

DOROTA KRYCZAŁŁO¹*Mazovian University in Płock, Poland*

ORCID 0000–0003–1672–775X

Received: 8.07.2025; revised: 4.08.2025; accepted: 5.09.2025

CISV AS A NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL YOUTH EXCHANGE ORGANIZATION EDUCATING FOR PEACE VIA EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

CISV – NIEFORMALNA ORGANIZACJA EDUKACYJNA DZIAŁAJĄCA NA RZECZ POKOJU POPRZEC UCZENIE SIĘ PRZECZ DOŚWIADCZANIE W RAMACH WYMIAN DZIECI I MŁODZIEŻY

Streszczenie: Międzynarodowe Letnie Wioski dla Dzieci (CISV) to niezależna, niepolityczna, wolontariuszowska organizacja, propagująca edukację na rzecz globalnego pokoju oraz międzykulturową przyjaźń. CISV działa w ponad 60 krajach na całym świecie. Ważną częścią CISV są jej programy wymiany dzieci i młodzieży, które od samego początku były pieczołowicie konstruowane przez dydaktyków uniwersyteckich i również obecnie nawiązują do koncepcji uznanych badaczy, takich jak: John Dewey, David Kolb, Bernice McCarthy, Paulo Freire, Howard Gardner, Charles Wedemeyer, Alvino Fantini, Albert Bandura, Tara Fenwick, etc. Dobrze skonstruowane oraz regularnie aktualizowane zajęcia prowadzone przez CISV mogłyby zostać wykorzystane w tradycyjnej edukacji, np. jako zintegrowana część lekcji hybrydowych, a nawet stać się obowiązkową częścią programów szkolnych.

Słowa kluczowe: uczenie się poprzez doświadczanie, edukacja na rzecz pokoju, organizacja wolontariuszowska, CISV, edukacja nieformalna, kompetencja międzykulturowa

Abstract: Children International Summer Villages (CISV) is an independent, non-political, volunteer organization, educating towards global peace and cross-cultural friendship. It holds member associations in over 60 countries all over the world. An important part of CISV is that its exchange programmes were initially constructed by university educators and also nowadays the content of activities relates to the concepts of prominent researchers, for instance John Dewey, David Kolb, Bernice McCarthy, Paulo Freire, Howard Gardner, Charles Wedemeyer, Alvino Fantini, Albert Bandura, Tara Fenwick and others. Well-constructed CISV activities, regularly updated, can be adopted in traditional education, for example embodied in hybrid courses, and even made a compulsory part of school curriculum.

1 **Dorota Kryczalło**, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Computer Science, The Mazovian University in Płock. E-mail address: d.kryczalło@mazowiecka.edu.pl.

Keywords: experiential learning, peace education, volunteer organization, CISV, non-formal education, cross-cultural competence

Introduction

I recall the statement of my son at the age of seven, ‘There won’t be any more wars, will there, mother?’ What could a mother answer that would give a child hope and courage for the future? I answered, ‘We don’t want any more wars, do we? We’ll have to do everything we can so that we will not need any more wars.’ That satisfied the child, and he walked down the hall and out the door to play with his friends. He had a lilt in his step. But for me, I was rooted to the floor. For me, it was a life commitment: ‘We’ll have to do everything we can...’ (Doris Allen 2002, p. 1)

Peace, similarly to democracy, is not given to people once and for ever. It is vital to cherish it, being actively involved in constructing peaceful relationships from early childhood. During the 20th and 21st centuries, numerous international cross-cultural organizations have come into existence. Their aims, principally humanitarian, educational, peace-focused, are usually expressed in mission statements presumably conducive to establishing world peace. They commonly speak of the intercultural preparation as a vital element enabling to ensure the effectiveness of their participants in the programmes, which substantially leads to achieving intercultural competence enabling to sustain peace. One of such organizations representing primarily non-formal, experiential way of educating is CISV (Children International Summer Villages).

