

*Developing programmes to  
promote ethnic diversity in  
early childhood:*

*Lessons from Northern Ireland*

By Paul Connolly



*Cover: Children aged 4–5 playing at a pre-school. Photo: John Spaul*

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WORKING PAPERS IN

Early Childhood Development

*Developing programmes to  
promote ethnic diversity in  
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## Executive summary

This working paper focuses on some of the issues and challenges faced in developing early childhood programmes to promote racial and ethnic diversity in societies characterised by deep divisions and/or conflict. The central argument of the paper is that the development, delivery and evaluation of such programmes need to be informed by three core values that are children's rights-based, outcomes-focused, and evidence-informed.

To provide some sense of what these values mean in practice and how they can be combined together in the development of early childhood programmes, the working paper is based on experience in Northern Ireland. The region provides a useful case study because its people are emerging from 30 years of armed conflict. The ability to study the development of an early childhood programme aimed at promoting understanding and respect for ethnic diversity in such a context raises a number of fundamental issues of relevance to a wide range of other situations and contexts.

The working paper identifies five key challenges from this case study for those wishing to develop early childhood programmes that promote respect for ethnic diversity elsewhere:

1. The need to develop and implement a children's rights-based approach to the design, delivery and evaluation of early childhood programmes;

2. The need to develop appropriate research methods and methodologies capable of understanding the effects of ethnic divisions in young children's lives;
3. The need to learn more effectively from other existing research and programmes;
4. The need to develop robust methods to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes; and
5. The challenge of ensuring government support and buy-in for programmes.

It is recognised that Northern Ireland represents a very particular context and that further work is required to determine how these challenges may be addressed elsewhere. It is with this in mind that the working paper concludes by describing the work of the Joint Learning Initiative on Children and Ethnic Diversity (JLICED), co-sponsored by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies. Based on the successful Joint Learning Initiative model developed previously by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in association with others, the JLICED represents a global network of early childhood researchers, practitioners and policy makers from across the minority and majority worlds.

The initial proposal for this particular JLICED was very much inspired by the approach and model of working developed in Northern Ireland and as described in this working

paper. In being able to draw upon the wealth of expertise that exists internationally in this area, the JLICED represents a unique opportunity to take this model of working – that is based on the three core values outlined above as well as a commitment to developing meaningful partnerships between early childhood educators, researchers, local communities and

non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – to see how the five challenges that have been identified might be best addressed in particular social contexts and regions around the world. In so doing, the JLICED can make an important contribution to existing knowledge and practice in this area.



## Introduction

This working paper focuses on the development of early childhood programmes that aim to promote respect for racial and ethnic diversity among young children and to address the negative effects of racial and ethnic divisions on their lives. At the heart of this paper is the argument that the development of such programmes needs to be underpinned by three core values. More specifically they need to be:

- ***Children’s rights-based:*** not only requiring the development of early childhood programmes that are compliant with relevant children’s rights standards, but also ensuring such programmes are informed by the experiences and perspectives of young children themselves and actively seek young children’s meaningful participation in their development, delivery and evaluation.
- ***Outcomes-focused:*** requiring an emphasis on being explicit about the outcomes of such early childhood programmes and, in particular, designing programmes that are effective in terms of leading to real and demonstrable improvements in young children’s lives.
- ***Evidence-informed:*** recognising that for such programmes to be effective they need to draw upon the best evidence available on the nature of the issues and problems faced by young children, and of the most effective ways of dealing with them. This, in turn, requires commitment to a wide-

ranging research agenda that seeks not only to increase our understanding of the impact of particular forms of racial and ethnic divisions on young children’s lives, but also to learn from evidence from other contexts. In addition, it requires commitment to evaluating the effectiveness of existing programmes, thereby ascertaining whether they have led to tangible improvements in the lives of young children.

To develop these arguments and to illustrate how these values can be implemented in practice, the working paper takes a case study approach. It looks at the development of a particular early childhood programme in Northern Ireland – the Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference Programme<sup>1</sup> – that has sought to encourage young children to celebrate diversity and respect differences, not just in relation to the ethno-religious divisions that exist in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants, but also in relation to other forms of difference including race and disability.

Northern Ireland represents an important case study because it has experienced 30 years of armed conflict and is now emerging from this with concerted attempts to build and sustain a peaceful future. However, while the armed conflict may have come to an end, its legacy

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<sup>1</sup> ©Peace Initiatives Institute and Early Years – The Organisation for Young Children

remains. Northern Ireland can therefore provide a number of important lessons on how to develop early childhood programmes aimed at promoting understanding and respect for diversity in a context that remains deeply divided and segregated and where fear, mistrust and intermittent violence still characterise relationships in particular areas.

The case study illustrates the importance of a grassroots approach to the development of early childhood programmes, involving local community peace-builders, media representatives, practitioners, educators at university through early-years levels, researchers and policymakers. It also demonstrates the potential role played by outside agencies in working respectfully and in partnership with local organisations and stakeholders to be a catalyst for change.

Northern Ireland is an affluent, advanced industrial society. Some of the specific issues faced and approaches developed therefore may not be immediately recognisable to early childhood professionals working in other, majority world contexts. In addition, the work undertaken in Northern Ireland is still in its early stages and much remains to be done. Therefore, the case is not presented as a model programme that can be simply emulated and applied elsewhere. With this in mind, the working paper aims to use the case study simply to draw out a number of broader issues and challenges that have wider

relevance to those wishing to develop early childhood programmes that promote understanding and respect for diversity in contexts characterised by racial and ethnic divisions and/or conflict.

Given the need to explore how these challenges might best be addressed in very different social contexts and regions around the world, the working paper concludes with an outline of the work of the Joint Learning Initiative on Children and Ethnic Diversity (JLICED), an initiative co-sponsored by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies.<sup>2</sup> The format and structure of the JLICED is based on the successful Joint Learning Initiative model developed previously by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in association with others<sup>3</sup>. It represents a global network of early childhood researchers, practitioners and policymakers from across the minority and majority worlds, who seek to address the negative effects of racial and ethnic divisions and conflict in the lives of young children through promoting effective early childhood programmes.

The original proposal for this particular JLICED has been inspired by the approach and model developed in Northern Ireland and described in this working paper. As will be seen, alongside a commitment to developing early childhood programmes that are children's rights-based, evidence-informed and outcomes-focused, the approach used in Northern Ireland has also

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<sup>2</sup> See: [www.jliced.org](http://www.jliced.org)

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the work of the Joint Learning Initiative on Children and HIV/AIDS ([www.jlica.org](http://www.jlica.org)).

been founded on a desire for early childhood educators, researchers, local communities and NGOs to work collaboratively and in partnership. By drawing upon the wealth of expertise that exists internationally in this area, both in relation to the wide range of work supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and beyond<sup>4</sup>, the JLICED represents a unique opportunity to explore how this approach to working might best be developed and adapted to very different social contexts around the world and, in so doing, to provide an invaluable opportunity to learn from one another in the process.

### Ecological model

Reflecting the partnership approach to learning, this paper adopts a broadly ecological approach to understanding the impact of ethnic divisions on young children. Inspired by such theorists as Lev Vygotsky, Urie Bronfenbrenner and Pierre Bourdieu, the paper recognises the importance of local environments as a context for understanding young children's attitudes and behaviour. In this sense, the development of young children's ethnic attitudes and identities, as well as other perceptions of various forms of difference, need to be understood within the specific contexts in which they are located. In the classical Vygotskian sense, such attitudes and identities can be regarded as representing the internalisation and/or embodiment of the immediate social relationships in which young children are engaged.

One useful way of making sense of this process is through the notion of the 'ethnic habitus'. Adapted from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (see Connolly 2003), the ethnic habitus represents the taken-for-granted ways of thinking and behaving that young children come to internalise over time in relation to ethnicity. In other words, through the sets of relationships in which they are engaged and the influence of the wider social environment of the local community, young children can be seen to develop particular cultural dispositions or habits reflective of their own ethnic group.

This ethnic habitus can often manifest itself in relation to young children's preferences for and dispositions towards the cultural events, symbols and practices of their own community. It can also be seen in terms of children's taken-for-granted preferences to want to be with others 'of their own kind' (what is often called 'in-group preferences') and, for some, in terms of a negative disposition towards those who are different from themselves ('out-group prejudices').

The importance of adopting an ecological model for understanding how ethnic divisions impact upon, and become internalised by, young children is demonstrated by the Northern Ireland case study. In particular, it shows how this approach makes it even more important to ensure that the development of early childhood programmes aimed at addressing issues of ethnic diversity are children's rights-based, outcomes-focused and evidence-informed.

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<sup>4</sup> For a useful outline of the breadth and depth of this expertise see Kernan (2008).



## Chapter 1: The effects of ethnic divisions on young children: A case study from Northern Ireland

As described in the Introduction, this working paper is informed by an ecological model of early child development that stresses the importance of understanding young children's development in general, and their acquisition of ethnic attitudes and identities in particular, within the broader sets of social relationships and contexts in which they live. It is in this sense that the attitudes and identities that young children come to internalise tend to reflect the particular forms of ethnic relations and divisions that are evident in their local communities.

However, it is important not to develop universal theories on how race and ethnicity affect young children's lives. The nature and forms taken by racism and ethnic divisions vary enormously from one context to the next and also at any specific time within a particular context (Connolly 1998; Vandebroek 1999; van Ausdale and Feagin 2001; Singer and de Haan 2007).

There is thus no universal early childhood programme that can be simply 'taken off the shelf' and delivered to children regardless of the specific forms of racial and ethnic divisions within which they are located. Rather, for such programmes to be effective, they need to be based upon a proper understanding of precisely how these divisions are affecting the lives of young children in particular contexts. Only

by basing the development of early childhood programmes on evidence in this way can we be confident that they will engage meaningfully with the experiences and perspectives of the children themselves.

Taking Northern Ireland as a case study, this section shows how research evidence has helped to challenge the widely held beliefs that young children are largely unaware of, and thus unaffected by, the divisions that exist. The section shows how research findings have helped shape the broad approach taken in the design and delivery of a programme aimed at addressing the effects of ethnic and other divisions on young children's attitudes and awareness. The section begins by describing the conflict and ethnic divisions in Northern Ireland and then examines how these divisions have tended to impact upon young children. It is shown that much of the earlier research tended to underestimate the extent to which existing divisions affect young children. This can be explained largely by the fact that researchers have tended to apply adult ways of thinking about the conflict to young children and assessing their attitudes and levels of awareness on that basis.

The author contrasts early research with the findings of more recent studies that have adopted far more open methods, giving young children an opportunity to talk about what

concerns them. In this sense, the section provides some important insights into the value of adopting a children's rights-based approach to research in helping to ascertain a more grounded understanding of young children's awareness of and attitudes to the specific forms of racial and ethnic divisions that surround them.

### **Ethnic divisions and Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland is a relatively small area, covering just 5,500 square miles and with a population of just over 1.6 million people. Since its creation in the early 1920s by the partitioning of the island of Ireland, it has comprised two main and opposing ethnic traditions. 'Unionists' represent the majority of the population and tend to regard themselves as British, desiring the region to remain part of the UK. 'Nationalists' remain the minority and tend to regard themselves as Irish, therefore desiring Northern Ireland to be 're-united' with the rest of the island.

Historically, the indigenous Irish population has been predominantly Catholic, while the British plantationists and settlers who arrived in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century tended to be Protestant. Over time, while the fundamental divide between the two majority ethnic groups has tended to be based around issues of nationality, religion has become one of the main markers of difference and ways of distinguishing between the two traditions.

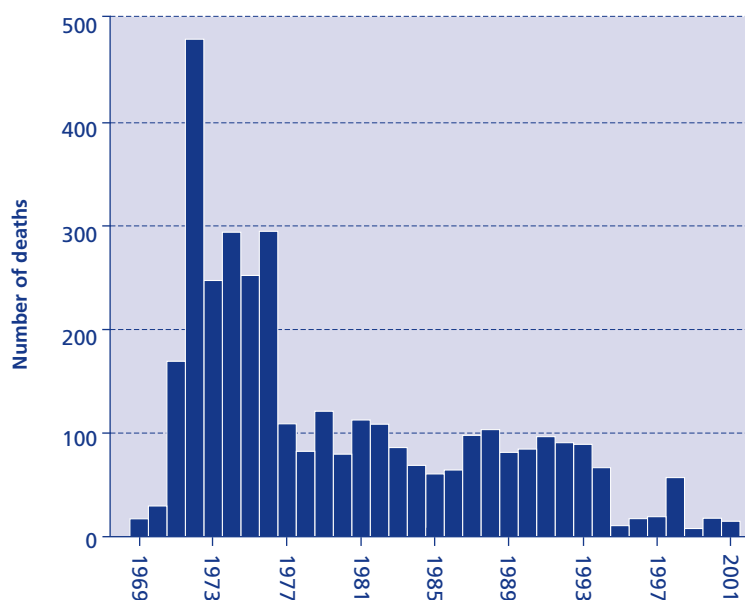
The most recent period of armed conflict – euphemistically termed 'The Troubles' – began

in 1969 and ran for 25 years until the first paramilitary ceasefires of 1994. In 1969 British troops were first deployed on the streets of Northern Ireland, ostensibly to keep the peace. However, it was not long before many within the Catholic community came to regard them as being there to look after and defend the interests of the Protestants.

The violence soon escalated as paramilitary organisations emerged on both sides of the divide. On the Catholic side a number of groups emerged, most notably the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which had the perceived aim of protecting the Catholic community from the British Army and sections of the Protestant community. On the Protestant side a number of paramilitary groups also emerged, including the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Ulster Defence Association (UDA) with the aim, as they saw it, of defending the Protestant community and its traditions from the republican paramilitary groups.

This provided the context for the next 25 years of violence. As can be seen from Figure 1, the early 1970s was a particularly violent period. A total of 479 people were killed in 1972 and between 250 and 300 deaths occurred per annum for the following few years. Overall, much of the violence during this period was indiscriminate. Bombs were detonated in city and town centres with little or no warning, and there were frequent 'doorstep killings', when victims were shot dead at point-blank range when simply answering their front door (Fay et al. 1999).

