Educating the United States: Landmines In and Out of the Classroom

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Educating the United States: Landmines In and Out of the Classroom

Enthusiastic students are giving back to their global community as U.S. Department of State-sponsored education programs are being launched in grammar schools, colleges and universities across the nation. In these programs, students are given a chance to both learn more about the global landmine crisis and to actively contribute to the mine action community.

by Susanna Sprinkel, MAIC

Introduction

Most U.S. citizens cannot even imagine the extent of the landmine threat that exists worldwide, as it is one problem they will probably never have to face. Assisted by the U.S. Department of State, a variety of programs have been enacted to educate students about the global landmine crisis. This program not only helps spread awareness to U.S. communities, but they also get more involved in mine action. Many people believe that the youth of today hold the future in the palm of their hands; these programs open a window of opportunity for students to actively improve their future on a global level.

Southwest Missouri State University Landmine Studies

Background

In 2000, the political science department at Southwest Missouri State University (SMSU) enacted a Landmine Studies Program that focuses on demining and survivor assistance. This program is coordinated by Ken Rutherford, a landmine survivor and co-founder of Landmine Survivors Network (LSN). SMSU houses a number of resources that enhance Landmine Studies, such as an extensive UN Depository library, an excellent Model United Nations group, and the Department of State's Annual Mine Action Fellowship, which allows students and faculty from mine-affected countries to attend SMSU. Aside from spreading awareness in and out of the classroom, this program includes a variety of activities to directly involve students in the mine action community and uses local television and radio broadcasts to extend the word beyond campus.

On-Campus Activities

Landmine Studies at SMSU includes various activities on- and off campus. On-campus demonstrations have included a Shoe Pile Commemoration, a Petition Drive, and a visit from guest speaker Jodi Williams, of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). The Shoe Pile Commemoration demonstrated a landmine being detonated every 22 minutes. Students began with a pile of shoes at 8:00 a.m. and added a pair every 22
One of the favorite activities of the Landmine Studies program has been a two-day visit to Fort Leonard Wood, a nearby Humanitarian Demining Training Camp (HDTTC). On this trip, 22 students and two faculty members woke up at 6:00am, ate breakfast with soldiers training, learned about the different types of landmines/UxO, dressed up in demining gear, and propped for artillery in an inactive minefield. Many of the students earned an even higher respect for deminers across the world as they experienced firsthand how dangerous and frustrating demining can be.

**Internship Experience**

Several SSMU students wanted to gain further experience in the mine action community and decided to intern at landmine-related organizations in the United States. During the summer of 2001, four students participated in internships at the Center of International Rehabilitation (CIR), Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VVA). Of these four, at least two plan to continue working in the mine action field. In addition, two other Landmine Studies students are currently working at LSN.

University of Denver's **Landmines: Exploring the Hidden Crisis**

**Background**

The best time to get people involved in global issues is at an early age. As a result, a number of faculty members from the Center for Teaching International Relations at the University of Denver—supported by a grant from the U.S. PMHDP—have put together Landmines: Exploring the Mine Crisis. Each packet for upper elementary school, middle school- and high school-age students. These programs involve a series of extensive activities that not only make students more aware of the landmine crisis but also demonstrate how the United States interacts on a global level. Each one of these packets includes instructions for class activities as well as a number of hand-outs and other valuable resources. (Packet can be downloaded or ordered for free online at http://www.du.edu/crit/crit_pubs_free.html)

**Upper Elementary Program**

The Upper Elementary Program correlates with a Social Studies class and is designed to teach students about politics, geography, and policies. It involves international affairs, critical thinking and problem solving. The curriculum includes up to 10 hours of in-class education with three major activities: a presentation on a specific landmine-related topic, a persuasive speech to a government official or publication editor and a poster related to mine action. To assess the students' understanding of the global landmine crisis, the course concludes with a final persuasive speech, when students "will pre

**Middle School Program**

The Middle School program is also geared toward Social Studies classes focusing on geography and civics, and involves up to 13 50-minute class periods of instruction to complete (if the teacher chooses to complete all activities). For the final assessment, students should complete an essay based on the "My Turn Essay" portion of Newsweek. In this essay, students discuss the landmine situation in a designated country, describe the United States' contributions to demining in this country, take a stand on the landmine crisis and suggest methods for spreading the word about the landmine crisis. Further activities include watching landmine-related videos, learning to create maps that demonstrate specific mine action statistics, studying and discussing the Global Mine Action Treaty, and the Korean Exception, examining mine awareness techniques, and reading fiction stories about middle-school-aged children growing up with the horror of landmines.

