

# EDUCATING FOR OUR COMMON PURPOSE!!!

The critical role of schools in reversing the decline of democracy.



*“Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.”*

- JOHN DEWEY -

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## INTRODUCTION

In December 2023, a group of educators, students, civil society leaders, and academics gathered at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to address the challenge of how young people learn about the promise and challenges of democracy today, on a global scale and from a global perspective. The gathering aimed to co-create concrete recommendations for how to increase the number of students and teachers who are not only ready to teach for American democracy, but for renewal of democracy worldwide.

Concerns about the future of democracy brought urgency to the gathering. A recent poll of 18-29 year-olds in the United States shows that 64% of young people have “more fear than hope about the future of democracy in America” ([Study from IOP](#)). This trend extends beyond the United States; global opinion surveys show a declining public faith in the value of democracy, and the number of people who believe democracy is the answer to our current challenges is shrinking.



The threat of democracy in decline is real and getting worse—not just in the United States. Since we met, the updated Bertelsmann Transformation Index/BTI 2024 has outlined an even clearer picture of global democracy in crisis. In its introduction, Ralph Heck, Chairman of the Executive Board of Bertelsmann Stiftung, writes: “At no time in the past 20 years have so few states been governed democratically as today.” The Index’s country reports and data show that more and more countries are restricting political participation rights in particular - from free elections and the freedom of assembly to the freedom of expression.

The threats to democracy are global, but efforts to mobilize education reform to address the decline of democracy have been led in national silos. As an example, this convening built on prior work done in the United States that began in 2021, when a consortium of civic institutions responded to the call for strengthened democracy education. This response culminated in the creation of the Education for American Democracy (EAD) Roadmap—a dynamic, inquiry-based framework to support policy makers and curriculum creators in making civics education more effective.

Since the launch of this framework, the importance of international issues to the future of American democracy have become increasingly evident, as has the global need to reimagine school to serve students in our time of increasingly rapid change. The [History Co:Lab](#), as an implementation partner of the EAD and a close ally of [EuroClio](#), took initiative with [World Savvy](#) to catalyze an effort around expanding our understanding of democracy education with peers from across the globe.

This report summarizes a set of insights that emerged during the workshop. Sharing them publicly is an invitation to continue conversations, collaborations, and the thinking we need to re-imagine how education is designed so that it is the midwife for democracy in a global, interconnected world. We know that we must do so in collaboration with young people, and with a commitment to collaboration and creative, bold experimentation. In doing so, we have the chance of aligning the future of school with our common purpose as human beings on this our shared planet.

We invite you to read, comment and engage with us on the journey forward.

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## THE URGENCY FELT BY PARTICIPANTS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE TO RE-ENVISION DEMOCRACY EDUCATION CANNOT BE OVERSTATED.

**We opened with an acknowledgment that 2024 is a historic year, with more countries holding elections and more voters called to the ballot boxes than ever before in the history of humankind. And yet, wherever one looks, the fabric of democracy seems stretched dangerously thin, with worrying signals.**

**Democracy is in Decline.** As noted in several global studies, over the past four years, democracies have become a minority. 74 of the 137 countries surveyed in the Bertelsmann (BTI) study were considered to be autocracies, compared to 63 that qualified as democracies. With a decline in democratic systems comes a decline in governmental problem-solving capacity: *“Overall, a third of all surveyed governments demonstrated an incapacity to thoroughly and inclusively design and execute social development plans and to shape them in a flexible and adaptive manner,”* the BTI 2024 reads.

**Young People are increasingly disappointed and skeptical.** With access to a constant stream of information, young people today are aware of the many threats facing our world, from the existential dangers of climate change and the unknown impact of AI, to persistent inequality and the challenging reality of displacement and migration. Everywhere in the world, young people are expressing profound disappointment in the democratic structures and systems that have failed to deliver both solutions to problems and the promise of equal opportunity, justice, and freedom. Full of anxiety but also full of ideas and passion for change, they experience systems in schools and their community that do not provide room for them to develop and share their agency and voice.

**School needs to be redesigned to prepare and engage youth.** As our youth participants underscored, civics—to the extent that it is taught at all—is often perceived as a disingenuous overlay to a system that fails to deliver relevant learning, engagement and belonging. Curriculum is detached from the core issues facing the communities in which they live and standard teaching models fail to help them thrive as learners. In order to renew and restore democracy, we must look at improving not just one subject, but the entire experience and design of teaching and learning.