Figure 1. The number of conflict-related deaths in Northern Ireland, 1969–2001.



Source: Connolly 2004: p.110.

It was also relatively common in certain areas for individuals to be attacked or shot when walking home because of their perceived religious identity. In addition, there were a number of incidents when individuals were bundled into cars, driven away and sometimes tortured before being shot dead and dumped. While the early 1970s represented a particularly intense and violent period, Figure 1 shows that significant levels of violence continued up to the first paramilitary ceasefires of 1994. Between 1977 and 1993, an average of 89 people were killed per annum as a direct result of the conflict.

Many people in Northern Ireland therefore lived in fear during this period. Not surprisingly, high levels of residential segregation

emerged as people either moved voluntarily to areas where they felt safer or were actually burned out of their homes and forced to move. It has been estimated, for example, that within the first few years of the violence (1969–1972), between 8,000 and 15,000 families were forced to leave their homes and live elsewhere (Smyth 1998). Moreover, and as Boal (1999) identified in his broader analysis of urban trends in the region, there was a ‘ratchet effect’, whereby intense periods of violence tended to increase levels of segregation, and these would never return to their previous levels during later times of relative peace (see also Murtagh 2002, 2003). It is also important to note that much of the violence and the population shifts that followed tended to be concentrated in areas that were

already suffering from social and economic deprivation (Fay et al. 1999; Morrissey and Smyth 2002; Smyth and Hamilton 2003).

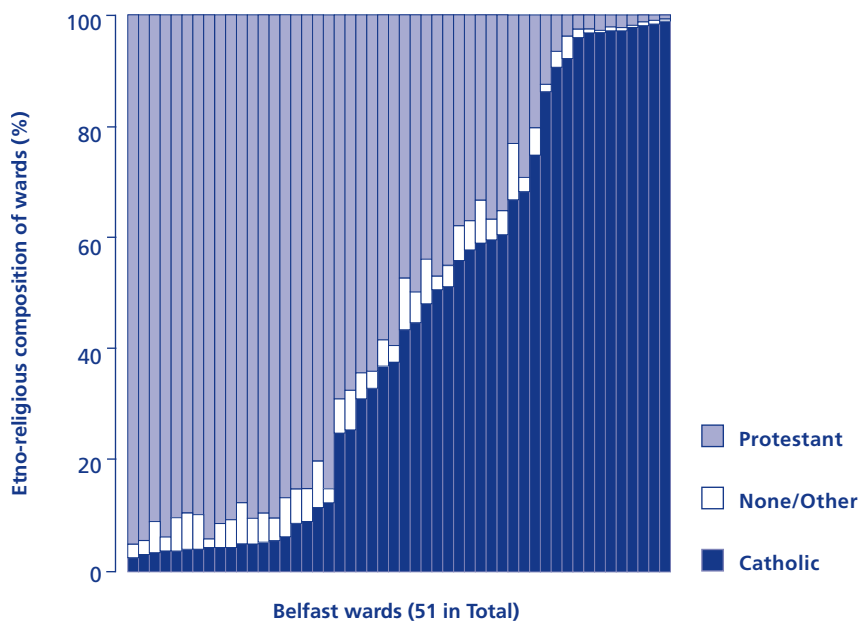
While there has now been over a decade of relative peace since the first paramilitary ceasefires announced in 1994, the legacy of this period of conflict remains, with social and residential segregation a characteristic feature. The 2001 Census, for example, revealed that a quarter of all local wards consisted of populations that were at least 90 per cent Catholic or Protestant, and well over half of all wards in Northern Ireland (58 percent) had a population that was at least 75 percent Catholic or Protestant.

While patterns of segregation can be found in more affluent areas (Smyth 1998) and rural areas

(Murtagh 2003), the highest levels of segregation are found in the poorer urban areas of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry where the violence has also been the most intense. Figure 2 shows the ethnic composition of the 51 wards that make up the city of Belfast, illustrating that around two thirds of these wards are either over 90 percent Catholic or over 90 percent Protestant.

Belfast is therefore a city that remains deeply divided with certain areas resembling mosaics of small neighbourhoods with opposing Protestant and Catholic communities living but-tressed up against one another. In some of these areas (see Figure 3), opposing communities are physically separated by so-called 'peacelines': fortified walls and fences designed to protect neighbouring communities from one another.

Figure 2. Ethno-religious composition of wards in Belfast, 2001.



Source: Connolly 2004: p. 112.



Within such a context, routine choices in terms of where to shop, which route to take and even what to wear tend to be determined against the backdrop of the threat created by the other community.



Figure 3. A peaceline in Belfast

(PHOTO © FRANKIE QUINN)

Moreover, and given this emphasis on territoriality, it is not surprising to find that some local neighbourhoods have been clearly marked with the community's political and cultural symbols. It is therefore quite common to find national flags flying from lampposts (either British flags in Protestant areas or Irish flags in Catholic areas), kerbstones painted in national colours, and political murals and graffiti on the sides of buildings.

While such stark manifestations of ethnic segregation tend to be found mainly in economically deprived, urban areas of Northern Ireland, broader patterns of segregation between the

Catholic and Protestant communities remain evident across the region. The education system, for example, remains segregated on a de-facto basis with the vast majority of children (some 95 percent) attending either Protestant or Catholic schools. It is still quite common to find young people reporting that they have had the opportunity to mix socially with those from 'the other side' only since going to University. Moreover, a large-scale survey of 9–10-year-old children conducted by the author for the BBC in 2007 found that Catholic and Protestant children still tended to live separate lives (Connolly et al. 2007b). Clear differences were found between the two groups of children, for example, in the places they visited with their families, where they went on holiday, the types of sports they watched and played, the newspapers they could recall lying around their homes, the names of politicians they could remember, and also how they defined their national identity.

### Early research on the effects of the violence on young children

It is not surprising that the research community has showed a keen interest in understanding the effects of the violence, and also the broader ethnic divisions and levels of segregation that underpinned it, on children. A plethora of research studies emerged dating from the early 1970s and through much of the 1980s focusing on a range of issues, from the effects of the divisions and conflict on children's attitudes through to their moral and emotional development. (For detailed summaries see Cairns

1987; Gough et al. 1992; Trew 1992; Cairns and Cairns 1995; Cairns et al. 1995; Connolly with Maginn 1999).

Interestingly, while this research has offered important insights into the effects of conflict on children's development, its core findings did not seem to resonate with those working in the early childhood sector. In particular, the finding that seemed to arise consistently across studies – that it was not until the age of about 10–11 that children began to recognise consistently and think in relation to the Catholic/Protestant divide – appeared to contradict the experiences of early childhood professionals, who were finding regularly that children as young as 3 and 4 years were recognising, talking about and re-enacting some of the events that they had seen. Anecdotal evidence was available, for example, for children playing at shooting games, re-enacting paramilitary-style funerals and striding around the playroom re-creating political marches.

To understand this apparent mismatch between research findings and the experiences of early childhood professionals it is worth looking briefly at some of the research conducted at that time. The vast majority of these studies were conducted by social psychologists and made use of a wide range of innovative experimental designs aimed at assessing the impact of the conflict on children's attitudes and types of behaviour indirectly. Three such studies will be described here in order to give a flavour of this type of work.

The first, by Jahoda and Harrison (1975), involved a number of tests with 60 boys aged 6 and 10 years from Belfast and a further 60 boys of the same ages from Edinburgh. One test involved them being asked to sort a collection of 16 items that consisted of four circles, four semi-circles, four squares and four trapezia. Each group of four shapes was coloured differently – one green, one orange, one red and one blue.

Overall, Jahoda and Harrison found that at the age of 6 years, the boys displayed no significant differences in whether they chose to sort the items by shape or by colour. However, at the age of 10 years, while all the boys in Edinburgh sorted the items by shape, all their counterparts in Belfast sorted them by colour. The researchers found that this reflected an increasing awareness of the political significance of the colours. Over half of the 10-year-olds in Belfast, for example, spontaneously mentioned religion when explaining their method for sorting, one boy arguing that: 'red and blue are Protestant colours and orange and green are Catholic colours' (p. 14).

The second study, conducted by Cairns et al. (1980), compared 5- and 6-year-old children from a fairly trouble-free area of Northern Ireland with a control group from a South London suburb. Each were shown a photograph of a derelict row of houses and asked to explain what they thought had happened to them. The children from Northern Ireland were much more likely to make reference to 'terrorist bombs' and 'explosions' in their explanations than the group from South London.

The third study, undertaken by McWhirter and Gamble (1982), involved a standard word definition test with a total of 192 children aged 6 and 9 years from three different areas of Northern Ireland: one that had a history of sectarian conflict and two from relatively peaceful towns. The children were asked to define a series of words including 'Protestant' and 'Catholic', which were embedded within the list so as to disguise the focus of the research. The conclusions were that 'about half the children in Northern Ireland, at 6 years of age, have some understanding of at least one of the category labels, Protestant and Catholic, and that by 9 years of age the majority of Northern Ireland children are aware, to some degree, of what both terms denote' (p. 122).

As indicated in these three studies, a general and consistent picture seemed to have emerged from the variety of studies conducted over this period regarding the development of children's attitudes and awareness with age. As shown above in relation to their ability to recognise the political/cultural significance of colours or names, while some awareness is evident among children as young as 5 or 6 years, the research has found that they are only able to demonstrate a strong and consistent ability to do this at the ages of 10 or 11 (Cairns and Cairns 1995). This overall pattern has also been confirmed via a number of other experiments that have, for example, tested children's ability to distinguish between stereotypically Catholic and Protestant first names (Cairns 1980; Houston et al. 1990) and faces (Stringer and Cairns 1983) and also

between Belfast, Dublin and standard English accents (Cairns and Duriez 1976).

These examples represent only one strand of the work conducted in Northern Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s, but it is this strand that has attempted to understand when children become aware of conflict and in what way. Of course, it is easy to find fault with work that was conducted some 20–30 years ago, particularly when the work was taking place at a violent and dangerous time. It is therefore understandable that researchers would exercise great care and use very implicit and indirect means of testing children's levels of awareness as well as imaginative and highly structured experimental methods.

While such an approach was understandable, it did have its limitations. In particular, the structured nature of the studies significantly limited their ability to fully capture the perspectives of the children themselves. Rather than being given the opportunity to raise and discuss what concerned them, the research tended simply to probe the children about very specific issues that were actually of concern to the (adult) researchers. Ultimately, therefore, this led to a situation where researchers used adult ways of thinking and making sense of the conflict to test children's attitudes and levels of awareness. The problem is that the conflict and its associated divisions may well have been exerting a significant influence on the children's lives but the children could have been thinking about and making sense of them in ways different

from those of adults. Just because younger children may not be aware of the cultural significance of different first names or different accents, this does not mean that they are unaware of the cultural divisions that exist. It may simply be that they use different markers and social cues to represent these differences. The danger is that a tendency to overlook the voices of the children themselves may have led to an underestimation of the extent to which young children are aware of the conflict and divisions that exist, and the ways in which these impact upon their lives.

### **Listening to young children: survey research**

A number of more recent studies have attempted to use more open and exploratory methods capable of capturing the ways in which children first become aware of the divisions that exist and also how these come to impact upon their attitudes and identities.

The first major study – *Too Young to Notice?* (Connolly et al. 2002) – aimed to map out in a more general sense the ways in which young children's awareness and attitudes tend to emerge with age. The study consisted of a survey of 352 children aged 3–6 years selected randomly from across Northern Ireland and made use of far less structured and focused methods. Each child was interviewed separately and was shown a wide range of pictures, photographs and symbols associated with the local cultural divisions. An extensive pilot was used

to identify any items that the children may have found significant but which the research team had overlooked.

For each item they were simply asked what they knew about it and their responses were recorded verbatim. For certain items, such as national flags, they were simply asked if there was one they liked the best and, if so, which one. For other items, such as photographs of an Orange march (a Protestant cultural tradition) and the police (viewed historically as a partisan and Protestant force by some within the Catholic community), they were also simply asked if they liked them and, if so, how much. The qualitative data gathered was then coded and analysed statistically.

While the study was relatively large-scale and quantitative in its design, it benefited from starting with the children's own attitudes and perspectives. As a result it showed that the divisions in Northern Ireland tend to impact upon children's lives at a much earlier age than suggested by the far more experimental designs outlined above. Some of the results are summarised in Table 1 and these show, for example, the emergence of significant differences among 3-year-olds in terms of their attitudes towards certain groups and events. Catholic 3-year-olds were twice as likely as their Protestant counterparts to state that they did not like the police or Orange marchers. In addition, the Protestant and Catholic children showed clear dispositions towards favouring the national flag associated with their own community.

Table 1. Differences in cultural preferences between Catholic and Protestant 3-year-olds\*

Percentage of children who:	Catholics		Protestants	
	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count
Do not like Orange marchers	18%	(22)	3%	(35)
Do not like the police	34%	(35)	15%	(33)
Prefer the British Union Jack flag	36%	(31)	60%	(37)
Prefer the Irish Tricolour flag	64%	(31)	40%	(37)

\*All differences found to be statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ ).

Source: Connolly et al. (2002)

Moreover, and as explained above, all of the children's comments about each of the items were analysed and coded in relation to their levels of awareness and knowledge about them. Interestingly, the vast majority of these 3-year-olds offered no indication that they recognised the cultural or political significance of the items shown or were aware of the reasons for their attitudes and preferences. Only a handful of children could name the flags or the Orange marchers and, similarly, very few could provide any meaningful information about them.