Experiential Learning

The Association of Experiential Education (2015), defined experiential learning as follows:

a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people’s capacity to contribute to their communities. Experiential educators include teachers, camp counsellors, corporate team builders, therapists, challenge course practitioners, environmental educators, guides, instructors, coaches, mental health professionals [...] and the list goes on. It is often utilized in many disciplines and settings: Non-formal education, Place-based education, Project-based education, Global education, Environmental education,

Learner-cantered education, Informal education, Active learning, Service learning, Cooperative learning and Expeditionary learning (para. 2).

There are a number of types of experiential learning which provide opportunities for various learners to gain knowledge, experience, cultural awareness, and, generally, understanding of complex issues. They include: cooperative education, internships, practicums, student teaching, study abroad, clinical experience, or service-learning. They are also embedded in online and hybrid courses, for example via vlogs, virtual blogs, video conferencing, online journaling, or mobile apps.

What is unique in CISV's experiential learning is that the focus is not on gaining work-related competences (although it also takes place, for example gaining various leadership skills) but on educating towards peace and friendship, starting with children. Children are supposed to become not only citizens of their own countries but also world citizens making global civil society. CISV activities are constructed around themes promoting peace and friendship. Children represent their countries' distinct paradigms and at the same time try to understand and appreciate other countries' cultural patterns.

Formal, Non-formal, and Informal Education

Formal education (FE) is the type of learning/teaching which involves a government that supports school systems and prepares curricula which are supposed to meet societal needs. The value of educated citizenry is primarily recognized by governments. Formal education is based on pre-established hierarchy of the teacher versus the student dynamic. Typically, it takes place in the classroom environment, although it is not the only setting in school-based education. Teaching/learning content is usually determined by the teacher. The main teaching method and at the same time source of information is lecture resulting in formal tests or other proofs of learning, used as a tool of evaluation. (Arnoy 2023) CISVers may use some formal teaching techniques, for example they can listen to a lecture or evaluate an activity, however, the core content of learning comes from being exposed to numerous cross-cultural experiences.

Defining non-formal education (NFE) is more complex than presenting the characteristics of formal education. There are a few perspectives and definitions of NFE. What seems to be common in them is the fact that it is any out-of-school learning focused on partnership among facilitators and participants. Because of the kind of teacher/student dynamic, the teaching/learning methods are mainly participatory techniques and the content composed by active participants who identify needs and methods of learning. The person in charge, guiding the participants, plays the role of a facilitator in place of the authoritarian approach. The learning environment is more casual, relaxed and improvised. It seems that teaching methods typical of NFE can be incorporated into any kinds of learning,

both formal and informal, with children, youth and adults. NFE involves designing activities plus developing them as well as implementing and evaluating their outcome. (Arnoy 2023) CISV belongs substantially to this type of education as well as the informal education (IE). Leaders in CISV play the roles of facilitators and Local Work (LW) enables to implement the knowledge, skills, and competences gained through CISV activities. CISV is a participatory, grassroots organization and “At the root of NFE is a participatory, grassroots approach to helping people to clarify and address their own needs” (Coverdell 2004).

Formal education can be contrasted with informal education because the latter is almost incidental. Informal learning, in fact, takes place every day, by listening to a friend, or by observing a colleague, going to the library, etc. IE may be recognised as individual “lifelong learning”, or learning shared within a group. It can occur in any environment and its content is determined by participants assessing their own needs and, as a result, identifying solutions. Teaching/learning methods are completely participatory and are based on individual assessment and reflection. (Arnoy 2023) Learning in IE is practical and, as it was mentioned earlier, related to real needs so it is applied in the community through the life of the learner. The crucial factor in IE is its individual aspect and CISV participants, being a part of a group, still express their individuality.

