

Practicums Help Students Gain Valuable Experience

Learn about others, themselves while in other countries

A “new outlook on development work.” That’s one of the things Thaya Moritz took away from her three-month practicum at the Good Shepherd Orphanage and International School in Ghana.

“I felt what I learned the most was that development work is never clearly defined,” she says, adding that what constitutes development “can have several forms.”

As well, she also learned the necessity of being flexible, and that “transparency is crucial for development actors.”

While at the school and orphanage, located in the town of Kasoa, about an hour outside of the capital city of Accra, she provided general care for the children, taught the lower grades and assisted teachers. She also worked in a nearby refugee camp, helping set up a scholarship fund for a senior high school.

The whole experience “affected me very deeply,” says Moritz, a Conflict Resolution Studies and International

Development Studies double major. “There were things daily that would bring me joy, along with difficult things that I encountered. It really emphasized the importance of taking every aspect of your actions as a development actor into consideration.”

Looking ahead, the Colleege Louis-Riel graduate says the experience has “definitely solidified within me the desire to continue participating in development work because I enjoyed every aspect of the experience, and I was able to find value in the things that were difficult. It has widened the possibilities of what I feel I am able to do, and how I am able to affect change.”

She also “found a new interest in working with children, or development issues affecting children, which I would not have considered before this experience.”

For Joelle Pastora Sala, living and serving in Nicaragua was a time of not only learning about others, but also about herself. “I feel as though I was able to learn so



Lindsay Anderson (centre) with graduates from the Change Agents Peace International Alternatives to Violence Project in Kenya.

much more from the youth than I was actually able to teach them,” she says of her practicum at Jovenes en Comunidad, an outreach centre for at-risk youth in Managua.

Among other things, the fourth-year Political Studies and International Development Studies major learned that “Paulo Freire’s model of popular education is ideal when working at the

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grassroots level, and I learned that good program planning and organization is essential for the success of a project.”

She also discovered that poor people are especially vulnerable to things like transit strikes, political upheavals, natural disasters or economic recession. “Inequalities are very real, and affect people in developing countries at a high level,” she says.

During the practicum, the College Louis-Riel graduate worked in one of Managua’s most dangerous neighbourhoods, helping youth with their homework, coaching a volleyball team, organizing workshops on topics such as global warming and HIV-AIDS, and providing general assistance. She was also able to help them start a jewellery cooperative, and taught some of the youth how to make jewellery.

While there, she also learned how difficult life can be for people caught in poverty. “I had opportunities to see first hand the complexities that exist within neighbourhoods that are run by gangs, and the police corruption that goes along with that,” she says. “I had the opportunity to have conversations with gang leaders and hear first-hand the



Thaya Moritz (right) with Mavis, a girl from the Good Shepherd Orphanage and International School in Ghana.

frustration that they live with and see how, in desperate situations, the value of life is often overlooked.”

Despite the difficulties and challenges, she came away from the experience with a sense of optimism and hope.

“It was one of the best experiences of my life,” she says, adding that “for the first time I actually felt as though I was working in something which fulfilled me.”

As for the future, “this experience has reinforced my decision to study IDS and politics,” she says, noting that she wants to go on to graduate studies with a focus on issues affecting Latin America.

Lindsay Anderson’s practicum in Kenya gave her first hand knowledge about “the experiences people had with conflict, and the daily struggle they have to survive.”

At the same time, her work with Change Agents Peace International (CAPI), a peace building organization that has projects in Rwanda, Congo, Burundi and Kenya, helped her discover that “even in countries torn by violence and poverty, there is hope—hope in the people.”

Anderson, a Conflict Resolution Studies and International Development Studies major, spent much of her time working on CAPI’s Kenya Alternatives to Violence Project, which



MSC Currents is a publication of Menno Simons College, the campus of Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) at the University of Winnipeg. MSC provides education flowing from Anabaptist Mennonite understandings of faith, peace, and justice while engaging other religious traditions and intellectual perspectives. This includes offering undergraduate programs in International Development Studies and Conflict Resolution Studies.

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Youth Peacebuilding Gathering A Success

“The important thing was that I am not a judgemental person anymore.”

“Learning about other religions helps me learn about myself.”

“It was an eye opening experience for me to be able to hear and experience the sweat lodge and see Aboriginal culture.”

“Nothing could ever compare to how this camp changed my opinion on different cultures and people. This was the most amazing experience ever and nothing can ever take this away from me.”

Those are a few of the comments made by campers at the first-ever Youth Peacebuilding Gathering, held August 24-31 at Pioneer Camp in northwestern Ontario.



Canoeing and other outdoor adventures were part of the summer Youth Peacebuilding Gathering.

“It was a very successful event,” says David Pankratz, Director of the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) Institute for Community Peacebuilding,

and one of the Camp’s organizers. “It drew together Aboriginal, newcomer and other youth from Winnipeg’s inner city, and established youth from the suburbs — people who might never get together otherwise — and provided a context for them to overcome the barriers and mistrust between them.”