What these findings seem to suggest, therefore, is that Protestant and Catholic children are already beginning to pick up the cultural habits and preferences of their respective communities from the age of 3 years, even though they have yet to develop the awareness and knowledge of what these mean. This certainly provides some support for the notion of the ethnic habitus. As described briefly in the Introduction, the ethnic habitus can be seen as representing those taken-

for-granted ways of thinking and behaving that children come to pick up through the relationships they have with significant others and that they progressively come to internalise. Given that children in Northern Ireland are growing up in a highly divided and segregated society, it is not surprising to find that they are likely to be internalising the dispositions and cultural habits of their own communities.

Overall, the study found that children's levels of awareness tended to increase fairly rapidly over the following few years. Thus while only about half (51 percent) of 3-year-olds could demonstrate some awareness of just one item they were shown, by the age of 6 years the vast majority of the children (90 percent) could demonstrate awareness of an average of three items. Interestingly, only a handful of the children demonstrated an awareness of the actual terms 'Catholic' and 'Protestant'. Rather, they were much more likely to show awareness of other cultural events and symbols, such as

Orange marches, flags and football (soccer) shirts<sup>5</sup>. This certainly added support to the concerns raised about the earlier research, that children were showing an awareness of the divisions that existed but that the particular cultural markers and symbols that they regarded as significant tended to differ from those identified by adults. In particular, alongside focusing on the terms ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’, these early studies were also concerned with such things as children’s recognition of stereotypically Catholic and Protestant first names or the political significance of certain combinations of colours, none of which were found to be very significant in the present study.

In addition to focusing on the children’s levels of awareness, the study also carefully analysed comments made to indicate whether children saw themselves as belonging to one of the two majority ethnic communities and also for evidence of sectarian remarks. There was little evidence of this occurring among the 3-year-olds, with only 5 percent indicating that they were identifying with one of the communities and only 1 percent making prejudiced comments about the other community. However, by the age of 6 years, around a third of children (34 percent) were identifying with one of the two communities and about one in six (15 percent) were openly making sectarian remarks about ‘the other side’.

## Listening to young children: ethnographic research

To explore these factors further, another study was conducted shortly after the publication of *Too Young to Notice?* The second study used ethnographic methods in an attempt to gain a more in-depth understanding of the children’s perspectives and how these relate to their particular social contexts (Connolly and Healy 2004). The study focused on three age groups: 3–4-, 7–8- and 10–11-year-olds, and attempted to build a picture of their lives through detailed observations, activities and small group discussions with them<sup>6</sup>.

Part of the ethnographic work focused on Protestant and Catholic children from two neighbouring areas characterised by high levels of social and economic deprivation and continuing relatively high levels of sectarian tension and sporadic violence. The two areas were separated by a peaceline similar to that shown in Figure 3 (see page 9).

At the end of the peaceline was a small field that provided an interface between the two areas. It had become an area where older children and young people clashed regularly, taunting and throwing stones at one another. Many of the houses overlooking the field had metal grids protecting their windows. Graffiti, political

<sup>5</sup> Two rival football teams based in Glasgow, Scotland have become strongly associated with the two ethnic groups in Northern Ireland, with Rangers FC being associated with Protestants and Celtic FC with Catholics.

<sup>6</sup> See Connolly and Healy 2004 for more information on the methodology of the study.



murals and painted kerbstones marked out the two areas as Republican or Loyalist, clearly displaying the distinct identities and allegiances of each community.

### **3- and 4-year-olds**

The 3- and 4-year-old children were at the stage of life when they were beginning to move beyond the confines of their immediate family home and become more aware of the broader environment around them. Many were starting nursery and/or pre-school and some were playing outside, often with older brothers or sisters. They were therefore developing awareness of other people and the different roles they perform (e.g. mother, father, teacher or police officer) and of particular events, items and symbols they saw around them. At this age, the children's awareness tended to be limited to their immediate experience. They tended to make sense of that experience through careful observation and by role-playing and rehearsing specific events they had seen or people they knew and/or with whom they had come into contact.

It was not surprising to find that some children had witnessed incidents of violence and specific events associated with their community. For some, these then formed the basis of their play as they attempted to re-enact and thus begin to understand them. When observing the children in a nursery setting, researchers recorded a small number of incidents of behaviour directly reflecting the broader tensions between the two areas. Interestingly, all of the incidents involved boys.

The first, in the Catholic nursery, occurred after lunch when a group of boys were making Lego guns and pretending to shoot one another. One of the boys had his gun hitched over his shoulder and was telling the others that he had a rocket launcher. As soon as one of the nursery staff saw this she intervened and encouraged the boys to play something else, reflecting the nursery policy that prohibited children making or playing with toy guns.

During a second incident, two boys were observed in the Protestant nursery playing with Lego and toy cars on the carpet. They had constructed an extremely elaborate scene that they had worked on for a considerable time. When they were asked what they were playing, one of the boys pointed to some cars that were overturned and explained: 'These are burning cars!' He then went on to explain that: 'The police are shooting and chasing the bad boys!'

In the same nursery and on a different occasion, two other boys were observed pretending to be a marching band. One boy was marching confidently and pretending to play the flute while the other boy, in front of him, was twirling a makeshift baton and throwing it in the air. Again, when staff noticed this they intervened and encouraged the boys to play something else. Finally, staff in the Catholic nursery recounted an incident in which one boy was organising a small group of other children to help re-enact a paramilitary-style funeral. This involved the children pretending to march either side of a coffin carrying guns.

Overall, however, these tended to be relatively isolated incidents. Observing the children over an extended period of time made it clear that the conflict and the divisions associated with it did not tend to figure prominently in their day-to-day play. This, in turn, can be interpreted in one of two ways: either the majority of children were simply not aware of the events and symbols around them, or they were aware but did not view them as particularly significant.

To ascertain which of these possibilities is true, each child was interviewed towards the end of the fieldwork. In a similar vein to the *Too Young to Notice?* study, the children were shown a range of items and asked to talk about them. The items included hand-held flags, pictures of a police landrover, an Orange march, an Irish dancer and miniature Rangers and Celtic football shirts.

Overall, the evidence supported the second possibility— that many of the children had experience of the particular items shown and were thus aware of them, but that they did not play a particularly significant role in their lives at this age. Indeed, while the items did not seem to figure prominently in the children's play, many of the children were aware of them and some held quite strong views about them when asked directly.

This can be seen, for example, in relation to the children's comments on the Rangers and Celtic football shirts. Indeed the wearing of such shirts

is probably the most visible and common way in which a person's ethnic identity is demonstrated in Northern Ireland.

Several children in the two nurseries, particularly the boys, were dressed in Rangers or Celtic football shirts. A number of the children also had Rangers or Celtic hats, scarves and even coats, while a small number of boys had rings and necklaces bearing the emblems of the two teams. It was not surprising to find, therefore, that some of the children have already developed a strong association with one of the football teams. This is evident, for example, in the following conversation with James and Kyle (both Protestant) that occurred after James had been shown the miniature Rangers top:

RESEARCHER – Who does he [*his friend*] support?

JAMES – [*Points to mini football top*] Rangers!

RESEARCHER – He supports Rangers or that's Rangers? [*Referring to the top*]

JAMES – That's Rangers.

RESEARCHER – Very good. How did you know that was Rangers?

JAMES – 'Cos...I have a top.

KYLE – [*Walks over the the table and notices the football top*] What's that?...[It's] Rangers! [*very excited*]

RESEARCHER – It is Rangers, you're very clever...Do you like them?

KYLE – Yes [*lifts jumper and looks at his top*]

RESEARCHER – Do you have a top like that?

KYLE – Yes.



For some of the children, a preference for one team was matched with a dislike for the other. This can be seen in the following conversations with Adrian and Patrick (both Catholic):

RESEARCHER – Well so you know this is Celtic football team [*holding up the Celtic football top*], do you like them?

ADRIAN – Yeah.

RESEARCHER – And [*you say*] this is Rangers [*holding up the Rangers football top*], do you like them?

ADRIAN – No.

RESEARCHER – Why not?

ADRIAN – ‘Cos they’re crap!

RESEARCHER – Are they? But Celtic are good?

ADRIAN – [*nods*]

RESEARCHER – Do your friends like Celtic?

ADRIAN – Yes.

RESEARCHER – Do you know anybody who likes Rangers?

ADRIAN – No!

PATRICK – [*Pointing to the Rangers football top*] They beat me, they beat me!

RESEARCHER – Rangers beat you?

PATRICK – Yeah.

RESEARCHER – At football?...Or [*did*] they beat you up?

PATRICK – [*Angrily*] I’m going to beat them up!

RESEARCHER – Do you not like them?

PATRICK – I’m going to knock them all down [*knocks over Rangers top*] [...]

RESEARCHER – Which of these two do you like the best?

PATRICK – Celtic!

These findings were replicated across some of the other items the children were shown. In relation to the Orange march, for example, it was not surprising to find that Protestant children demonstrated a much greater awareness. For most of the Protestant children, they tended to find the marches colourful and exciting and expressed a strong level of enthusiasm for them. The majority had personal experience of the marches, either from being taken along to watch or through the direct involvement of a family member. This is evident in the discussion with Claire below. Along with all the other children, she was shown a photograph of a traditional Orange Parade, with the marchers dressed in black suits and bowler hats and with orange sashes. No bands were present:

CLAIRE – My granda wears one of them [*collaret*].

RESEARCHER – Does he? One of these [*collarets*]

...do you go and watch them?

CLAIRE – Yes. [...]

CLAIRE – [*looking hard at picture*] I can’t see my granda in there.

RESEARCHER – Maybe he’s in a different one.

CLAIRE – Maybe behind them.

RESEARCHER – Could be. Where do you watch him?

CLAIRE – I think he’s behind them?

For the Protestant children, Orange marches tended to represent a significant and positive element of their lives. In contrast, the Catholic children demonstrated much less knowledge

and awareness and some appeared quite confused. Patrick, for example, when asked what he thought they were doing, explained that: ‘I think they’re getting somebody buried’, whereas Sean thought they were ‘singing’. Moreover, a small number of the children expressed rather negative attitudes towards the marchers as the following comments from David and Kieran illustrate:

RESEARCHER – What about these people in this photo, what are they doing?  
 DAVID – They’re marching.  
 RESEARCHER – Very good.  
 KIERAN – They’re marching, they’re soldiers.  
 RESEARCHER – Have you seen them before?  
 DAVID – No.  
 KIERAN – You can’t see their guns.  
 [...]
 RESEARCHER – Do you like them?  
 KIERAN – No.  
 RESEARCHER – Why not?  
 KIERAN – ‘Cos they’re soldiers.  
 RESEARCHER – You don’t like the soldiers?  
 KIERAN – No.  
 RESEARCHER – Why do you not like soldiers?  
 KIERAN – ‘Cos they shoot people.

Finally, besides recognising and showing preferences for common cultural symbols and events, a small handful of children were also beginning to pick up and use the language of sectarianism as illustrated in the discussion with Patrick and David (both Catholic) below. It is not possible to state whether Patrick was aware of who the ‘Orangies’ are that he mentions or what they

represent. It is quite possible that he is embellishing and exaggerating his account for the benefit of the researcher. However, regardless of what the ‘truth’ actually is and the fact that he may not know why he dislikes these people, this does not stop him recognising that such a group of people exists and consequently developing strong attitudes towards them:

PATRICK – We go up to the field and there’s Orangies up there.  
 RESEARCHER – There’s Orangies up in the field?  
 DAVID – Yes.  
 PATRICK – And dogs.  
 DAVID – Soldier dogs.  
 RESEARCHER – Soldier dogs?...What are Orangies?  
 PATRICK – They have knives...my daddy. They kill you.  
 [...]
 PATRICK – [My daddy has a gun and] there’s bullets in it.  
 RESEARCHER – What does he have a gun for?  
 PATRICK – To shoot the Orangies.  
 RESEARCHER – To shoot the Orangies?  
 PATRICK – Aye we go to the field.  
 RESEARCHER – Does he take you with him?  
 PATRICK – Yeah.  
 RESEARCHER – Yeah? Why does he do that do you think?  
 [...]
 PATRICK – There’s Orangies and there’s ones who go there...they have knives, and guns and bullets [*excitedly*]  
 RESEARCHER – My goodness and why do they have those?

PATRICK – They have a bomb!

RESEARCHER – A bomb? Why?

PATRICK – Aye and they shoot the bomb and the blows.

RESEARCHER – And why do they do that Patrick?

PATRICK – ‘Cos.

## 7- and 8-year-olds

By the time the children reached the ages of 7 and 8 years, many were spending much of their time playing outside. This gave them increased exposure to the events and cultural symbols in their area. They were also likely to develop an awareness of the neighbouring community, and of the fact that it might pose a threat to them. This became evident in the existence of the peaceline and the field at the end of the peaceline, which was the main interface area between the two communities. While most of the children were not likely, at this age, to be involved directly in the stone-throwing and other forms of confrontation, they were likely to have witnessed such events on many occasions. By mixing with older children and listening to their conversations, they were also being introduced to the explicit language of difference, based around the terms Catholic and Protestant and also the more negative variations such as ‘Orangies’, ‘Prods’ and ‘Taigs’.

The new context required the children to work hard to assimilate all the different experiences and to make sense of them. The embryonic ethnic habitus, already emerging among the

3- and 4-year-olds, was being developed much further and consolidated. The general preferences and predispositions the children had internalised at a younger age had now become the main conceptual framework within which their experiences and the new knowledge they acquired were being organised.

Underpinning the majority of the children’s experiences and perspectives were the ongoing violence and sectarian tensions that existed in the area. By this age, both sets of children had tended to develop some recognition of the very real threat posed by those from across the peaceline. This is clearly evident, for example, in the following discussion with Chloe, John and Mandy (all Protestant):

RESEARCHER – Do you ever go over there [*across the peaceline*] to play?

CHLOE – Aye and get my head bricked in!

RESEARCHER – Why would that happen?

CHLOE – ‘Cos they’re bad.

[...]

CHLOE – They throw bricks and all over at us.

RESEARCHER – Why?

CHLOE – I don’t know.

MANDY – Ivor got chased by the Fenians in three cars.