A Few Basic Concepts Applied in Non-formal Education and Experiential Learning

The pioneer in the use of the term non-formal education is Philip Coombs, the head of UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning, who recommended that type of teaching/learning to overcome a crisis in education. A few of the most prominent and influential educationalists discussing non-formal education include: John Dewey, David Kolb, Bernice McCarthy, Paulo Freire, Howard Gardner, Charles Wedemeyer, Alvino Fantini, Albert Bandura, Tara Fenwick and other researchers.

John Dewey. Dewey identified continuity and interaction. He described continuity as connecting past experiences with new ones and, thus, evoking a learning process. However, the learning process may take place when the learner is actively involved or interacts with novel situations and experiences. Although he did not specify the definition of experiential learning, he stressed the role of the learner as grounded in social interaction and defined the role of the teacher as a provider of the appropriate experience and an assessor of the student’s capabilities and readiness to learn (Dewey 1938).

David Kolb. Kolb’s experiential learning cycle is nowadays one of his most popularized holistic approaches to the learning process. First of all, he observed that there are different *learning styles* and suggested four various categories of learning. The first category/stage in his cycle is concrete experimentation. Next, some reflexive observations are made by the learner. Then abstract conceptualization is

created. Finally, active experimentation is implemented into life. Kolb described methodology for incorporating all of these categories into any learning experience (Kolb 1983).

Bernice McCarthy. McCarthy based her research on Kolb's work and created her *4MAT System* related to left and right brain processes. She defined four different types of learners: dynamic, imaginative, analytic, and common sense learners. As an experienced teacher, not only a theorist, she created a framework for lesson design and her 4MAT template appeals to all learners. She has observed that teachers should know not only what to teach but also how to teach and they should take into consideration how people learn (McCarthy 1987).

Paulo Freire. Freire was interested in raising awareness and stimulating action in disadvantaged groups. To trigger such a process, he used "problem-posing" methods that involved problem analysis and reflection, followed by taking action. He was convinced that community needs to be encouraged in order to think in a critical way about problems present in their everyday lives. Critical thinking should be followed by making decisions and solutions based on taking action (Freire 1970).

Charles A. Wedemeyer. Wedemeyer was a pioneer in the field of "distance education" focusing on independent learner. It seems he predicted today's E-learning by realizing that instructional communication is ubiquitous, thus students can learn anytime and anywhere. As a result, classroom face-to-face teaching can be reduced. Today's hybrid/blended courses or activities have their background in some of his observations (Wedemeyer 1961).

Alvino Fantini. Fantini's area of interest focuses on "cultural competence", also known as cross-cultural, or intercultural competence. He identified five abilities that determine cultural competence: first of all, mindfulness based on being cognitively aware of the ways in which communication and interactions with others are formed; secondly, cognitive flexibility which enables to create new categories of information; thirdly, tolerance for ambiguity which helps to maintain focus in unclear situations and act methodically rather than become anxious; next, behavioural flexibility as the ability to adopt and accommodate in a different culture; finally, cross-cultural empathy enabling to visualize the situation of another person from both an emotional and intellectual perspective (Fantini 1984).

Albert Bandura. Bandura represents a psychological approach to experiential learning which focuses on behaviourism, specifically social learning theory. He carried out an experiment which showed that children learn by imitating observed behaviours. He described attentional process of a child related to child's expectations, followed by retention process triggering child's cognitive abilities and leading to production processes. Finally, he explored motivational processes of a child, namely incentives for imitation (Bandura 1977).

Tara Fenwick. Fenwick provides a framework for experiential learning with her five perspectives predominantly placing responsibility for a learning process with the learner. The teacher's role, in her view, is to be a facilitator, coach, and

also an evaluator. The first concept of the constructivist perspective evolves around reflection that leads to testing as well as developing new paradigms (Davis, Sumara 1997). The psychoanalytic perspective takes into consideration personal bias as a result of the conscious versus unconscious (Elsworth 1997). Situative perspective stresses the fact that learning depends on a specific situation (Lave, Wegner 1991). Critical cultural perspective focuses on power and inequity limiting experiential learning since there are groups or individuals who benefit from setting and keeping cultural and social boundaries (McLaren 1995). Finally, enactivist ecological perspective emphasizes that learners and contexts are integrated and that the collective experience is stronger than individual perception (Fenwick 2003).

