

PELHAM EDUCATION FOUNDATION FUNDS GLOBAL SIMULATION WORKSHOP FOR SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS

Imagine that you know that a major, but undefined, disaster will soon affect the earth, but that it can be averted if nations, non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations contribute sufficient resources to fight it. Imagine further that you are a leader empowered to decide how much your country or organization will contribute, but you don't know how much the solution will cost or what any other organization will contribute.

If you were a seventh-grader at Pelham Middle School, you would have been faced with that situation on Thursday, November 5 during a four-hour global simulation workshop. The workshop, funded by a \$5,200 gift from The Pelham Education Foundation, was provided by o.s. Earth, a Connecticut company that follows the model of a "world game" that originated with Buckminster Fuller, the architect, inventor and futurist.

A global simulation workshop is a live-action game that puts participants into the roles of global leaders who must find individual and communal success in a complex environment. In the view of Principal Joe Longobardi, the o.s. Earth simulation was "truly a dynamic experience that represented sound instructional pedagogies. Our children were clearly engaged in this activity as they used a multitude of skills to solve real world issues." The interdisciplinary approach to learning exemplified by the simulation fits perfectly with the school district's emphasis on building 21st century skills such as collaboration and creative problem solving.

At the beginning of the simulation, students were randomly assigned to teams representing either the media, a multinational corporation, an international human interest organization focused on health, education, human rights or the environment, or a geographic region, while teachers were assigned roles representing a global foundation. Students experienced the ways in which economic and political development are affected by factors such as financial resources, technology, education, environmental concerns, human rights issues and public perception. They were given tasks and asked to set goals, learned to collaborate and negotiate in order to achieve their goals, and assessed their progress toward meeting those goals.

Each team was assigned an initial development level, along with a set of challenges to be met in order to move to the next development level. In addition, each team faced at each development level an additional problem that could be solved only by working cooperatively with another team. At the end of each round, they saw that at one or more regions had managed to move up a level on the development scale. Observant students might also have noted that the simulation is a non-zero sum game: as some regions improved their quality of life, none moved down on the development scale.

The third, or "crisis" round, demonstrated the interdependence of world actors. Because of the large number of students, they were divided into two "worlds", participating in parallel simulations. When they were told of the impending undefined crisis and the need to pool resources to avert it, they achieved strikingly different results. The teams of one world managed to contribute far more resources than required to avoid disaster. The other world managed to contribute too few resources, and faced a year 2035 in which a shortage of clean water in Southeast Asia led to the spread of infectious disease, resulting in 45 million deaths and a 30 % decline in global wealth. During the debriefing session that followed the simulation, students revealed that, even though they had experienced global success through negotiation and cooperation during the first two rounds, not one team consulted another when facing a crisis.

The lessons from the simulation did not end when the simulation did. All seventh grade teachers spent an afternoon class period discussing the experience with the students. More importantly, they plan to infuse all areas of the curriculum with concepts pulled from the simulation. With the help of the educators from Sharpe Reservation, where all seventh grade students will participate in an outdoor education activity in the spring, the Sharpe experience will also build on the lessons of the simulation.

Mr. Longobardi plans, with Foundation support, to provide staff development opportunities related to the simulation, including a simulation for teachers. More immediately, the experience provided an opportunity for teachers to reflect on ways in which students learn. When the simulation began, teacher James Rogers noted, “students were in a state of confusion of how to best trade their cards, coins or stickers. Typically in the classroom, because of time constraints, we as teachers will usually intervene and push them in the right direction. Here they had to.... work out their own solutions. That was my favorite part of the experience, the students getting themselves out of a jam instead of relying on outside help.” Certainly teachers who participated in the global simulation workshop will be more attuned to opportunities to permit their students to do just that.