

## **Where SIETAR Began**

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The idea of SIETAR developed in a cross-cultural training conference sponsored by the US Peace Corps in October 1968, forty years ago, high in the mountains of Colorado. The 1960s was a time of social unrest and turmoil, a time of rebellion against “the establishment,” against traditional values, mores, and institutions, perhaps best known, at least in the U.S., for the hippie movement, drug culture, and experiments in communal living. But it was also a period of idealism, soul-searching, and social responsibility, concern about racial discrimination, injustice, inequity, and prejudice—punctuated by student protests, marches, sit-ins, and other demonstrations against racism and discrimination in the U.S. and against the war in Vietnam.

Many social programs evolved in the 1960s: the US Peace Corps, sending volunteers to developing countries throughout the world; domestic programs in the U.S. (Vista, Teacher Corps, Job Corps, New Careers), and, in Canada, New Start. These programs were mainly concerned with poverty and lack of opportunity, working with the poor and underprivileged to help improve their lot in life, and to reduce inequity and discrimination. I was fortunate to work with all of these programs at one time or another.

The Peace Corps, started by President John F. Kennedy in 1962, contracted with universities to do most of the training.<sup>i</sup> Most Peace Corps volunteers were recent university graduates, however, caught up in the idealism and revolutionary ideas of the time, looking forward to doing something active and meaningful in their life, and with little patience for sitting through more lectures from university professors. As a result, the Peace Corps soon became disenchanted with the traditional, lecture-oriented training in the universities and encouraged trainers and training institutions to experiment with non-traditional training methods.

I became involved in research for the Peace Corps in 1964, as a graduate student at the University of Utah. The research initially was to identify the characteristics of creative Peace Corps volunteers, based on the assumption that creative persons would be the most effective volunteers. But at my urging, and with the concurrence of the Peace Corps, the research soon evolved into identification of differences between effective and ineffective volunteers, to the consternation of the lead psychologist on the project and chairman of my doctoral committee, Dr. Calvin Taylor, who was known for his research in the area of creativity. Rather than creativity, we found the main difference in volunteers to be a “project orientation” as opposed to what I called a “human development orientation.” Project-oriented volunteers were those who felt it was their responsibility to identify projects for the community and bring together the resources needed. The people of the community too often saw these as Peace Corps projects, not their own, and had little commitment to them. Human development-oriented volunteers, on the other hand, were those who worked with the community to help identify projects the people themselves

felt they needed and to help them find the resources required to carry out the projects. These were the projects that were more likely to be sustainable.

Beginning with a demonstration program at Utah State University, I soon became involved with Peace Corps training as a consultant and trainer throughout the United States and at the Peace Corps training centers in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Escondido, California, and was contracted to write a training manual for Peace Corps Community Development. In 1968, I was asked by the Peace Corps to pull together the best of what had been developed in cross-cultural training up to that time and prepare the Guidelines for Cross-Cultural Training.

It was agreed that the training should be based on the instrumented methodology developed by Dr. Robert Blake at the University of Texas and the National Training Laboratories. I had trained with Bob Blake and had extensive experience using the methodology with a wide variety of training populations, from institutionalized delinquents to managers in major corporations.<sup>ii</sup> The instrumented approach was to serve as a central, unifying methodology within which to incorporate the entire training program, as opposed to a collection of exercises, lectures, etc. Too many trainers to this day see training simply as a collection of training activities.

The lecture and instrumented, participatory methodologies represent two fundamentally different and diametrically opposed orientations, which we see in people in all walks of life—basically an authoritarian, directive, controlling, take charge approach versus a democratic, participatory, facilitative, exploratory approach. The training was to be experiential—active, not passive; participatory, not authoritarian; trainee-centered, not trainer-centered; and problem-oriented, not information transmission/rote learning-oriented.

