Measuring Open-Mindedness
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Funded and run by the Institute, Generation Global (https://generation.global/) has allowed thousands of children from different cultures to virtually ‘meet’ via videoconferencing and blogging.

The Institute’s Generation Global programme (formerly known as Face to Faith), designed to make young people resilient to extremism and recruitment by extremist groups, is an “inoculation against extremist violence,” an independent study by the University of Exeter has found.

Aimed at combatting radicalisation and recruitment to violent extremism, the programme promotes interreligious and intercultural understanding to build young people’s resilience to narratives often used by extremist groups, which frequently suggest that people from different cultures have nothing in common.

The study of the effectiveness (/sites/default/files/inline-files/Measuring%20Open-mindedness_29.06.17.pdf) of the programme by academics at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter, published this week, found that in many schools the results were “spectacular.”

In its lifetime, the programme has run in 40 countries, including Pakistan, Palestine, India, Israel, Italy, the UK, and the USA, and has
connected 230,000 students aged 12-17 in over 2,500 schools around the world.

Designed to expose them to other cultures, break down stereotypes and build tolerance and cohesion, it puts children from different cultures directly in touch, allowing them to communicate through videoconferencing and online dialogue. The children discover what they have in common, learn to successfully navigate difference, and realise that stereotypes about different cultures are not true.

The study found it made young people less susceptible to extremist views, and opened their minds to other cultures and ways of life.


The goal of the programme is to build a generation of young people at ease with those of different religions, beliefs and cultural backgrounds. Such young people will have cultivated a personal resilience to extremist thinking and will be less prone to radicalisation.

EXCERPT FROM THE STUDY

A linguistics analysis of the language students used after taking part in the programme found "unequivocal evidence of the programme producing a shift towards open mindedness."

The Exeter University academics found a marked shift away from a sense of 'us defined against them' towards greater empathy towards children from different backgrounds and religions. The use of words like 'us' and 'we' expanded to refer to young people from around the world, rather than just a narrow group.

Professor Rupert Wegerif of the University of Exeter’s Graduate School of Education, who led the analysis, said:

"Those who have experienced the positive potential of dialogue across a range of different perspectives are less likely to fall prey to
the simplistic black and white ways of thinking that underlie extremism. It is reasonable to say that this programme serves as a kind of inoculation against extremist violence. Exeter University’s evaluation found clear evidence that it is effective in its main goal of increasing open-mindedness.”

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PROFESSOR RUPERT WEGERIF UNIVERSITY OF EXETER’S GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Over 9,000 teachers have been trained to boost young people’s resilience to extremist ideas by making them at ease with different religions and cultures. The programme allows teachers to be flexible about which methods they used to challenge pre-conceived ideas.

In some schools the results of the Generation Global Programme were more pronounced than others, with the commitment of the teachers to the programme making a perceptible difference in results.

Since the programme’s inception, children have taken part in over 2,500 videoconferences with young people of the same age in different cultures, across the world and also in online dialogue, blogging together using the project website.

The students found that children living in different cultures not only had much in common with them, including musical tastes, but also enabled them to encounter the differences between cultures and perspectives, to ask questions, to engage in respectful challenge, and thus to learn to successfully navigate diversity, without resorting to conflict.

After taking part in the programme they were more at ease with those of different religions, beliefs and cultural backgrounds.

After they had taken part a greater number of students wrote about how ‘happy’ they were to know a student from a different
culture and the language they used to describe others was generally more positive than before.

Existing research suggests that increased awareness of complexity and tolerance is a good way to prevent future radicalisation.

The programme is not designed to de-radicalise those who are already engaged in extremist activities. It was it is intended to build young peoples’ resilience to potential radicalisation and potential recruitment into extremism.

Case studies suggest the potential for “transformative effects on teachers, students and whole classes”. The Exeter University academics suggested that blogging be used more to allow spontaneous communication.
ABOUT GENERATION GLOBAL

Generation Global (https://generation.global/) is part of the Tony Blair Institute’s work in promoting co-existence and counter-extremism.

Its resources have also been included on the UK Department for Education’s Educate against Hate (http://educateagainsthate.com/) website, and are highlighted in both the UNESCO Guide for Policy-Makers Preventing Violent Extremism through Education (http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002477/247764e.pdf), and the Brookings Institution’s report on Measuring Global Citizenship Education (https://www.brookings.edu/research/measuring-global-citizenship-education/).

Over the last eight years, the programme (formerly operating as Face to Faith) has provided practical tools to address some of the challenges young people face in dealing with diversity. We have reached more than 230,000 students and 9,000 teachers in 2,500 schools, and have been active in over 40 countries.

Dr Ian Jamison, Head of Education, Tony Blair Institute said:

“Education is one of the most effective tools that we have to address the ideological drivers of extremism. Governments should prioritise education system reform to implement and embed proven approaches to building resilience, such as those demonstrated by Generation Global. Through teacher training, and classroom resources, the programme is an effective way for schools to deliver, by giving opportunities to build understanding and open-mindedness, increase how children value diversity, and provide safe spaces to engage in meaningful dialogue.”

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DR IAN JAMISON | HEAD OF EDUCATION
Generation Global continues to develop new resources to support schools around the world, and, based upon the research carried out by Exeter University, refining approaches to embedding effective dialogue within schools. The Institute also seeks to advocate to policy makers to ensure that this approach to education – which recognises the enormous significance of developing skills in order to impact attitudes – is recognised and embedded in education systems.
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