RESEARCHER – Who’s Ivor?

MANDY – My brother.

RESEARCHER – Oh dear, who chased him?

MANDY – The Fenians.

RESEARCHER – Who are they?

MANDY – Catholics. Bad people, throw bricks at all our houses.

CHLOE – My wee [*small*] friend got her windows put in by one of them.

It is evident from the above that the children clearly understood the divisions behind the violence. They were fully aware of the categories of Catholic and Protestant and had also learned and were using a variety of other terms and knowledge in making sense of the differences between the two groups.

This level of awareness and way of thinking was equally strong among the Catholic children. The following discussion among Louise, Aine and Rosie, shows they were distinctly aware of the threat posed by the neighbouring community and the dangers of playing in the field:

LOUISE – And then I’m going to sneak up the mountain to catch bees and butterflies and greenfly.

RESEARCHER – Why do you have to sneak up?

LOUISE – ‘Cos there’s Orangies.

RESEARCHER – What’s that? [*looks around at the others who laugh*]

LOUISE – You don’t even know what that is?

AINE – Orangies is Protestants.

RESEARCHER – Why do you call them that?

LOUISE: It’s a bit of the thing, the war. The Catholics are on the other side and I’m a Catholic.

AINE – I’m a Catholic.

LOUISE – ‘Cos they’re in the war.

ROSIE – They’re bad to you.

RESEARCHER – ...] They’re bad to you?

ROSIE – Yeah the Orangies kill people, they

kill people in our country.

RESEARCHER – Where did you hear that?

LOUISE – That’s true I heard it from my granny.

ROSIE – They’re like the hoods they kill people like us.

RESEARCHER – When did you find that out?

ROSIE – I always knew that, my mummy told me when I was only 6.

[...]

AMANDA – I thought they were going to kill me [*serious voice*] I went up the mountains and the Orangies were hiding in the bushes and they had guns so they did, and they had their guns ready and all and I said, “Daddy, Mummy there’s guns and the Orangies”, and we all had to run away down the hill, and the Orangies were nearly following us.

It is clearly not possible to fully distinguish truth from fantasy with the children’s accounts, including the one above. In many ways, however, this is not the point. It is clear that these children had witnessed violent events, particularly in the interface area of the field. Moreover, whatever the underlying truth behind the discussions above, they clearly indicate the sense of threat felt by the children and the negative attitudes they had developed about children from the other side. Finally, while some attitudes may have been passed on by family members (in the case above by granny and mummy respectively), it is too simplistic to explain the acquisition of such attitudes completely in these terms. The main reason why these attitudes have been appropriated and used by the children is that they help them to make sense of

and explain their real experiences. In this sense, the children's growing sense of identity and awareness of difference is grounded in, and thus a reflection of, their experiences. It is this point that reinforces the usefulness of the notion of the ethnic habitus.

The children's growing knowledge of and attitudes towards a variety of other events and symbols take place within the overarching shadow of the violence and tensions that exist between the two communities. To illustrate this it is worth briefly returning to the two themes discussed in relation to the 3- and 4-year-olds – football shirts and Orange marches – and assessing how the attitudes of these slightly older children have developed.

The strong recognition and preferences among the 3- and 4-year-old children for Celtic and Rangers tops provided the basis from which they became aware of the cultural and political significance of the two teams. By the ages of 7 and 8 years, the children's conversations about football led routinely to expressions of sectarian attitudes. This is evident, for example, in the following conversation with Chloe, John and Mandy (all Protestant):

CHLOE – I don't like Celtic.

RESEARCHER – Why not?

CHLOE – They make me sick!

RESEARCHER – Why?

CHLOE – Just... 'cos everytime, one time just because they got, they beat Rangers 3–2, they were up on that big wall across the street

[*the peaceline*] from my house and they were going all shouting and all.

[...]

RESEARCHER – John, do you like Celtic?

JOHN – No!

RESEARCHER – Do you like the people who support Celtic?

JOHN – No 'cos they're ugly...they are Catholics.

CHLOE – They throw bricks and all over at us.

RESEARCHER – Why?

[...]

MANDY – 'Cos they're bad and because we don't support Celtic.

RESEARCHER – Is that the only reason?

MANDY – Yeah.

As can be seen, the preferences and predispositions that the children had developed a few years earlier for Celtic and Rangers respectively now provided one of the key markers of difference they used to distinguish between themselves and those from across the peaceline. Being a Celtic supporter and being Catholic, for these children, had become one and the same thing. Extremely similar sentiments were found among many of the Catholic children as the following discussion with David and Stephen illustrates:

DAVID – I'm doing Celtic and...what else?

RESEARCHER – What about Celtic and Rangers?

DAVID – Can't do Rangers.

STEPHEN – Rangers are Protestants...they're tramps.

RESEARCHER – Why?

STEPHEN – They are...Protestant teams.

RESEARCHER – Who told you that?

DAVID – They're scum.

RESEARCHER – Why do you say that? Do you not like them?

DAVID – They're scum...and they beat Celtic all the time.

The mixing together of Protestants, Rangers and the sense of threat that these children felt and how they were all seen to be inextricably inter-linked is also evident from the separate conversation with Louise and Aine (both Catholic):

LOUISE – Protestants support Rangers.

RESEARCHER – Why is that?

LOUISE – Because Rangers are Protestants.

RESEARCHER – So what are Protestants, what does that mean?

LOUISE – It's bad to be a Protestant and/...

RESEARCHER – What was that Louise?

LOUISE – [*quietly*] Protestants come down and shoot ye.

RESEARCHER – Do they?

[...]

AINE – They shot a man down our way.

RESEARCHER – Why did they do that?

AINE – I don't know.

A very similar process can be seen in relation to the children developing attitudes towards Orange marches. The differences that were already evident among the 3- and 4-year-olds in terms of their awareness and attitudes towards Orange marches were also found to have become more defined and pronounced at this

slightly older age. For the Protestant children, some were likely to have begun participating in various activities and to gain enjoyment from this as the following discussion with Steven and Phil (both Protestant) illustrates:

STEVEN – Have you seen the Lodge, the Orange Lodge? I'm in it.

RESEARCHER – Are you?

STEVEN – And my granda.

RESEARCHER – And what nights do you go to that on?

STEVEN – Umm. Tuesday, Wednesday.

RESEARCHER – What do you do when you go there?

STEVEN – Walk.

PHIL – You just walk.

STEVEN – And I swing my band pole.

RESEARCHER – Very good, can you throw it away up in the air?

STEVEN – And we go in to the bar and all! [*very excited*]

PHIL – Aye we go into the bar and all.

RESEARCHER – And are you allowed in the bar?

STEVEN – Aye everybody/

PHIL – /I just drink Coke/

STEVEN – /Even people from this school, Karen, Phil...Paula.

RESEARCHER – Do they all go as well?

STEVEN – Ben doesn't.

PHIL – Wee Ben doesn't go.

RESEARCHER – Who doesn't go?

STEVEN – No his daddy doesn't walk in the lodge.

More generally, Orange marches gained a particular significance for these children in relation to the Twelfth of July celebrations. In the following discussion with Karen, Brittany and Davy, even though it was only April, they were already talking about collecting wood for the bonfires that traditionally accompany such celebrations. Note also how, through reference to the Republican leader Gerry Adams, these children were also beginning to learn the political significance of the divisions that exist:

KAREN – We had millions of fireworks last year, six big boxes.

RESEARCHER – Brilliant, for your house or for the street?

KAREN – For our family and the whole street.

RESEARCHER – Did you have a party in the street?

KAREN – Yes.

BRITTANY – Was it good?

KAREN – We had bonney [bonfire] wood but it's all gone.

RESEARCHER – Where did it go?

KAREN – The workmen took it all away.

RESEARCHER – So what will you about the bonfire?

DAVY – We got a whole lot of wood and they just took it away.

RESEARCHER – So how many bonfires do you have?

DAVY – Lots.

RESEARCHER – That's right, you were telling me that you put things on the top.

KAREN – Aye, Gerry Adams.

BRITTANY – Guess what, see on my bonfire we

put him, a false face of him up there.

KAREN – That was like ours.

In contrast, the Catholic children's perspectives on Orange marches were inconsistent and varied in terms of their awareness and knowledge. While the term 'Orangies' had become a staple part of their vocabulary, many of the children had limited understanding and very little experience of Orange marches. For some of the Catholic children, Orange marchers were simply the same as Protestants and the 'Orangies' they talked about and thus represented a threat. This is evident in the discussion with Matthew, Ryan and Andrew (all Catholics):

ANDREW – I hate the Orangies.

RESEARCHER – But why?

ANDREW – 'Cos before one of them booted me in the privates.

RESEARCHER – And how did you know this boy was an Orangie?

ANDREW – Easy! He had the orange thing round here [indicating a sash around neck] and a hat and all on.

RESEARCHER – He had an orange thing round his neck?

RYAN – And he had guns, Orangies have guns.

ANDREW – So they boot me in the privates, so I booted him up the privates too.

RESEARCHER – All of them were...?

ANDREW – Had brown hair except for one.

RESEARCHER – And is that how you know them?

ANDREW – Yeah.

RESEARCHER – Sure David and Stephen from

your class have brown hair.

ANDREW – Aye I know, but I mean Orangies!  
Orangies!

RESEARCHER – So how can you tell who is an  
Orangie?

ANDREW – I can tell if the man has orange/

RYAN – /Orangies are big giant things.

RESEARCHER – They're big giant things?

RYAN – 34 and 54 and all, but they're not 7s or  
8s or 9s.

RESEARCHER – I'm not sure what you mean,  
are you talking about their ages?

RYAN – Yeah.

RESEARCHER – So they're only old people?

RYAN – They're big people, not over 7s, 8s, 9s  
and 10s.

RESEARCHER – So could someone be the same  
age as you and be an Orangie?

RYAN – No.

RESEARCHER – Why not?

RYAN – [*A little exasperated*] 'Cos, how could  
they be an Orangie when they can't get their  
size of the suit and wouldn't give them the  
guns.

Finally, it is worth noting that most of the children in both areas by this age had developed an awareness of the local paramilitary organisations. The vast majority of the children simply regarded them as a fact of life. The generally matter-of-fact and accepting way in which the children talked of the local paramilitaries is evident in the following conversation with Rosie and Louise (both Catholic). In what follows, Rosie is describing a street fight involving several adults. She is disappointed that despite

trying to reach the IRA only the 'Peelers' (police) arrived in time:

ROSIE – No sure we phoned the IRA and everything but they didn't come in time, only the Peelers came in time.

RESEARCHER – So did you phone both?

ROSIE – Yeah we phoned the IRA and the Peelers were only down the street from us and they came up anyway, and Frances phoned the IRA and thing, they didn't come in time.

RESEARCHER – What do you think they would have done?

ROSIE – They would have stopped it and all 'cos we had to get the IRA or somebody up, or a/  
LOUISE – /A big strong man to beat them.

ROSIE – We get the IRA anytime there's fighting so we phoned the IRA and Frances tried to phone everybody.

[...]

RESEARCHER – What do you know about the IRA then, what do they do?

ROSIE – They always, we tried to phone everyone to come to get the Provos to come around but no one came, only the Peelers. See when the Peelers came everybody throwed big bottles of glass at them, at the Peelers and the Peelers had to stop and talk to Marty in our street 'cos he was throwing bottles at them.

RESEARCHER – Why were they throwing bottles at them?

ROSIE – I don't know, they always do it.

Some of the boys, especially, were also developing strong associations with paramilitary



organisations and fantasising about being members of them. This is seen, for example, in the following discussion involving Phil and George (both Protestant):

- PHIL – The UDA, they're men and they have guns.  
[...]
- GEORGE – I work for the UDA [*laughs*].
- PHIL –[singing] We all work for the UDA! We all work for the UDA!
- GEORGE – They're good.
- PHIL – Sometimes they're good and sometimes they're bad.
- RESEARCHER – What good things do they do?
- GEORGE – Hundred guns in your head!
- PHIL – I don't know.
- GEORGE – I know something good they do, they won't blow up this school.
- RESEARCHER – Will they not?
- GEORGE – 'Cos we're all Protestants.
- PHIL – 'Cos we're all Prods, everyone here in this here whole estate is all Prods.
- RESEARCHER – Why is that?
- PHIL – Just is, I don't know.

## Conclusions

Although this section focuses on Northern Ireland, lessons drawn from the study have much wider relevance. Perhaps the key point is the importance of listening to young children and understanding their experiences and perspectives against the wider social environments within which they live.

In relation to Northern Ireland, while early research suggested that it was not until the ages of 10–11 years that children consistently became aware of the divisions between Catholics and Protestants, this perception appears to be more of an artifact of the particular methods used rather than a reflection of the reality of young children's lives. In particular, it tended to reflect the imposition of adult ways of thinking on children, rather than focusing on how the children themselves have come to think about and make sense of the ethnic divisions around them. By adopting a more explicitly children's rights-based framework, that acknowledges and respects children's rights to be heard and to express themselves, this paper demonstrates the important role of research in informing our understanding of the impact of ethnic divisions on young children. The notion of the ethnic habitus provides a useful framework for understanding the perspectives and experiences expressed by the young children in Northern Ireland. In this sense, the survey-based study provided clear evidence of children as young as 3 years beginning to internalise the cultural habits and dispositions of their respective communities, while the ethnographic study showed how children are actively and competently involved in attempting to make sense of their experiences and develop their understanding throughout early childhood (see also Connolly 1998; Vandebroek 1999; van Ausdale and Feagin 2001; Bar-Tal and Teichman 2005; Singer and de Haan 2007). As the following section explains, this research played an important role in influencing the work of the early childhood sector in North-

ern Ireland, in relation to the consideration of how a more proactive stance could be adopted when dealing with the effects of ethnic divisions among young children and their families.

It is worth noting that the ethnographic findings reported above relate to children from a very specific context, where ethnic divisions remain strong and sectarian tensions and violence persist. The findings are clearly not representative of all children in Northern Ireland or even the majority. While these children were developing very strong and largely negative attitudes towards the other community, the broader survey-based research suggests that this tendency is found only among a small, but significant minority of the population.