Howard Gardner. Gardner's broaden theory on "multiple intelligences" has been enormously influential not only in non-formal education but it has also made impact in formal education. He has described at least nine intelligences (intrapersonal, interpersonal, bodily/kinaesthetic, existential, verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, auditory/musical, visual/spatial, and naturalistic) and claims that if someone wants to be successful in learning experiences, it is best to trigger as many of the mentioned intelligences as one can. Gardner asserts that all people have multiple intelligences, however, the multiple intelligences are not equally developed (Smith Budhai, Brown Skipwith 2022).

CISV's Beginnings

One of the unique organizations promoting global peace is CISV (Children International Summer Villages) founded in 1950 by Doris Twichell Allen, PhD, a psychologist at the University of Cincinnati (USA). She was convinced that the atrocity of the WWII could not be left without reaction and that young people from different nations could learn to live together amicably and would later successfully utilize that experience in working to create a peaceful world. CISV is an independent, non-political, volunteer organization promoting peace and cross-cultural friendship. Children International Summer Villages provides inter and intracultural experiential education, outside the school system, for young people who exhibit cooperative skills, communication ability and leadership potential. It is a charitable organization independent of any government, political party, religious body or other "umbrella" organizations.

To understand the ideals of CISV, it is vital to mention its founder's activity. The initial concept for CISV was inspired by Doris Allen's response to a newspaper article, by Professor Alexander Meiklejohn in the 11 August 1946 issue of the "New York Times". Meiklejohn was discussing the formation of UNESCO, and proposing an international institute to bring together postgraduates in philosophy, history, political science and other disciplines with the aim of leadership towards world peace. A respected psychologist, Doris Allen, took a strong view related to striving for the peaceful world organization: "[...] we must start with children". She received

strong family support, especially that of her husband, Erastus Allen, a prominent attorney, and she also had access to internationally recognised social scientists working on new paths to peace. After careful formulation of her ideas, she was given a sympathetic hearing in many quarters and was successful in directing attention towards the role of pre-adolescence children in the fostering of peace (Knopp 2002, pp. 1–2).

Dr Allen was also instrumental in enabling multi-disciplinary professionals to test the application of theories on prejudice, personality, communication without a common language, group dynamics, retention of learned attitudes and other factors facilitating international understanding among children representing many cultures. Applying this psychological research background to the planned experiential educational programme for children, she consulted specialists and secured the services of experienced teachers and summer camp experts to formulate appropriate activities for a month-long educational camp that would make a deep and lasting experience for the children's future cultural and social patterns of behaviour (Knopp 2002).

The key factor that enabled her to start fulfilling the goals was backing from the Cincinnati community plus own resources as the only practical means of realizing the initial Village project. Accordingly, in cooperation with sympathetic professional colleagues, prominent business and media leaders, progressive educators, family foundations, and community voluntary organizations, they set to raise funds locally, in order to bring the initial participants from Europe and Mexico to Cincinnati in 1951. There, Dr Allen's theories were put to the test in the first ever Village, and from these beginnings, CISV's future became irrevocably linked to the volunteer ethic, specialized professional consultation and the participation of children interested in international friendship.

CISV has a long-term research relationship with the Department of Education at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, England, and it is established as a reputable youth exchange organization which has had over 150 000 official international participants, since 1951, representing approximately 100 countries. CISV has host families, adult facilitators and staff members are volunteers and receive no compensation. CISVers work as friends to foster and maintain a culture of peace within both their local and global communities.

