Fostering Middle School Student Awareness of Childhood Hunger Issues- Using the Voices of Peers who have experienced it.

As middle school students study in our classrooms, almost 15 million children in the United States and around the world confront hunger each day with growling stomachs and the resultant health, emotional and academic outcomes of malnutrition. Particularly because this health today and well- being issue so directly affects student peers, growing numbers of teachers, counselors, young group leaders and schools involve students in studying the economic, social, nutritional, emotional and academic aspects of this international issue that is also prevalent in these United States. While the issue is sometimes exceeding visible in the physical appearance of the children confronting it, it can also be invisible and only known to the child suffering it. and Ironically it is a secret the child sufferer often does not to “reveal” to adults or peers. Teachers and youth leaders often have students research the statistics, factual locations and data of health, academic and career outcomes of hunger. Yes, research in the issue is certainly necessary, but it does not tap an immediate no cost resource readymade and available on demand. That resource is an impressive burgeoning collection of child focused and child told “see me, feel me” digital stories. These stories need to be the first ones that communicate the reality of the emotional, health, economic and social aspects of child hunger in the United States and the world. If these stories are prioritized over concrete data driven statistics. All the resources cited are available on demand at no cost and feature children explaining the impact of hunger on their lives in the United States and internationall.

TASK- SURVEY

First, prior to use of the digital resources, engage the students in examining the accuracy and the depth of prior knowledge and assumptions they bring to the issue of childhood hunger. Prepare a short survey so they as citizens can have a personal sense of their knowledge base before starting on this investigation. A sample survey should be distributed as a print handout or even better posted on google class or padlet so the teacher can also get a chance to preview student knowledge base and then review at the close of the project.

Survey

1. Food insecurity is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
2. Free lunch is offered to students at school whose families’ income is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
3. Fresh fruits and vegetables are the same price or less than are chips, candies and fries. \_\_\_\_True \_\_\_False
4. In the United States alone \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ million children are hungry.
5. Children who live in rural areas are not hungry because they live in those areas. \_\_\_True \_\_\_\_False
6. Being hungry when you get to school because you had no breakfast, can affect how well you learn in school even if you did your homework. \_\_\_\_True \_\_\_\_False
7. You should keep being hungry a secret from the school staff and from kids in your class. \_\_\_True \_\_\_\_False

Discuss the survey with the students and have them share how they responded to it. Do not tell the students the factual answers to some of the questions, but do allow them to discuss their responses as a community of peer citizens.

ENGAGE- DIGITAL STORIES- LISTEN AND SEE CHILDREN WHO ARE HUNGRY

With prior knowledge of this issue shared, it is time, not for statistics with real numbers, but rather digital come “real” stories. Start with the historic recognized documentary from 11 years ago, “A Place at the Table.”

<https://youtu.be/fC4rk6tKlRl?si=JddPc2ygSiXeLjvv>

Challenge the students to review a short segment of it- under 3 minutes with a focus on identifying which of the survey questions it answers. In addition, ask them to listen for information about what it means to be hungry from children interviewed as part of this documentary. Ask that they jot down a quote or two from the children as well as any comments the director has to share about her purpose in developing this functional digital document. If necessary screen twice, so the students take notes and let them discuss the story details they hear and see. Do make certain they reference back their initial assumptions and quote the subject remarks.

Since “A Place at the Table” is focused on children who are hungry in the United States, ask students to what extent and where in the world they think or know that hunger among children is a pervasive issue. Have the students name geographic regions or countries, where they personally are aware through their reading, studies in school or even community campaigns about international childhood hunger. List the regions and countries the students identify before hearing the digital story. Once the student list is made, show the international stories featuring peers sharing how hunger affects their lives.

Sample digital stories can include:

Children Speak Up About Hunger Crisis

<https://youtu.be/9HMaxjsnqhg?si=wPv-6BuwfEWxzhOJ>

Childhood Hunger is Real-

<https://www.nokidhungry.org/blog/childhood-hunger-real-there-hope>

Children Speak Up About the Hunger Crisis

<https://youtu.be/9HMaxjsnqhg?si=wPV-6BuwfEWxZhOJ>

Focus the students on again seeing the ways in which these international testimonies about peer hunger confirm or refute their initial assumptions. Ask them to also note the scenes or data shared in these digital resources which to,uche or upsets them most emotionally as empathetic peers. Set aside time for students to discuss their reactions to the stories, they have seen and heard.

CREATE

Songs, Rap, Community Service, Food Drive, Workshops

The international digital stories reference the famine in Ethiopia in 1984, share with students the lyrics of the Richie/Jackson song “We Are the World” plus its video.

<https://youtu.be/s3wNuru4UOl?si=q_RbohGNDvgbtZ5e>

lyrics-

<https://genius.com/Usa-for-africa-we-are-the-world-lyrics>

Focus the students on identifying the lyrics which state the purpose and the mission of this still relevant four decades later song. Ask the students after they correctly identify, the song’s message and purpose, to discuss the extent to which they “can save their own lives” and those of other peers hungry in America and the United States. Point out how the 45 famous artists who gathered together to make this record sold it to contribute millions of dollars to the USA Africa nonprofit to indeed save so many children’s futures, plus left a document that is making the students today forty years later aware of this childhood hunger plight.

Challenge the students who are indeed the world 21st century global citizens how they from this middle school classroom can start making a difference. Encourage them to think about hunger projects they have already completed. For example in NYC schools, many students have collected food cans for distribution through City Harvest and many have packed boxes for distribution at food pantries. Some have been involved in UNICEF drives raising monies or through posters awareness of the reality of world hunger and its health implications for peers.

SHARE

Give the students an opportunity to consider how they can tap already available school youth leadership, podcast, school newsletter, community organizations, candy sales, graphic tee shirt design, performances and local shelters to make a specific measurable meaningful impact in this ongoing life, health, and future wellbeing concern for peers. Suggest filming their own versions of the digital reportage they watched or developing a visual symbol or original song or rap to heighten awareness. Encourage some to create child hunger talks for homeroom classes and to select one or more of the resources featuring actual children to use with these peers.

ASSESSMENT

As the students start their own campaigns and projects to spread this awareness and advocacy, take them back to their original assumptions and prior information they brought to the project. Ask them to explain which of their assumptions did not play out in reality. What “knowledge” did they assume which turned out to be wrong? In what ways did hearing and seeing these actual hungry peers change their involvement in this issue and their willingness to advocate? Why?

Exit Question:

What new knowledge about child hunger in the United States did you acquire from this project?

Closing thoughts:

The lyrics of the Townshend

song-“See me, feel me-listening to you. . .I get the story”

<https://genius.com/The-who-see-me-feel-me-lyrics> were not written to relate to childhood hunger. Yet as the lyrics correctly communicates the ways digital stories make the issue personal, with actual hungry children speaking out, “right behind you, I see the millions.” Stories need to go first as peer “we are the world” sitting in our classrooms are engaged in learning what hunger connotes for peers in the United States and in the world. Once child old digital hunger stories are shared, students can start telling and writing their own advocacy stories, “healing our own world.” Children will listen to peer stories. Let them listen.