Further ethnographic research is needed to explore the experiences and perspectives of children living in different areas of Northern Ireland and wider survey-based research could explore

the variations in attitudes and awareness more systematically. In this sense, it would be useful to adopt a more epidemiological approach to the study of children's attitudes to explore which factors (such as gender, family socio-economic background, local neighbourhood, etc.) tend to be associated with the incidence of negative attitudes among young children and the strength of their own identities. This theme will be explored further in the following section.

Ultimately, the evidence provided by such research enables the development of early childhood programmes that are capable of recognising, and thus engaging more meaningfully with, young children's current experiences and understandings. While this section has focused on a very particular case study, the need to adopt this evidence-informed approach and the types of methods used are clearly applicable and relevant to many other contexts and regions characterised by racial and ethnic divisions.

## Chapter 2: The response of the early childhood sector to ethnic divisions: A case study from Northern Ireland

In reviewing research evidence of the type reported in the previous section, it is very easy to conclude that racial and ethnic divisions are so entrenched, and their effects on young children so profound, that there is little the early childhood sector can do in response. The purpose of this chapter is to show that the early childhood sector can make a real difference to the lives of young children and that it is possible to have a positive and demonstrable effect on young children's attitudes and levels of awareness. (See also Vandebroek 1999, 2005; van Keulen 2004; MacNaughton 2006; Connolly et al. 2007a; Brooker and Woodhead 2008.)

Returning to the case study from Northern Ireland, this section looks at the role played by a particular early childhood organisation in attempting to recognise and deal with the effects of violence and continuing ethnic divisions on young children. The section charts the development of *Early Years – The Organisation for Young Children* – from its inception in 1965 through to the present day, and examines the way it has attempted to respond to the changing nature of the region's conflict.

The section begins with an account from Siobhan Fitzpatrick, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of *Early Years*. She describes some of the issues and problems faced during 'The Troubles'

and how the organisation has come to reconsider its approach to dealing with continuing divisions within the context of the present peace process. One of the main responses is to recognise the need to develop a more proactive stance to dealing with ethnic divisions and to encourage young children to recognise and respect diversity more broadly. This has led to a partnership with the Peace Initiatives Institute (Pii) and the development of the *Media Initiative for Children Respecting Differences Programme*.

The section describes the development of the *Media Initiative* and the rigorous evaluation that has been used to determine whether it was effective. In this respect, the section shows how evaluation methodologies can be used to encourage early childhood programmes to be outcomes-focused. Such evaluations can play an important role, not just in terms of providing evidence on whether a programme is achieving its goals, but also in identifying areas that require further work and/or different approaches.

### Responding to the outbreak of violence

*Early Years* was founded in 1965, just a few years before Northern Ireland erupted into violence. It has therefore been unavoidably shaped by its

experiences in developing and growing through the conflict years. While *Early Years* originally had similar aims to other pre-school organisations in England and elsewhere, the arrival of the conflict significantly changed its ethos and approach. As Siobhan Fitzpatrick, the current CEO of *Early Years*, explains:

“In 1965, just before ‘The Troubles’ in that first couple of years, *Early Years* would have reflected what was happening in England at the time; being led mainly by the middle class, by private providers whose main aim was to set up private pre-schools to meet a need in a community. But a shift began to happen in 1969 when the place just blew up around us and then it was communities and parents who began to come together, not just to provide appropriate play and education facilities for their children, but also, crucially, it was often about creating a sense of shared space for children and for parents themselves within this divided society. Most of the institutions here, including the education institutions, were divided across religious lines and the community-based *Early Years* movement became an opportunity for parents to unite around the interests of their children as opposed to the sectarian or other political divisions that were there. Often they would have said to you that this was the first time they had this opportunity to come together to organise something for their children and it was the only opportunity for parents to work together to provide services for their children in a non-sectarian environment.”

For *Early Years*, therefore, the conflict had the effect of re-focusing its work and approach towards one that was underpinned with a strong community development ethos. As Siobhan goes on to explain:

“While *Early Years*’ role initially was to help the private sector, that quickly shifted to helping communities organise. *Early Years* helped develop committees and constitutions, it helped communities with the standards in terms of what they would need to do to set up, it did the brokering with social services, and provided the initial training for the staff who were going to set up. Also at that stage in the 1970s, even the further education colleges here were doing very little in terms of childcare training, so there was a big role for training which eventually *Early Years* encouraged the colleges and then the Universities to become involved in.”

One of the most significant aspects of *Early Years*’ work during this period was its ability, as an organisation run by women, to work ‘under the radar screen’ to begin creating an alternative space, away from the violence and division caused by the conflict:

“I’d say 99 percent of the membership would be women operating under the radar, definitely, and you know the sector wasn’t funded and in many respects I think it was easier then for the sector to do this type of work because it wasn’t being fought over by the power brokers in terms of the Catholic

church or the controlled education sector. There wasn't very much money, it was being run by women who were motivated by a new experience for themselves and their children, and they were outside the radar and definitely nearly like an alternative to what was happening in terms of the conflict."

Within this alternative space the opportunity was therefore created for women from across the divide to meet to share experiences and perspectives and to support one another. This was made possible by the fact that *Early Years* was organised into 19 branches across Northern Ireland with between 20 and 30 local pre-school providers being members of each. Many of these providers were located in segregated areas and therefore branch meetings provided the space for Catholic and Protestant playgroup leaders and parents to come together. Siobhan provides some sense of the importance of this alternative space for building cross-community relationships:

"Now, the language was very different then from what it is now. The local playgroups would have been saying things like they were *non-sectarian*, *non-political* rather than being *anti-sectarian* but they still created community-based services that were united across the sectarian divide. And as The Troubles unfolded, it was interesting to see – and I myself remember – examples of people in the local community playgroup and the local branch, people beginning to talk about what

was happening around them and trying to do something about it.

"One of the first examples I remember when coming to work in *Early Years* was after the Enniskillen bomb when a lot of people in the local area of Fermanagh knew those who were killed. They had some connection with community playgroups and the local branch was used as a vehicle for people to talk about the awful atrocity. Even more explicitly, and I know it's much later, but after the Omagh bomb, the local branch brought together an emergency branch meeting to offer counselling, because again a lot of staff in settings were directly or indirectly affected. They used the branch as a way of sharing, you know, growing that respect again for each other so it became much more explicit later on. Once people got to know each other in that sort of environment, the cementing and building of relationships really began to happen and I think that's why it was easy for us to begin to explore this work around the whole culture of respecting difference. While it was implicit early on it was still very much a strong element of what we were about."

### **From non-sectarianism to anti-sectarianism**

While the paramilitary ceasefires of the mid-1990s created a new political space, *Early Years* was acutely aware of the fear that remained within the early childhood sector in terms of

dealing with the issue of sectarianism. As Siobhan recounted:

“It was around 1996 when we had the *Children Northern Ireland Order*<sup>7</sup> with a specific focus on equal opportunities so we started to do an awful lot of work around respecting difference. But the thing that we noticed definitely was that it was very easy for groups to bring in costumes of the world, you know, race issues, disability, but you know they just did not and would not name our own particular ‘ism’ so that was definitely a block. And we were worrying that some of the work being done was also a tokenistic approach to difference, especially around race. Now, to be fair I think some of the work around inclusion and around disability and special needs was better but the issue around cultural differences was definitely not being touched at all.”

*Early Years*’ concern for the need to develop a more explicit approach to dealing with the divisions between Catholics and Protestants was confirmed in 2002 with the publication of the research report *Too Young to Notice?* (Connolly et al. 2002, discussed in previous section). The research showed that children as young as 3 years were beginning to be affected by cultural divisions and, that by the age of 6 years, a third of them were aware of the divide and saw themselves as being on one side or the other,

while one in six children were expressing negative attitudes and prejudices about the other community.

By this point, therefore, *Early Years* had resolved to develop a programme of work aimed at addressing sectarianism and promoting respect for difference among young children. Fortunately, and independently of these plans and of the research that had just been published, David McKay and Paul Harris of the Peace Initiatives Institute (Pii) visited Northern Ireland at this time. Pii was established in Colorado USA, with the aim of exploring ways to contribute to building peaceful societies in conflict areas of the world through a focus on children and young people. Pii’s vision is to ‘create a different dialogue, different understanding and less strife among populations in conflict throughout the world’. Many of the founding members of Pii had a business background and believed that their knowledge of mass media could be used to good effect to promote such a message. An important early decision was that effective change work would require the development of partnerships with local organisations and leaders who had insight into the conflict and culture of local situations.

Thus, as *Early Years* were considering how they might best develop a programme of work, they were invited to a meeting convened by Pii, together with the researchers responsible

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<sup>7</sup> This Order represents the main piece of childcare legislation in Northern Ireland covering all children in need as well as children in care. At the time of writing (2009), it continues to provide the main legislative framework regarding children in Northern Ireland.

for *Too Young to Notice?*, to consider how to develop a peace-building programme through the media. As Siobhan recalled:

“We had been doing this thinking and again, coming from the *Too Young to Notice?* report, we felt that if this is beginning to really present itself in very young children we have to be doing something different and more explicit. We had just made an application for funding and were thinking about developing a new curriculum and just out of the blue we were contacted by Pii. They talked then about wanting to work with older children and our initial feeling was look, you know, we feel that it’s nearly too late then and that we have to start with younger children and it could also be easier. So when we came to that first meeting, and others at the meeting were also beginning to say ‘look we’ve done quite a bit of work with older children but there’s been nothing really done with young children’, that fitted perfectly with where we wanted to go. And you know I think what was very exciting for us from the Pii perspective, and one of the things that I think made it easier for the communities, was their expertise and knowledge in terms of the mass media and wanting to use the media to support a change in the perception of ‘difference’ across the entire Northern Ireland community, including within pre-school settings and families.”

It was not long after this first meeting that Pii approached *Early Years* and entered into a partnership to establish and take forward what

was to become the *Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference Programme*. As Siobhan explains, it was an innovative partnership that combined Pii’s media and facilitative skills with the curriculum development expertise of *Early Years* to produce a series of short animations for television:

“It was quite amazing, very quickly – I think it was after the second meeting – Pii approached us and said to us: ‘Right what you’re doing currently, the way you think, what you had wanted to do anyway this fits with what we want to do,’ and then we began exploring with them how we could work together. I think initially all they wanted to do was the televised cartoons and we felt they hadn’t thought about the outreach work, but when they heard what we were already hoping to do, they thought these two things can fit together. What they definitely brought with them was their expertise in the media and their desire to use the media. We wouldn’t have done that ourselves, we would have just thought it was too expensive and that we’d never be able to get funding to do that. But the combination of both and I think Paul Harris (Executive Director of Pii) in particular, his knowledge of the media, what worked, was terrific. What we brought to the media and the cartoons, in turn, was the expertise from people like Carol MacNamara and Eleanor Mearns [Senior Early Years Specialists within *Early Years*] in terms of how young children view characters, what they should look like, you know, all of that sort of stuff but that combination worked very, very well.”



## The Media Initiative for Children Respecting Difference Programme

For the initial pilot programme, three 1-minute animated media messages were designed and produced based around four characters playing in a park (see Figure 4)<sup>8</sup> The critical first step of Pii's work in Northern Ireland in developing these came in selecting an Advisory Council to help with strategic and creative decisions. As Paul Harris explains:

“Pii wanted this programme to reflect a broad worldview, not just another set of opinions about sectarianism. To get that, we needed to have the consistent advice of people with that sort of breadth in their experience and their thinking. Accordingly, the initial Advisory Council contained people from Northern Ireland's mass media (television), university and early-years education, research, community development and government relations



Figure 4. Characters from the Media Initiative (original in colour) PHOTO © PEACE INITIATIVES INSTITUTE

areas, as well as individuals from community conflict neighbourhoods.”

Another critical aspect of the programme was selecting local contractors to create virtually every element, including professionals to research and develop the animations and an educational institution with credibility and expertise in early years settings. Developing the park setting as an independent, safe space was an early decision taken by the creative team. Within that setting, each message was shaped to deal with a particular aspect of difference. As Paul Harris explains, the issue of choosing which differences on which to focus the campaign was a difficult one:

“Pii conducted several focus groups with early years practitioners and policymakers in Northern Ireland and we found a diversity of opinion as to whether we should focus on one or many types of difference. Ultimately we settled on the three areas of disability, ethnicity and cultural/religious difference specifically because of the elevated profile they had in the consciousness of the Northern Ireland community. Pii was clear from the beginning that we needed to address issues of interest throughout the community if our television messages were to have the powerful effect we wanted with adult and child audiences alike.”

The first ‘difference’ therefore addresses disability and involves a storyline in which Tom, one of the characters, was initially excluded

<sup>8</sup> These messages can be downloaded and viewed online at: [www.pii-mifc.org](http://www.pii-mifc.org)



because he wore a corrective eye patch. Early community feedback revealed that wearing an eye patch was a more traumatic experience for children in Northern Ireland than some other countries because of inadequate early medical treatment received in previous years. The storyline showed how being excluded made Tom feel sad and how the other children eventually reached the conclusion that it is much better for everyone to be inclusive and play together.

The second message deals with the issue of race. As Paul Harris explains, this specific difference was chosen because of escalating levels of racist harassment and violence in Northern Ireland:

“Incidents of discrimination and even violence against individuals of Asian and Indian descent were increasing rapidly in Northern Ireland neighbourhoods as we were developing the cartoon series and Pii saw this to be an opportunity to explore in our 60-second cartoons the fact that the roots of all discrimination are the same. This was important too because the entire community was quite sensitive about being ‘preached to’ about continuing sectarian attitudes and behaviours and this allowed us to appeal to a common sensibility about doing away with all forms of discrimination.”

With this in mind, the second message features a young girl, Kim, who is excluded initially because she is Chinese. As before, the storyline shows how children rely upon each other and thus the need for them to be inclusive and play together.