During the week long camp, youth met each morning for small-group dialogue sessions where they explored issues of identity, conflict and peace. At the beginning of the week, the groups focused on the development of trust and building relationships through games, activities and discussions.

Later, they moved on to skills development and perspective sharing, considering themes of anger management, communication and conflict styles. At

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offered workshops for people who wanted to learn to deal peacefully with conflict.

“As a practicum student, I was able to teach others what I knew about conflict and encourage them to use the skills they learned in the workshop,” she says. “I also analyzed the impact of the project through interviewing and surveying people.”

While in Kenya, she also compiled a newsletter for the organization, and helped out with office organization and in the library. She also traveled to partnering organizations in nearby countries, and got to “see and experience first hand the wonderful peace building projects that CAPI is doing in the continent of Africa today.”

Anderson, who attends Winnipeg’s The Meeting Place, a Mennonite Brethren congregation, also was able to teach at a local Mennonite church while there.

As for how the experience affected her life, the Miles MacDonnell Collegiate graduate says it enhanced her sense of “appreciation and respect for people of different cultures” and confirmed her desire to guidance counselor.

“Conflict is inevitable in places such as in a school setting,” she says, noting that she wants to use her education and experiences to help resolve it. “As a guidance counsellor I can not only be a peacemaker myself, but I can help people realize their potential as peacemakers as well,” she adds.

For Ruth Taronno, who directs the practicum program at MSC, practi-

cums are ways that “organizations can benefit by having knowledgeable, capable university students work in their programs, and students benefit by gaining valuable experience.”

She notes that while students “often enter their placement with the idea that they are going to ‘give back’ to the community or ‘help’ people—and they often do—they also inevitably feel that they have received far more than they have given.” **C**

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the end they tied it all together to create a space where they could talk freely and openly about conflict and misunderstanding between the various groups.

For Pankratz, whose office is located at MSC, a pleasant surprise was how the youth actively engaged in the dialogue, and the level of bonding that occurred.


“Rather than use the week of dialogue to move deeper into the rifts which divide, they were eager to find common ground and build friendships,” he says. “As the issues that divided them were identified, they were highly motivated to resolve them, to move to positive relationship-building rather than dwelling on the negative.”

In addition to the dialogue sessions, the youth also participated in artistic activities such as African drumming and dance, song writing, theatre and painting, and regular camp activities like canoeing, kayaking, wall climbing, archery and soccer. Opportunities were also provided for faith-based activities for those for whom this was important.

“Through the camp, the youth were able to identify and address issues that keep them apart, and find ways to overcome them,” says Pankratz, adding that parents and others connected to the campers have noted many positive changes in attitudes, including those towards members of other cultural groups.

“I think it worked because they learned about each other in the context of building relationships, rather than us lecturing or work-shopping them about racism,” he says. “When the right context was provided, they found they can be friends in any context.”

In addition to the Institute for Community Peacebuilding, the other partners in the project were Ka Ni Kanichihk (“Those Who Lead”), The Welcome Place (Manitoba Immigration Interfaith Council), The YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM) and Manitoba Multicultural Resource Centre. Partial funding for the project was provided by the United Way of Winnipeg.

Discussions about holding a second peace gathering next year are underway. 



Campers relax on the dock at Pioneer Camp.



Youth Peacebuilding Gathering leader Muuxi Adam speaks to campers.



Youth and leaders participate in small group discussion at the summer Youth Peacebuilding Gathering.

The Bulletin Board

John Derksen, Assistant Professor of CRS, is on a six month sabbatical from July to December, 2008. John is researching two topics: *Anabaptist Women and Freedom of Conscience* and *The Conflict Styles of Menno Simons*.

Neil Funk-Unrau, CRS Program Coordinator /Assistant Professor of CRS, completed a six-month research sabbatical, January to June, 2008, concentrating most of his time on research and writing on apology processes used and misused in restorative and redistributive justice contexts. One article has already been accepted for publication the journal, *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, while another article is in a draft stage. Neil also used his sabbatical time to participate in an evaluation of a community circle project sponsored by El-Dad Ranch (a halfway house for mentally disabled adults in trouble with the law) and participated in early development stages of a comprehensive history of Native Ministries, Mennonite Church Canada. In June he was one of the instructors for the two-week Social Justice Summer Institute, hosted by the University of Tubingen in southwestern Germany.

Ismael Muvingi, Assistant Professor of CRS, co-taught a continuing education course on the intersection of human rights and the Anabaptist-Mennonite faith with theologian Paul Doerksen, a history and Bible teacher at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute. The course ran from September, 2007 to March, 2008. In March he presented a paper on Transitional Justice and

Human Rights at the International Studies Association in San Francisco; the focus of the paper was on the issue of redistributive justice. In April he was on a panel on development, conflict and displacement for the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID) symposium at the University of Manitoba. He also presented a paper titled "The Politics of Entitlement and the Failure of Democracy in Zimbabwe."

