globalcities inc.
A PROGRAM OF BLOOMBERG PHILANTHROPIES

Top Ten Questions to Ask About Global Digital Exchange

Companion to The Future of International Digital Learning K-12

Adapted from a Presentation to U.S. School Districts At the Global Cities, Inc. Symposium, May 12, 2016, New York City

By Marjorie B. Tiven

Top ten questions to ask about global digital exchange

Companion to
The Future of International Digital Learning K-12

About

Global Cities, Inc., a program of Bloomberg Philanthropies, works to cultivate the next generation of global citizens and to improve how cities across the world connect and communicate. Its signature program Global Scholars connects 10,500 students ages 10-13 to one another through a shared original curriculum and a secure e-classroom. There is no charge to schools for participation in Global Scholars. For more information, please visit www.globalcities.org.

Marjorie B. Tiven is Founder and President of Global Cities, Inc., a program of Bloomberg Philanthropies. From 2002 through 2013, she served as New York City Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for International Affairs, under the administration of Michael R. Bloomberg.

globalcitiesinc.
A PROGRAM OF BLOOMBERG PHILANTHROPIES

Why this list?

The civic leaders and educators who convened in New York City at the May 12, 2016 Global Cities, Inc. Symposium discussed the need to build global understanding into K-12 education. (Full participant list on page 9.) One challenge they identified is the plethora of products and services on offer. School leaders who want to incorporate global perspectives into the classroom face a vast array of options. Many products and services tout the word "global," but these differ significantly from one another. Even the categories are different. Some focus on professional development for classroom teachers, either in person or online, such as Global Kids and VIF International Education. Others prioritize curricula about global issues for teachers to access on their own, such as AFS Teacher's Toolbox, Bridges to Understanding, and TeachUNICEF.

The Global Cities Symposium focused on another category: **providing curricula plus actually connecting groups of students in e-classrooms through a global digital exchange.** Taking advantage of social media culture and the widespread availability of computer devices with internet access, digital exchanges allow educators to expand their classrooms by connecting to classes in distant cities. Tech-savvy, direct peer-to-peer learning programs can develop student skills in investigating the world, recognizing perspectives, communicating ideas and taking action—the four skills identified by the Asia Society and the Council of Chief State School Officers as the core capacities of "global competence."[1]

Symposium participants—including chief academic officers, ministers of education, and principals from 25 urban U.S. school districts, as well as representatives from Barcelona, London and Warsaw—shared their first-hand experience with international digital exchange as an increasingly accessible opportunity to enlarge their students' world. They explored benefits to students and teachers and shared tips for implementation success. A key point was that the needs of school districts vary, so no single digital exchange program can be the right fit for every school. Global digital exchanges also vary in what they do, how they operate, and whom they connect; one size does not fit all.

In order for education leaders to make the most of the opportunity for schools to connect and collaborate globally, it is necessary to understand how programs differ and exactly what they do offer. At the Symposium, four cities—Barcelona, Ft. Lauderdale, Miami and New York City—discussed how they implemented our Global Scholars program.
Three other global digital exchanges—Out of Eden Learn, Kizuna Across Cultures, and Reach the World—presented their models.

The questions below were developed as a guide to help education leaders ask the critical questions about any digital exchange on offer. While each question is important, we inverted the order to put special emphasis on question Number 1. (Hint: it has everything to do with finding the right fit.)

---

[1] *Boix Mansilla and Jackson, "Education for Global Competence: Preparing Our Youth to Engage the World," Asia Society and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2011.*

10 Who is being connected?

Confirm with whom your students are being brought together, where the other parties are located, and what is the organizational structure. Global Scholars brings together students living in urban areas in the United States with students living in urban areas in cities worldwide in multi-city e-classrooms. Out of Eden Learn follows the unique seven-year walk of journalist Paul Salopek along the migratory paths of our earliest ancestors, bringing together K-12 classes from the United States and other countries in age-appropriate, geographically-diverse, digital "walking parties." Reach the World connects classes in the United States each with a traveler abroad. Kizuna Across Cultures connects Japanese language classes in the United States with English language classes in Japan.

9 How old are the students your schools want to engage?

Programs target different age groups. Before computing power made it possible to connect classrooms digitally, student exchange programs meant study abroad and were geared mainly to college students. Digital programs offer a different kind of opportunity, which can also be eye-opening, for students as young as pre-kindergarten. The Global Scholars program is for students ages 10 to 13.

8 How does the program make its matches?

Do they bring classes together with their peers? If so, is one school in the U.S. matched with one school in another country? Or is one class connected to classes from several countries? Or, is a class matched with one adult, such as a traveler, journalist, or teacher? Yet another model focuses on bringing together students from particular regions, such as linking students from regions of conflict with students across national borders.

