



***Cultural Detective* and the Training of Students Abroad**

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For the past two years, the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) has been relying extensively on *Cultural Detective* to help us train students to learn to interact more effectively and appropriately in the new cultures where they're studying. CD packages now make up an integral and highly successful part of our Seminar on Living and Learning Abroad ("the Seminar"). Offered at CIEE Study Centers, this course is designed to maximize student learning and development. During the coming year, we'll be offering the Seminar at nearly all of our semester programs, and our resident staff will be teaching one or more *Cultural Detective* packages in the Seminars that they'll be teaching.

We're investing in more than two dozen CD packages this coming year because we've come to understand that this method helps students learn the sorts of knowledge, and develop the sorts of skills that we wanted them to learn when we designed the Seminar three years ago. CD is helping us meet our goals for this course in three important ways. First, it deepens our students' understanding of what CD calls "Subjective Culture," helping them become more aware of their own cultural values, beliefs and behavior. Second, CD introduces and helps students develop "Cultural Literacy," the set of skills that allows them to recognize the difference between, on the one hand, behavior that they can observe and, on the other, key cultural values and beliefs that underlie and inform that behavior. And third, CD helps our students understand that to be effective and appropriate in their new cultures, they're going to need to learn to "Bridge Cultural Difference" through applying key intercultural concepts and foundational intercultural skills, including the relationship between culture and identity, stereotyping and cultural variability, seeking cultural reasons to explain behavior, sharpening observation, suspending judgment, and shifting perspectives.

Each *Cultural Detective* package consists of an easily understandable *Series Facilitator Guide* that explains how to use the method, a user-friendly *Facilitator's Guide* written for a specific culture, and a physically attractive *Participant's Guide* that helps students develop intercultural perspectives and skills through two different tools. The first, the "Cultural Lens," identifies and elaborates on a

number of—typically six or seven—core values of a particular culture. When we designed the Seminar, we anticipated that our resident staff would themselves develop this sort of material. However, we quickly found that this wasn't happening, with the result that students at the sites abroad where we were piloting the Seminar were complaining that the course was offering them only culture-general information and skill-building, while they had originally made the decision to study at a particular program because they wanted to learn more about the specifics of the place where that program was offered. From their point of view, they wanted and needed culture-specific material. From our point of view, we wanted to offer them culture-general, as well as culture-specific, material.

CIEE Resident Directors have expert knowledge about the cultures within which they live and work—and if they had the time, they would presumably be able to produce culture-specific material for their students. The reality, however, is that the demands of their jobs don't leave most of our resident staff the time to do this. We came to understand, then, that if we wanted each of our Study Centers to develop effective culture-specific material—that focused on values and beliefs as well as objective culture—we would need to hire additional staff, individuals qualified to produce this sort of material. There is no question that our decision to invest in *Cultural Detective* has turned out, pedagogically and financially, to be a very effective way to teach our students about local values and beliefs that they want and need, and to do so in a way that also teaches them key culture general concepts and skills.

We place high value on the second CD tool as well, a debriefing method that the Guides refer to simply as "The Worksheet." Seminar teachers find that using this simple and highly effective approach to debriefing Critical Incidents contributes greatly to their students' understanding and development of those key intercultural perspectives and skills. Each CD package includes a large number of Critical Incidents that, in depicting cultural misunderstandings between or among people of different cultural backgrounds, give the students opportunities to practice the intercultural knowledge, perspectives and skills that CD introduces. Put simply, this second tool complements the culture-specific approach of the Cultural Lens as students work with the sorts of core culture general concepts, perspectives and skills associated with increasing intercultural competence.

We have also come to rely on the very effective on-line training that Dianne Hofner Saphiere and Kris Bibler have, for more than a year, been providing CIEE resident staff who are new to teaching the Seminar on Living and Learning



Abroad. This on-line training, which consists of two ninety-minute webinars, allows staff to understand and practice the skills that they will need in order to facilitate *Cultural Detective* and, more generally, the other activities we have built into our Seminar. While CIEE offers staff in-house training and coaching, we continue to contract with *Cultural Detective* for this part of their training since CD staff are able to help our colleagues come to understand, through two short webinars, how to maximize their students' understanding and use of this method.

In short, *Cultural Detective* is contributing very significantly to CIEE's efforts to help students abroad understand core cultural concepts, and develop key intercultural perspectives and skills—and is doing all of this in cost-effective ways.