Content education is becoming less important than teaching children to understand and empathize with diverse individuals, thus supporting their ability to fully understand the context of challenges affecting the world and collaborate on solutions.

One Globe Kids is a new and unique way to engage the youngest global citizens. Developed by the nonprofit Globe Smart Kids, the program is also part of global competence research being conducted by the University of Kent in England. Through simulated contact, using digital play, stories, and activities, it offers intercultural experiences that feel like a pretend play date.
Confidence in Contact Is the Foundation of Global Citizenship

People around the globe generally feel safest interacting with individuals from groups that are familiar to them, whether the group is characterized by religious belief, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, etc. Unfortunately, that means they generally feel less safe interacting with people from different groups. This ancient fight or flight instinct often leads to discrimination, segregation, hate, and violence within and between societies across the globe. It is an instinct that no longer serves us in the 21st century, when the world’s most pressing issues can only be solved by working together.

Interacting with someone from another group influences our attitudes toward them. When it’s a good experience, you’re more likely to choose to repeat it. Over time, this not only positively affects your view of that group but also makes you more positive about other groups you don’t yet know.

The One Globe Kids program was created to tackle “othering” before it begins, working closely with researchers in intergroup contact in young children to explore the roots of global citizenship: confidence in contact with others who are not in your group (yet).

Bias Starts Young, Global Citizenship Education Often Late

By 6 years of age, children frequently demonstrate an implicit preference for those in their familiar groups and bias against those in other groups. Once that preference exists, if left unchallenged, it will remain relatively stable across children’s development. Yet in this age and time, we are all born as global citizens. Even those who never leave their communities can find the world close to home. The preference for one’s own group and against others limits a child’s preparation for the diverse world she will enter. Not only will it subtly influence choices made throughout life—whom to befriend, whom to help, where to live, whom to trust, whom to hire, whom to elect—it will also directly affect her ability to feel safe and to thrive as a global citizen.

The One Globe Kids program is designed to make positive intergroup interactions appear attractive and doable for young children. It lays a foundation for next steps in exploring the world, before students go online, participate in virtual exchanges, go on school trips, and learn languages and study abroad. This foundation will help them collaborate successfully across all kinds of boundaries to take on global issues like the ones defined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

From Global Education to Local Friendship
Research has found that children with diverse friends have higher levels of social competence and increased self-esteem, well-being, and resilience. They also tend to be better at perspective-taking, which makes them better able to understand how children around them feel and more likely to think race-based discrimination is wrong. Interestingly, the research even indicates that children with cross-group friends show more leadership potential and are more popular. These children have the confidence, skills, beliefs, and experiences that encourage them to engage positively with cross-group peers. The trust, empathy, and emotional closeness shared by friends make cross-group friendship the most powerful way to reduce bias and prejudice between groups.

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Unfortunately, the opportunity to form cross-group friendships during childhood is often limited. If cross-group friendship is not an option, other strategies can provide the foundation for understanding and empathy. Children at school age are at a formative phase when imagination and imagery are key components of how they learn about the world. At a very young age, they start to notice differences in people and very often they develop different attitudes about those in their group vs. those in a different group. Introducing positive experiences with others while these differences are being recognized and opinions formed is key. A child’s ability and motivation to imagine, and even step into, worlds beyond their own is immense. It’s the perfect window of opportunity to encourage cross-group friendship. When direct contact isn’t yet possible, imagined contact can spark confidence about contact in the future. That is where One Globe Kids comes in!

**One Globe Kids Brings Friends From Around the World Into the Classroom**

Technology offers something new in the field of imagined intergroup contact: simulated contact. This option is great for younger kids. Books spark imagination and bridge worlds; digital play can enhance those effects. Using technology to simulate cross-group friendship makes it possible to bring children close to real peers around the globe without having direct contact. One Globe Kids enables young children to imagine friendship beyond geographic, linguistic, and other boundaries that limit their connection with diversity. The program is unique because:

- **It is created as a friendship experience:** One Globe Kids currently offers 10 immersive stories, plus interactive activities, from Haiti, the Netherlands, Indonesia, New York City, Burundi, and Israel. Each photograph story is told child-to-child, designed to simulate intercultural friendship and structured to help students appreciate the similarities between their lives and those experienced by children in other countries. Stories are narrated in the first person and include local language to bring them to life (currently in English, French, and Dutch).

- **It uses technology to create emotional closeness:** Each story includes multiple activities that are designed to replicate the friendship-making process of building familiarity, sharing, and learning from each other.

- **Its program design is based on 70 years of research:** One Globe Kids collaborates directly with researchers and experts in the field of intergroup contact to ensure maximum impact and learning for students. Program impact is measured in positive attitude changes toward “the other” and confidence in contact.

- **It targets the youngest students and their teachers:** The program focuses on the age range during which implicit bias is known to develop. Functionality is designed for ease of use by children 4-10 years old, including pre-readers. Lessons and activities are easy, low cost, and fun. Educators with little time or international experience can easily integrate One Globe Kids in daily language or social studies lessons. A free, standards-aligned English Learning Arts curriculum is available for K-2. All online resources are entirely safe, offering only simulated contact to respect the privacy of students and the real families in the stories.

More and more educators recognize the need for global citizenship education and intercultural dialogue. By intervening in the early years, with an approach proven to help children be excited about interacting with diverse others and in global contexts, we can lay a foundation for all global citizenship education to come.

Notes:


- **Students Collaborating Worldwide**

**Climate Action Project**

Young people across six continents connect virtually to solve one of the world’s most pressing challenges: climate change. Students from age 6 to 22 collaborated on climate change topics over the course of four exciting weeks: studying causes and effects, trying to solve issues, and taking action. The project is supported by HH Dalai Lama, UN Foundation, Dr. Jane Goodall and world leaders.

Students explore, brainstorm, discuss, create, have fun, connect, present, and share their findings via weekly videos. The project targets important skills like creativity, empathy, real-world problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking. Students will also be planting trees (#PlantED) as part of the project, with the goal of planting 1 million trees.

Learn more: [https://www.climate-action.info/](https://www.climate-action.info/)