**History matters.** The gathering’s historians underlined that as memories of World War II fade, so too does the sense of obligation to prevent the horrors that totalitarian and authoritarian regimes perpetrate. Schools have lost their focus—to the extent they ever had it—on preparing all young people to identify and combat the dangers of authoritarianism, apathy, and tribalism. At the same time, schools are struggling to address the complexities of their nations’ history, including atrocities committed in the name of democracy.

As schools fail to make the teaching of democracy engaging for all, they fail to prepare a gifted generation of diverse, curious, and creative youth to be the engineers of renewed democracies. The participants reflected on what could be done within their own institutions and collectively to shift the norm in democracy education from teaching a civic status quo to children, to leveraging schools as spaces to both co-imagine a brighter gain the tools necessary to create it.

# What do we mean by transforming democracy education?

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Over two days, participants surfaced a series of principles that could inform a youth-centered, future-focused, democracy-strengthening educational paradigm. Three themes run through these principles:

## 01. NEW MINDSET

Informed by insights from the **science of learning and development**, adults must embrace a mindset of seeing and trusting every young person as a learner, contributor, and creator.



## 02. CONTENT

We must examine the **content** we are offering to ensure it is relevant for young people and provides the context they need to create solutions for the challenges in their communities: locally and globally.



## 03. EXPERIENCES

Our **systems and pedagogies** must be designed to engage young people and enable relationships that provide students with the guidance they need to thrive and grow.

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*“Everything we do as educators is an act of optimism. We show up to work, every day, believing in our purpose as midwives to a better future.”*

- RACHEL HUMPHRIES -

## Embracing a youth-centered mindset

### PRINCIPLE 01: DEMOCRACY BEGINS WITH BELONGING

Civic education initiatives often begin with catalogs of what young people should know or do. It rarely acknowledges how adults must approach young people so that they feel the desire to engage.

Because of increased migration, schools world-wide are serving the most diverse student populations they ever have. For these students to thrive, our schools must be places of belonging for all. [Dr. Pamela Cantor's](#) spark-talk on the biology of learning underscored the centrality of belonging for student well-being, academic success, social cohesion, reduction of prejudice, healthy identity development, and mental health support.



### BUILDING BELONGING REQUIRES MORE THAN A LESSON PLAN

Adam Strom from [Re-Imagining Migration](#) shared research on how to deliver a sense of belonging for all students which includes:

01



Prioritizing the building of strong teacher-student relationships.

02



Developing and re-enacting culturally responsive curriculum in which students are able to see their lives in what they are learning.

03



Creating welcoming and inclusive school communities in which all students and their families feel seen and valued.

One way to connect these efforts is through story-sharing projects like the Moving Stories exercise that we engaged in on the first day of the convening. Participants reflected on various methods that they know of (including World Savvy curricula) that can be used to build belonging in schools—including creating connections among students and between their students' lives and broader academic, civic, and social dispositions.

#### ACTION

Create welcoming environments in which students from all backgrounds can thrive.

For specialized resources see [reimaginingmigration.org](https://reimaginingmigration.org)

## PRINCIPLE 02: DEMOCRACY IS ABOUT ACCESS TO POWER AND AUTHENTIC AGENCY

In order to learn democracy, students have to have the chance to live it. As participating students from [UnTextbooked](#) and [Global Nomads](#) emphasized, if student voice and passion are stifled, there is no way they can grow up feeling like they have agency. Democracy thrives when diverse voices and perspectives are actively integrated into the fabric of societal decision-making. Landon Mascareñaz shared his recent work on [Open Systems](#), underscoring the importance of creating “brave spaces” that foster humanity, dialogue, and the emergence of new voices, particularly those of young people. These spaces are essential for young individuals to understand and engage with the concepts of power and responsibility in a democratic society. They offer opportunities for active participation, where everyone, regardless of background, can contribute to shaping the future.



### BRAVE SPACES FOR ENGAGEMENT

The participants discussed the challenge of industrial and hierarchical school systems that do not provide an environment encouraging open, honest dialogue and risk-taking. They discussed the need to create brave spaces in communities, designed to support educators and community members as they navigate complex discussions, allowing them to express themselves fully and learn from diverse perspectives. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of democracy as a living, evolving system that benefits from the active participation of its constituents.



### EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATION

There is a critical need to get more creative about providing ways for young people to engage in real-world problem-solving and decision-making processes. The group discussed the need for hands-on experiences to demystify the concept of power and illustrate the impact of individual and collective action. By engaging directly with community issues and contributing to solutions as advanced by Peace First, [World Savvy](#) and the [Bill of Rights Institute](#), young people learn the value of their voices and the importance of taking responsibility for their part in a democratic society.

#### ACTION

Give students agency in their own learning.

## PRINCIPLE 03: THE HISTORY OF DEMOCRACY IS OFTEN WRITTEN IN BLOOD

Democracy is designed to be the form of government that guarantees all people the possibility to express and fulfill their full human capacity and creativity. And yet, in their creation, development and transformation, democracies almost always carry stories of trauma, conflict and the suffering of human beings. Blood is shed when democracies are established on the rubble of a former model of government. It is shed when there are struggles over whose voice should be heard in the halls of power. It is shed when peoples' bodies are violated for being seen as inferior or for economic gain. The histories that some celebrate as foundational to the establishment of democracy, are sometimes seen by others as tarnished by conflict, violence, and injustice.

### THE BURDEN OF HONEST PATRIOTISM

The group reflected on this painful truth, and voiced a shared interest in supporting educators in addressing the complexity of democracy's history in age-appropriate ways. There is a fine line to be walked for educators in framing the complex legacy of the past. They must find a tone that is both honest and truthful, honors multiple perspectives, and yet one that inspires hope and possibility rather than a sense of futility. As noted in [Educating for American Democracy](#) (EAD)'s design challenges, honest patriotism is hard, and educators are rarely equipped to hold and convey this complexity, particularly in politically charged environments.

### POWER OF COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

Participants emphasized the power of historical and cultural institutions to support schools and educators in holding some of the weight of this challenge, and discussed examples of museums enabling discussions on the complexity of history that would not have been possible in a textbook-based classroom setting.



### ACTION

Acknowledge the harm done to human beings in the name of democracy in the past.



## PRINCIPLE 04: DEMOCRACY EDUCATION MUST BE INFORMED WITH GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

For any nation seeking to revitalize its democracy education, civics must encompass a worldwide perspective. This entails broadening the scope of civic participation to include global movements, understanding different governmental systems, and recognizing the worldwide implications of social and demographic transformations. By exploring these themes through a global lens, students can grasp the interconnected nature of democratic movements and the collective effort required to address global challenges, fostering a deeper appreciation for the shared responsibility in upholding democratic values across borders.

### GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE

The discussions underscored the significance of recognizing the global ripple effects of local civic actions. Historical events like the Arab Spring, the international movement for the abolition of slavery, and the suffrage movement serve as potent examples of how civic participation in one region can inspire and ignite change in others, demonstrating the interconnected nature of our global society. Indeed, through social and traditional media, local events can instantly ignite calls for action by millions of people around the world. Education has to prepare young people to both respond to these events and make informed civic choices in response.

### DEMOCRACY AS A TERM CAN BE MISUSED

Some of the least democratic regimes call themselves a democracy, think Democratic Republic of Congo. Many authoritarian regimes are trying to keep an aura of legitimacy by calling elections that are not fair, e.g. Russia, Azerbaijan. As we engage students in a comparative analysis of democracy, we must help them differentiate between labels and lived reality.



### ACTION

Introduce more global perspectives to democracy discussions, and introduce discussion of democratic models and implications to the study of global issues.

# PRINCIPLE 05: DEMOCRACY IS A DYNAMIC AND GLOBAL HUMAN PROJECT

**Democracy is not a static construct. It's a topic of vibrant study, discussion, analysis, and debate. People of all ages around the world should be able to critically review a range of definitions, rationales, principles, objections, and alternatives to democracy, informed by historical cases and philosophical arguments from diverse contexts and perspectives.**

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The participants underscored the importance of understanding civic participation and democracy through a comparative lens, highlighting the diverse ways in which individuals engage in democratic processes across different cultures and nations. This comparison should not only celebrate the variety but also identify common threads that unify disparate experiences of civic engagement, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic worldview. Particularly in a world on the move, in which classrooms are often full of young people and educators with many different origin stories, it is imperative to frame the rationale for democracy as one that spans cultures and borders.