7 What are the costs?

The major cost should be teacher time—for preparation, professional development, and for leading and monitoring the classroom. Some programs have no additional cost; some charge a fee. Further investment in technology should not be needed. More about this in question 3, below.

6 What's being exchanged?

Stories? Foreign language instruction? Skills to discuss difficult topics with peers from other cultures? Solutions to global problems? The most robust programs have a clear curriculum and focus on specific subject matter. Be sure to look into the details of what students will be studying or sharing in order to advance your larger education goals.

5 What is the purpose?

Look carefully at the program's stated goals, both immediate and long-term, and how they align with your educational vision. Some offerings have multiple goals. For example, Global Scholars uses a curriculum about an important global topic, but mastery of the subject matter is only one objective. The broader purpose is global citizenship, in particular building the skills of "global competence" cited above (investigating the world; recognizing perspectives; communicating ideas and taking action, Boix Mansilla, 2011).

4 How does the digital exchange actually work?

Most are asynchnonous, not live. They don't take place in real time for obvious reasons, such as different time zones and school schedules. Students connect by posting to multimedia discussion boards in an e-classroom on a digital platform. They log on, post, and receive responses in due time. Some programs also use real-time connection technology (Skype, WebEx) on occasion.

Other operational questions: Is the program led by classroom teachers? Can students sign up without the guidance of a teacher? Confirm that there is a curriculum, and ask to review the content. A few programs do not provide a set curriculum, but work instead with schools to fit digital exchange experiences into their existing curricula.

Ask about the pedagogical approach. Is it project-based learning? Does it emphasize problem-solving and critical thinking? Since working in a digital classroom is new to many teachers, an important question is how the classroom teachers are supported. What does professional development look like? Is it live and interactive? Does professional development include training in the digital tools students will use? What are the means for assessing student work? Ultimately, you want to identify the full package that best supports your teachers and students.

3 **What technology is needed? First, hardware.**

Be skeptical and investigate carefully any suggestions that you need to spend more money for technology. Most likely, whatever hardware and reliable high-speed internet service you already have will work for digital exchanges. If your students have access to a computer or tablet, and have a reliable internet connection, they have enough for asynchronous exchanges. The platform itself should not need to be downloaded.

In some instances, live connections are also used. This may be for occasional Skype meetings between classes. Or it may be to bring teachers together for professional development via WebEx. In some models, the live connection is an integral part of the program, bringing together students via videoconference to discuss a subject they have been studying together, distantly, through a common curriculum.

If a program features a live connection between U.S. students and students in another country, then it is important to ask whether specialized videoconferencing software, or a higher bandwidth, is required. But even a live component doesn't necessarily mean costly products. Free services such as Skype and WebEx may not be the same quality as high-end products for sale, but most of the time, they do the job of connecting people online adequately—whether teachers from a dozen cities on WebEx for professional development, or classes from two distant cities meeting via Skype.

Next, software. The technology considered thus far is what you need to connect to classes globally. Separately, what about the tools used in an e-classroom to participate and communicate ideas? Some digital exchanges use more tech tools than others, depending on the program model and the capacity of their digital platform. More tools should not mean more cost. There are downloads for an array of products for graphics, multi-media, and video and audio editing.

Another tech question concerns your state's technology standards. It would be helpful to know if your state mandates use of certain technology skills to achieve curricular goals. Then you can determine whether a particular program can help meet that mandate. Why not show how global digital learning is also advancing state goals?

Security and privacy are important to consider. Is the platform password protected so no one outside the program can sign in? (That's why we do virtual tours and why you cannot visit the Global Scholars e-classroom uninvited.) Is the classroom moderated? By whom? And for what? What student information is required? Is online safety addressed directly as part of the curriculum? Before you enroll your students in a digital program, these are some of the security questions to consider.

2 How much time is required?

What is the duration of the program, and how many hours a week are required? In terms of calendar time, there are global exchanges of varying lengths – from short-term to full-year. There may be a weekly time requirement on the part of the program, such as a minimum of two hours a week for the full academic year. But the answer to how much time it takes each week, and where that time comes from, depends on figuring out question Number 1...

1 Where and how does it fit?

Schools fit digital exchange programs into their curricula in different ways. It depends on how educators view these opportunities. Here are four examples from the program we know best, Global Scholars.