**Messiah College's Landmine Action Project**

Since 1997, students and faculty of Messiah College in Grantham, PA have actively researched landmine issues, and a number of students have used this research to design low-budget detection and clearance techniques for countries that cannot afford other machinery. In the fall of 2001, a group of students and the help of Dr. Donald Pearl, enrolled the Messiah College Landmine Action Project (MCLAP). Through this project, students hope to increase awareness in the Messiah community, to further research on the global landmine crisis and to design more projects to enhance the mine action community. Currently, there are nine students actively involved in MCLAP. During the summer of 2001, Aaron Dahlstrom, student and co-facilitator of MCLAP conducted extensive research on the landmine issue and the number of resources available. This research has provided a foundation for future efforts at the College.

**Senior Engineering Design Projects**

In order to fulfill graduation requirements, students in the Engineering Department at Messiah College must complete a Senior Engineering Design Project. A number of these projects have dealt specifically with the landmine issue. Related projects have included using acoustic sound waves and infrared photography to detect buried landmines, training ferrets to sense landmines, building a device to contain and detect landmines, and a high school project. The last project is currently being designed and an enhanced version of this system is more efficient and less costly.

**MCLAP Activities**

The MCLAP team is divided into three separate teams: the Vapor Detection Research Team, the Robotics Team and the Education Team. The Vapor Detection Team is continuing work with ferrets by training them to work in the field. The Robotics Team is designing a robotic vehicle that will deliver tools into minefields. This robotic vehicle is geared towards a desert environment, and students hope that it will be inexpensive and easy to use. The Education Team will be providing awareness to teachers and students. This team will visit schools and teach young children how to detect landmines.

The MCLAP Robotics Team hopes to create a low budget robotic vehicle that can safely and effectively deliver tools into minefields, c/o MCLAP.

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NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Issue Today Map

The "Landmines: Eliminating the Threat" wall map, now available in color, provides a visual overview of landmine-affected countries and regions around the world. The map includes a list of key statistics about landmine incidence and related activities (1-800-256-2395). Related Activities

Along with the "Landmines: Eliminating the Threat" wall map, Newsweek also created a Study Guide with information and discussion questions about the landmine issue and related educational activities that could be used in a Social Studies classroom. The Study Guide includes an overview of the landmine crisis, survival stories of a person, a minefield, and an entire nation, descriptions of the different types of demining techniques, and a look at future mine action endeavors. Discussion questions in the guide include finding out how different world leaders' opinions of the landmine crisis, research opportunities for landmine survivors and profiling the landmine crisis in a specific country. The online portion of the program (http://www.newswecodeography.com/landmines) includes a list of useful web links and two intensive activities that correspond with the Issues Today Map and mine awareness programs.

Teflony Middle School and Global Core Unlimited

Background

Students at Teflony Middle School (Teflony, NJ) were first introduced to the global landmine crisis during an inspiring speech from Ken Rutherford at a student-organized Human Rights Day. As a result, interested students, with the help of the school librarian, formed a chapter at their middle school teacher Mark Myhan's request. Students then organized a Student Landmine Awareness Club and started taking steps to sponsor training in a sister city in Bosnia-Herzegovia. Once fundraising efforts began, students and other interested parents and community members formed Global Core Unlimited, a separate non-profit organization that receives donations only to fund landmine demolition techniques, and a look at future mine action endeavors. Discussion questions in the guide include finding out how different world leaders' opinions of the landmine crisis, research opportunities for landmine survivors and profiling the landmine crisis in a specific country. The online portion of the program (http://www.newswecodeography.com/landmines) includes a list of useful web links and two intensive activities that correspond with the Issues Today Map and mine awareness programs.

Teflony Middle School and Global Core Unlimited

Landmine and Global Core Unlimited

United Nations CyberSchoolBus: Schools Demining Schools

In an effort to spread awareness to students around the world and encourage schools in support of the clearance of mine-infected schools and play areas, the UN CyberSchoolBus program has created a Schools Demining Schools initiative. Participating schools have been able to correspond with deminers in Afghanistan and Mozambique through e-mail, allowing students to ask specific questions about the deminers' job and how to answer common questions that have arisen during fundraising efforts. Some of the students have even made phone calls with young landmine survivors in their adopted country.

