



Hyla Goes to Costa Rica

Kim and Laura will present at the ACEI Global Summit on Childhood to share Hyla’s methods for inspiring youth activism and leadership.

When an international audience gathers next spring at the Global Summit on Childhood, hosted by the Association of Childhood Education International (ACEI), they will learn about Hyla: our culture, our teachers, and the many ways our students are learning to be leaders, global citizens, and change agents for social justice.



The theme of the summit is “Creating a Better World for Children and Youth through Sustainability, Social Innovation, and Synergy,” and will explore the role of childhood in ensuring a positive human future during a time of rapid change and increased global connectivity.

It started with an invitation to the summit. “But when we saw the title of the event, we knew we had to do more than attend,” said Laura. “Given all the work that Hyla does to educate and encourage youth leadership and activism, we knew we had something important to share.” Kim

submitted a proposal for a presentation called “Global Goodness: Emerging Leaders in the Middle School Years,” which was accepted this fall. Their presentation will draw on examples primarily from eighth grade work in Global Goodness

class to show the importance of creating venues for students to fulfill their inherent desire to learn, create community, and affect change in the world around them. “This experience is really a celebration of what all teachers do at Hyla, across the board,” said Kim. “To have our work recognized internationally is incredible and we’re honored to represent our Hyla community.”

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While Global Goodness will be the focus of the presentation in Costa Rica, “it is one example of the many unique opportunities Hyla teachers create to inspire leadership and activism in our students,” said Kim. Vicki adds that everything from “alternative energy projects in Science, to the subtlety of cultural awareness taught in Spanish, to collaborations with schools in Myanmar, to micro-lending through Kiva in an Elective, to working with Hope by Twelve, to Mini-Term – all are great examples of how global education and engagement happens at Hyla. And of course everything students learn in Human Relations builds the skills they will need for collaborative problem solving.”

Hyla has a long tradition of providing a blend of experiential and democratic learning for students. “We know this is how students recognize their potential to instill change

and become life-long visionaries and ambassadors of a better, healthier world,” said Kim. Hands-on experiences and democratic classroom practices - such as class meetings, and class jobs - create a learning space where students are expected to participate and take responsibility for their learning.

In Global Goodness class, these methods help students approach global issues from a different perspective. Colleen, Kim and Laura, who co-teach Global Goodness, ask students to look beyond the Band-Aid charity approach, and encourage them to think collaboratively about sustainable solutions. This means that students actively practice the critical skills they will need for their entire adult lives. “The world is so connected and changes so fast that we’re

beyond a need for just awareness," cautions Laura. "Students are learning to ask not what they can do for someone, but rather what can they do with someone. When we learn to look beyond our "nice" intentions, we begin to ask very different questions, and then it becomes a collaborative process of solving together – it changes the entire mindset, and opens up new ideas and possibilities." When students are encouraged to ask different questions about global issues, they become aware of the broader, interconnected systems around those issues. This awareness reveals new action plans, ones that are about changing systems, not just treating symptoms. "One of the big things we teach is that we have to work together," said Laura. "We are not isolated nations with isolated challenges. We have common struggles and therefore the solutions to those issues will be shared, much like what happened with climate change in Paris." Students are exposed to many real-world scenarios of this model. For example, Colleen is an alumni role model whose direct experience working with the Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Island Association is another example of what it means to work with someone to instill change.

The presentation in Costa Rica is possible because of several key elements, starting with years of creative collaboration between Kim and Laura. Their working partnership is fueled by a shared passion about and dedication to global education. They are able to do this work at Hyla because teacher passion is respected, encouraged and appreciated for the value it brings to the entire community. And it is work – teaching democracy requires ongoing commitment from all faculty to fully engage students, offer them independence, and guide the responsibility that comes with it. "When you engage students in this way, you have to be flexible to what they bring," says Laura. "No matter what you have planned, you have to listen to the kids. You may have the best lesson plan in place, but you have to hear their excitement and respect where they are going. You have to be able to let the plan change to allow for deeper understanding."

The presentation in Costa Rica will tell the story of a school culture that demonstrates a commitment to democratic values through sustained effort, every day. It's the story of Hyla's fundamental belief that middle school students have a tremendous capacity to learn, understand the world, and generate solutions. It's the story of our teachers, and ultimately a story about our students: the people who will soon be voters, policy makers, leaders, and change agents in a complex world.