## NARRATIVES AND MYTHOLOGIES

The stories we tell about democracy deeply influence our engagement with it. By critically examining the narratives and mythologies surrounding democracy, we can uncover underlying biases and assumptions that shape our civic participation and realize how broad the cultural heritage of democracy truly is. This reflection can allow young people of all identities and backgrounds to find a narrative connection of their own self to civic duties in collaboration with others.

## DEMOCRACY IS FRAGILE

When we recognize that democracy is dynamic, students must also discuss the fact that democracy can be overthrown by democratic means. The classic example is the Weimar republic, but there is a growing list of global democracies that are trending toward autocratic leaders promising simplicity in a time of complexity.



## ACTION

**Critically examine and engage with narratives and debates around models and theories of democracy.**

## PRINCIPLE 06: INTEGRATING DIVERSE NARRATIVES

The dominant narrative of most democratic societies was designed at a time in which many voices and experiences—of women and people outside the social elite—were not acknowledged, and many of those voices remain sidelined in the historical framing of power and democracy in schools. This presents an existential problem in a time of demographic change, for if what they learn about history leaves students feeling excluded, they have no chance of seeing themselves as authors of history’s next chapter.

### INCLUSIVE, VARIED NARRATIVES MATTER

The group stressed the importance of incorporating the voices and stories of traditionally marginalized groups into the educational narrative, enriching students’ understanding of their own national history and that of other nations. [#MeWeInternational](#) and others shared their approach to supporting students in embracing practices of storytelling and listening so they develop a deep appreciation of diversity as a democratic strength. Educators are urged to include diverse narratives throughout their teaching so students graduate ready to engage with the world with openness, respect, and a genuine appreciation for the richness of cultures and traditions that are embodied in our classrooms and communities.



“All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.”

- JOHN F. KENNEDY -

**ACTION** Intentionally and consistently include diverse narratives.

## PRINCIPLE 07: GLOBAL DEMOCRACY RELIES ON A SHARED SET OF HUMAN COMPETENCIES, MINDSETS, AND DISPOSITIONS

At a time when there are myriad national and international efforts to define the skills and competencies graduates will need to navigate the job-market of the future, centering a definition of future-readiness in the concept of individual and collective human dignity and thriving is crucial. The group reflected at length on the critical skills required so that all young people can, as the [History Co:Lab](#) framed it, “step into their role as makers of our shared history,” and become a prepared and oriented global citizen. [World Savvy](#) and [EuroClio](#) share the competency models that form the basis of their work in democratic citizenship development, and the group workshopped a list of the ones that some celebrate as foundational to the establishment of democracy, are sometimes seen by others as tarnished by conflict, violence, and injustice.

### KEY DISPOSITIONS

**Curiosity, cultural humility and a sense of interconnectedness are pillars of global democratic education**

These dispositions, along with competencies like critical thinking, effective communication, and collaborative problem-solving, are indispensable for students to engage thoughtfully and constructively with global issues. Prioritizing these attributes within the education system is crucial for nurturing students who are not only academically proficient but also equipped with the mindset and skills necessary for active, empathetic participation in a global democracy.

### KEY NECESSARY MINDSET

**Democracy requires hard work**

Students must realize that there is no version of a thriving democracy in which citizens can choose to not participate.

U.S. President Barack Obama once adeptly defined citizenship as a being *“about what can be done by us together through the hard and frustrating, but necessary work of self-government.”*

SPEECH 7TH NOVEMBER 2012

## PRINCIPLE 07: KEY COMPETENCIES, SKILLS + DISPOSITIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

We looked at a variety of excellent national and international competency frameworks, including from XQ, [World Savvy](#), the OECD and the Council of Europe. We discussed the need to focus in on the competencies and dispositions that provide the basis for human thriving in connection with others and allow for engagement with the complex challenge of renewing democracy.

### CONNECTING WITH SELF

#### Self-awareness, self-worth and self-esteem

Recognizing one's own value and building self-esteem, recognizing that of others.

#### Managing emotions

Awareness of body and emotions, to value what your body and heart are telling you, and managing emotions, not getting rid of.

### CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

#### Perspective talking

The ability to see things from different viewpoints, actively integrating perspectives from around the world.

#### Honor diversity

Valuing the power of diversity to support sustainable decision-making.

#### Understanding interconnectedness and interdependence

We are only whole as individuals when all can be whole.

#### Empathy

Understanding and empathizing with others.

#### Cultural humility

Valuing people even in the presence of disagreement and respecting diverse cultures.

