

HISTORICAL SIMULATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

BRINGING RACE AND SOCIAL CLASS TALK TO STUDENTS

Katie Campbell

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Trinity College, Hartford, CT

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Research Questions

- How does an historical simulation get students talking about race and socioeconomic class?
- In the creation of an historical simulation that addresses difficult topics, what steps must be taken to make it a valuable learning tool for students?

The Literature

- Technology in the classroom
 - Gredler
- Gaming for Students
- Race and class discussions in the classroom
 - Pollock, Tieken

Background – The Simulation

- The “Where Can You Find a Home?” Simulation mixes technology, such as Google Maps, with historical material, such as census data, newspaper articles, meeting notes, reports and more regarding the history of Hartford.
- The game is played in two rounds (1930, 1960) and players adopt a profile (defined racially and socioeconomically) on which they must make many decisions.
- Students strive to buy a home in each round, and must vote on important issues for their hometowns and the Hartford region between rounds.

Map Satellite Hybrid Terrain

Bloomfield

West Hartford

Hartford

East Hartford

West Hartford, Newly built Home for Sale
New Restricted Development available, units going quickly buy now

- 2) Hartford, \$25/month
- 4) West Hartford, Rent Reduced!
- 5) Hartford, \$30/month rental
- 6) Bloomfield, Farm and Farm house
- 7) Hartford, apartment for rent
- 10) West Hartford Apartment for Rent
- 11) Hartford, looking for roommate to help with rent
- 12) Bloomfield, Boarder needed, extra bedrooms in 3rd floor
- 13) East Hartford, Home for Rent or purchase
- 15) East Hartford Home for sale or rent
- 16) Bloomfield Home for sale or Rent
- 17) West Hartford, Newly built Home for Sale

“Where Can You Find a Home? 1930s simulation map

Jack Dougherty et al., “Preview: Where can you find a home?,” *On the Line: How Schooling, Housing, and Civil Rights Shaped Hartford and its Suburbs*, October 2010 preview edition. <http://ontheline.trincoll.edu/2010/10/18/preview-simulation/>.

Methods of Research

- 17 Participants
- Trinity Students (and one faculty member)
- Qualitative Survey data collection
 - ▣ Used to get statistics on a larger group of students, but also so that participants could answer qualitatively
 - ▣ All questions open-ended

Complication

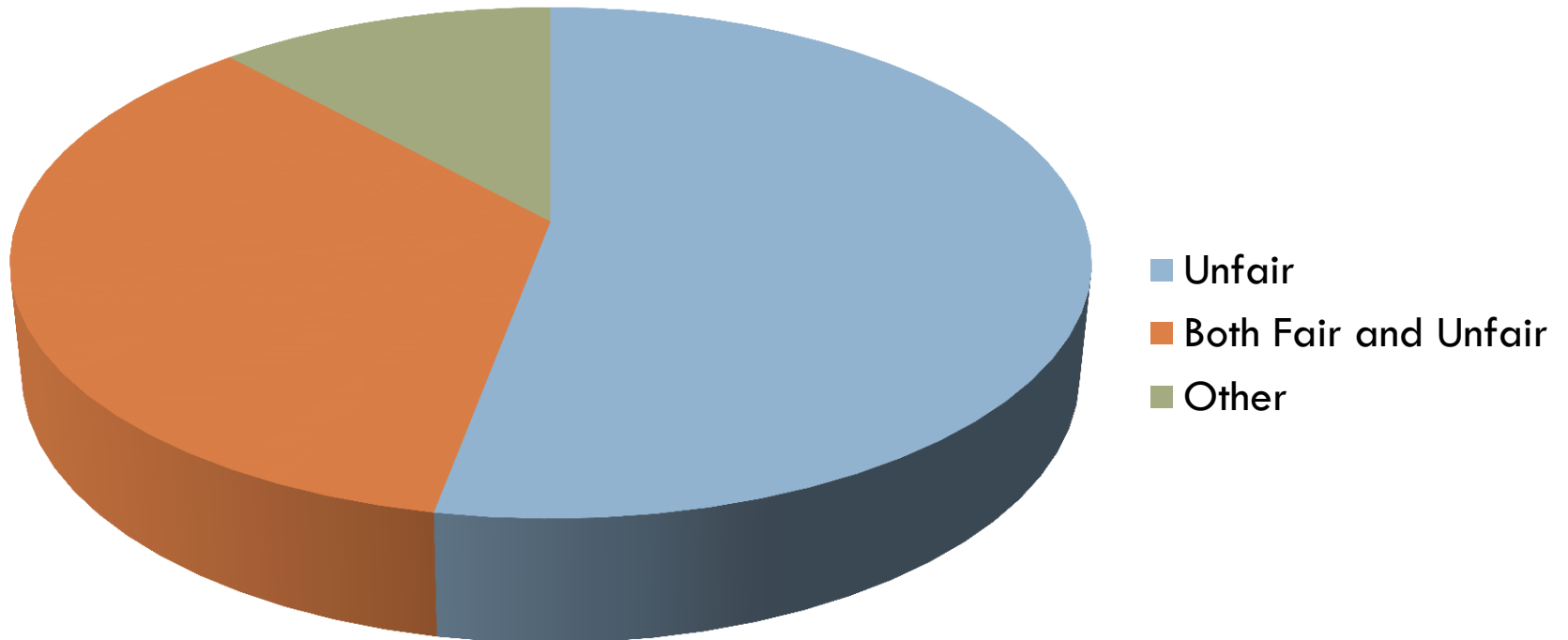
- Two separate groups took the survey after completion of the simulation.
 - ▣ Because I decided to restructure the survey between participant groups, I asked for additional information on the second survey. This means that for 6 of the participants, I have additional data about the participants' demographics.

Thesis, Part 1

- Students responded well to the material presented and believed that it was able to teach them new information about the Hartford area, especially regarding discrimination in Hartford

Data

Participant responses



Quotation

- “It [the simulation] was fair in the sense that the profiles were given out randomly, but there was no way that those with less income would have had more points in the end than those with higher income.” – Participant C

Thesis, Part 2

- Students were able to use the information represented in the simulation to describe their own experiences and to talk about their feelings about Hartford's history of race and class relations

Evidence

- 10 of 17 participants discussed the ways in which their own identity influenced the decisions they made in the simulations. While the 10 answers differed greatly about how the participants' identity influenced their decisions, all 10 agreed that it did.

Quotation

- “I come from a low income family in reality, so I felt strongly about issues such as zoning, non-discriminatory housing and affordable housing because it is something that is very real in my life.” – Participant H

Quotation

- “My character wasn’t particularly well-off, so housing decisions were based on that. The voting questions tended to be answered based on my personal identity as a Catholic and what I believe to be *morally* right.” – Participant Q

Statement

- Participant N stated that she actively disregarded her own identity in the decision making process because she felt that it was more important to be true to her character

Conclusions

- Historical Simulations have the potential to be an incredibly powerful tool in the process of teaching history, especially when teaching about discrimination (racial or class-based)
- Especially in Hartford, where we have discovered much evidence of historical discrimination, simulations that teach the students in Hartford about the history of their home can be a useful tool for talking about the past, present and what can be done to change these patterns in the future.

Where We Go From Here

- Revisions of the simulation, with the input of participants and my own observation will need to be made
- The simulation needs to be tested on High School students in the area to determine whether results will be duplicated
- Presentation of a more final simulation for classroom use to high schools in Hartford County

Quotation

“Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn a part of themselves.” ~ Chickering and Ehrmann