

Teacher Innovation Grant

**Arna Lewis, grade 5 teacher
Deer Hill School**

Title: Human Rights Around the World

Grade 5

50 students

1 teacher (at first)

Social Studies and integration of other subject areas

Requested funding:\$1,625

Project to be conducted during 2012-13 school year

Description of the program:

I intend to design a program of study in which students will learn about human rights around the world by participating in a simulation game I will develop this summer. The program will be modeled after a program developed by John Hunter called the *World Peace Game*. John Hunter developed a game in which children take on a role and work with others to “solve” the game over a number of sessions/weeks. John Hunter developed the game, fourth graders played it and Chris Farina made a film all about it. Hunter did a TED Talk about it, and both his talk and the documentary have won all kinds of awards.

I viewed the film last fall and was captivated by the whole idea of students learning in such a hands-on, interactive, problem solving and participatory way. In this way learning was interactive and meaningful, and it was easy to see how children would develop all kinds of 21st century skills and be able to apply them to all other kinds of learning.

This summer I plan to take a course in which John Hunter works with teachers to help them develop a simulation game of their own using the philosophies and theories of the design of his work.

For more information view:

worldpeacegame.org

ted.com - search for John Hunter

Goals:

The students would be learning about human rights around the world, but really they would be learning all kinds of different skills. They would be developing collaborative and communication skills as they work together to solve the problems the game would pose. They would be using critical thinking skills, problem solving and creativity as they play the game, too. They would also be learning global competence skills as they

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investigate and learn about the importance of understanding, and acting on, issues of global significance. They could apply these skills when learning about climate change, world hunger, immigration issues, renewable energy ideas, democracy, and other types of civic engagement. Hopefully, this type of activity will encourage them to get involved in civic issues locally, and globally.

What the students will do:

This project will involve learning, researching and participating in a simulation activity about human rights issues. I envision that during the simulation activity students will have a role to play and will work and act together to accomplish the tasks assigned to them in order to complete the game. Each session of the game would involve solving another “crisis”.

How the project is innovative and how it will enhance students’ learning:

This is an innovative way for students to learn because it involves the students working creatively and collaboratively to solve a real-life issue in a real-life manner. Some students might be ambassadors of a country, others might be civilians, others might be in the government, others might work for NGOs - the options are limitless. But, everyone will need to think and act in ways that will push their critical thinking skills to problem solve, communicate and persuade. It is also innovative in that the teacher is the facilitator, not the director of knowledge who has all the answers. Teachers will need to learn how to give the control to the students instead of trying to control their learning. In this situation students will be forced to think for themselves and learn from trial and error and they directly witness how their ideas and decisions play out in a real-life simulation activity.

How this project be incorporated into the curriculum, into other classrooms:

At first, I will use, and more fully develop, this project with my class and my other switch class, within the context of our social studies curriculum as the students learn about geography, cultures, the impact of history, civil rights and government. Then, I would like to present the project to the other teachers at Deer Hill and support them in their own endeavors to design and implement their own simulation game project.

How this is project collaborative and/or cross-disciplinary in nature:

This project involves collaboration of all sorts. The students will have to work together to solve the issues presented in the game in order to “win”. Even aside from the cross-disciplinary skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, analyzing, evaluating and such, other aspects of the project will feature writing, reading, researching, using math skills and investigating areas of science.

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The global component:

This project will involve learning about human rights issues in different countries around the world. It will also involve learning about the United Nations and the Millennium Development Goals. Students will see how these issues impact other cultures/countries around the globe and understand how these issues may effect the United States. Students will also learn about how other agencies, and NGOs, work to help other nations, and what everyday citizens can do to make an impact.

The community outreach component:

I do not yet know if this will lead to an outreach project - that should come from the kids. Yet, I do believe that such a project will get kids interested in thinking about their own civic engagement, and hopefully, will lead some to act on this.

How success/impact will be measured:

I think the success and impact of this program will be evident by the enthusiasm of the students as they engage in the process. This project will be focused more on the process than the outcome. Students will evaluate their own learning in terms of the skills they used - critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, communication, analyzing, and problem solving. I, too, will be evaluating them in this regard. They will also respond, in written form, each time they participate in the game in order to process, and evaluate, the developing issues pertaining to that day.

Costs:

Materials/equipment: \$165

Teacher time for development: \$210

Professional development: \$1,250

Total cost: \$1,625