### EXPLORING + ACTING

#### Curiosity + Inquiry

Recognizing the need to seek knowledge and context and to ask questions.

#### Moving from understanding to action

Translating knowledge and understanding into practical actions.

#### Being bold as a problem-solver

See how you can take action to solve problems.

#### Understanding

how practices and systems create justice.

#### Communication skills

Effective communication, including listening, storytelling, and group decision-making.

#### Non-violence

Promoting peaceful and non-violent approaches to conflict resolution and societal change.

#### Building resilient communities

Recognizing the need to make amends when necessary, building trust and accountability.

#### Information literacy

Acquiring and working with information effectively.

### ACTION

Direct learning with a focus on building global competencies that help students better to understand themselves, their relation and responsibility toward others, and to use and broaden their agency.

## PRINCIPLE 08: YOUNG PEOPLE NEED EFFECTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES THAT BUILD THESE COMPETENCIES

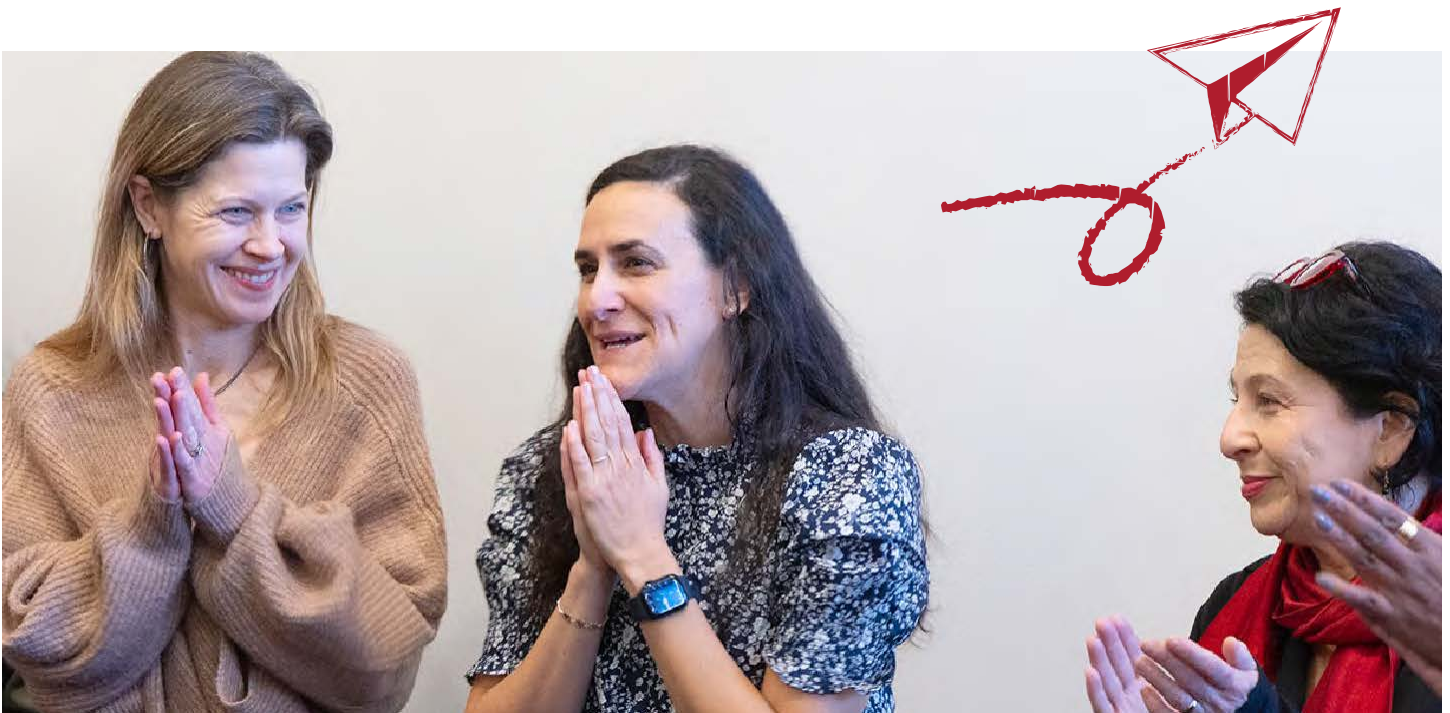
Learning science has come a long way in understanding why some experiences are effective at building competencies and curiosity and others are not. Creating emotionally safe spaces for risk-taking, providing hooks to create relevance and spark curiosity, facilitating authentic and relevant projects in community, utilizing play-based learning practices, and encouraging iteration and reflection on learning processes--things that excellent teachers have done for decades--have been scientifically proven to support learning for students. This knowledge is not yet integrated into standard preparation of educators, creating an urgent need for deep professional learning.