The third message deals with cultural differences between Catholics and Protestants, with the remaining two characters – Jim and Jenny – wearing clothes and playing games that identify them as Protestant and Catholic. Initially, they play separate games in the park. Again, the storyline emphasises how children can help one another and how much better it is if they all play together.

Eleanor Mearns played a key role in developing and facilitating the *Media Initiative* in early-years settings. As she explains, the main message underpinning the cartoons and the curricular materials developed to reinforce them was straightforward:

“The main message in all the cartoons is the same, that you respect difference whatever that difference is and that it’s okay to be different. We picked three differences and I think the main message coming over in all of them is that difference is okay; it’s okay to be different, diversity is good and you should respect that.”

One of Eleanor’s key responsibilities, along with Sinead McShane, has been to design the curricular resource pack to accompany the cartoon messages. She explains the thinking behind the resource pack:

“We thought it would be very good to provide playgroup resources and lots of activities or suggested activities to do with the children. The idea was to give them a sort of

turnkey package because I know from when I ran an early childhood centre myself and tried to do some of this work, you find yourself running to the library to try and get a book and you're trying to look up catalogues who do jigsaws in diversity and you're running somewhere else for something else and it can be quite hard work collecting all this stuff and getting it together. So I remember I was very keen to try to give them a sort of turnkey package where they'd have a lot to start off with and they could take it forward from there."

The pack includes a range of resources and suggested activities. There are hand puppets representing the four animated characters with changeable faces to allow the children to explore different feelings; jigsaws depicting a wide variety of cultural events and symbols, including those associated with the Protestant and Catholic communities; sequencing cards to help children understand and discuss the storylines from the three cartoons; lotto cards; posters; and feelings cubes that have the faces of the cartoon characters on each of the sides of the cubes and allow further exploration of feelings. Alongside encouraging the children to explore differences and respect diversity, the other key theme underpinning the resource pack is a focus on feelings. As Eleanor explains:

"The key things that we were trying to draw out for the curriculum was that we're all different in many ways; there's no two of us that are the same and it's okay to be different. I feel the core of it is around feelings to

be honest. There's a big emphasis on feelings and young children at this age. Although they have the feelings they can't articulate them. They don't even always know the body language associated with the feelings so I think a big part of the core of the work is around the feelings associated with being left out and excluded."

### Evaluation of the pilot programme

The media messages were first broadcast on television in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland early in 2004 and the resource pack was piloted for four weeks during this time in five *Early Years* settings. As Paul Harris explains, television airtime was purchased by Pii initially to target young children watching afternoon programmes:

"We went very cautiously into these children's programming slots. Our feeling was that, even after pre-testing the materials on young children, airing the cartoons themselves might invoke backlash from some elements of the community that had objected to previous programmes on the subject of discrimination, so we initially bought very narrow programming times to see what children's reactions would be. The result, of course, was that they were so well received they actually made it 'safer' to teach the materials on a widespread basis in early-years settings throughout the country. Eventually, media time was purchased in evening adult-child programming slots."

The pilot phase not only provided an opportunity to see how the materials were being delivered in practice and to identify any issues or problems raised by the early childhood professionals, but also allowed for an initial evaluation on whether the programme was achieving its objectives. To accomplish this, Pii used a professional research resource with experience of working with young children and knowledge of worldview issues. Paul Harris explains:

“There were literally hundreds of ‘peace programmes’ operating throughout the country at the time, but none using this untested integration of television messages combined with classroom teaching. So we felt that we needed to understand whether it worked or not and, if not, why not? Given the groundbreaking work done in the *Too Young To Notice?*, we committed to two of the authors, Paul Connolly and Alan Smith, to design and implement the research.”

The evaluation used a quasi-experimental design that involved measuring the children’s attitudes and levels of awareness before and after they had experienced the programme. The results were compared with those from a control group of children from a matched set of five settings who did not participate in the pilot programme. Experimental designs like this help assess whether early childhood programmes can actually lead to positive and measurable change in children’s lives. Using a control group that is matched in terms of age and backgrounds is essential since the only difference is that one

group is participating in the *Media Initiative* while the other is not.

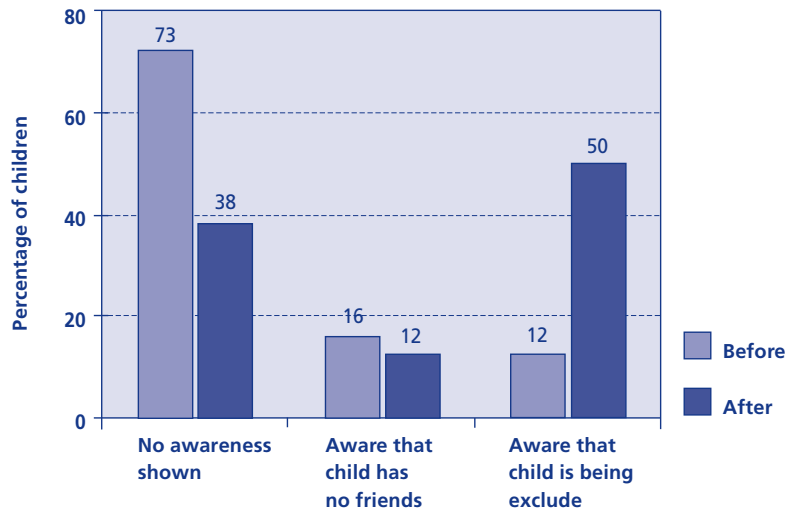
The evaluation also helped Pii and *Early Years* clarify exactly what they intended to achieve through the programme. In other words, to define what is going to be measured and thus what one expects to change. This is an extremely important benefit since it helps to make the intended goals explicit and thus to open up to interrogation and critical scrutiny.

The pilot study evaluation focused on three key outcomes:

1. To increase young children’s ability to recognise instances of exclusion;
2. To increase young children’s ability to understand how being excluded makes someone feel; and
3. To increase young children’s willingness to be inclusive of those who are different.

In relation to the first outcome, the children were shown a photograph of a playground scene with three children huddled together looking at something that one of them was holding. A fourth child was standing a little distance away looking on. This fourth child was expressionless, looking neither happy nor sad. The children were simply asked to describe what they could see in the picture. The children’s responses were recorded verbatim and then coded into one of three categories (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. The effects of the Media Initiative on pre-school children's awareness of exclusion



While no change was found among the children in the control group, positive increases in children's awareness were found among those in the intervention group. The proportion of children believing that the fourth child was being purposely excluded by the other three rose from 12 to 50 percent.

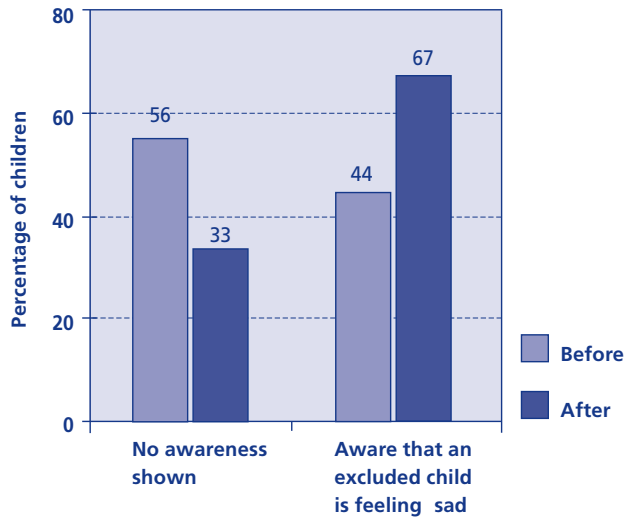
For the second outcome, after the children were asked to describe what they thought was happening in the playground photograph, the fourth child was pointed out without any comment being made and the children were simply asked to state how they thought that child was feeling. Their responses were coded according to whether they described the fourth child as 'sad', 'unhappy' or a related term. As before, while there was no change among the children in the control group, positive change was seen in those who participated in the programme (see Figure 6). The proportion of

children believing that the fourth child was sad increased from 44 to 67 percent.

Evaluating the third outcome involved measuring the children's attitudes by showing them photographs of different children and asking if they would like to play with them. They could reply 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'. If they replied 'yes', they were asked whether they would like to play with them 'sometimes' or 'all the time'. Ten photographs were used depicting a Chinese boy and girl; a boy and a girl who both wore a corrective eye patch; a boy and a girl who wore a Celtic football shirt; a boy and a girl wearing a Rangers football shirt; and a white boy and a girl with no other distinguishing features.

The findings were analysed in two ways. Firstly, the average overall response of each child was calculated both before and after the programme. For each child, their mean score

Figure 6. The effects of the Media Initiative on pre-school children’s awareness of how being excluded can make someone feel



varied between 0 (i.e. not willing to play with any of the 10 children) to 4 (i.e. wanting to play with all 10 children ‘all the time’). The pre-test and post-test mean scores for each child were then compared to see whether their willingness to play with others had changed. While no change was found in the control group, an overall positive effect was found among those par-

ticipating in the pilot programme. As illustrated in Figure 7, the children tended to increase their general willingness to play with others.

Secondly, the children’s specific responses to each of the photographs were analysed to ascertain whether the pilot programme had any effect in terms of increasing the children’s

Figure 7. The effects of the Media Initiative on pre-school children’s general willingness to play with others

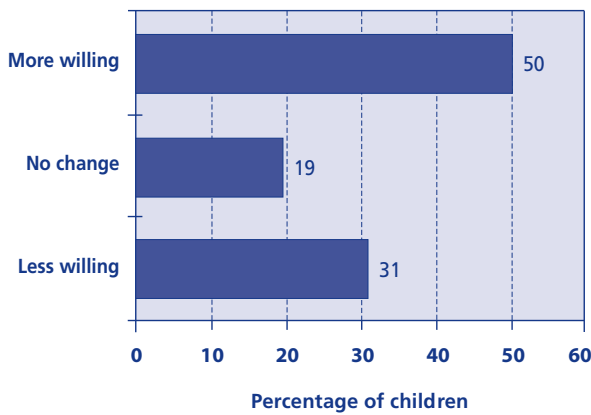
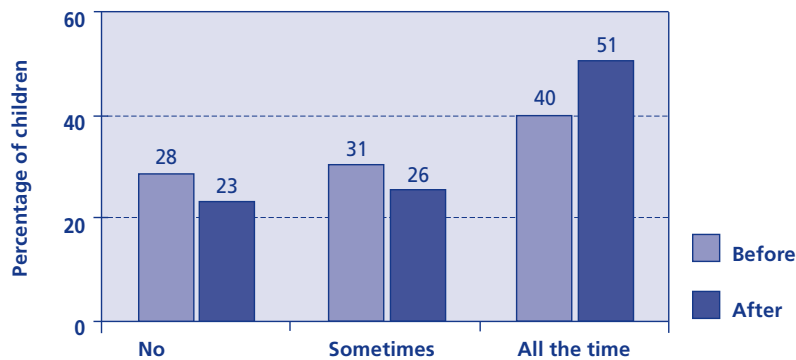


Figure 8. The effects of the Media Initiative on pre-school children's willingness to play with the Chinese girl



willingness to play with those who are different, in this case the Chinese boy and girl and the boy and girl wearing the corrective eye patches. In addition, the team analysed the Catholic children's responses to the boy and girl wearing the Rangers football shirts and the Protestant children's responses to the boy and girl wearing the Celtic football shirts.

Overall, while no changes occurred among the children in the control group, two significant effects were found in relation to the children's responses to the Chinese girl and the girl wearing a corrective eye patch. The findings in relation to the Chinese girl are shown in Figure 8 by way of illustration.

Interestingly, there was no evidence of change in the children's willingness to play with the other children featured in the photographs. This was a particularly significant finding. While the programme therefore appeared to have achieved some measurable success in relation to encouraging young children to be more inclusive of

others in relation to disability and 'race', it did not seem to have had any effect in relation to attitudes of Catholic and Protestant children towards one another (as measured through their willingness to play with the children wearing Celtic and Rangers football shirts).

### Lessons learned from the evaluation

The evaluation helped Pii and *Early Years* to reflect on the *Media Initiative*, identifying areas of success as well as those that required further work. As a follow-on, *Early Years* organised a half-day seminar, during which teachers who delivered the pilot programme shared their experiences and observations. This allowed Pii and *Early Years* to explore some of the findings that emerged from the evaluation in a little more depth.

Overall, it was clear that the pilot programme had a positive and tangible effect on children's awareness and attitudes. Moreover, the general feedback from the participants was overwhelm-

ingly positive. They reported that the children were very attracted to the cartoons and were soon able to recognise and recall the storylines and sing the signature tune. Moreover, the participants felt that the resources and recommended activities provided were appropriate for the children, complemented the messages underpinning the three cartoons, and could be used with little preparation or additional effort.

Beyond this, six key lessons have helped to inform the further development of the *Media Initiative*. Some of these, in terms of the need for more training and support for playgroup leaders and for the development of meaningful relationships with parents and the wider community, reflect those learned elsewhere (see, for example Vandebroek 1999, 2005; van Keulen 2004; MacNaughton 2006; Preissing and Wagner 2006; Connolly et al. 2007a).

The first followed on directly from the finding that the *Media Initiative* appeared to be having no effect on the attitudes of Catholic and Protestant children towards one another. This particular finding was certainly disappointing and encouraged a considerable degree of reflection about the pilot programme and, in particular, the approach being taken in relation to cultural differences. These reflections eventually led to a realisation that it was not appropriate to approach the issue of cultural differences in the same way as those relating to disability and 'race'. More specifically, a re-analysis of the baseline data from the pilot evaluation showed that while there was already a pre-existing

tendency for children to be less willing to play with the children wearing corrective eye patches and also the Chinese children, no such tendencies were found among Catholic and Protestant children's willingness to play with those wearing Celtic and Rangers shirts.

