



Childhood Education

INNOVATIONS

July/August 2018

Art education and innovation

Engaging students with
foreign policy



Transforming school discipline

Reimagining library-school
partnerships

Cross-sector collaboration
to address barriers to education

Innovative pathway to
child care professionalization

Online education ecosystem

Development impact bonds
for girls' education

Embracing change at the
school district level



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Pedagogy With Purpose

Engaging students with foreign policy issues

An important goal for education innovation is to support the development of today's students into strong and committed global citizens. Innovative programs that build leadership skills and expand foreign policy understanding are critically important to our interconnected future.

Elizabeth Bishop and Myles Bittner
Global Kids

Global Kids (GK), a nonprofit operating in New York City and Washington, D.C., works to ensure that youth from underserved areas have the knowledge, skills, experiences, and values they need to succeed in school, participate effectively in the democratic process, and achieve leadership in their communities and in the world.

They are committed to providing positive youth development within the context of international affairs education.

GK provides dynamic opportunities for young people to engage with the most pressing contemporary domestic and foreign policy issues, while also focusing on culminating critical pedagogy. In this pedagogical space, students tackle policy issues that tap into their “critical civic engagement.”¹ During any given week, GK educator staff reach over 3,000 students across the two cities in school-day

and after-school programming. Over the past decades, community-based GK has emerged as a leader in the field of youth development in New York City, providing programming to public school students through classroom residencies and after-school youth leadership programming.

Overall, GK has reached more than 200,000 students and educators, receiving recognition throughout the United States for its exemplary practices in international education, digital media programming, experiential learning, and youth development. Our work is enhanced by our strong partnerships, including a dynamic collaboration with the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), a renowned foreign policy think tank. Each year, CFR hosts bi-monthly roundtables and an intensive three-week summer institute for GK youth. By discussing foreign policy issues with CFR Fellows, staff,



and other experts, GK students are able to explore pressing issues, ranging from nuclear proliferation and conflict stabilization to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the rise of China and India as major global powers.

The partnership with CFR is a unique access point to power players in public policy, and the fundamental pedagogy in the Summer Institute follows core principles of GK youth development strategies. In the words of one senior staff member, the program is a success because of the “belief that youth come to the table with knowledge that is already embedded in the philosophy of Global Kids.”

At the core of our work are programs focused on youth leadership development, youth civic engagement, human rights activism, and digital media projects. Beyond our classic youth development programming, GK’s Digital Learning and Leadership (DLL) program is on the cutting edge of addressing global issues through digital media learning, integrating international and public policy issues into digital media programs to encourage digital citizenship, new media literacies, and technical competencies. Whether in person or online, GK youth engage in a process of critical learning that fosters their global awareness and promotes civic participation. In the sections that follow, we discuss the core conceptual

frameworks that drive GK's pedagogy and what it means to cultivate leadership and global competency skills with youth from underserved communities.

Conceptual Framework: Global Citizenship and Human Rights Education

Since 1989, GK has worked to create an ever-growing network of diverse young people from historically under-resourced schools and underserved communities who have attained leadership at all levels of society and entered fields of international affairs and public policy.

GK integrates human rights education (HRE) by engaging in critical analysis on developing effective and sustainable global change. Much too often, although an HRE framework is present in policy, application is difficult when it comes directly from top-down education structures. Successful developments like that of mother-tongue education programs in Nepal² or India's 2010 Right to Education Act³ show the versatility and positive impact of global HRE efforts. Programs such as Global Kids can bridge the many challenging divides in education by providing a space for local and national cooperation.

Inside the HRE framework, the concept of global citizenship education (GCED) is key to providing a holistic perspective on education development. In their article, "Are WE the World? A Critical Reflection on Selfhood in U.S. Global Citizenship Education," Chenyu Wang and Diane Hoffman illustrate how GCED issues focus on the need for a conscious reflexivity to provide a space for educators and students to analyze issues that impact the current global educational climate:

To create and support a genuinely postcolonial global citizenship, it is imperative to question the centrality of global desires and constructions of universal values and selfhood that may underlie and potentially undermine even our best efforts at promoting global citizenship knowledge and activism.⁴

Continued conscious reflection allows for creative innovation toward strategies that advance the direction of education into the 21st century and beyond.

In examining successful examples of Transformative Human Rights Education (THRED) in models that foster local community engagement and create inclusive learning environments, we can clearly see the need for increased focus on organizations that use similar strategies.⁵ GK can incorporate HRE and global citizenship frameworks to introduce students to the most up-to-date techniques for addressing foreign policy issues. GK does this by working one-on-one with students and developing their global competencies to provide tools that last into the future.