### THE POWER OF PLAY

Several participants, including from [Education for Sharing](#) and [iThrive Games](#), drew on expertise in using play to develop democratic knowledge, competencies, and mindsets. The group shared myriad examples of play as a powerful tool for activating people as empathetic and curious learners, including role-playing and simulations, when done correctly and with great caution to not cause or reinforce trauma.

### THE POWER OF PROJECTS

Civic projects are often rather narrowly defined as projects connected directly to activism or voting. Participants underscored that there are a wide variety of experiential projects that contribute to nurturing civic competency, and created a rich list of experiences that they have seen used to great effect (e.g. World Savvy's Knowledge to Action projects, or History Co:Lab's Community-Connected Projects).



# PRINCIPLE 08: MODEL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Participants discussed the importance of ensuring that all young people have experiences that are proven to develop these competencies, mindsets and dispositions. They shared from their own lives and practices a set of experiences that can have a deep and lasting effect on helping young people develop specific skills, if mindfully designed and executed.

<p><b>Culinary Cultural Exploration</b>  <b>GLOBAL AWARENESS, CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING</b>            Students explore global cultures through culinary experiences, such as visiting local international restaurants or preparing dishes from various countries, deepening their understanding of diversity and interconnectedness.</p>	<p><b>Local Global Tours</b>  <b>CULTURAL AWARENESS, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</b>            Organizing walking tours to explore the diverse cultural landmarks within their own communities, helping students recognize and appreciate the multicultural aspects of their local environment.</p>
<p><b>Digital Storytelling Exchange</b>  <b>EMPATHY, COMMUNICATION SKILLS</b>            Using digital platforms for storytelling, students engage with “Zoom pals” to share and listen to personal stories across borders, fostering empathy and global awareness.</p>	<p><b>Linguistic Immersion Challenges</b>  <b>LANGUAGE SKILLS, ADAPTABILITY</b>            Activities that place students in situations where they are linguistic minorities, to experience and navigate the challenges and emotions of communication barriers.</p>
<p><b>Virtual Home Visits</b>  <b>CULTURAL SENSITIVITY, PERSPECTIVE TAKING</b>            Websites like The Dollar Street.org offer virtual tours of homes around the world, allowing students to visually and empathetically engage with different living conditions and cultures.</p>	<p><b>Place-Based Learning</b>  <b>ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY, HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION</b>            Integrating local history, ecology, and culture into the curriculum, students learn through the lens of their immediate environment, making connections between their community and wider global issues.</p>
<p><b>Role-play and Simulations</b>  <b>CRITICAL THINKING, PROBLEM-SOLVING</b>            Activities like Model UN or historical simulations enable students to adopt different roles, encouraging empathy, perspective-taking, and understanding complex global and historical dynamics—to be done with great care!</p>	<p><b>Reflections Journal</b>  <b>SELF-REFLECTION, METACOGNITION</b>            Maintaining journals where students reflect on their learning experiences, particularly those related to empathy, cultural understanding, and community engagement, enhancing metacognitive skills.</p>
<p><b>Human Library</b>  <b>ACTIVE LISTENING, EMPATHY</b>            This project involves people serving as ‘books’, sharing their life stories with students, thereby humanizing diverse experiences and fostering deep listening and empathy.</p>	<p><b>Transformative Learning Projects</b>  <b>CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS, PERSPECTIVE SHIFT</b>            Using threshold concepts to design projects that challenge students’ existing perspectives, encouraging deep reflection and a shift in understanding.</p>
<p><b>Emotional Literacy with Story Dice</b>  <b>EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, SELF-AWARENESS</b>            An activity where students roll dice with different emotions depicted and then express or create stories based on the emotion shown, enhancing emotional intelligence and self-awareness.</p>	<p><b>Youth Journalism Projects</b>  <b>CRITICAL THINKING, COMMUNICATION SKILLS</b>            Students act as journalists, exploring and reporting on local stories, fostering critical thinking and enhancing communication skills as they learn to present information clearly and ethically.</p>
<p><b>Community Problem Solving</b>  <b>CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY, COLLABORATIVE SKILLS</b>            Students identify and engage in projects that address real problems within their community, applying critical thinking and collaborative skills to find practical solutions.</p>	<p><b>Authentic Story Sharing</b>  <b>STORYTELLING, COMMUNITY CONNECTION</b>            Activities where students share personal stories or narratives from their community, emphasizing the power of storytelling in building connections and fostering empathy.</p>
<p><b>Peer Teaching</b>  <b>KNOWLEDGE SHARING, MUTUAL RESPECT</b>            Encouraging students to teach each other about topics of personal or cultural significance, promoting an exchange of knowledge and fostering mutual respect.</p>	<p><b>Cultural Exchange Projects</b>  <b>GLOBAL COLLABORATION, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION</b>            Partnering with schools in different countries for joint projects or exchanges, enabling students to directly engage with peers from diverse backgrounds.</p>