It would appear, therefore, that the pilot programme had actually been attempting to address a problem (children's unwillingness to be inclusive) that was simply not evident among the children in relation to differences between Catholics and Protestants. It was therefore not surprising to find that the pilot programme had no effects given that there were no differences in attitudes between Catholic and Protestant children in the first place.

On further reflection it was realised that this finding actually confirmed those of the earlier *Too Young to Notice?* study in that it was only by the ages of 5 and 6 years that notable proportions of children were explicitly recognising that they belonged to one community or the other and developing negative attitudes and prejudices on the basis of this.

However, and as has been outlined in the previous section, this did not mean that young children were unaffected by the conflict. As the study also found, even by the ages of 3 and 4 years, children were already beginning to acquire and internalise the cultural preferences of their own communities and this, in turn, provided the foundations upon which their ethnic identities were formed (see Connolly

2003). An important lesson, therefore, is that while it was appropriate to address children's negative attitudes and prejudices towards disability and 'race', it was more appropriate in relation to the Protestant/Catholic divide to focus on widening children's experiences and awareness of a range of cultural events and symbols associated with a variety of communities. More specifically, this would help to encourage the children to recognise and develop positive experiences of and attitudes towards events and symbols beyond those associated with their own communities, thus helping to prevent what was already emerging as an extremely partial and partisan cultural awareness.

The second key lesson learned from the pilot phase was the need to provide training to help playgroup leaders use the resources and exercises. Eleanor Mearns explains:

"We've learned that people need a lot of ideas around how to use the resources to get the most out of them and they do need to be careful, because you can use the resources in a wrong way. For example, some people were concentrating far too much on the differences within the characters and highlighting them and that has led us to talk now about first of all thinking about the similarities before looking at the differences with the children. Maybe you could introduce Tom first as a wee boy who comes to playgroup and loves playing with the Lego, who loves to go swimming on Tuesday night, and one day a week he loves to go to the park with his grandmother. So you try to get all of the similarities

in first of all and then you can say he has to get an eye patch but that's okay. He's got an eye patch because he's got a sore eye and if you had a sore hand you might need a patch on that or if you broke your leg, you know, and getting it in that way. What we found was, because we weren't giving them enough guidance in the beginning, some groups were saying to the children 'now why do you think they won't play with Tom?' and because the children weren't saying too much at all they said 'Is it because he has an eye patch?'"

Within this, one specific issue is the fear expressed by some playgroup leaders around using the resources relating to differences between Protestants and Catholics. As Eleanor explains:

"I think in some cases they were unsure about the message concerning differences between Protestants and Catholics; what they were actually supposed to be doing, you know. And we had to do a lot of work in telling them what they weren't doing because I think they thought they were nearly expected to teach politics in some way to young children. Whereas we were saying, look, you know, there's activities there and if you look at them closely and in detail they're just looking at the different sports people play the different social activities that they have, we weren't sort of teaching politics to the children but that's the one that causes the greatest concern."

A third key lesson from the pilot was the recognition that, in order to deliver the *Media Initiative* effectively, playgroup leaders need to



begin reflecting upon their own attitudes and beliefs. Some work was required to convince some playgroup leaders that this was necessary in the first place. Eleanor explains:

“One of the things that came up at the very beginning was that these children are too young and that we shouldn’t be starting with this age group. So we now do an exercise in training about your first memories of difference. We start by getting them to start thinking about their very first day at school to get them thinking way back and then we ask them to remember the first time they ever noticed someone who was different from themselves. And the stories and the dialogue that comes out of that shows that they have memories of difference from maybe 4 and 5 years and maybe their experience with the adults around them hasn’t always been a good experience. And therefore they’ve had to make their own sense of what was happening and quite often it has given them a lot of fear, you know. We got one woman saying how she remembers there was a boy beside her and she didn’t know what was wrong with him so she ran away every time she saw him. Now as an adult she thinks he probably had cerebral palsy but she didn’t know that at the time and she was frightened of him because he made involuntary movements and so she ran away.

“So I think we have got much better too at making them think things through a wee bit more. We had another woman a couple

of months ago there and she kept saying she didn’t think there is any problem here between Protestants and Catholics, you know, and she’d said to us a wee while earlier she would be afraid to take the Twelfth of July jigsaw [*an event associated with the Protestant community*] in her group. We were therefore able just to come back and say well if you think there’s no problem then why are you so worried about using the jigsaw?”

It was also found necessary to increase the playgroup leaders’ own understanding of the events and symbols associated with the other community and, moreover, to be comfortable with discussing them. Recognising this led Pii to secure initial funding from the Community Relations Council in Northern Ireland to ensure that the training included a significant experiential dimension to encourage playgroup leaders to reflect upon their own attitudes and experiences. As Eleanor explains:

“If people are going to do work around diversity with young children then they need to look at themselves first of all and their own values, attitudes, prejudices. [...] and we were picking up as well that the biggest fear was around the third media message and the cultural differences between Protestants and Catholics. So we’ve done a lot of different things since then. First of all we’ve tried to produce the wee booklet to supplement that a bit. We found that still wasn’t enough. There needs to be discussion and

dialogue. You only really get the true learning when you get into the dialogue. So then we wanted to up our training more so that we would have a full day training [...] around the cultural differences so we have what we call a one-day follow-up day and that's where we just sit, and we still bring Tony [*Tony McCauley – the Specialist Trainer*] in for that because we don't feel confident enough to do that on our own. But that's where we sit and talk about a lot of the cultural differences within Northern Ireland. People bring in symbols and things that represent their own cultures and there's a lot of dialogue and discussion. Then we look again at those resources that are representing the third media message and how we're trying to bring those symbols like the flags and the parades and the sports into that and how we're trying to represent them. Then we talk about how you would maybe work with those with the children so as to take the fear out of it for people."

A fourth key lesson from the pilot is the importance of training as a way of increasing the confidence of playgroup leaders, parents and management committees. This is especially the case in relation to dealing with parents, particularly when dealing with differences between Catholics and Protestants. As Eleanor explains:

"I think we've got the training a little bit better now and we are able to make people a lot more confident about dealing with Catholic/Protestant differences. But there's still fear big time about that particular one

and dealing with parents' reactions to it. They are worried about what will they say if a parent comes in and says: 'I don't want my child doing a Twelfth of July jigsaw puzzle'. What do we say, you know, so there was a lot of fear around that. And there still is to a certain extent. And sometimes you can see there's worry there, you can see it from the body language, but I feel we have certainly got a lot better at the training now and giving them a lot more support, a lot more ideas, a lot more storylines, you know."

The importance of playgroup leaders being confident in their relationships with parents can be seen in relation to how two different playgroups responded to complaints from parents. In the first one, as Eleanor explains, the playgroup leaders were confident and able to work with the mother to resolve the matter:

"There was this wee boy who was with his mother driving through a local Protestant area where there were a lot of flags and he said: 'Oh, this is Union Jack city!' The mother came in the next day and said angrily: 'What are you teaching about flags?'. As it happened the group were pretty confident and they explained to the mother exactly what they were doing through the curriculum and they explained to her that flags were an issue that was not going to go away and what they were trying to do and what they weren't trying to do, so they were quite confident in how they dealt with it and showed her the activities they were doing

around flags. As far as I know she was okay in the end when she understood.

“They were quite confident in talking about exactly what they had done and were very sure of what they had done and how they were doing it but were not going to say ‘we’re not going to do this’, they weren’t going to get into that sort of dialogue with her because their attitude was, you know, flags are something that’s not going to go away and if we never do anything about it...and all we’re trying to do with children at this stage is show them that there are flags of the world and that in every country there’s a flag. Football teams have flags, you know, and they were explaining what they were doing and they talked about we might even make a playgroup flag.

In the second example described by Eleanor, it can be seen that the lack of confidence in the playgroup almost led them to discontinue with the *Media Initiative*. The direct support she provided was a significant factor in changing their perceptions:

“There was a mother who came in saying ‘my child was playing quite happily with the next door neighbour’s child who had an eye patch, you’ve started this programme just one day and now he’s not playing with him, this is a terrible programme!’ So it’s the same sort of thing and in that particular instance those staff weren’t confident about dealing with that and I think they sort of felt maybe

they shouldn’t be doing this programme. They began to have doubts about it and that’s when I went in and talked to them about what they could be doing and then I ran a parents’ workshop within that group.

“Strangely enough, when I came to do the workshop with the parents, that parent wasn’t able to come because she worked. But a couple of her friends were there and they were very happy with the workshop and I think they reassured her. And the staff, by the time I had given them a few ideas, were able to reassure her as well. I think what had happened within that group and with this mother because she was annoyed was telling all the other mothers that this was a terrible programme that makes matters worse! So I think the ones that came to the workshop could see that it was a good programme.”

This last example leads into the fifth key lesson learned: the need to provide ongoing support to playgroup leaders delivering the programme. For *Early Years* this has involved the training of their own Advisers so that they can then provide support to their respective playgroups. As Eleanor explains:

“We’re trying to get more people trained up because we feel that works two ways. The more the advisers know about it and the more they get involved, the more they can support and help the groups and the parents out there. So I think that is something we need to do. Another thing is that we’re send-

ing them out with the resource packs but nothing actually for them to use with parents other than the wee booklet we've done giving them ideas and telling them what they can do. But I think what we would like to do, Sinead and I, would be to get funding in order that they go away not only with their big resource pack but a also a wee pack, parenting pack and maybe things like videos and different things in there that they can use to work with the parents and support them."

The sixth and final key lesson, again arising from the last point, is the need to find ways to help playgroups work more closely with parents. Providing resources and training for playgroup leaders so they can run parents' workshops is clearly one important way of doing this. It may also be useful to extend the current resources and activities to encourage parental involvement. However, the fear and anxiety expressed by some playgroup leaders at the moment means that they tend to avoid these particular resources and activities. The key point seems to be that greater partnerships with parents are likely to be forged only through effective training and thus increased confidence within the playgroups themselves.

Perhaps the most important point to make in this regard is that many of the concerns and fears held by playgroup leaders about parents' reactions seem to be unfounded. Indeed, the use of mass media in this instance helped to reach parents directly and diffuse most potential opposition to the programme. As Eleanor explains, the overwhelming reaction from

parents to the *Media Initiative* has been positive, reflecting the point made by Siobhan earlier that most parents simply want the best for their children's futures:

"I think we need to do more work, we need to involve more parents. In general the big fear among playgroups has been that the parents will object and the reality has been that there have been very few parents objecting. There have been a few. But the reality has been it's been very few, you can probably count on your hands the number of parents that have actually really made a fuss about it, and the majority of parents have welcomed it and gone along with it.

"Since the initial development of the programme, *Early Years* have developed an extended training programme for pre school leaders, three workshops for parents and a workshop for management committees. We have found that this type of community development approach is much more effective than just concentrating on training pre-school teachers. We have also been able to encourage the Department of Education to introduce the programme within the primary school sector, therefore providing opportunities for children to have a developmentally appropriate approach to this type of work from 3 to 8 years."

## Conclusions

Once again, there is a need to recognise that Northern Ireland represents a very specific

context. While it is a society emerging out of nearly three decades of armed conflict, it is also a relatively affluent region. The highly developed infrastructure found in relation to the early childhood sector may not be representative of other regions experiencing armed conflict. Also, the resources that have been developed and made available in early childhood settings through the *Media Initiative* may be difficult to replicate elsewhere and/or be inappropriate for other contexts.

However, the purpose of recounting this case study is not to hold it up as a specific model that should be replicated elsewhere, but rather to draw out a number of broader points about potential roles and approaches that can be taken by the early childhood sector and augmented in this case by mass media in contexts characterised by racial and ethnic divisions. In this respect, three key messages emerge.

Firstly, and through the example of *Early Years*, this section shows the potential power of the early childhood sector in terms of its ability to work ‘under the radar’ of the conflict and thus to begin to build relationships between communities and across ethnic divides.

Secondly, the paper illustrates the potential role that outside organisations – in this case Pii – can play in working respectfully and collaboratively with very diverse stakeholders on the ground, by developing strategic networks capable of formulating and implementing new and innovative early childhood programmes.

Finally, and underpinning such networks, is the importance of research, in terms of both providing the impetus for change and ensuring that such change is informed by evidence on the nature of the issues and problems that the new programmes are seeking to address. Moreover, the paper demonstrates the importance of vigilant documentation and rigorous evaluation methods, not only in encouraging an outcomes-focused approach to the development of early childhood programmes, but also in ascertaining whether such programmes are achieving their objectives.

Of course, the evaluation described in this case study concerned a short (4-week) pilot programme that was delivered in five very committed and enthusiastic settings. It is not possible to say whether the same findings would be gained when running the programme for a year in a much larger number of settings. Fortunately, this is something that, at the time of writing, is currently being addressed with a full cluster randomised controlled trial (September 2008 to June 2009) in 80 pre-school settings across Northern Ireland and in two counties in the Republic of Ireland, involving around 1,000 3- and 4-year-olds. The trial will not only assess the effects of the programme on children, but will also assess its effects on the parents’ and early childhood practitioners’ attitudes and awareness.

Another understandable concern raised often in relation to evaluations of this type is that we do not know whether the effects of the programme will last into the future. In fact, it is quite reasonable to hypothesise that if there is

no follow-up then the effects may be quite limited and short-term. However, this should not detract from the fact that, in the present case, there is at least some evidence that the *Media Initiative* can be effective; at least in the short-term. The challenge here is therefore to look at ways in which the positive developments that have arisen from the programme can be sustained and built upon in future years. In this sense, rather than focusing on the programme's short-term nature, it may be better to look at it in another way, asking: if this level of positive change is what can be achieved in a short period, what more could we achieve if we were able to use this as the starting point for an

holistic and long-term approach to dealing with issues of ethnic diversity?

The debate about the potentially short-term effects of such programmes should not detract from recognising the importance of evaluations of this type in helping those involved in the development of early childhood programmes to be critically reflexive about their work and thus to identify areas of success as well as those needing further work or adaptation. That the current evaluation was able to encourage serious reconsideration of certain elements of the pilot programme – especially those related to addressing Catholic/Protestant differences – is certainly evident from the above account.

