Who Are We?

Section 1: Description of the humanities program or program series.

  Title of the program or program series.

  Explain the humanities theme or topic emphasized in the program.

  The program - entitled, **"Who Are We?"** - challenges multi-age classrooms of 7th and 8th grade students to explore the behavior of human beings in the past and present in a series of quarterly research projects. Utilizing print and online resources and multiple social networking tools, students work in small groups to research and create presentations of their findings about *topics exploring individual and collective human behavior and action.*

  Explain why you chose this program.

  Describe the planning process and collaborative relationships involved.

  In the fall of 2010 the school principal challenged the teachers of "specials classes" (library, technology, art, music) to design collaborative project-based quarterly projects that supported the curriculum and advanced the social justice element of our school's mission. We specials teachers worked together to integrate specific themes into our classes in the same quarters. The technology teacher and I agreed to design and execute the same projects in our programs concurrently and to establish a way of sharing library and technology student research findings with art and music students. We worked collaboratively to select content, resources, technology tools, assessment tools, and skills and knowledge that supported curriculum goals across various content areas.

  `**Describe in detail the program or program series.**

  Quarterly project themes are often connected to books or other media. For example, *If America Were a Village* by David J. Smith (Kids Can Press, 2009) served as the inspiration for a project in which student groups analyzed different aspects of the U.S. population (e.g. wealth distribution, immigration patterns, religions practiced, energy and water usage, languages spoken, poverty rates). In another quarter the film *Viva La Causa* (A Southern Poverty Law Center Teaching Tolerance Film, 2009) about the life and work of César Chavez inspired the project, "Power and Protest in America," in which students researched and compared and contrasted various protest movements in U.S. history. In

the third project, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," students analyzed and interpreted specific articles of the Declaration, identified places in the world where the rights guaranteed in those articles were being honored or not honored, reported on the impact of those realities, and explored actions that ordinary people can take to effect positive change in those situations. In the final project, "Individuals Who Stood Up to Power: A Biography Study," students explored the life and work of change makers, identifying characteristics and experiences that led them to stand up, exploring the views of their opponents, and describing their lasting legacies. Typical project information requirements include analysis of statistical information, compare and contrast of distinct events, analysis of inspirational quotations, the impact of human action on others, the identification of actions that have yielded positive outcomes for the community, connections between past actions and the present day, and connections to art and literature.

All information about each project is posted on a page of the school library website. This includes requirements, assessment rubrics, links to recommended resources and tools, model products completed by teachers, parent information, technology tool instruction, and links to student work. Students enrolled in library and computer classes create "research wikis" using Wikispaces.com as a workspace to organize the research process, organize research findings (information, images, citations, etc.), store documents (e.g. word processing, slide presentations) and share findings easily with others. Drawing from print resources and free and subscription online information sources, students create information products using PowerPoint, Voicethread.com, and/or Glogster.com. In some quarters art students reviewed student research wikis to find inspiration for visual artwork which was photographed and then integrated into the products of student researchers. Students access each others' final products online and provide feedback to each other using student e-mail or a Google-generated survey. All completed projects are posted in "the digital hallway" on the dedicated project page of the library website, making it easy for their work to be viewed and enjoyed by our school community and the wider community.

Assignments are designed in the framework of the Big6, providing students a process model for information solving that clearly defines necessary skills.

Section 2: Impact of program or program series in the humanities.

Identify the number of student participants. 130 7th and 8th grade students

Describe how the program features higher order thinking skills.

The projects are driven by essential questions, such as, "What is leadership?" and "What's worth fighting for?" and "What are human rights?" Addressing these questions requires students to go far beyond reporting research findings. Students analyze information from multiple sources, select the most relevant information, and organize it in a logical manner to create a compelling original product that meets information requirements, informs their conclusions about their selected topics and the shared essential questions, and persuades others.

Describe the benefits that ensued, including how you measured success.

Student work was evaluated for the purpose of grading using assessment rubrics. The rubrics analyzed the completion of content requirements, robust use of the research wikis for organization and sharing, and responsible use of information (i.e. quality of resources and bibliographies). Beyond that success was measured by the quality of communication and collaboration between and among students in the same and different classes, the extent to which the student learning experience was enhanced by their engagement in a wide variety of classmates' topics, the contribution of student products to the community's "the digital hallway," and the contribution of permanent artwork to the school grounds such as benches located throughout the school painted with words and images representing articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Involvement/awareness of parents, administrators and community leaders.

Parents pledge their support by signing a form indicating that they have read all information about the project. The administration made changes recommended by specials teachers about how students are grouped and scheduled to maximize outcomes. Community leaders have been interviewed by students on numerous occasions during the research process. Community members supported the hands-on work of art students.

Program is exemplary or goes beyond normal school library activities.

These projects require students to work collaboratively in various ways - integrating resources, technology tools, content areas, and skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) to create and share original digital products that stir passion.

Section 3: Relationship of the program to the curriculum.

Relationship to the school's curricular goals and to state learning standards.

