

A summary of the research carried out by the program director Diana Certan on the IMPACT program is presented below. Following a methodology similar to the one employed in the research on VIATA, the study used the following items: interpersonal trust, cooperation, tolerance, and empowerment. Preliminary results showed a 36% increase for those who answered “to have a lot of trust in people.” After one year of IMPACT activity, the percentage of 9, 1% of children who declared at the beginning of the program to have a lot of trust in people increased to 45, 5%.

The research was meant to analyze the effects of IMPACT program on participants, from the social capital point of view. The aim is to investigate if a service learning program like IMPACT develops attitudes and abilities that would lead to an increase in interpersonal trust and cooperation and implicitly to social capital development.

Research questions:

- What are the effects that the IMPACT Program has on the kids who enter the program?
- What kind of abilities and values the kids develop during a year in the IMPACT program?
- Does the program make a difference from the social capital point of view?

Hypothesis: The analysis tries to find to what degree the participants to IMPACT increased their social capital after one year of activity in the IMPACT program. The hypothesis is that *the young people who joined IMPACT, after one year in the program, have a higher level of social capital than they had at the beginning of the program.*

Methodology of the paper:

The research design is structured on two dimensions: a quantitative dimension and a qualitative one. The quantitative dimension consists of a questionnaire applied both when the

kids entered IMPACT and after a year of IMPACT. The data analysis focused on the differences observed between those two moments of time. Through the questionnaire we tried to see with what values and abilities the kids came in the program and what qualities and competencies they have after one year in the IMPACT Program. The qualitative dimension consists of face-to-face interviews with kids, parents and teachers. We added this qualitative dimension in order to gain more depth on the information gathered about the kids.

Measurement and results

Social capital has been measured through the following items: interpersonal trust, cooperation / tolerance and empowerment.

1. Trust The trust item was measured through two questions that we took over from the World Values Survey questionnaire:

- *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can not be too trustful with people;*
- *How much trust do you have in people?*

For the first question, comparing the answers, there has been an increase of 18% of those who think that most people can be trusted. As for the question: *How much trust do you have in people*, there was a 36% increase for those who have a lot of trust in people.

2. Tolerance (openness to cooperation) was measured through 2 questions:

- *How often do you contradict or fight with your colleagues? and*
- *How important is it for you to accept that your opinion is criticized?*

The first question: at the end of the year spent in IMPACT, 54,6% of the respondents are rarely or never contradicting, as opposed to 18,2% - the percentage obtained at the moment of entering IMPACT. The second question: a cumulative percent of 91% from the respondents answer, after one year in IMPACT, that the opinion of others is important or very important, in contrast to 63,5%, at the beginning of their IMPACT membership.

Therefore, participants tend to become more tolerant one with another and more open to the others opinions after the IMPACT experience.

3. Empowerment: a representative question that measured this item was the following: “*In the last 12 months did you do something in order to prevent things getting worse in your school?*” After one year of IMPACT, 45,5% answered that they did, as opposed to 9,1% at the beginning of the program. Examples of actions undertaken: talking to the professor or the principle, talking with other high school students or talking to their families.

From **qualitative** point of view, after one year of IMPACT, all the kids have been interviewed by their leaders. From the discussion we tried to see if they noticed something different to themselves after the IMPACT experience. Below there are some selected quotes:

“I honestly can say that I am more responsible and it seems to me like I am seeing the world with other eyes now. Before coming here I was thinking that I cannot do anything to change the world, now I know better” (Maria Nita).

“I was impressed by me. to some of our projects I was not able to do anything and with all this I succeeded doing some things. I wouldn't have done that if it weren't for IMPACT” (Ionela Ursu)

“I learned how to work for the others. If in the past I was thinking that this is lost time, now I am enjoying it.”

“I think I changed a lot this year, because I learned to accept people as they are, and the ones that determined me to change were the IMPACT members”

Conclusions

The above results seem to confirm our main hypothesis: *the young people, who joined IMPACT, after one year in the program, have a higher level of social capital than they had at the beginning of the program.*

These results are encouraging and enforce the idea that the service learning approach promoted by the New Horizons Foundation is a valuable strategy, with the power to change mentalities and values, generating trust and social capital.

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