CISV Poland

For Poland the key role on the path to CISV played the fact that CISV Germany, as a Polish neighbour country, was tremendously supportive, especially Heidi Kriegbaum, a former chair of IPC, who paid many visits to Poland to develop close relationships with those in charge of initiating and strengthening CISV structure. The first chapter came to existence in Plock, in central Poland, owing to a few involved and devoted families whose children participated not only in Villages

but also Interchanges, which enabled to enlarge the scope of activity and evoked wider interest in CISV. The enthusiastic children, encouraged by their leaders, became active members of Junior Branch and when they moved to study in other cities, they started developing CISV activities there. Now CISV Poland has three chapters (in Warszawa, Łódź, and Dąbrowa Górnicza) and in 2024 celebrated its 20th anniversary of being registered as a voluntary, non-profit, non-religious, peaceful organization with a strong organizational structure and many committed volunteers.

Promotion is a very gradual process. Progress often appears slow, and at times even non-existent, for example during coronavirus pandemics, but CISV is fortunate in its team of dedicated volunteers. Led and coordinated by the IPC, they continue to carry out this vital work extending and reinforcing the grassroots of the International Association.

Unique Aspects of CISV

CISV is completely unique in a number of very important aspects. The Village programme, which is both multicultural and multi-lingual, enables children, at the age of eleven, to communicate and make friends with others who may not even speak the same language and will almost invariably have different customs. They are able to experience and appreciate other cultures at an age at which they are still open and receptive to new experiences. Additionally, more than three quarters of the youth participating in CISV's international programmes are under the age of sixteen, and have thus experienced their initial activity before they reach the minimum age for other international youth exchange or government programmes. No other major international youth exchange organization is administered solely by volunteers. CISV recognizes the power of children as agents for social change, and empowers youth to assume responsibility in organizational governance and programme development and coordination at every level of the organization. There are many youth organizations which are run by adults for young people, but CISV is unique in that it is a volunteer organization providing experiential education for youth, with an emphasis on democratic grass-roots leadership, and involving the young people at every level and in every programme. CISV is run by youth and for youth.

CISV evolved from a firm conviction that lasting peace is possible if individuals and groups can learn to live together as friends. For CISV, the key to making this vision a reality was to start working with children and youth. Programmes were developed which offered young people opportunities to meet their peers from other countries and to form intercultural friendships. Locally, programmes give people the chance to learn about the cultures in their own communities and explore important themes related to peace and understanding.

Since the original Village, the last years have seen the range of CISV programmes expand and continuously develop. While remaining true to CISV's

goals, programmes have been designed to suit different age groups and to adapt to distinct formats. Leadership training is mandatory for all adult delegates, staff and youth with programme responsibility, while host families and participants are also given training and orientation. This training includes the basics of CISV philosophy, programme content, potential problem recognition, cultural awareness, risk management and conflict resolution.

CISV in a World of Conflict – the Importance of Local Work

The Local Work programme is both a beginning and an outcome of CISV initiatives. It is a starting point for many participants who come to know the organization through its presence in their home communities. At the same time, it is a programme, which often gets its impetus from participants returning from international CISV programmes abroad and seeking to adapt the themes to the local context.

CISV's mission is to empower each of its participants to incorporate the values of intercultural understanding and respect into their lives as they become global citizens and strive for a more peaceful world. Local Work gives CISVers an opportunity to translate empowerment into action. While all Local Work activities are guided and bound together by CISV principles, an activity in Jakarta may cover the same subject matter as one in Warsaw, but be completely different. The scope for creativity is endless.

Often, Local Work programmes are inspired by specific, current events at home or abroad. Not surprisingly, within years, many CISV Local Workers were developing ways to respond to the global shock following the events of September 11, 2001. Faced with the instability of global events, the organization's work proved to be a bright spot during a period of uncertainty. It may go without saying that a peace organization sees the greatest need for its work during times of impending conflict. However, the remarkable aspect of CISV's response to global events was that it originated in each community, as members saw the most appropriate avenues to act.

