



# Childhood in the **Anthropocene**

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## Building Glocal Mindsets in Early Childhood Education



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### A Pedagogical Response to the United Nations Ocean Decade

Children today are growing up in a world shaped by global challenges — climate change, pandemics, migration, and economic shifts—that affect even the smallest communities. In early childhood education, we have a responsibility for securing children’s joyful meanings of life, nudging their care for nature, facilitating their exploration and emergent nature literacy and abilities to act responsibly towards both human and non-human entities. The ways we pedagogically engage with young children in early childhood education matters for their growth and mindset. We cannot prepare children for the future without recognising the realities of the global polycrises we face such as climate and societal instabilities. At the same time, young children live their lives locally, nested in families, communities, educational settings and physical landscapes. How do we connect these intimate, everyday experiences with the global polycrisis challenges that define our time?

One answer lies in building what I call a glocal mindset; a way of seeing what connects local experiences with global awareness (Ødegaard, 2025). Glocal

pedagogy is founded in the immediate places, materials, and traditions of children's lives, while at the same time opening pathways to broader planetary perspectives. This approach is particularly important in sustainability education. The ocean, for example, is both deeply local and profoundly global: it shapes local weather and provides food and resources for the survival of humans and other species, while also regulating the Earth's climate, transporting goods across continents, and connecting cultural heritages, stories, myths, and communities worldwide.

To explore what glocal pedagogy can look like in practice, we draw on the One Ocean: Exploration Project, implemented with coastal kindergartens in Western Norway. Over several weeks, groups of kindergarten children repeatedly visited the same coastal site. The children played with stones, seaweed, and sand; observed seabirds and boats; collected seawater; and, turned old maps into recycled paper. On the handmade recycled paper, they painted "ocean portraits," poetically facilitated by artists. One ocean portrait mapped a local tall ship circumnavigating the world. The children collaboratively explored with the teacher how the tall ship crossed oceans and lands, inspiring children's personal storytelling about travels, migration and family histories. Some of the children also interacted with a community of older adults repairing vintage boats (Ødegaard, Birkeland & Oropilla, 2024). Through this work, the children were encouraged to sense, imagine, explore and create in ways that connected their local shoreline to the expansive oceans beyond that encircle the globe.

One kindergarten involved in the project was called *The Sea Protectors* and demonstrated how various activities with children on a local stony beach nurtured a glocal mindset. For the children, the sea became a place of both joy and seriousness. They threw stones into the waves, laughed at the splashes, felt the salty wind on their faces, explored the water's surface and discovered what was below while wading in waterproof boots. This was a rich opportunity to wonder and discover various colours, shifts of light, changes with the tides and many small living organisms. However, they also discovered plastic waste and dead seabirds washed up on the shore. Their teachers and artists invited the children to collect the plastic waste, but also to pause, reflect, and even create small rituals of respect for the dead seabirds. Some of the children linked the deaths to the story of the "plastic whale" that had stranded nearby years earlier, its stomach full of plastic bags—a story widely shared in the media and remembered in their community. In this way, local experience, community memory, and global ecological challenges came together in the children's reflections.

This project demonstrated younger children can begin to connect the local and the global through sensory encounters, imagination and collaborative exploration (Ødegaard, 2021). For example, for the children a wet stone could become a boat, a fish, or a planet and a map could spark imaginative journeys across the seas. A recycled sheet of paper, painted with blues and greens, could be transformed into "ocean portraits or a child's vision of the ocean. In these small acts, children

experienced themselves as both part of their local community and participants in a wider, shared world.

Based on collaborative exploration of the oceans, shorelines and local culture with children, innovative and retroactive forces informed this glocal pedagogical approach. It presents an opportunity to reinterpret and adapt traditional methodologies and adjust and reshape pedagogy to align with new purposes and values. In the One Ocean: Exploration Project, we combined play with hands-on crafts, such as making recycled paper from maps and sea water and repairing vintage boats. Children and adults alike explored and wondered in local seascapes, thus creating intergenerational meeting places. Children learnt to read visual maps and cues, such as studying old ocean paintings and contemplating the sea view before painting their artistic interpretation. Pedagogy and exploration have a deeper purpose here: nurturing children's ecological awareness and global imagination through varied authentic activities over time. This project built on the best of early childhood traditions —embodied learning, curiosity, sensuous experience, storytelling and valuing children's expressions, while adding new layers of meaning connected to urgent global issues.

The impact is equally significant. By cultivating glocal mindsets from an early age, we strengthen the foundations for responsible citizenship and sustainable living. Children learn that their everyday actions—how they play, what they notice, how they care for animals or artefacts—are part of larger stories that link them to other people, places, and species. This is not about burdening young children with responsibility for solving the polycrises, but about fostering the sense of belonging, imagination, and empathy that can carry them into later life and future responsible actions.

As for implementation and inspiration for early childhood education, glocal pedagogy does not require extraordinary resources. What it requires is time, attentiveness, and the courage to value children's embodied experiences, questions and imaginations. It can be realised through repeated visits to familiar local landscapes, and/or through relevant artefacts such as maps and world globes. Moreover, artistic activities that invite expression, and open-ended conversations that connect children's experiences to larger global narratives are critical. Children's collaboration with visiting artists and researchers can enrich the process, but the glocal pedagogy can be easily integrated into everyday practice in any kindergarten setting. For some teachers it may also be about restoring traditional early childhood education pedagogies that capitalize on a knowledge of children's urge to move, play and explore.

In conclusion, building glocal mindsets in early childhood education is both a pedagogical innovation, a 'retovation' and a societal contribution. Glocal pedagogy enables children to base themselves in their local environments, while also opening their eyes and hearts to the global and planetary dimensions of life. It is a way of responding to the significant challenges of our time with hope, creativity, and respect for the interconnectedness of all things. In the laughter of children throwing stones into the sea, in their rituals for dead birds, in their

painted portraits of the ocean, we glimpse the beginnings of a glocal imagination—one that can help us all navigate towards more sustainable futures.

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