The program supports our school's mission statement to educate students who "demonstrate social consciousness in a pluralistic world." Our school seeks to create world citizens who are bilingual, alert, informed, sensitive, community-minded, intellectually curious, and committed to social justice. This program seeks to raise consciousness and cultivate habits of mind that connect problems to solutions as students deeply explore past and present conflicts and challenges, identify patterns in human history and human behavior, and identify effective and peaceful courses of action to resolve conflict and solve problems.

ILLNOIS STATE GOAL 16 (Social Science): Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.
16.A.3b Make inferences about historical events and eras using historical maps and other historical sources.
16.C.3b (US) Explain relationships among the American economy and slavery, immigration, industrialization, labor and urbanization, 1700-present.
16.C.3c (US) Describe how economic developments and government policies after 1865 affected the country's economic institutions including corporations, banks and organized labor.

16.C.3c (W) Describe the impact of technology (e.g., weaponry, transportation, printing press, microchips) in different parts of the world, 1500 - present.

Incorporation of AASL's Standards for the 21st Century Learner
1. *Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge.* 1.1.1, 1.1.4, 1.1.6, 1.1.8, 1.1.9, 1.2.1, 1.2.6, 1.3.1, 1.3.3, 1.3.4, 1.3.5, 1.4.2
2. *Draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge.* 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.4, 2.15, 2.1.6, 2.2.1, 2.2.4, 2.3.1
3. *Share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society.* 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3, 3.1.4, 3.1.5, 3.1.6, 3.2.3, 3.3.1, 3.3.5, 3.4.2
4. *Pursue personal and aesthetic growth.* 4.1.7, 4.1.8, 4.3.1

Curriculum component./ How program goes beyond standard curriculum.

This program fits seamlessly with the 6th-8th grade theme, "We Are Scholarly Activists," the middle school portion of our unique "Curriculum of the Americas." These projects foster collaboration and dialogue about real world issues and struggles, address curriculum a wide range of curriculum standards including those unique to our program, and cultivate a spirit of citizenship and activism in our students.

Section 4: Replicability

A model for humanities programming in other schools.

All documents related to this project are posted in one place for easy access and download: http://iamslibrary.wikispaces.com/Archives The skills and content can be applied to academic areas including social sciences, language arts, or mathematics, providing a vast array of options for collaboration with classroom teachers. The content corresponds closely with many common learning standards and topics. These projects adhere to the practices of "conceptual learning" and can be adapted to many other themes (e.g. conquests, natural disasters, economic crises, peace movements, immigration waves, empires, discoveries). Any single project or any combination of projects can be executed.

Identify key components of the program essential to the program's success.

Key components include the support and involvement of teachers and parents, access to school computers, access to print and online information sources, and availability of social networking tools. All the social networking tools used in these projects are safe, available at low cost or no cost, require no downloads, and meet the criteria of our school district's acceptable use policy. This program requires scheduling that permits students to work on consecutive days rather than on a weekly basis. Use of portable devices is optional, but they provide the option of quiet spaces for making recordings.

Identify components that might need to be modified for use in other settings.

If scheduling doesn't allow students to attend library classes on consecutive days, students can locate and print research information on days when they do have access to online computers (such as during library or computer classes) and then later utilize that information in their content class periods (e.g. social sciences, language arts). Strategic scheduling of computer resources (using available labs or mobile equipment) is an option for completing the tasks that require access to computers. If this access is limited, teachers might consider low-tech options for student sharing of research findings (such as brief oral summaries of findings) and/or low-tech options for final student products. If social networking tools are not permitted by the district, educators might consider software-based tools such as Microsoft Movie Maker (a free download).

Section 6: Reflection and unexpected benefits

What would you change about the program?

As the "Who Are We?" program continues into the current school year with new projects, the main change has been an adjustment to how students are grouped and scheduled so that students are enrolled in library and computer classes during the same 10-week periods when they are enrolled in their social science courses, allowing for deeper and more robust collaboration between the librarian, the technology teacher, and the social sciences teacher. Further, we are executing a project completely in Spanish, which contributes greatly to our school's dual language mission. Finally, this year we are expanding the number and range of technology tools to be used for creating final products (e.g. Microsoft Movie Maker, Prezi.com).

What were some unexpected benefits or reactions to the program?

The individual project pages posted on the library website have created "virtual classrooms," rendering all project information, forms, and student work available anywhere at all times. The "digital hallway" has greatly increased the knowledge level and support of parents and increased student motivation. I have had impromptu conferences with parents made possible by accessing the project pages using a laptop or an iPad. Further, and more importantly, I see students more readily making connections and noting trends with regard to past and present events.

How did this program take the library to the next level?

This program has transformed the middle school library program (and by extension, all specials classes) from a once-a-week activity to a core element of the middle school curriculum. Because the content of this project is so well aligned with the curriculum and the values of our community, the library program is now considered vital to the mission of the school. This project series has cultivated cross-curricular integration and productive collaborative relationships among the middle school staff and the specials teachers. Discussions with parents before, during, and after project work have greatly elevated the awareness of and respect for the work in the library program. The steady, frequent use of free and subscription information resources and technological productivity tools in this program has expanded the awareness of parents and teachers and students of these resources and tools throughout the school community.