Proposal for 100 Projects for Peace

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Peace Through Crafts with Middle School Children
Draft Proposal for the Kathryn Wasserman Davis 100 Projects for Peace

Introduction

On my first trip to Ghana, one of Africa's most long-lived and stable democracies, as an AFS high school exchange student, I was astonished at the depth of interest in and lack of awareness of religions other than the two major religions in the country: Islam and Christianity. Therefore, I would like to do a project in Ghana that addresses both inter- and intra- cultural understanding.

"What is your religion?" is a common question in Ghana, even from a person just met on the street.

When I answered that I am Jewish, Ghanaians were typically confused.

"Is that Christian?" they would ask.

Because of the deeply embedded interest in religion in Ghana there are great opportunities to encourage understanding of differences, including religion and ability in this developing nation. I feel because of the cultural willingness to talk about religion among Ghanaians that I could create an effective project fostering religious understanding and greater tolerance for differences, including deafness.

The importance of de-emphasizing sectarian differences in young nations can be seen only too clearly around the world in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Northern Ireland.

Much of Ghana's educational system is very segregated by religion or economics. Poor road conditions and the cost of transportation contribute to geographic isolation. Attitudes about disabilities also isolate. Most Ghanaians speak one of many tribal languages at home but are taught in most schools in English, the government's official language.

Inter-Cultural Understanding-Beading

Sometimes to start a difficult conversation you need an activity to take your mind off your nervousness, especially in new surroundings with people you do not know. For most children, I have found that if you can offer something to play with they are much more likely to trust you and want to get to know you.

My plan is to offer a fun activity to middle-school-age children (9 to 14 years) to do while having discussions about identify, religion, differences, and similarities.

Because Ghana has both a long tradition of beads, dating to fifteenth-century trade beads, an active bead-making industry, and long-standing traditions of wearing beads, beading activities could provide the entrée to discussing religious similarities and differences in their own milieu. Likewise, beads have a part in many world religions providing other opportunities.

> *"Hand-crafted glass beads…are symbols of beauty, desire, influence and power. The beads -- their colors, patterns, sounds they make when clicking together -- connect communities all over the planet." --Kearsley Stewart and David Schoenbrun, Africanist scholars at Northwestern University*

Intra-Cultural Connections-Computers

Most Ghanaians have little access to computers but are eager to learn. For instance, the Bechem School for the Deaf, with over 350 students, has only two computers, neither accessible to the students.

Therefore, to foster continuation of relationships that the program helps establish and to begin to build global connections, I propose to donate one or more desk top computers to each of the settings I work in. (Fortunately, the dollar goes a long way in Ghana and so I can buy computers for about $350. each). I would also offer computer workshops to the children.

In a developing country such as Ghana it is very unlikely that most of the children in this age range have ever touched a computer. Providing these children with exposure to basic computer skill will not only help them with job opportunities but also open up the world to them.

Goals

To foster world peace by teaching tolerance to youth, teaching about differences, understanding, and fostering self-identity

- teach about tolerance of differences
- teach basic beading techniques as a culturally relevant craft activity
- introduce computer skills to help keep connections with both the other students in Ghana and the world.

The Project and Its Future Impact

Over a one-month period I propose to have individual beading workshops with nine to fourteen year-old-students from three (Muslim, Christian, and Jewish) religious up-bringings and schools and one school for the deaf. I anticipate spending approximately one week at each of three settings doing bead and computer workshops and building relationships with the children.

During a second month, I would get groups from the three settings together to work on projects and interact with each other, hoping to develop friendships and understanding of differences. Throughout, beaded objects will serve the purposes of reminder, sharing, and engagement.

One of the goals of this project is to create lasting connections between groups of Ghanian children. Before leaving I will help them set up both ways of keeping in touch with each other and also set up a reunion date. By doing this I hope to help the children take their own steps in planning and following through with the relationship they will create. I want to provide a learning opportunity that I hope will spread when the participants use their experiences from the project in their every day lives.

I plan to use computers as a way to foster these connections, both with each other and the world.

My Background that will help make a successful project:

- Love of Ghana. Ghana has a piece of my heart. I have now traveled to and in Ghana three times, once for six months as an AFS student and two other summers for four and six weeks. I understand much of the local culture, how things are done, and how to get things done.
- Beading and jewelry making. I have been an enthusiastic beader since I was in the sixth grade. More recently, I have become interested in beading and jewelry as vehicles to understand other cultures. I have also taught beading to children for two summers in day camp so understand the challenges, logistics, and opportunities in beading with children.
- American Sign Language (ASL), disability, and diversity awareness. I spent six weeks as teacher's aid and teaching beading at the Bechem School for the Deaf, Ghana in the Summer of 2006. I have studied and used ASL for eight years, been involved with American Deaf Culture and am only too aware of the need for better integration of the deaf population into mainstream Ghanaian life.