April 2002

Connecting Global Education with Activism: Building A Local and Global Community

Marta Colburn
Colburn Consulting International

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol6/iss1/18

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
Connecting Global Education with Activism: Building A Local and Global Community

Getting children active in international events can be done through effective classroom learning experiences. This educator explains how tragedy can lead to a better understanding of diversity.

By Marta Colburn, Colburn Consulting International

Introduction

September 11th and its aftermath have had a lasting impact over the world that has had a deep emotional, physical and spiritual impact. This fateful day will be engrained in our memories not only for its tragic events and the heroic actions of many in New York and Washington D.C., but also for its repercussions domestic and international. While the tragedy of September 11th and its implications for our world continue to develop, one positive result of this tragic day is that a teaching moment was created. The horrific images of that day and the subsequent war in Afghanistan have created a thirst for knowledge to which many are trying to respond. I believe that by educating ourselves and our children about the world and the lives we can make a positive difference in the world. We need to understand the experiences of people living in these places, and to have the courage to stand up in the face of injustice. This is a responsibility that we have as educators.

Coping With A Brutal Reality

One of the challenges of global education for teachers, families and activists is the reality that much of the information about the world outside our borders is deceptive. Even in last year's election times, a glimpse of the international section in most mainstream newspapers includes few articles that present a positive view of the world. Cooperation, conflict, resolution and the daily lives of people around the world are not deemed newsworthy to the American public by most journalists and news organizations. This challenge is particularly relevant when introducing a topic such as landmines in the classroom. In my work with Portland 4th and 7th graders, I have been impressed with their retention of detailed information on various types of UXO. However, stories of landmine victims and the challenges of mine awareness and demining campaigns around the world can be overwhelming for children (as well as adults). How such topics are presented can influence how much of the hard-to-handle information can be tolerated. Humor can facilitate the learning process. In relating the 1999 kidnapping experience of my parents and myself by Yemeni tribesmen, for example, my experience with future landmine victims also helps inform and guide our discussion of the current landmine problem and the role that we can play in helping to resolve it.

Highlighting the Positive

Another important aspect in encouraging literacy about global issues is not only focus on the negative, but also to seek out and share with children the positive aspects of international issues. This need to highlight positive features of a conflict or issue is also true for adults. For example, reading books such as A Man To Match His Mountains: Badshah Khan, Non-Violent Soldier of Islam by Eknath Easwaran (Nghiri Press, 1999) available at: www.mlmg.org helps paint a broader context of conflict in Afghanistan and the region. This book tells the story of Badshah Khan, a Muslim leader who received a nonviolent army of 100,000 men from among the Pashtun of the Khyber Pass to resist British rule in India. Called "Frontier Gandhi" by his followers, he was regarded as 'the real father of nonviolence.' This book not only challenges the myth that Islam is a religion of violence, but it also demonstrates that people's commitment to nonviolent causes is a powerful lesson for our students.

Beyond Education to Activism

A first step in educating ourselves and our children about international issues is to seek out opportunities for activism. I believe that one of our primary responsibilities as educators of students is to make students more aware of the world around them. This can be accomplished by encouraging students to learn about and participate in the work of organizations working in the world's most difficult places. I was impressed by the efforts of the students at Winterhaven School in Kirkland, WA. Students at Winterhaven School (K-12) were taught by local lawyer Linda Hendrickson to create friendship bracelets using a weaving technique common in Afghanistan. Students then sold the bracelets and donated the funds to Mercy Corps to assist Afghan children.

Conclusion

By reaching out to others of diverse backgrounds in our local community and forging a myriad of international ties, we build a sense of belonging and actively participate in creating community. Additionally, by becoming active in international issues we learn and take steps to forge a better world. This activism addresses the need of a complex and often frightening and depressing world and helps us heal. September 11th, 2001, not only altered the perception of our world, but also emphasized the urgency of building a strong local and global community.

Landmines in Afghanistan: Classroom Activity

Appropriate Level: Grades 4 - 12

Goals/ Focus: to learn about landmines in Afghanistan:

Materials:
- Background information for children on landmines in Afghanistan
- 200 pieces of 6 " x 11 " study cardboard, red spray paint and a set of "X" spray paint the red "X" on 20 percent of the cardboard pieces.
- Additional information on landmines.

Procedure:

Part 1: Discuss with students what they know about landmines. Part 2: For the students to assemble the landmine facts down the red "X" should be randomly scattered throughout the paragraph. In the middle of the path around the room and out into the hallway. Part 3: Have students read the background information. Part 4: Have students make a line at the beginning of the path and explain the procedure. Step 1: Turn over each card that is stepped on. Step 2: Players are only allowed to step one or two cards at a time when walking through the minefield. Step 3: When a player steps on a red "X", they are out of the game. Part 5: The first person in line walks through the minefield until they hit a landmine or leave the game as second person. Then begins from the beginning of the path and follows the first player's steps (the landmine they stepped on) and continues until they hit a landmine. The next player steps over again, following the previous victim's

(Revised 6/7/02)