## PRINCIPLE 09: GLOBAL DEMOCRATIC AWARENESS GROWS IN LOCAL CONTEXTS

**Our histories as human beings are interconnected, and we as a species are always on the move. This means that what might seem like remote or abstract global issues always have local salience and can be explored within familiar surroundings.**

### LOCALIZED GLOBAL ISSUES

Participants emphasized the necessity of creating learning experiences that connect students' immediate environments to global issues, encouraging them to understand their roles and responsibilities within a broader international community. By integrating global perspectives into local narratives, educators can foster a sense of global interconnectedness and responsibility, encouraging students to act as informed global citizens who appreciate the impact of their local actions on the world stage. World Savvy, for example, has pioneered this kind of pedagogy in districts across the nation for over a decade, creating opportunities for students to connect through research and action with global issues. Global Nomads has brought global groups of young people together to design learning experiences that bring global perspectives into learning design, and E4S has designed play to help young children connect with global challenge.

### SEEING HISTORY MATTERS

Having enjoyed an early morning trip to the John F. Kennedy Library and Presidential Archive, thanks to its President and workshop participant Alan Price, a sub-group brought fresh examples of the full-body activation of curiosity that can be made possible by interactive spaces that hold artifacts.

### ANY STREET MIRRORS WORLD HISTORY

Any street can hold global history. Since many educators are constrained by resources or geographic access to museums, global concepts can be made visible in cobblestones and street signs for engaging students in learning about the dangers of hate. An example for this kind of youth-led, place-based learning is the toolkit created by [EuroClio](#), advised by [The History Co:Lab](#) and participant Viola Gyorgi, enabling students anywhere in the world to design local projects that connect their hometown to the history of the Holocaust.



#### ACTION

**Make more explicit connections between what is learned at school and experienced at home. Provide more robust opportunities for young people to make deeper connections by analyzing, comparing, and contrasting local and global issues.**



# PRINCIPLE 10: DEMOCRACY RELIES ON UNLOCKING EVERY CHILD'S FULL HUMAN POTENTIAL

In a session that deepened reflection on what it means to build belonging in schools, [Dr. Pamela Cantor](#) shared insights from the field of epigenetics and the biological basis of learning, emphasizing that a mere 10% of our DNA is expressed and that the activation of specific genes is heavily influenced by the environments, relationships, and experiences that individuals are exposed to. This scientific perspective underpins a powerful argument for the education system's role in creating the conditions necessary for all students to thrive and engage. Participants discussed the need for professional learning to help educators shift their mindset and translate this science into practice.



[Click here to watch Dr. Pamela Cantor's full video](#)

## CREATING NURTURING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Participants discussed the paramount importance of creating nurturing environments for all children, fostering the kind of positive experiences and relationships that can stimulate growth and thriving. There was a consensus on the need for schools to become spaces of inclusivity, empathy, and holistic support, enabling every student to tap into their inherent potential. The impact of empowering relationships: The conversation further delved into the critical role of relationships in the educational journey. Participants shared examples and strategies for fostering relationships characterized by mutual respect, understanding, and trust within schools, thereby democratizing the learning process and ensuring that education serves as a true catalyst for unlocking every individual's full potential.

## ANY STREET CAN HOLD GLOBAL HISTORY

The conversation further delved into the critical role of relationships in the educational journey. Participants shared examples and strategies for fostering relationships characterized by mutual respect, understanding, and trust within schools, thereby democratizing the learning process and ensuring that education serves as a true catalyst for unlocking every individual's full potential.



