



# How One After-School Program Prepares Students for the World

by guest blogger Heather Loewecke | December 6, 2014 12:16 PM

*Community organizations incorporate global learning into their afterschool programs in a number of ways. Here, Asia Society's Heather Loewecke interviews Katie Aylwin and Amanda Wells from [WHEDco](#), an organization committed to building a sustainable Bronx, to learn how they have included global components across their afterschool program from the mission to activities to staffing practices.*

## **Prioritizing Global Education**

*Heather:* How does global learning fit in to WHEDco's afterschool mission and approach?

*Katie:* Our afterschool mission is to provide a safe environment for students where they can develop positive attitudes about cultural, artistic, intellectual, and academic pursuits and that through the positive experiences they have with us, they will learn to have healthy social interactions and develop leadership skills and a sense of responsibility. In this [South Bronx] community, we have a growing West African population, a very large Latin American population, and an emerging Southeast Asian population. These different cultures blend together at our English-Spanish dual-language host school. It's easy for families to feel marginalized. We work hard to create an environment in which families and students feel supported emotionally, culturally, and academically. The diversity in the community allows for an easy and important entry point into global learning. We try to be as respectful and understanding as possible and educate ourselves and the staff about different cultures and perspectives in our community.

*Amanda:* We made global education a priority in our afterschool program because one of our primary roles is to expose youth to opportunities and experiences they otherwise would not have. We are located in one of the poorest Congressional districts in the country, so while the community is becoming increasingly diverse, the kids and families often stay around the institutions in their neighborhood and don't always get a broader world view as a product of their circumstances. We need to prepare ALL youth for the globalized world we live in.

### **Global is Engaging**

*Heather:* What are examples of global learning activities you do during afterschool?

*Amanda:* We try to integrate it into everything we do. One, we make it an obvious part of our program offerings: We have Latin Percussion and West African Dance. Two, we choose curricula that allow us to integrate global learning into all content areas. All students have English Language Arts (ELA) two times a week, so we choose books about global issues and diverse populations. We use [KidzLit](#), for example, which has a set of books about different cultures and communities. One STEM curriculum we use is [Engineering Everywhere](#). Each unit focuses on a different part of the world. For example, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders last year had to engineer earthquake resistant buildings, and they used the earthquake in Haiti as a jumping off point for that investigation. Third, we have two specific global learning programs: [PASE Explorers](#) and Project STEP. In Explorers, youth focus on their local community first because it's the world right in front of them: they start with their school, then community, then broaden to the entire city by looking at who is represented there.

*Katie:* Project STEP is our middle school social justice program. Participants learn about diversity and human rights, things going on at the UN, climate, neighborhood issues—the focus is on students' thinking about themselves as agents of change and giving them a voice in their community, their block, their school—wherever they envision. They have been looking at [The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), breaking down each human right and ways they impact students—for example, what it means to say that everyone *should* have access to food, housing, healthcare, and education and what that looks like for everyone [around the world]. It helps to connect students to global issues and discuss which rights should be given to every human being in the world

regardless of income, living situation, family structure, or race. For their projects, they've transferred some of what they've learned into workshops on bullying for younger students to help them explore [how they treat each other].

### **Infrastructure and Supports**

*Heather:* What infrastructure do you have in place, such as staff hiring and training practices, policies, or curriculum supports, to support high-quality global learning in your program?

*Amanda:* We look for very skilled facilitators. We hire specialists to run specific activities like ELA and Project STEP. Those people tend to have higher levels of education and teaching experience in both formal and informal settings [than non-specialist staff]. Some specialists have led social justice projects or taught in other countries. All staff attend trainings outside of the agency to learn best practices and exchange ideas. Project Explorers staff attend specialized trainings for that program.

*Katie:* And, we emphasize that all staff should make global connections [in their lessons]. Also, during staff orientations we are explicit that we only practice acceptance and tolerance, and if something comes up that people are uncomfortable with or that they are not aware of or that they don't know how to answer, it's okay to say they don't know. Staff are encouraged to bring those questions and issues to supervisors and ask how to address them.

### **Practical Advice**

*Heather:* What advice do you have for afterschool programs to help them with global learning?

*Amanda:* Decide it's going to be institutionalized at your program. For curriculum-based efforts, make the connection to your immediate community first. Kids learn developmentally, so start with what is right in front of them, and then help them make the leap to global issues. Also, take advantage of all the professional development out there because it's really about building staff confidence to have these conversations [with youth].

*Katie is the senior director of education and youth development and Amanda is the education coordinator at PS/IS 218 afterschool program for WHEDco. Heather is the senior program manager for afterschool and youth leadership initiatives at Asia Society. Follow [WHEDco](#) and [Asia Society](#) on Twitter.*