collaboration.

International Collaboration: Making Potentials Realities was a workshop offered at the Together 2000 International Conference in June. The workshop provided the opportunity to exchange information and generate ideas for collaboration. The purpose of this article is to share the incredible exchange and recommendations from our group.

- International Collaboration can occur from the micro level (individuals, programs at home) through the macro level (international exchanges such as conferences and staff, youth, or both actually traveling and visiting or living in other countries). Opportunities are limited only by our knowledge, insights, ideas and actions.

IN OUR OWN HOMES

Never have the backgrounds of children, adolescents, and staff been so diverse. This provides an opportunity to nurture international collaboration at home. Learn about the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of residents and staff. Formal and informal ways support cooperation within diverse groups. For example, learning about and celebrating customs, religious beliefs, songs, and games can foster understanding. Displaying art, telling traditional folk tales and discussing the meanings, reading literature, writing one's own life story have value in respecting our similarities and differences. Doors open for collaboration when there is validation and mutual respect.

Technology provides opportunities for international communication... literally. Exchanges which provide the opportunity to learn about other cultures and "the world beyond ourselves" can be successful if carefully structured. The web provides a wide range of resources which can be educational. Consider how technology can be used to foster international collaboration in your home.

IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Know your own community and surrounding areas. There are many opportunities to learn from people from different cultures. To illustrate, there may be international students in a local high school who would be willing to share some of the similarities and differences in being a teenager in our country and the student's country of origin. Being involved in community projects is one way to meet people from different backgrounds. For example, a "clean up the beach" (park/community) day or participating in a walk for diabetes is an opportunity for children and adolescents to contribute to their community. Like any venture outside the homes, clear goals, discussions, literature, and clear expectations foster successful experiences. Follow up including evaluation and expressions of what was learned is an important part of learning to collaborate. There are often festivals celebrating different cultures that include music, dancing, and food which are open to the public. Often local groups will perform for free in their community. Consider sponsoring an evening or weekend picnic where a local group performs for children, youth, and families. Integrating community experiences with school assignments strengthens what is learned... another opportunity for collaboration.

VENTURING BEYOND COMMUNITY

Carefully planned travel experiences beyond the community can result in significant learning. Planning travel, new experiences which might include staying in residential or group homes, can be life changing. Of course realities such as funding a trip, liability, and preparation for possible emergency situations, must be thoughtfully addressed. One participant has a goal of taking a small group of adolescents along the west coast of USA into Mexico. We are hopeful that the youth and staff will be presenting a workshop at the International Conference in 2003!

Professional organizations often provide opportunities for youth to be participants in their conferences. Participation in such programs are great ways to foster significant growth in many realms. Look for such opportunities in professional journals, newsletters, and on the web.

Staff exchanges:

The International Federation of Educative Communities (FICE) is a UNESCO affiliated international organization focused upon children and youth in extra-familiar care. It offers a Professional Exchange Program (PEP) for experienced staff. Staff apply through a national contact. Arrangements can be made for an exchange of up to three months. Agencies can also host staff from another country. This is a wonderful way to learn about our profession in another country or host staff from another part of the world. The only expense is travel to the country. Of course, it is important to speak the language of the residents. There are some participants whose language is English or where the residents speak

English as a second language. PEP participants do not replace staff but are there to learn and to share their expertise and experiences in professional child and youth care. Anyone interested can contact the FICE-USA representative and PEP contact, Dr. Carol S. Kelly, at carol.kelly@csun.edu.

Student and Faculty Exchanges:

There might be interest in college and university student and faculty exchanges. Many colleges and universities have International Exchange Programs for students. The Educators Day at the International Conferences can be a mechanism for formalizing a procedure for both student and faculty exchanges.

Presentations:

There are opportunities to make presentations at local, regional, state, national, and international conferences. There should be a concerted effort to include children, youth, and families in such programs. Their voices need to be heard.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2003 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Participants had many ideas for the 2003 International Conference to be held at the University of Victoria. Our recommendations include the following:

- Have cross-generational sessions.
- Include work shops in which families, children, youth, and staff present.
- Have time and space for DIALOGUE on selected topics as well as informal discussions.
- Create opportunities for photo documentation, writing, visual, and musical expressions during the conference.
- Have art exhibits from participating countries which includes the work of children, youth, and families.
- Include international collaboration themes throughout the conference.
- Have “the arts” be on-going integral parts of the conference. For example, have several sessions involving music in addition to informal times where people sing and play guitar.
- Allow countries to pay the registration fee in their own currency. This would result in inclusion of participants who can't afford the high conference fees.

- Contact airlines about sponsoring participants' flights to the conference. It could be excellent public relations. The conference could acknowledge the contributors.
- Contact businesses, service organizations, and other groups to discuss sponsorships to attend the conference. Perhaps a presentation for the sponsors could be made after the conference. Again, excellent public relations potential for sponsors.
- Start fund-raising projects to raise moneys to attend the conference in 2003.
- Plan to submit presentation proposals for the conference. Local and national professional organizations will have the application forms available.

SUMMARY AND A CHALLENGE

In so many respects, we do live in a global village. Making international collaboration into a realities can make important contributions to the development of children and youth. There is a weighty responsibility on child and youth care professionals to introduce children and youth to our "shrinking world". Each individual; each staff; each program; and local, regional, state, national, and international organizations have a part to play. We invite you to take action to operationalize international collaboration. Our workshop exchange was positive, motivating, and productive. *We hope that you will join us in our commitment to making opportunities realities in international collaboration.*