A Dynamic Approach to Informal Learning

A few core components characterize the GK methodology, curriculum, and instructional practices. We ground our work in culturally relevant,⁶ responsive,⁷ and sustaining pedagogies⁸ by infusing best practices of positive youth development into promoting opportunities for youth critical civic engagement in their local communities and a wider global context. To do so, we frame an approach to GCED that foregrounds the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the SDGs. Through experiential education workshops and community events, GK provides a dynamic informal learning space where students develop as leaders through collaborative activities. While endless directions are possible for the further excavation of this methodological approach and core content, three significant nodes for further illumination can be discussed: (1) construction of a critical consciousness⁹ through (2) opportunities to become border crossers¹⁰ and operate as activists through forms of (3) radical healing.¹¹

- **Critical Consciousness.** The notion of "critical consciousness" is most overtly

associated with the work of eminent critical educator Paulo Freire. In his seminal 1970 text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire emphasized the importance of critical consciousness, or “conscientization,” as a means of “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.”¹² For GK youth, their critical consciousness is developed and articulated in relation to understanding the interconnectedness of local issues, such as access to quality health care, housing, and education, with larger macro political trends in relation to socio-economic justice worldwide. By learning about, teaching about, and campaigning around local issues with a global mindset, GK youth not only educate themselves, but also contribute to a larger discourse among their peers and in their local communities. Further, they assess and debate the ramifications of various practices to alleviate inequality and injustice while proposing solutions and engaging with local representatives, such as city council members, to advocate their positions.

• **Border Crossing.** Connected to critical consciousness in various ways, the notion of “border crossing” has important meanings in this schema. Critical educationalist Henry Giroux articulated the idea of border crossing as learning conditions in which “students meet to demonstrate the importance of a multicentric perspective that allows them to recognize and analyze how the differences within and between various groups can expand the potential of human life and democratic possibilities.”¹³ Giroux points to the various locales for learning in which cultural and political borderlands can be crossed. GK youth have numerous opportunities to interrogate intellectual and material borderlands, investigating the ramifications of free trade, sanctions, and other forms of economic organization. In doing so, they not only investigate and entertain new ideas, but also consider global ramifications, expanding their view beyond any nationalistic interests. GK youth who participate in international travel experiences

as GK “Youth Ambassadors” become literal border crossers, noting the significance such experiences have for their work toward becoming budding diplomats, policymakers, peer educators, and community organizers alongside other global citizens. One GK participant stated that her international travel experience “taught me how to empathize with people who don’t look like me; who have a different kind of struggle.”

• **Radical Healing.** Finally, GK youth frequently operate within the parameters of what the scholar Shawn Ginwright calls “radical healing”—a strategy, process, and approach to activism for social justice:

Radical healing as an ecologically responsive strategy highlights the socially toxic conditions in urban communities; the process for building the capacity for youth to respond to these conditions; and the ways in which social justice, agency, and resistance can contribute to individual, community, and broader social wellness.¹⁴

There is much to be explored about the learning that young people from historically under-resourced schools in New York City and Washington, DC, engage in as they seek to grow in their individual and collective development as global citizens. In a study of urban youth organizers engaged in struggles around issues of language privilege, youth voice, and social justice,¹⁵ youth reported that they were motivated to participate in various social and political action projects within community-based youth development organizations when they felt they were supported as growing activists; collaboratively involved in the direction, content, and purpose of their learning; and affirmed in their ability to use their voices and actions to design campaigns and projects. These youth activists believed they could successfully “get their word out” by creating workshops for peer education, making videos, engaging in public speaking, organizing, conducting outreach, and developing social actions and conservation techniques.



Video Alert



Global Kids in the News

Global Kids students from William Cullen Bryant High School in New York City were interviewed by the *Financial Times* to discuss why they participated in

the March for Our Lives in Washington, DC.

Watch the video on YouTube:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sg_fH83_DbM&feature=youtu.be

The skills involved in such activist and advocacy projects, conceived of across critical youth studies research as “civil literacies”¹⁶ and “critical civic praxis,”¹⁷ include working with others, building consensus, collaborative decision-making, interpreting public problems and taking action—all while promoting a form of collective efficacy.¹⁸ Yet little research has been conducted to illuminate the pedagogical practices youth engage in as they participate in local community learning and events within a global mindset.

