

Teaching about Global and U.S. Poverty Using the Internet

C. Frederick Risinger

The very morning that I started working on this column, the U.S. Census Bureau held a major news conference and released its report, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage: 2010*. The story was on the front page of just about every newspaper in the nation and headed up the hourly updates on CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, and other news stations. The statements were dire: *The New York Times* quoted Harvard economics professor Lawrence Katz saying, “This is truly a lost decade. . . . We think of America as a place where every generation is doing better, but we’re looking at a period when the median family is in worse shape than it was in the late 1990s.”

Just a few months earlier, the United Nations and the World Bank reported that 1.4 billion people live below the new poverty rate of US \$1.25 per day. That news was accompanied by stories of severe famine in Africa, Asia, and even scattered through Europe and the Americas. By comparison, the poverty rate for a family of four within the United States is \$22,314.

I know that it’s sometimes difficult to teach about contemporary issues in today’s rigid curriculum—with national, state, and local standards, combined with high-stakes testing. Yet most of us became social studies educators because we wanted to help our students become knowledgeable and participatory citizens. This means understanding the issues facing them—including poverty in the United States and worldwide poverty.

The websites that I have selected are just a small selection of those that

address both poverty within the United States and global poverty. I have chosen sites that I think will accomplish two things: (1) give teachers and students an understanding of poverty’s meaning, social and cultural causes, and impact on society; and (2) provide teachers with lesson plans and resources to help them integrate this controversial and sad topic into their curriculum planning. This topic is not easy to deal with and it has had a deep impact on me.

The U.S. Census Bureau

www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/pdf/2010_Report.pdf

This is the place to start for information about poverty in the United States. It’s the news release of the Sept. 13 news conference that accompanied the report. There is also a link to the full report, but the news conference has some great resources. You can actually go to the link on page 3 and download the Power Point

presentation and other helpful links. The slides would provide middle and high school teachers with some powerful information for class discussion or student projects.

The United Nations

www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/poverty2000/index.asp

The United Nations “cyber school bus” is a regular feature in the exhibits at recent NCSS Annual Meetings. I enjoy going through the bus each year and looking at the new resources. This address takes you to a “Poverty Curriculum” that includes 7 units, such as food, health, housing, and education. Each unit has an overview, a 20-minute classroom activity, a community service activity, and a group of Internet links that can be used for further information or group projects.

Illinois State Board of Education

www.isbe.state.il.us/homeless/pdf/Lesson_Plan_Links.pdf

One facet of poverty, both in this nation and around the world, is homelessness. It is estimated that 1 in 50 children in the United States is homeless. Imagine awakening in a car parked in a vacant lot and then going to school. The Illinois State Board of Education has collected a large number of resources and lesson

plans from other states and both private and public agencies that provide teachers with the tools to teach this often-neglected issue.

UNICEF

<http://teachunicef.org/explore/topic/poverty>

Worldwide, 21,000 or more children die each day from preventable causes. The United Nations Children's Fund provides children with clean water, nutrition, education, emergency relief and more. It also has some of the best teaching resources available on topics associated with poverty and deprivation. This link takes you to a collection of resources on poverty. They include unit and lesson plans for grades 6-8 and 9-12 and other resources for all grade levels. Their resources include videos, podcasts, and other media. They also have links to cartoons on a variety of issues and games that would appeal to children of all ages.

Lesson Planet

www.lessonplanet.com/

Longtime readers will know that I typically do not include sites that require paid membership. However, Lesson Planet has one of the most extensive collections of teacher developed and tested lesson plans. You can register and utilize all their resources for free for 10 days. If you find it useful, you can join for \$39.95 per year. I know teachers who have signed up ... and they renew. If you type "poverty" in the search box, you will be taken to a page of lesson plans, worksheets, and articles. You can also click on the "state standards" link and find out how various lessons match your state's standards. I saw several lesson plans that I would select to use.

Bright Hub

www.brighthouse.com/

Bright Hub is another collection of lesson plans and other resources, with a distinct focus on electronic/computer resources. There's no charge to use any

of the materials, but you have to tolerate a range of advertisements for technical gadgets. Type "poverty" in the search term box on the home page and you'll find a wide array of excellent resources including articles, biographies of people who have worked to alleviate poverty, and lesson plans. The first one on the list, "Teaching Children about National and International Poverty," makes a visit to this site worthwhile.

Teachnology

www.teachnology.com/

I wish I had learned about Teachnology a long time ago. For over a decade, the site has "been providing free and easy to use resources for teachers..." Typing "poverty" into the home page search box brings up a myriad of great resources including lesson plans, rubrics, worksheets, and other tools and resources. The lesson plan, "A Christmas in Poverty," based on *The Little Matchstick Girl*, by Hans Christian Andersen is very powerful. Even if you are not teaching about poverty, you should go to this website and check out its offerings.

This was not an easy column to write. When I was searching through Bing (my new favorite search engine), I hit "images" after typing "teaching about poverty." The images of poverty—both in the United States and throughout the world—are heart wrenching. Yet, this is our world. Hopefully, it's not too late to make changes. Zbigniew Brzezinski (still one of the most astute policymakers in the U.S.) said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" program the other day, "We cannot have a society where 1 percent owns so much and the refugees from the middle class are so deprived. This is a recipe for social conflict in addition to economic paralysis." 🌐

C. FREDERICK RISINGER is retired from the School of Education at Indiana University, Bloomington. He currently is working on two social studies writing projects, is developing a new website, and works two shifts a week as a bartender at a local microbrewery.

Crafting Freedom Workshop

"Crafting Freedom: Black Artisans, Entrepreneurs and Abolitionists of the Antebellum Upper South" or simply the **"Crafting Freedom Workshop"** is a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Landmarks of American History and Culture Workshop offered to K-12 educators in two sessions: **June 21–26, 2012** and **July 12–17, 2012**. The workshop provides a stipend for travel and living expenses and the opportunity to study the lives and works of individuals such as Thomas Day (1801–ca. 1861) a highly successful furniture maker and business man, and Elizabeth Keckly (1818–1907) a famous dress designer, author and social activist of the Civil War era. They, like other featured "freedom crafters," created opportunities and achieved greater freedom for themselves and others through their actions and ingenuity, through their works of art and craft, and through their spoken and written words. Visits to off-the-beaten-track black history landmarks enhance this one-of-a-kind learning experience in the North Carolina Piedmont. Application deadline is **March 1, 2012**. For more information, see: <http://thomasday.net/crafting-freedom-workshop>

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Doctoral Assistantships Available for Fall 2012

The University of Iowa College of Education has four doctoral graduate assistantships in Social Studies and Global Education starting fall semester, 2012. The assistantships include a 20-hr/week salary with health benefits and greatly reduced tuition.

The assistantships are for full-time Ph.D. students, renewable up to three years. The UI Social Studies and Global Education Program affords students opportunities as field supervisors, teaching assistants, grant writers, and outreach program coordinators in the field of social studies education with a global focus.

For more information:

www.education.uiowa.edu/teach/social/global/program-info

or contact: Professor Greg Hamot
Program Coordinator
gregory-hamot@uiowa.edu

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