The Schools Demining Schools program also includes three in-class teaching units covering the scope of the landmine crisis and different aspects of mine awareness. These activities, as well as sample correspondence between students and deminers/survivors, can be found on their Web site (http://www.un.org/ cyberchoolbusminetmine/index.asp). Schools can register with this project by sending an email with the subject "Ban Mines" to cyberchoolbus@un.org.

Useful Resources

There are a number of useful resources available for educators interested in adding the global landmine crisis to their curriculum. Listed below are a few of the ones recommended by the programs mentioned in this article.

Articles

"A Time to Plant Mines, A Time to Make Arrows!" This article, originally published in Newsweek, tells the story of a man who planted mines for a guerrilla movement as a child and has since dedicated his efforts to clearing his native land. This article is available for $2.50 from the New York Times (http://query.nytimes.com/search).

"Connecting Global Education with Activism: Building A Local and Global Community." This article, written by Education Liaison for Mercy Corps Marta Colburn, describes methods for getting students involved in global activities. It also includes a Landmines In Afghanistan classroom activity for students in 4th-12th grade. The article and activity were published in issue 6.1 of the Journal (http://netic.jmu.edu/journal/6.1/features/colburn/colburn.htm).

"One Step at A Time: A Landmine Removal Initiative!" This article, written by Mark Hyman of Teflony Middle School and Global Core Unlimited, describes the steps that his middle school was taking in developing a Student Landmine Awareness Club and adopting a minefield in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was published in the May/June 2001 issue of Middle Level Learning and can be ordered for $7.50 (while supplies last) through the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) publications at 1-800-983-0812. Copies of Middle Level Learning may also be available at your local library.

Vietnam

History: A near-continuous state of war from the early 1950s until the late-1970s has left an enormous legacy of land mines and UXO. Impact: There are an estimated 3.5 million land mines and 300,000 tons (272 million kilograms) of UXO in the country. The most mine-affected region is the Quang Tri province, which contains the former border between North and South Vietnam. Vietnam suffers an estimated 2,000 casualties a year from mines and has one of the world's highest concentrations of antipersonnel mines as a result. Progress: As of early 2003, the Vietnamese Army had cleared 97 anti-personnel and antitank mines and 25,544 UXO. More than 7,000 UXO and 200 mines were located and destroyed by the British Mines Advisory Group.

(For more information see Mark Hyman's contact information below.)

Additional Programs

United Nations CyberSchoolBus: Schools Demining Schools

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Creative-Action Service

Landmine Removal Project

As a part of the Creative-Action Service requirement for the International Baccalaureate diploma, high school students from Oregon and Washington have decided to adopt a minefield in Cambodia. Their efforts include spreading awareness to the local community and raising money for the effort. As of April 7, 2001, the goal for each participating high school was to raise $1,000. Since then, the designated minefield has been cleared and over 100 schools across the United States and Canada have joined the effort to adopt additional pieces of land.

Shenandoah Minefield Adoption Project

A group of student employees from the MAIC, along with a number of volunteers from the JMU community, have developed the Shenandoah Minefield Adoption Project (SMP) in order to promote awareness in the JMU community and surrounding areas. This past spring, SMP members sponsored a landmines awareness week where they passed out statistics and discussed the landmine problem with interested students and faculty members and faculty. In addition, Ken Rutherford from LSN shared his story, and Angie Mahoney from Adopt-A-Minefield presented the logistics of minefield adoption. SMP participants were amazed by their fellow classmates' enthusiasm towards the subject. This following year, SMP will further their efforts by adopting a minefield in a country that will be selected by interested community members in September. Planned fundraising activities include a Field Festival with food and music, a raffle, and an International dinner. Eventually, the students hope to expand involvement to other nearby high schools and Colleges.

Sprinkel: Educating the United States; Landmines In and Out of the Classroom

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University library, and free online copies are available at many mirrors of NCSS (sign up at http://www.socialstudies.org).

"Schools Denying Schools: A Global Teach-In." This article, published in the September 1998 issue of Social Education, provides a number of materials for teaching the landmine crisis in the classroom and for getting students more involved in the mine action community. A copy of this article can be ordered for $7.50 (while supplies last) through the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) publication services at 1-800-683-0812. Copies of Social Education may also be available at your local University library or high school Social Studies department, and free online copies are available to members of NCSS (sign up at http://www.socialstudies.org).