### ACTION

Create space for relationships and experiences that release the hormones needed for cognitive and emotional thriving.

# Strategies for Transformation

As the group wrapped up, there was an acknowledgment of the need to include more voices and perspectives in these discussions to ensure an even more holistic and inclusive approach to democratic education. Brimming with positive energy and a genuine desire for more collaboration and interaction, participants expressed enthusiasm for meeting again, and expanding opportunities for small group discussions and casual conversations. They expressed a shared sentiment of wanting more time to connect and network, suggesting extending the conference and activities and incorporating more flexible programming to allow for spontaneous exchanges.

The summit culminated in a set of actionable strategies for embedding global competencies in education. While the plans crafted are contingent on this group's ability to raise funds, the ideas for collective action included the following:

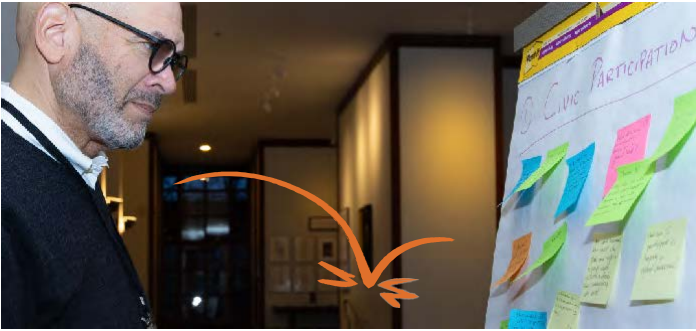
- 01** Activating and catalyzing a global and trans-sectoral network to ensure that preparing young people to be innovators for democracy becomes a core priority for education systems world-wide.
- 02** Convening a global youth summit on innovation and imagination for democracy renewal, leveraging existing models and networks and providing the foundation to center youth voice in all of our work.
- 03** Creating a library of replicable democracy learning experiences and methodologies that are proven to work.
- 04** Fostering continued innovation and experimentation through collaborative pilot projects to ensure that we expand our imagination on how to nurture democratic citizens and to help good ideas scale across the network.
- 05** Define metrics of success, capture impact and shift narrative through powerful storytelling.



*“The big intellectual model of democracy cannot be separate from the body. All of us, educators and young people, have to figure out how to feel the promise of democracy, as a sense of joy, freedom and connection that gives us strength.”*

- SUSAN RIVERS, PhD -

# Hopes and Commitments



The group ended the session with a collective call to build on the ideas generated during the conference to explore ways to implement these ideas in practical, actionable forms. There was a call to funders to support more convenings, research, and collective action to further these goals and transform education in alignment with the realities of a globalized world.

The summit demonstrated the power of weaving possibilities and hope, through alignment on goals, discussion of challenges, and deep human connection. The insights and commitments generated during the summit are a call-to-action for expanded collaboration toward preparing students not only as citizens of their nations, but as proactive, compassionate participants in a global democratic society.

The fragility and failure of democracy to deliver its promise of justice and equality, is a global challenge. The same is true for the rise and return of populism and authoritarianism. Therefore, we need to get the perspective of learners from across the world, and work with actors around the world, who share our beliefs, and are willing to invest their time and energy to be part of the change.

## PERCEPTIONS

# 92%

RECOGNIZED THE STRONG  
POWER OF PLAY TO HELP CONVEY  
COMPLEX CIVIC CONCEPTS

# 96%

MADE A NEW CONNECTION  
THEY ARE HIGHLY LIKELY TO  
TAKE FORWARD

# 84%

LEFT FEELING EXCITED  
TO COLLABORATE ON BUILDING  
GLOBAL COMPETENCIES

# 92%

RANKED IT CLOSE TO OR  
AMONG THE BEST CONVENINGS  
THEY HAD EVER ATTENDED

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### **DISCLAIMER**

*This report is a summary of discussions held during a workshop and is intended for informational purposes only. The opinions and views expressed within this document are those of the participants as a collective and do not necessarily reflect the individual perspectives of any specific attendees or their affiliated organizations. While every effort has been made to accurately represent the discussions and outcomes of the workshop, the accuracy, completeness, and relevance of the information contained herein cannot be guaranteed.*



**Join us to reverse the decline in democracy.**

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