Some trainers, particularly university professors, could not accept the assumption that the lecture approach was not effective in attitude change and development of effective, constructive attitudes and behavior, and particularly in learning. Many people, particularly those who are control-oriented by nature, dismiss such activities as “unstructured, laissez-faire, ineffective, and irresponsible.” Participatory activities can be all these if not managed properly. Effectiveness of such activities requires an understanding of the methodology and skill in its application. Instrumented participatory activities, when properly conducted, are highly structured, not unstructured, but the structure is very different from that found in the traditional classroom.<sup>iii</sup>

The underlying assumption is that you don't change attitudes and behavior, particularly long-standing, deep-seated, strongly-held attitudes and behavior, by telling people what they should do. You don't treat such things as acceptance of and effective relations with other cultural, racial or ethnic groups as subject matter, to be taught through traditional information transmission methods. Instead, you treat these as issues to be confronted and problems to be solved, and engage the participants in the process. You achieve change by helping people assess the problems and issues and decide for themselves what they need and want to do, often challenging some of their basic beliefs and assumptions, then

guiding and supporting them in exploring alternatives, examining probable effectiveness and consequences, finding their own solutions, and identifying and practicing the new skills required. People see the relevance of solutions they find to problems they want to solve, of answers to questions they ask, and are then committed to implementation of decisions they take. The individuals, and group, need to feel that they themselves have assessed the issues and problems and arrived at responsible decisions, that they know what must be done, and that they have the obligation and commitment to take action.<sup>iv</sup>

In October of 1968, as a part of the project to develop the Cross-Cultural Training Guidelines, we held a conference in Estes Park, Colorado, at the Center for Research and Education (CRE), a major contractor for Peace Corps training. The Peace Corps invited a number of persons considered to be doing the most significant work in the intercultural field to the conference—an interesting and talented group of persons representing many different professions and institutions. Many of these names will be recognized as persons who have remained active in the intercultural field.<sup>v</sup>

This, to our knowledge, was the first major conference of intercultural or cross-cultural specialists. It was a heady experience. The discussions were lively and stimulating, not so much because of the beautiful setting, the high altitude, and the cool, crisp air, but because of the ideas exchanged, and their potential significance for communication and understanding among peoples of the world. Midway through the conference, we paused to reflect on the process and experience, and observed that none of us had ever before had an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences related to cross-cultural communication, adaptation, and training with such a diverse group with similar interests and concerns. Reg Batten commented that he had found no one in all of England with whom he could talk about such things. Steve Rhinesmith<sup>vi</sup> then suggested that we form a society which would allow us to continue this association, not only with this group but with an ever-expanding group of persons with similar interests. The group was unanimous in its agreement.

Since the purpose of the conference was to share ideas for the *Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Training Guidelines*, we were not able to spend much time pursuing Steve's suggestion, but during our breaks and spare time, we discussed the purpose of the society, the form it might take, and brainstormed possible names. We settled on the Society for Training and Research, SITAR (the Indian musical instrument), because we liked the acronym. (This was later changed to SIETAR, to accommodate members from education.) I was asked by the group to serve as the interim executive director, and CRE agreed to serve temporarily as sponsoring organization. We formed a steering committee and agreed to continue the work we had started at the conference.

Then came the work. Through correspondence and phone calls with the participants and others, we began formulating a more definitive statement of purpose and objectives, developing criteria for membership, exploring possibilities for funding, identifying potential members, and expanding the mailing list. All of this had to be done while carrying out the monumental task of writing the draft *Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Training Guidelines* and a *Peace Corps Training and Assessment Manual*. The draft

Guidelines were reviewed in a spring conference with Peace Corps personnel and tested in 1969 summer training programs.