Books

The Cinnamon Tree: This 208-page novel tells the story of a young girl who loses a leg in a landmine accident and how she struggles to regain her life and to help spread awareness of this issue around her. This novel can be purchased for $7.95 (list price) or less from Amazon.com: (http://www.amazon.com).

Videos

Documentary Film on K-9 Denying Corps by the Marshall Legacy Institute: This documentary provides an overview of mine dog teams and can be ordered by contacting the Marshall Legacy Institute:info@marshall-legacy.org(http://www.marshall-legacy.org).

The Menace of Landmines: This documentary, created by UNMAS, provides graphic footage of mine-threat countries, an overview of the global landmine crisis, and descriptions of the different areas of mine action. It can be downloaded from the Adopt-A-Minefield website (http://www.landmines.org/Multi-media/index-mm.asp).

Website

ICBL Media Reports (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/icblmedia/messaging/) contains a collection of news articles on recent activities in mine action. Interested users can also subscribe to the ICBL Media Report mailing list at http://www.icbl.org/media.

One world.net Full Coverage: Landmines (http://www.oneworld.net/episodes/topicic_136.shtml) contains over 100 documents related to landmine topics as well as a number of useful guides and links to other affiliated organizations.

U.S. Department of State Humanitarian Demining Program (http://www.state.gov/s/gelm/hdp/) contains information about U.S. involvement in demining including their policy and budget as well as fact sheets and reports on recent activities.

U.S. Department of State Office of Mine Action Initiatives and Partnerships (http://www.state.gov/s/gelm/miap/) contains information about U.S. involvement in other areas of mine action including detection and clearance, awareness, survivor assistance, and research and development.

Glances and Abbreviations MAIC (http://maic.jmu.edu/research/glossary.htm) at http://maic.jmu.edu/research/acronyms.htm

U.S. Department of State: http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/ppe_9890_denne_mrtExtm


Contact Information

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Update: The Landmine Situation in Chechnya

Stemming from the ongoing war between Russian and Chechen forces, the use of anti-personnel mines throughout Chechnya continues today. As the landmine victim toll increases, much is being done in an attempt to alleviate the current state of affairs.

by Hayden Roberts, MAIC

Introduction

After the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991, many of the ethnic and minority groups on the outskirts of the surrounding areas began to secede and declare themselves newly independent republics. The first three to do so were Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia—the southernmost of the Soviet republics. The area to the north of these republics continued to be a part of the new Russian federation, although the people of this area were not Russian but rather ethnic Muslims. As time went on, several of the ethnic groups in this area began to press for their autonomy from Russia. The Chechens were one of these groups who have fallen between these two extremes. Today, the new republics comprise an area in southeastern Europe called the Caucasus. Located in the northern tip of the Caucasus is Chechnya, situated in the Caucasian Mountains. Chechnya extends from west to east for about 680 miles between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. One thousand miles to the south of Moscow, the republics of Daghestan, Georgia, North Ossetia and South Ossetia surround Chechnya.

Background: The Chechen War

During the past decade, Chechnya has been ravaged by an ongoing war with Russia. The sides’ stances are highly polarized from one another and this has intensified the climate of the war. The Chechens’ efforts to gain independence stand in stark contrast to Russia’s claims of absolute sovereignty over the republic. However, these polarized stances have led each side to commit severe human rights abuses during the war, completely obscuring the reasoning that lay behind both the Chechen and Russian positions. This has made the conflict very difficult to understand for anyone not directly involved. Although the middle of 2000 saw a decline in the amount of large-scale military action in Chechnya, aggression from both sides still causes civilians to be the victims of this unceasing conflict. Landmines have become one of the staple weapons of the war and have been used at great lengths by both Russian and Chechen forces. Excessive use of landmines throughout the conflict has left the Chechen region a grim and bloodied place where the population struggles with this dilemma on a day-to-day basis. The people who are affected the most are the estimated 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have been moving to refugee camps and settlements in the neighboring area of Ingushetia. Once these people reach the camps, they usually remain. The main reason for their unwillingness to leave a camp is an absence of safety, for often the IDPs are the ones who stumble upon hidden mines. Experts have claimed that Chechnya has at least half a million UXO hidden throughout its roads, trails and countryside.1 As Russian and Chechen groups have moved across the republic, they have often left behind these forgotten landmines.

1 Thousands of people, many of whom are children, have become refugees due to the ongoing war in Chechnya. These children who have settled in Ingushetia await the day they can return home.