To: The United World Colleges

From: Diane Keyes

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Subject: Proposal for determining the necessary components of a facilitation training for all UWC Short Course coordinators

**Introduction**

The United World Colleges (UWC’s) are a network of eighteen international high schools located around the world that offer short two- to three-week long youth leadership programs, called Short Courses (SC’s), during the school breaks. These SC’s are rather decentralized, each operating independently and often re-designed each year by the new coordinating teams. Most SC’s center their program’s content on social and environmental justice and global peace, reflecting the UWC mission.

The research I conducted from September to December 2018 on a SC indicates that a certain culture set by program coordinators creates the conditions that enable a powerful experience for participants. Many have described it as *'magic'*, as words fail to express the profoundness of their experience. Coordinators also describe it as personally transformative. This research led an inquiry into what this powerful *‘magic’* experience is and what conditions make it possible, focusing on program culture and coordinator practices and attributes.

The research found that when SC coordinators embody certain principles and practices within themselves and within their relationships with others, a good culture of exchange and possibility for transformation is initiated. This culture is what seems to create the conditions that enable this *‘magic’*. Key elements of this culture include high levels of support, acceptance, and normalized experimentation, to name a few. Notably, this culture is closely linked to the coordinators who embody certain attributes including a high level of personal integrity with congruence between their words and actions. Certain practices and pedagogical approaches were also identified as contributing to this culture including emergent and power-sharing practices as well as facilitation approaches (like naming, framing, and modeling).

Based on my more recent background research conducted in September 2019 on transformative education, a certain mindset can be identified among facilitators who lead transformation processes. Additional facilitation practices have been identified as enabling facilitators to create these transformative spaces. These findings warrant further investigation and consolidation with the findings from the 2018 research.

**Statement of Problem**

Currently, there is no standardized facilitation training for SC coordinators. Each SC team oversees the hiring of their own coordinators and provides training, if any. Some SC teams comprise of previous SC participants who may not have received facilitation training. This means quality of experience is not guaranteed. In light of the UWC’s plan to expand the number of SC’s offered, upper level staff indicate a need to understanding what factors distinguish a high-quality transformative program. Recognizing that coordinators themselves have a huge impact on participant experience, there is interest in developing a facilitation training for SC coordinators.

**Proposed Solution**

Developing a facilitation training for SC coordinators would enable each coordinating team to create a program culture or social ‘container’ which enables a powerful and transformative experience.

The experience of *‘magic’* is not content-related, but rather is a container into which different content can be added. Thus, each SC will continue to be free to develop their own program content and yet offer a similar powerful experience to participants. In other words, whether a SC decides to focus on sustainability or on social justice, they will still be able to create the culture or social ‘container’ which enables this *‘magic’*. This upholds the UWC’s interest in retaining some degree of SC decentralization, affording each SC valuable autonomy in designing a program that is context-specific and unique to different nations and topics. Thus, the valuable diversity of SC’s is maintained while a quality of experience is ensured.

Researching best-practices regarding program culture and facilitator practices and attributes (including mindset) would serve as the basis for the creation of a facilitation training for SC coordinators.

**Scope**

To uncover the elements necessary for facilitation, I plan to pursue three areas of inquiry:

1. What are key facilitation practices that create the culture or social ‘container’ for transformation?
2. What is the mindset of facilitators who create these transformative spaces?
3. How does the way a facilitator ‘shows up’ affect the participant group?

This inquiry will culminate in a formal report.

**Methods**

Primary sources will include interviews with two seasoned SC coordinators who are highly skilled facilitators and two autoethnographies based on my participation in two facilitation courses in September 2019. Secondary sources will include written works posted by two reputable schools of facilitation.

**Researcher’s Qualifications**

Working for the past five years with the SC’s, first as a participant in 2014 and then as a coordinator nearly each subsequent year, has given me ample experience with SC’s and facilitation. Running seven residential youth leadership programs since 2014 within and beyond the UWCs has provided me with exposure to a wide range of facilitation practices. Having participated in over five facilitation trainings has further developed my facilitation skills and understanding of important facilitation approaches. Additionally, my background in anthropological research methods positions me to conduct and analyze interviews and autoethnographies. Importantly, the research I conducted in 2018 on SC coordinator best-practices has prepared me to take this inquiry to the next level.

**Conclusion**

Ensuring quality of participant experience at SC’s is important as the UWC’s plan to expand the number of SC’s they offer. Research I conducted in 2018 on the best-practices of SC coordinators revealed the fundamental role coordinators play on participant experience through the ways they show up, their mindsets and attributes, and the methods of facilitation they embody. Their ways of being have the potential to create a program culture and social ‘container’ which enables a transformative experience.

A deeper inquiry into effective facilitation practices, facilitator attributes and mindsets, and the program culture that enables transformation will enable the development a facilitation training for SC coordinators. This will ensure quality among SC’s while maintaining their valued autonomy allowing them to continue designing context-specific programs.