

Institution: Queen's University Belfast
Unit of Assessment: 25 (Education)
Title of case study: Promoting Respect for Ethnic Diversity in Preschool Children
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The impact of this case study is that every preschool child in Northern Ireland has followed an educational programme, developed at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) from 2003 onwards, on respect for ethnic diversity. It has been adopted and embedded within practice by more than 1,200 preschool settings with more than 40,000 children in Northern Ireland and The Republic of Ireland. In Northern Ireland children as young as three years old have been shown to hold sectarian and racist attitudes. As a result of the work there were major changes on the attitudes of preschool children in terms of respect for ethnic diversity in Northern Ireland. A partnership with US-based Sesame Workshop and the BBC produced a children's television series. Every preschool child in Northern Ireland has seen the series. This has also resulted in less racist and sectarian behaviours amongst the pre- school population. There are early childhood programmes, based upon this work, to promote respect for ethnic diversity being developed in Indonesia, Kenya and Colombia.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Research demonstrated that in Northern Ireland children as young as three years old were shown to hold sectarian and racist attitudes. As a result of this our research clearly showed that it was possible to design an effective intervention to increase respect for ethnic diversity and minimise sectarian and racist attitudes. The interdisciplinary nature of the research, the adherence to high standards of experimental methodology (e.g. the use of randomised controlled studies in a school setting is unique and sector leading) and sample design (ensuring surveys are representative) make this research robust and reliable.</p> <p>Data from a random sample of 352 children aged 3-6 years selected from primary schools and attached preschools across Northern Ireland provided clear evidence, for the first time, of the effects of the continuing religious-ethnic conflict and divisions in Northern Ireland on the awareness and attitudes of children as young as three [1]. The project team were: Connolly, Professor of Education, QUB, 2003-13; Kelly, Senior Lecturer in Social Work, QUB, 2003-13; and Smith, Professor of Education, University of Ulster, 2003-13]. This indicated that early childhood represented a significant period where children begin to acquire and internalise ethnic attitudes and prejudices. However, it also indicated that this provided a window of opportunity to promote the development of positive attitudes towards ethnic diversity and inclusive identities.</p> <p>This study led directly to the development of a new preschool programme – the Media Initiative for Children – that was evaluated using a small quasi-experimental study, in 10 preschool settings and involved 165 children aged 3-4 years [2]. The project team were Connolly; Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive of The Early Years Organisation (previously NIPPA), 2003-13; Gallagher, Professor of Education Queen's University Belfast, 2003-13; and Harris, Director of Peace Initiatives Institute, 2003-13. The innovative approach to collaboration between researchers and early childhood practitioners in the development of the programme and its robust evaluation was subsequently disseminated widely through two international monographs ([3], [4]). The project team were Connolly; Hayden, Professor of Education, University of Sydney (2003-08), Macquarie University, Australia (2008-13); and Levin, Professor of Education, Wheelock College, Boston, MA, USA (2003- 13). The development of the programme provided an important case study on how effective programmes aimed at promoting respect for diversity could be developed in a collaborative and inclusive way, even in the context of a society emerging out of ethnic violence and conflict. The study demonstrated the importance of researchers and practitioners working closely in partnership and the way in which research informed the design, delivery and evaluation of early childhood programmes; mirroring, in many ways, the values and ethos of the initiative itself. The findings of the evaluation provided clear evidence that the programme had a positive impact on the awareness, attitudes and intended behaviours of preschool children in terms of their respect for ethnic diversity.</p> <p>Following on from this a large-scale survey of the attitudes and awareness of a sample of 1,049 preschool children aged 3-4 years-old provided further evidence of the ways in which ethnic divisions shape the attitudes and identities of preschool children [5]. The Project team for this was Connolly. A version of the Media Initiative for Children programme, enhanced on the basis of findings noted above, was subsequently evaluated using a mixed method design that included a large-scale cluster randomised controlled trial involving 74 preschool settings (54 in Northern</p>

Ireland and 20 in the border counties of the Republic of Ireland), 1,181 children aged 3-4 years, 868 parents and 232 practitioners from the settings. The trial was funded by Early Years: The Organisation for Young Children (£312,000) and took place from 2009 – 2010 [6]. The project team was: Connolly, Miller and Eakin (all QUB). Findings indicated that the Media Initiative for Children was having a positive impact in improving young children's: socio-emotional development; awareness of cultural differences; and willingness to engage in cultural activities associated with their own and other ethnic traditions.