## Chapter 3: Future challenges and the work of the Joint Learning Initiative on Children and Ethnic Diversity

The case study from Northern Ireland provides some useful insights into how early childhood diversity programmes can be developed in contexts characterised by racial and/or ethnic divisions. It also draws attention to the many challenges that lie ahead.

These challenges provide the focus for the final section, which describes the work of the Joint Learning Initiative on Children and Ethnic Diversity (JLICED). This is a global and interdisciplinary network of leading researchers, policymakers and practitioners who are committed to reducing racial and ethnic divisions/conflict and building socially inclusive and respectful communities through the promotion of effective early childhood programmes. JLICED is co-sponsored by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies and its format and structure are based upon the successful Joint Learning Initiative model developed previously by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in collaboration with other partners<sup>9</sup>.

The original proposal for JLICED was inspired by the approach and model of working developed in Northern Ireland and described in this paper. Thus, alongside a commitment to developing early childhood programmes that are

children's rights-based, evidence-informed and outcomes-focused, the approach was founded on a desire to see early childhood educators, researchers, local communities and NGOs working collaboratively and in partnership.

By drawing upon the wealth of expertise that exists internationally in this area in relation to the work supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and beyond, JLICED represents a unique opportunity to explore how such an approach might be best developed and adapted to very different social contexts around the world. It also provides an invaluable opportunity for those involved to learn from one another.

This section describes JLICED and its proposed programme of work. It then returns to the three core values set out at the beginning of the paper that seek to ensure that the development of early childhood programmes are children's rights-based, outcomes-focused, and evidence-informed. These values are being taken forward by JLICED in its own work. The section draws out how these values have, to varying degrees, underpinned the work described in the case study before then setting out the challenges that lie ahead for JLICED in taking these forward.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the work of the Joint Learning Initiative on Children and HIV/AIDS ([www.jlica.org](http://www.jlica.org)).

## The JLICED

Up-to-date information on the work of JLICED can be found on its website ([www.jliced.org](http://www.jliced.org)). The initiative represents a global network of internationally respected researchers, policy-makers and practitioners who promote the development of early childhood programmes that seek to address the negative effects of racial and ethnic divisions and conflict in the lives of young children. JLICED seeks to do this in a number of ways:

- **Dissemination** – providing an international platform for the sharing and dissemination of existing research and practice with regard to racial and ethnic diversity and young children;
- **Research** – undertaking research to increase understanding of the ways in which racial and ethnic divisions and conflict affect the lives of young children and their families and communities;
- **Community development** – helping local early childhood organisations, communities and researchers to work in partnership to develop new and innovative early childhood programmes aimed at addressing the negative effects of racial and ethnic divisions and conflict; and
- **Evaluation** – evaluating the effectiveness of early childhood programmes in order to contribute to the development of an international evidence base on the types of programmes that are suitable for particular children and communities in specific contexts.

JLICED is organised into six Learning Groups. Each group has at least 10 members and their activities are coordinated by a Steering Committee, co-directed by Professor Paul Connolly and Professor Tony Gallagher from Queen's University Belfast. During the first 3-year phase (2008–2010), the Learning Groups will seek to develop and build strategic networks, disseminate existing knowledge and practice, and produce support materials for use by local organisations wishing to develop new early childhood programmes. Inspired by the overall model of working outlined in the Northern Ireland case study, the following phase of JLICED will seek to work respectfully and in partnership with local organisations in a number of regions characterised by racial and/or ethnic divisions.

## Future challenges

JLICED faces five key challenges, several of which were identified during the Northern Ireland study.

### 1. Developing and implementing a children's rights-based approach

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the work ahead relates to the need to ensure that it is underpinned by a commitment to children's rights. The case study has drawn attention to some of the benefits of doing this in terms of shifting the research focus towards one that respects children's rights to express their views and for these to be taken into account (UNCRC 2007: Article 12). In practical terms, an emphasis



on young children's own experiences and perspectives has helped to inform the development and refinement of the *Media Initiative* so that it addresses the needs of young children more directly and appropriately and is thus more likely to achieve its goals.

However, the adoption of a children's rights framework requires much more. On the one hand there is the need to ensure that programmes are fully compliant with relevant children's rights standards. In the case of the *Media Initiative*, this means recognising the requirement that children have the right to be protected from discrimination, whether on the grounds of race, ethnicity, language, sex, religion, disability or nationality (Article 2), and that they have the right to learn and use their own religion, language and culture (Article 30).

A children's rights perspective also emphasises the need for the education of children to focus on the development of respect for their own cultural identity, language and values (Article 29c) as well as preparing them for a 'responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin' (Article 29d).

On the other hand, there is a need to move beyond simply focusing on and incorporating young children's experiences and perspectives, and towards finding meaningful ways to encourage their active participation in the design,

delivery and evaluation of early childhood programmes (Article 12).

It is with these challenges in mind that one of the Learning Groups of JLICED has been charged with the specific remit of exploring these issues and working out how to incorporate a children's rights-based framework in practice. Moreover, being a global initiative, the Learning Group is acutely aware of the different and culturally-specific ways in which children's rights can be conceptualised. This is also something it will explore in detail.

## **2. Developing appropriate research methods and methodologies**

The second key challenge facing JLICED is the need to develop appropriate and meaningful methods for understanding young children's experiences and perspectives and the ways in which racial and ethnic divisions impact upon their lives. Since the nature and extent of racial and ethnic divisions vary significantly from one context to the next, developing such an understanding is crucial if local early childhood programmes are to address the particular needs of young children in a specific area or region.

The case study clearly demonstrates the important role played by research at a number of levels. Firstly, and through large-scale surveys, research can help to identify when and how ethnic divisions begin to affect young children's lives. In the case of Northern Ireland, such research was able to identify that even young children were beginning to recognise and

develop negative behaviours in relation to race and disability and thus there was a need to deal with these explicitly.

The research also challenged the view that children's attitudes towards Catholic/Protestant differences should be understood and treated in the same way. More specifically, the evidence suggested that children were not recognising such differences explicitly at a very young age but they were, nonetheless, already developing and internalising the cultural preferences and dispositions of their respective communities. As described, this suggested the need for a different approach in relation to the ethno-religious divide; one that focused on increasing children's awareness of the cultures and traditions of their own and other communities.

Such research is essential if the development of early childhood programmes is to be outcomes-focused. Only large-scale research will identify the particular effects of racial and ethnic divisions on young children's levels of awareness, attitudes and behaviour, and thus precisely what needs to be changed, in what way and by how much.

However, the use of research to promote an evidence-informed approach to the development of early childhood programmes is not restricted to the identification and setting of outcomes or goals. When developing the programmes themselves it is essential to have a proper understanding of the ways in which racial and ethnic divisions are interpreted and experienced by

young children, and thus what impact they have on the children's lives and relationships.

This is where qualitative research plays a crucial role. As demonstrated in the case study, such research can help us understand the ways in which young children come to understand and attempt to negotiate issues of race and ethnicity and the interpretive frameworks they use. Again, given the diverse ways in which racial and ethnic divisions operate in different contexts, we cannot assume that children will make sense of and respond to them in a uniform way. In-depth qualitative research is therefore needed to help researchers develop the necessary understanding to ensure that the nature and content of early childhood programmes will engage young children in a meaningful and effective way.

The challenge of further development of a wide range of research methods along these lines is now being taken forward by two of the Learning Groups within JLICED. One of these will be concerned, in part, with the further development and application of quantitative methods to provide insights into the different ways in which young children in particular social contexts first tend to become aware of racial and ethnic divisions, and how these tend to impact upon their attitudes and behaviour.

The use of larger-scale survey methods will also allow for a better understanding of whether such levels of awareness, attitudes and behaviours may tend to be associated with factors

such as age, gender, race, religion, local neighbourhoods and wider socio-economic factors. The development of this type of ‘epidemiological’ approach will, in turn, help to inform decisions concerning whether specific programmes in particular regions need to be universal and/or more targeted in their delivery.

Another Learning Group will focus on the development of new and innovative qualitative methods to provide insights into young children’s experiences and perspectives and the particular environments, sets of relationships, factors and social processes that tend to inform them. The Learning Group will explore and develop a range of methods for enabling young children to express their views and to reflect upon them.

### **3. Learning from existing research and programmes**

A third challenge for JLICED in terms of adopting an evidence-informed approach is to ensure that it can make use of the lessons available from existing research and the experiences of developing and delivering similar programmes elsewhere. This will be done in two ways. In relation to research, part of the first phase of work accomplished by the two Learning Groups mentioned above will be to draw together and disseminate what is currently known from relevant quantitative and qualitative studies. The Learning Groups will draw out and summarise the key points from the research literature and the JLICED website will host a fully searchable database listing specific research articles and reports.

Two other Learning Groups will focus specifically on the development of new programmes. One will focus on programmes in contexts characterised by racial and ethnic divisions, while the other will focus on the specific challenges of developing programmes in areas undergoing or emerging from significant levels of armed conflict.

Both Learning Groups will include members who have significant experience in developing and delivering early childhood programmes in a range of contexts. Moreover, both Learning Groups will contribute to the development of a second database on the JLICED website that will provide information on existing early childhood programmes that have been developed and delivered across the world.

### **4. Developing robust methods to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes**

The fourth key challenge for JLICED is to develop further methods for evaluating the effectiveness of early childhood programmes. As demonstrated in the case study, this is an essential element in ensuring the development and delivery of early childhood programmes are outcomes-focused and evidence-informed. The evaluation of the *Media Initiative* pilot programme needed an explicit focus on identifying and then measuring the planned outcomes, as well as using the evaluation findings to inform the further development and refinement of the programme.

This type of evaluation, to assess the efficacy of early childhood programmes in addressing

issues of racial and ethnic diversity, is a new approach and more work is needed to determine how such evaluations can be undertaken meaningfully and appropriately. The work will seek to develop practical and valid measures for use in the evaluations as well as appropriate ways of designing and undertaking them.

While the case study demonstrates the important role and potential for rigorous evaluations of this type, many challenges lie ahead. Clearly, not all outcomes can be measured easily and some positive effects of particular programmes may not be picked up. At the same time, some outcomes that are identified as important for a specific programme may be difficult to measure directly. There is also the question of how to interpret and use the findings of such evaluations in terms of applying and generalising them to wider situations.

These all clearly represent major challenges for the JLICED. It would be very easy to point to the limitations of such evaluative approaches and then dismiss their use altogether. However, when used carefully and pragmatically, such evaluative methods can play an important role in encouraging a critically reflexive approach to the development of early childhood programmes, and the case study is a good illustration. Moreover, and however fraught with difficulties it may be, there is surely a need to ask and attempt to answer the fundamental question of whether the programmes are having a positive effect on children. Indeed, there is an ethical responsibility on early childhood professionals to ensure that such

programmes are, at the very least, having no negative effects on children.

### **5. Ensuring government support and buy-in for programmes**

The final challenge is associated with the need to ensure that such programmes are recognised, adopted and supported by key service providers and, ultimately, by governments. In this sense, even when such programmes have been developed and have research evidence testifying to their effectiveness, they will not be automatically accepted, funded and rolled out by governments.

Governments have their own political priorities and early childhood care and education will be positioned within these. Governmental priorities are informed by a complex range of economic, social and political discourses. These define what is and is not acceptable in early childhood practice, and what types of programmes (if any) are important to the government. If JLICED cannot engage and attempt to shape the political domain then there is a real danger that the programmes it develops will remain marginalised. Moreover, in many societies affected by conflict, governments are either weak or seen by particular sections as partisan or non-existent. In such contexts there is a need to consider different ways of gaining political support for early childhood programmes. For this reason, a sixth Learning Group will engage explicitly with these wider political discourses and contexts and adopt an advocacy role in promoting and securing commitments to future JLICED programmes.

## **Conclusions**

JLICED faces many challenges as it takes forward and develops a global initiative around the development of early childhood programmes to address the effects of racial and ethnic divisions. The six Learning Groups will need careful coordination and integration to ensure they continue to inform one another.

Perhaps the greatest challenge is working out ways of successfully developing new early childhood programmes from the standpoint of being children's rights-based, outcomes-focused and evidence-informed, and how these three core values can be integrated in practice. The author hopes that the case study reported here has demonstrated some of the potential benefits associated with such an approach.



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#### About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. The foundation was established in 1949 and is based in the Netherlands. Our income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883 to 1958.

Our mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equality of opportunity and rights for all.

We work primarily by supporting programmes implemented by partners in the field. These include public, private, and community-based organisations. Our strategy of working through partnerships is intended to build local capacity, promote innovation and flexibility, and help to ensure that the work we fund is culturally and contextually appropriate.

We currently support about 140 major projects. We focus our grantmaking on 21 countries in which we have built up experience over the years. These include both developing and industrialised countries and represent a geographical range that encompasses Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.

We work in three issue areas:

- Through "Strengthening the Care Environment" we aim to build the capacity of vulnerable

parents, families and communities to care for their children.

- Through "Successful Transitions: The Continuum from Home to School" we aim to help young children make the transition from their home environment to daycare, preschool and school.
- Through "Social Inclusion and Respect for Diversity" we aim to promote equal opportunities and skills that will help children to live in diverse societies.

Also central to our work is the ongoing effort to document and analyse the projects we support, with the twin aims of learning lessons for our future grantmaking activities and generating knowledge we can share. Through our evidence-based advocacy and publications, we aim to inform and influence policy and practice both in the countries where we operate and beyond.

#### Information on the series

*Working Papers in Early Childhood Development* is a 'work in progress' series that presents relevant findings and reflection on issues relating to early childhood care and development. The series acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas, often arising out of field work, evaluations and training experiences. As 'think pieces' we hope these papers will evoke responses and lead to further information sharing from among the readership.

The findings, interpretations, conclusions and opinions expressed in this series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

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