We had planned to hold an official organizing meeting in conjunction with a November 1969 conference to review a second draft of the *Guidelines*, but Peace Corps fell victim to the upheaval in Washington as the Nixon administration took power. A pall fell over the Peace Corps office in Washington. Whereas previously the lights would be on and people would be working until late into the night, now you could seldom find anyone in the building after 5 PM. Nixon and his people rejected the idea of generalists as Peace Corps volunteers, and focused on recruiting of technically qualified persons to bring their expertise to developing countries. A new Director of Training Support took control of the Guidelines project, with the assumption that anything done by his predecessors in Peace Corps was suspect. Countless hours, days, and weeks were wasted explaining what we were doing and why, dealing with arguments over insignificant details, and meeting his and his staff's needs to assure themselves that they were firmly in control. The November conference was limited to Peace Corps participants, with only a couple outside consultants. Although we had planned to continue with the original group as a steering committee for the Guidelines, only one person, Reg Batten,<sup>vii</sup> was allowed to participate. We were able to bring in one new person, Dr. Bernard Bass,<sup>vii</sup> because of his significant experience and contributions in the field of international management training. Needless to say, any mention of SITAR at the conference was out of the question, and the plans for an official organizing meeting had to be postponed.

In 1970, efforts continued to expand the SITAR mailing list and obtain funding for an organizing conference (while completing the final rewriting of the *Guidelines* and *Training and Assessment Manual*, conducting a three month Peace Corps training program in Micronesia, and making trips to Brazil and Costa Rica). In the spring of 1971, we decided that funding or no funding, we would hold another SITAR meeting, sandwiched in between two training programs, one for Peace Corps trainers and the other for persons not involved with Peace Corps. This would allow persons from either program to take part. We did not have the funds to bring the original group to the meeting, but the new group of participants was an excellent addition, and represented expanded interests beyond the Peace Corps. Most became active in SIETAR International, and some served on the governing council.<sup>viii</sup>

This was a working conference, held in May of 1971, to review the objectives, proposed organizational structure and charter, membership criteria and categories, name, funding, location, etc. Much of the work had already been done by the earlier group and others who contributed along the way, but it was polished and ratified by the new group. The primary purpose of SITAR, we agreed, was to promote intercultural, interracial, and international understanding, communication, and cooperation. It was agreed that SITAR should not be the purview of any one professional group but should be interdisciplinary, that it should be an international organization, and that its focus should be more practical than academic, but providing opportunities for practitioners and researchers to dialog and to collaborate. It was agreed also that it should not be an elitist organization, but one that would welcome neophytes and give them an opportunity to learn from the veterans.

It was suggested that initially the central office might rotate among cooperating universities. The East-West Center of the University of Hawaii was suggested as a possible sponsor, but this was rejected by the group because of its focus on one part of the world, East Asia and the Pacific. The University of Utah and University of Pittsburgh were also considered, because of the interests of persons at those institutions.

A new steering committee, taken from the original group and the participants of the 1971 conference, and including Irene Pinkau of the International Secretariat for Volunteer Services, was selected to assist and advise the executive director (myself). But after a summer in Brazil, I transferred to Utah, to head up a project for the Office of Education, and no longer had the base of CRE support. Drs. Phil Hammond and Seymour Parker, professor and chairman of the Anthropology Department of the University of Utah, were interested in assuming the sponsorship of SITAR, but the academic vice president refused to give his approval because he said he would have to be assured of the professionalism of the society before he would allow the university to be associated with it. He was not convinced by the impressive list of names and affiliations we provided.

Steve Rhinesmith and I then approached the University of Pittsburgh, which had an Intercultural Communication Project funded by the US Department of State. After consulting with the State Department, they agreed to become the sponsors of SITAR. There was no conflict of interest with their project. The project's newsletter, *Communique*, would also serve as the newsletter for SITAR. I passed the reins, the records, and the mailing list to David Hoopes, director of the project, who then carried on with the work we had started, and ultimately succeeded in holding a very successful official SIETAR organizing conference in Washington, D.C., in 1974.

For those of us who attended the workshop in 1968 in Estes Park, Colorado, however, this was where it all began.

End Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Most cross-cultural training in the 1960s, to our knowledge, was with the U.S. Peace Corps. In 1969, Mike Tucker and I conducted a survey of international corporations in the U.S. to determine whether any might be interested in cross-cultural training for the people they were sending overseas. In spite of the research showing the high incidence and cost of failure overseas, the typical response was: "If the other countries want our knowledge and expertise they will take us the way we are, and if our people want to stay with the company they will go where we send them." In the 1970s, however, the U.S. companies began to feel the competition, primarily from Japan, and became interested in training for overseas assignment. CRE became heavily involved in such training. The training we developed there is being continued up to the present time by Mike Tucker through Tucker International in Boulder, Colorado.

<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Robert Morton, another disciple of Bob Blake, had developed the very successful Patient Training Laboratory for institutionalized psychiatric patients at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Houston, Texas, based on the instrumented methodology. He and I had then developed the Organizational Training Laboratory for Aerojet-General Corporation, which he continued to conduct as a private consultant until he retired.

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<sup>iii</sup> Some persons criticized the training as being appropriate only for the American culture. It has been used and shown to be effective with many different cultural groups around the world, however, including American Indians, whose culture is very different from that of the dominant White American culture.

<sup>iv</sup> The hope and intent was that the Peace Corps volunteers would incorporate and use the orientation in their work in community development. A good example of this was James Doxsey, a trainee in the second demonstration project which I conducted for the Peace Corps in Texas. He very successfully used the methodology as a volunteer in community development work in Costa Rica. Later he worked as a trainer in a number of Peace Corps programs, worked with me to develop training for public school teachers and administrators, married a Brazilian, became a Brazilian citizen and sociology professor at a university in Brazil, and, now retired, is still very active as a consultant in social programs in Brazil.

<sup>v</sup> Participants attending the conference, besides myself, were:

- Harry Triandis, professor of psychology at the University of Illinois;
- Edward C. Stewart, intercultural training specialist, University of Pittsburgh;
- David Kolb, assistant professor of organizational psychology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology;
- Art Niehoff, professor of anthropology at California State College in Los Angeles;
- Glendon Casto, educational psychologist at Utah State University;
- T. R. Batten, reader in community development studies, University of London;
- Stephen Rhinesmith, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh;
- Richard L. Hopkins, Westinghouse Learning Corporation;
- Stephen E. Guild, Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts;
- Bryant Wedge, social psychiatrist with the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy, Tufts University;
- Jeremy B. Taylor (representing Jack Donoghue), Community Development specialist, Peace Corps Training Center, Escondido, California; and
- Phillips Ruopp, representing the Office of Program Planning and Review, US Peace Corps, Washington.

<sup>vi</sup> Steve Rhinesmith later served as President of SIETAR, and remained active in the intercultural field.

<sup>vii</sup> Bernie Bass (now deceased) and I had worked together in management training. While having a beer together one evening we discovered that we were born exactly the same day and year.

<sup>viii</sup> Participants, besides myself, were:

- Philip C. Hammond, anthropologist from the University of Utah;
- Agnes M. Niyekawa-Howard, East-West Center, University of Hawaii;
- Henry Holmes, University of Massachusetts;
- Ragu Nath and Melvin Schnapper, University of Pittsburgh;
- Roger Baty, Johnston College, University of Redlands, California;
- Reverend Ronald L. DuBois, Maryknoll College, Illinois;
- Reverend George McShea, Maryknoll Fathers, Colorado;

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- Paul Yount, Missionary Orientation Center, Stony Point, New York;
  - James Doxsey, Institute for InterAmerican Studies, University of Miami (recently retired sociologist with the University of Espirito Santo in Brazil); and
  - Michael Tucker, then with CRE but formerly with the Peace Corps Training Center in Puerto Rico (and before that, beginning in 1964, with me on the Peace Corps research project at the University of Utah and Peace Corps training at Utah State University and Thiokol Chemical Corporation).