

# Danny Labin

## How muppets promote peace by building respect for all

Since its inception in 1969, Sesame Street has been predicated on the knowledge that children need to develop multiple skills beyond academic skills to interact effectively with the world around them. The idea is embodied in our mission statement, “Helping children to grow smarter, stronger, and kinder.” Using the magic of Muppets and the power of media to speak directly to preschool-aged children about difficult issues, Sesame Street has pushed the boundaries of what it means both to educate and to entertain young children by focusing on the whole child with an emphasis on key socio-emotional and life skills such as empathy, respect, and confidence.

Sesame Workshop’s groundbreaking work around the world has expanded the curriculum to encompass important life skills such as resilience and aspiration, mutual respect and understanding, and girls’ empowerment. Sesame Street broaches these topics not only with young children, but also with the adults in their lives--empowering caregivers with language and skills that can be used to talk to their children about these challenging or hard-to-teach topics. The various initiatives around the world address these needs in real life contexts: helping tackle the stigma of HIV/AIDS in South Africa; educating girls in Afghanistan; promoting respect and understanding among children in Kosovo, the Middle East, and elsewhere; and helping children to demystify differences and value diversity.

Sesame Workshop’s programs seek to promote cognitive and emotional skills in children that help them to build resilience as well as interact with the world around them. The Sesame Street co-production in **Afghanistan**, *Baghch-e-Simsim*, nurtures resilience through a focus on skills such as self-regulation, management of emotions, persistence, and optimism. This focus is especially important in settings where children face insecurity and violence. In **India**, where more than two thousand ethnic groups reside, *Galli Galli Sim Sim* promotes pluralism and inclusion through a diverse cast. On *Galli Galli Sim Sim*, we showcase a respectful environment where individual differences are accepted, appreciated, and celebrated, and we strive to provide children as well as caregivers with effective strategies for building empathy and respect. In **South Africa**, *Takalani Sesame* focuses on de-stigmatization, modeling behaviors of respect and friendship toward children with HIV/AIDS. Designed to help break the culture of silence around the disease, the HIV-positive Muppet Kami helps promote age-appropriate HIV/AIDS education messages.

Sesame Workshop tackles issues of gender equity--particularly in contexts where girls face a lack of access to education and equal participation in society. Our powerful girl Muppet characters pursue education, engage in activities from which they may have traditionally been excluded, and aspire to future professions. Helping young girls to dream big and modeling the possibilities for girls’

achievement to boys and fathers is yet another way that Sesame is changing attitudes and cultural norms.

Sesame Workshop's international projects, through the careful blend of humor, entertainment, and learning, are pushing the boundaries of what it means to educate children and giving the next generation the best chances for success.