Summary

CISV International has always worked with like-minded institutions. As a Non-Governmental Organization, it is an official partner of UNESCO. It also cooperates with the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum. On its website it holds a blog delivering space for observations, discussion and views exchange, remaining open to any voices striving to build the world of peace.

CISV programmes use the experiential education model – the opportunity to learn from direct experience, in which participants and facilitators share responsibility for learning. Exercises or activities, games and simulations, music and drama are followed by discussion and evaluation.

Emphasising friendship, CISV educates through action, stressing cooperation rather than competition in its activities. Young people are encouraged to take initiative towards leadership and programme responsibility, to overcome prejudices and build self-confidence. Programmes are interactive, action – oriented, sensitive to cultural variation, multi-lingual and – fun. They will typically explore a variety of educational ideas linked to a selected theme, such as communication, bridge-building or cooperation. The overall emphasis is designed to develop intercultural competence and an appreciation of cultural diversity.

CISV experiences form an important component in developing a global perspective and philosophy of life and a desire to work towards cross-cultural tolerance and cooperation. Through participation, individuals come to a better understanding of themselves, others and their cultures.

References

- Allen-Twitchell D. (1961). *A Handbook of procedures for Children International Summer Villages*. Cincinnati: CISV International, USA.
- Allen-Twitchell D. (1983). *Children as the ultimate source for social change*. “Research and Development”, no. 11, pp. 13–17.
- Arnoy J. (2023). *Non-formal peace education founded on European youth work: A practitioner’s critical reflection*. Wiley Online Library. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12630>.
- Association of Experiential Education (2015). *What is Experiential Education?* Retrieved from www.aee.org/what-is-ee.
- Bandura A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Banks J.G. (1999). *Among Pioneers and Pathfinders*. “CISV Interspectives: A Journal on Transcultural Education”, no. 17, pp. 22–25.
- Caulfield J. (2023). *How to Design and Teach a Hybrid Course. Achieving Student-Centered Learning Through Blended Classroom, Online, and Experiential Activities*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Coverdell P. (2004). *Nonformal Education Manual*. Washington DC: Peace Corps Center for Field Assistance and Applied Research. Retrieved from https://files.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/library/Moo42_nfmanual1.pdf.
- Davis B., Sumara D.J. (1997). *Cognition, complexity and teacher education*. “Harvard Educational review”, no. 67(1), pp. 105–125.
- Dewey J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ellsworth E. (1997). *Review of teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy and the power of address*. “Educational Studies”, no. 30(1), pp. 74–79.
- Fantini A.E. (1984). *Cross-cultural orientation: A guide for leaders and educators*. Brattleboro: Intercultural Series.
- Fantini A.E. (1995). *At the Heart of the things: CISV’s Educational Purpose*. “CISV Interspectives”, no. 13.

- Fenwick T. (2001). *Experiential learning: A theoretical critique from five perspectives*. Columbus: Ohio State University. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov.proxy.lib.wayne.edu/PDFS/ED454418.pdf>.
- Fenwick T. (2003). *Learning through experience: Troubling orthodoxies and interesting questions*. Malabar, FL: Krieger.
- Freire Paulo. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Gardner H. (1993). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books.
- Knopp C. (2002). *Voluntireeng for CISV*. "CISV International Annual Review", no. 1–2.
- Kolb D.A. (1983). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Kuhn T.S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press.
- Lave J., Wenger E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Lehos A. (2002). *CISV Programmes*. 'CISV International Annual Review', no. 3–4.
- McCarthy B. (1987). *The 4MAT System: Teaching to Learning Styles with Right/Left Mode Techniques*. Barrington.
- McLaren P. (1995). *Critical Pedagogy and predatory culture: Oppositional politics in a post-modern era*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Smith Budhai S., Brown Skipwith K. (2022). *Best Practices in Engaging Online Learners Through active and Experiential Learning Strategies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Wedemeyer C.A., Childs B.G. (1961). *New perspectives in University Correspondence Study*. Chicago: Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults.