In Medford, MA (Boston metro), four teachers integrated Global Scholars into the social studies curriculum in all 7th grade classes for the full year. In Fort Lauderdale, FL, when the Chief Academic Officer convinced principals that this work is not a frill, unconnected with day-to-day learning in schools, it led to an enormous jump in Global Scholars enrollment and integration into classes including English Language Arts, world history, science, global perspectives and critical thinking. In Barcelona, a key feature to integrating Global Scholars is a cross-disciplinary approach including two to four subjects, coordinated by the English teacher. The subjects might include math, science, history and/or art. Several London schools piloted Global Scholars as an afterschool program, and then decided to move it to the school day the following year as a required interdisciplinary class.

The decision about time and fit belongs to the school leaders. You know your district, and your schools, best. Principals and teachers can be very creative about finding time and devoting attention, if they feel that a program fits their curriculum and will capture their students' enthusiasm.

These ten questions should arm you with the information you need to see what programs might bring this new and exciting form of global education, digital exchange, into your schools.

California	Oakland Unified School District
	Corona-Norco Unified School District (Riverside County)
	Los Angeles Unified School District
Florida	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
	Ft. Lauderdale/Broward County Public Schools
Georgia	Clayton County School District (Atlanta)
Maryland	Baltimore County Public Schools
	Baltimore City Public Schools
Massachusetts	Boston Public Schools
	Medford Public Schools
Missouri	St. Louis Public Schools
Nevada	Clark County Public Schools (Las Vegas)
	Washoe County Public Schools (Reno)
New Jersey	Newark Public Schools
New York	Buffalo Public Schools
	New York City Department of Education
North Carolina	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
Pennsylvania	School District of Philadelphia
Rhode Island	Providence Public Schools
Texas	Austin Independent School District
	Aldine Independent School District (Houston)
	Houston Independent School District
Utah	Granite School District (Salt Lake City)
Virginia	Richmond Public Schools
District of Columbia	DC Public Schools

Attendees
Global Cities, Inc. Symposium, 2016

Lisette Alves	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
David Andrews	National University
Frances Arricale	Global Cities Advisory Board
Scott Bailey	Washoe County Public Schools
Martin Bates	Granite School District
Desiree Peterkin Bell	Democratic National Convention Committee
Preeti Birla	New York City Department of Education
Roy Belson	Medford Public Schools
Elizabeth Bender	St. Louis Public Schools
Robert Brazofsky	Miami-Dade County Public Schools
Kriner Cash	Buffalo Public Schools
Julia Charles	Los Angeles Unified School District
Eric Contreras	New York City Department of Education
Paul Cruz	Austin Independent School District
Dallas Dance	Baltimore County Public Schools
Stacey Davis	Baltimore City Public Schools
Traci Davis	Washoe County Public Schools
Rosemary DiCarlo	Global Cities Advisory Board
Devin Dillon	Oakland Unified School District
Liz Duraisingh	Out of Eden Learn
Verna Eggleston	Bloomberg Philanthropies
Ester Fuchs	Columbia University
Daniel Gohl	Broward County Public Schools
Thomas Golden	Global Cities Advisory Board
Bill Gray	Global Cities Advisory Board
Heather Halstead	Reach the World
Michele Henriquez	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
Sarah Holloway	Columbia University
Andrea Kane	Richmond Public Schools
Joshua Koen	Newark Public Schools
Ebony Lee	Clayton County Public Schools
Michael Lin	Corona-Norco Unified School District
Cheryl Logan	The School District of Philadelphia
Meg Louis	Global Cities, Inc.
Christopher Maher	Providence Public Schools
Kate McNamee	District of Columbia Public Schools
Montserrat Montagut	Catalan Regional Ministry of Education, Barcelona
Fran Newberg	The School District of Philadelphia
Michael Nutter	98th Mayor of Philadelphia
Mònica Pereña	Catalan Regional Ministry of Education, Barcelona
Sara Ptomey	Aldine Independent School District
Fernando Reimers	Harvard University, Global Cities Board
Missie Rennie	Global Cities Advisory Board
David Rose	District of Columbia Public Schools
Linda Rosenbury	Brooklyn Urban Garden School
Farhan Shah	Houston Independent School District
Shanti Shoji	Kizuna Across Cultures
Ayako Smethurst	Kizuna Across Cultures
Nancy Soderberg	Global Cities, Inc.
Shari Tishman	Out of Eden Learn
Marjorie B. Tiven	Global Cities, Inc.
Sir Craig Tunstall	Gipsy Hill and Mayflower Federations, London
Jesse Welsh	Clark County Public Schools
Bartosz Wilimborek	Warsaw Centre for Socio-Educational Innovation and Training
Ross Wilson	Boston Public Schools

Notes