

Summary of the June 2022 AERO (Alternative Education Resource Organization) Conference

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Abstract

This article summarizes the 2022 AERO (Alternative Education Resource Organization) conference. Presentations available at <https://www.aeroconference.org/registeredattendees>.

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The June 2022 **AERO Conference** was, as participants are saying, "The best AERO yet, how does it get better every year?", AERO2022 was absolutely phenomenal! Each year seems to get better and better!!! From the feedback, we received so far, the diverse, multigenerational speakers, and topics were the driving force of the conference. There was plenty of content at this year's conference, highlighted by the most youth presentation we ever had.

The conference began with a welcome by Peter, Jerry, Addie & Jay. The sessions got kicked with Kayley Chery's (who stepped in at the 11th hour) powerful presentation on - Centering the Black Narrative in the Environmental Justice Movement.

[Raheen Fatima](#), & Kurt Krueger followed with ideas for the future of education.

From there, an exciting set of workshops were given by [Ymorah Blakeney](#), Safania Wright, Katryna Alexis, [Laurel Tien](#), [Ashley Nielsen](#), Peter Gray, Gina Riley, and Gabriel Groiss

During the break time, we were very fortunate to have a special drop-in session by Katerina & Dosha from [One Crazy School](#). They described the situation in Ukraine, and how

they and their school community are able to continue on. You can donate using the links on the last side.

Shortly after, [Ava Mateo](#) & [Apoorva Panidapu](#) gave mini-talks on the liberating power of peer-to-peer education, and how youth can leverage online platforms to start a business.

[Dayna Martin](#) then joined us for her powerful Keynote talk on parenting and unschooling. She was followed by [Kate Robinson](#), who presented a Keynote on finishing her father's (Sir Ken) manifesto "Imagine If". Dayna joined us the next day during one of the break times just to chat with whoever was there.

After a break, we came back to a fascinating Keynote given by Mark Jacobs of [Longview School](#) on the potential of using virtual reality for self-directed education.

The day/night was wrapped up with two important mini talks given by [Jay Bates](#) (one of our youth organizers) on domestic violence during virtual learning, and Michael Maser on the important legacy of Brent Cameron.

The second day began with a bang when Kyla Avery (AERO youth organizer), told the story of how her decision to not stand for the pledge impacted her and her school.

Addie Lentzner (AERO Youth Organizer) joined us from her vacation and gave a powerful talk on equity in American education.

After Addie's talk, another set of workshops were facilitated by [Laurel Tien](#), [Amanda Cottrell](#), [Je'anna Clements](#), [Sheen Tyagi](#) & [Jerry Mintz](#)

[Sophia Benavente-Sayani](#), took time from her event in Washington, D.C. to present on how youth can lead service projects with a focus on gender equality. This led us to the panel discussion by the [Liberated Learners](#) alum, where they shared their experiences and what they've been up to.

After a short break, [Dr. Ulcaa Joshi Hansen](#), presented her unique, thought-provoking keynote session on the future of smart. A foundation of this conference was its multigenerational nature. Which was reflected in 16-year-old Zakia Irfan presenting right after Ulcaa, on maintaining good mental health while engaging in many activities.

We weren't finished yet! [Peter Gray](#) presented his incredible keynote session on hopeful signs that education evolution is accelerating. There is a lot of hope. Day 2 was brought to a close by a courageous, inspiring teenager, [Crystal Widodo](#). Crystal shared her personal journey and her thoughts on how the education system can support student mental health.

The last day of the conference decided to throw us a curve with two workshop presenters falling ill. Jerry filled in and led a session on the democratic process, Praja Ticko conducted his session on how students can impact the future using design thinking, and Monica Cochran facilitated a well-being workshop for adults. Before the workshop sessions got started Peter Gray graciously gave us more of this time by hosting a Q & A session.

Shortly after the workshops, [Ssannyu Lukoma](#) treated us to a session on how she started her own business to bring more diverse literature to students of color. Immediately after [Swami Ramchandra Das](#) presented his Keynote session on the spiritual life and the integral education.

Then it was time for [Dammy Balogun's](#) session on youth transformational leadership in SDG's. After a brief pause, [John Wall's](#) session on giving children the right to vote was a perfect follow-up and segway into the next set of workshops. These diverse workshops were led by [April Huard](#), [Hope Wilder](#), [Mariola Strahlberg](#), Miruna Braescu, & [Adriana Vasile](#).

There was still more to come! [Moses Ssekyanzi & Mariam Natasha](#) joined us from Uganda and shared the story of their work with youth, and how they inspire youth to take action.

Highlighting the diversity of presenters and topics, [Frank Edelblut](#) Commissioner of Education for the State of New Hampshire, spoke about educational opportunities and innovations for students in NH.

Addie & Jay our youth organizers perfectly brought the conference full circle. They engaged us in a conversation about ways youth and adults can support each other in taking action. We were fortunate to get feedback from conference participants who remained and we have good ideas for our next event and happenings. One thing we know is that we will have more break times.

Sadly, it was time for us to say goodbye, until next time, to all of our friends around the world.

I am still buzzing from what is certainly our most unique and diverse conference. A few more thoughts from our conference participants. "I left feeling inspired, hopeful, excited and fired up to take concrete actions toward educational alternatives. I can't wait to continue to be a part of AERO conferences in the future and remain in touch with the many amazing people I met." "I loved that you brought different people that are not the same from the SDE circle." "I was amazed by the young people and how AERO keeps finding such inspirational speakers. AERO keeps getting better!

A very special thank you to our youth organizers Addie Lentzner and Jay Bates, for their presence, help with organizing, and sacrificing sleep to be part of this conference.

None of this happens without all of you and the life-changing work you do. With deepest gratitude, love and respect to all of our presenters and participants. Thank you

for making this event what it was and for being a part of AERO and the education revolution.

Acknowledgements

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