Paul Redekop, Dean of Menno Simons College/CMU Faculty of Social Sciences, attended the Project Directors' Conference for International Cooperation in the Field of Higher Education and Training in Brussels, October 26-28, on behalf of the Canada - E.U. Student Exchange Program on Social Security.

Ruth Rempel, Assistant Professor of IDS, returned from a year long sabbatical on July 1, 2008. Ruth's primary task on this sabbatical was to research a book tentatively entitled *A History of Development in Africa*. The book is expected to be part of Cambridge University Press's New Approaches to African History series, which consists of short books oriented to the needs of undergraduate courses.

Jonathan Sears, Assistant Professor of IDS, presented a paper in March at Canadian Security into the 21st Century: (re)articulations in the post-9/11 World. The conference was hosted by the Department of Political Science at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ont. and co-sponsored by the Security and Defence Forum of the Department

of National Defence. His paper was titled "Canadians in Mali: peace-building and security-sector reform between local knowledge and norms transfer." It will also appear in a forthcoming publication of the conference proceedings.

Anna Snyder, Assistant Professor of CRS, co-authored a chapter for a publication with Dr. Brian Rice titled "Reconciliation in the Context of a Settler Society: Healing the Legacy of Colonialism in Canada" in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the legacy of Residential Schools* published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in conjunction with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008. She also attended the International Studies Association Meeting in San Francisco in March and gave a paper titled "Women Refugees, Empowerment, and Peacebuilding."

Stephanie Stobbe, Lecturer in CRS, presented a paper at the 2008 International Studies Association Conference held in San Francisco in March, 2008. The paper, based on research conducted in 2007, highlights traditional indigenous conflict resolution processes in Laos. The same paper was also presented in April at a symposium on Development, Conflict and Displacement organized by the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development held at the University of Manitoba. Stephanie is back from study leave this academic year and continues to pursue Ph.D. studies in Peace and Conflict at the University of Manitoba. 

Perspectives

By Ruth Taronno, Associate Vice-President

In 1994, I came to Menno Simons College as an activist. I had spent many years raising my children and working/volunteering in the local peace community and I wanted to expand my knowledge of inequality issues. I'd heard about this relatively new college at the University of Winnipeg, and I was keen to take a course which would expand my horizons and challenge me.


I decided to audit the Introduction to IDS course—why bother spending the money to take it for credit when I already had a BSc degree in biology and couldn't imagine taking more university courses? I registered for the evening section taught by Dr. George Richert (President of MSC at the time). It didn't take long before I was hooked.

Hmmmm, I thought; maybe I should switch to taking it for credit just in case I decided to take a couple

of more courses. Later I could take just one more course—strictly out of interest, of course.

That small step changed my life. Over the years I acquired a BA in IDS, got a job at MSC as practicum administrator, and received an MA in Anthropology. Now I am in the lucky position of being able to be involved in administration, the practicum program and teaching. How good is that?

I am not the only one who was “hooked” by what we do at MSC. I have spoken to many students over the years who were majoring in other disciplines, but found their place here, or took one course out of interest and ended up changing their plans and their lives—just as I did.

Sometimes I regret the fact that I am no longer actively involved as a peace activist. But then I see the energy, enthusiasm and knowledge of MSC students and alumni and I realize there are many ways to make a difference in this world—like teaching and working at Menno Simons College. 

Exchange Program Supported By MSC Acknowledged

International Event To Be Hosted in Winnipeg June 1-12, 2009

An international student exchange program supported by Menno Simons College has been recognized for its good practices by the European Commission for Education and Training.

Called Social Justice and Human Rights in an era of Globalisation, the program finds students from Europe and Canada participating in a summer course each year in the areas of social justice, restorative justice and human rights.

During the course, which has been supported by seven universities in Canada and six in Europe, students and scholars from various disciplines gather to exchange ideas and theoretical frameworks while learning more about social justice and human rights issues in the host countries.

“It's a great way for students and academics to develop relationships and learn from each other,” says Paul Redekop, Associate Professor of Conflict Resolution Studies and Dean of CMU/Faculty of Social Sciences. “It also promotes research, articles and other projects, and students get credit for participating in the course.”

In recognizing the program, the European Commission for Education and Training noted that participating institutions have received long-term positive impacts, developed strong connections and attracted students from a variety of disciplines.

The 2009 course will be hosted by MSC in Winnipeg June 1-12, and will bring together professors and students from other universities in Canada as well as from Europe. While in Winnipeg, course participants will learn more about social justice and human rights issues in Canada, and participate in tours and cultural activities.

“We are pleased to be part of this program, and happy that it has been recognized in this way,” says Redekop. “We are looking forward to hosting it in 2009.” 