The field of positive youth development with an overt sociopolitical framing is one of the few spaces that focuses simultaneously on the individual and the collective within a social and political context, providing youth with rare opportunities to engage in projects that can form the basis for their future organizing projects. A trend toward activism and organizing has emerged over the last decade in youth spaces, picking up where conventional civic engagement leaves off and allowing youth to identify common interests and mobilize their peers to work collectively to influence policy that affects their lives.¹⁹

Conclusions: Toward the Cultivation of Critical Diplomacy

Across the wide array of GK programs and across the K-12 spectrum, we work to cultivate the skills of negotiation and consensus-building and support explicit forms of diplomatic international travel as Youth Ambassadors. As we continue to evolve our practice, cushioned in the essential conceptual and pedagogical frameworks we discussed above, we are forwarding a model of ethical leadership to young people who have been historically left out of essential social, political, and economic conversations.

As an organization, we hold to the SDGs as an essential framing mechanism for working with youth from a wide range of backgrounds to pursue learning that promotes peace, conflict resolution, and understanding across spaces of difference. We will continue to create programs that engage students with critical foreign policy issues, focusing on exploring indigenous knowledge and self-representation among youth populations who have been historically marginalized. At GK, we provide a safe environment for students to engage in significant learning experiences about the most pressing contemporary global issues. With the help of our partners in schools, communities, and the arena of international affairs, we can continue to facilitate positive youth development that focuses on global citizenship and human rights. In an increasingly more connected world, we hold steady to the goal of cultivating dynamic youth leaders—both locally and on the global stage.

Notes:

- ¹ Kirsher, B., Stroble, K., & Fernandez, M. (2003). Critical civic engagement among urban youth. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 2(1), 1-20.
- ² Bajaj, M., & Kidwai, H. (2016). Human rights and education policy in South Asia. In K. Mundy, A. Green, R. Lingard, & A. Verger (Eds.), *Handbook of global education policy* (pp. 206-223). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- ³ Bajaj, M. (2014). The productive plasticity of rights: Globalization, education and human rights. In N. Stromquist & K. Monkman (Eds.),

- Globalization and education: Integration and contestation across cultures* (2nd ed., pp. 51-66). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- ⁴ Wang, C., & Hoffman, D. D. (2016). Are WE the world? A critical reflection on selfhood in U.S. global citizenship education. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24(55-59), 1-18. p. 14.
- ⁵ Bajaj, M., Cislighi, B., & Mackie, G. (2016). *Advancing transformative human rights education. Appendix D to the Report of the Global Citizenship Commission*. Cambridge, England: Open Book Publishers.
- ⁶ Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491.
- ⁷ Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, practice & research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- ⁸ Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- ⁹ Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- ¹⁰ Giroux, H. A. (2005). *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- ¹¹ Ginwright, S. (2010). *Black youth rising: Activism and radical healing in urban America*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- ¹² Freire, P. (1970). p. 35.
- ¹³ Giroux, H. A. (2005). p. 26.
- ¹⁴ Ginwright, S. (2010). p. 24.
- ¹⁵ Ardizzone, L. (2007). *Gettin' my word out: Voices of urban youth activists*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- ¹⁶ Flanagan, C. A., & Faison, N. (2001). Youth civic development: Implications of research for social policy and programs. *Social Policy Report: Giving Child and Youth Development Knowledge Away*, 15(1), 1-15.
- ¹⁷ Ginwright, S., & Cammarota, J. (2007). Youth activism in the urban community: Learning critical civic praxis within community organizations. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(6), 693-710.
- ¹⁸ Ginwright, S., Noguera, P., & Cammarota, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Beyond resistance! Youth activism and community change: New democratic possibilities for practice and policy for America's youth*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- ¹⁹ Kirsher, B., Stroble, K., & Fernandez, M. (2003).

Global Kids Blogs

DIGITAL LEARNING & LEADERSHIP BLOG

Global Kids' Digital Learning & Leadership (DLL) program (formerly known as the Online Leadership Program) leverages technology and digital media tools to teach leadership skills and to promote local and global community building opportunities for high school, middle school, and elementary school students.

ON THE GROUND: THE GLOBAL LIVES OF GLOBAL KIDS

The Global Kids Blog is dedicated to sharing the unique stories and perspectives of our Global Kids youth in high school and program alumni as they experience life after Global Kids.

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST PROJECT BLOG

The Global Kids Human Rights Activist Project (HRAP) addresses the absence of youth voices in the public policy decision-making process and trains youth to become human rights activists.