3. References to the research

- [1] Connolly, P., Kelly, B. and Smith, A. (2009) Ethnic habitus and young children: A case study of Northern Ireland, *European Early Childhood Research Journal*, 17(2): 217-232.
- [2] Connolly, P., Fitzpatrick, S., Gallagher, T. and Harris, P. (2006) Addressing diversity and inclusion in the early years in conflict-affected societies: A case study of the Media Initiative for Children – Northern Ireland, *International Journal for Early Years Education*, 14(3): 263-278.
- [3] Connolly, P. and Hayden, J. with Levin, D. (2007) *From Conflict to Peace Building: The Power of Early Childhood Initiatives – Lessons from around the World*. Redmond, WA: World Forum Foundation
- [4] Connolly, P. (2009) *Developing Programmes to Promote Ethnic Diversity in Early Childhood: Lessons from Northern Ireland*. Working Paper No. 52. The Hague, The Netherlands: Bernard van Leer Foundation.
- [5] Connolly, P. (2011) Using survey data to explore preschool children's ethnic awareness and attitudes, *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9(2): 175-187.
- [6] Connolly, P., Miller, S. and Eakin, A. (2010) *A Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial Evaluation of the Media Initiative for Children: Respecting Difference Programme*. Belfast: Centre for Effective Education (<http://www.qub.ac.uk/cee>).

4. Details of the impact

The impact of the programme of research described above can be seen in five key respects:

Impact A. The impact of this work is improved respect for diversity, improved awareness of own ethnic identity and that of others and reduced racist and sectarian behaviour among preschool children in Northern Ireland. This was achieved through the development of an evidenced based programme 'Media Initiative for Children', the preschool education programme that promoted respect for ethnic diversity. Based on original research, this was a resource for schools, teachers and children that was designed to maximise impact of the findings of the research. The Media Initiative for Children combines cartoon media messages around diversity with an early years curriculum. Cartoons are set in a play park and messages are reinforced with learning resources and interactive activities. Teachers and early years practitioners are given professional development over two days on how to use the learning resource. This has had impact on staff from 1,200 preschool settings across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland who have been trained to deliver this programme and over 40,000 preschool children who have undertaken the programme since development in 2006. This is approximately every pre-school child in Northern Ireland since the development (allowing for absence etc.). This is saturation coverage in terms of 'reach' in the Northern Ireland context. To put these numbers into context it is more than one trained practitioner for every primary and pre-school setting in Northern Ireland. Figures indicate 946 Government run/maintained pre-school and nursery class settings in Northern Ireland in the 2012-13 data. The figure is also considerably greater than the 'annual' intake into pre-school and nursery class settings. Figures indicate 14,613 pupils are in Government run/maintained ante and pre-school year nursery class settings in Northern Ireland in the 2012-13 data available, equating to an intake of about 7,300 students per year. The main cluster randomised trial referred to above [6] has provided strong evidence that this programme is having a measurable and positive impact on preschool children's attitudes to respect for ethnic diversity with a strong basis to claim generalizability to the whole population who have used the programme.

Impact B. The work has significantly shaped Government policy in Northern Ireland and their approach to cross-community relations. It significantly influenced submissions to the Department of Education on its consultation in 2010 regarding 'Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education' policy. Connolly was invited to give oral evidence to the UK Parliamentary Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in relation to their investigation into hate crime in Northern Ireland specifically in relation to 'young people and the future' based on the findings of the research. There is also evidence of impact at policy level in the Republic of Ireland (ROI). The ROI

Ombudsman for Children, noted the significant impact that early years interventions had and how they were underpinned by work that '*originated in Northern Ireland following research by Dr Paul Connolly of Queen's University, Belfast, which demonstrated that children at an early age are sensitive to difference and diversity.*'

Impact C. The work also had an impact on policy and practice of a number of Non-Government Organisations. The findings led to Northern Ireland-based organisation 'Early Years' in collaboration with the 'US-based Peace Initiatives Institute' (Pii) to use the approaches suggested by Connolly towards respect for diversity as they developed the 'Media Initiative' programme. It should be noted that these organisations have excellent reputations. Early Years is the umbrella organization for preschool playgroups in Northern Ireland and has a strong reputation in Northern Ireland and produces the majority of materials dealing on diversity in this context. Connolly was instrumental as a consultant in helping this change in approach. Evidence of the substantive impact of the research and how it informed the materials and focus of the programme was provided on the websites of both organisations. Early Years state on their website that '*the development of the initiative was greatly influenced by research 'Too Young to Notice?' carried out by Professor Paul Connolly from Queen's University Belfast which showed that by the age of six a significant proportion of children (1 in 6) in Northern Ireland are making sectarian and racial remarks*'. Similar evidence is available on Pii's website, with reference to the key impact of the research on their work is made on their home page: '*Children as young as three understand differences between themselves and others and begin to take on the attitudes and prejudices around them - which later can lead to conflict-oriented behaviour*'. The impact that the research had on policy and practice decisions made during developments influencing the design, development and delivery of the programme is provided in the article listed in research outputs above [2].

Impact D. The impact on the general populations of education professionals in terms of improved professional practice and children in terms of reduced racist attitudes and increased respect for ethnic diversity. Outcomes and impact of the research through the Media Initiative for Children programme was assessed through rigorous trial methodology. As with earlier iterations, impact on young children was seen in large-scale trials. This gives good validity to claims of impact to the general population now it runs throughout Northern Ireland. There has been impact with wider reach. The impact of the research on practice is evidenced by prominent references made to the research on both the Early Years and Pii websites. One of the main funders of the programme, The Atlantic Philanthropies, makes significant reference to the research and explains that, '*As a result of the evaluation findings, Early Years is taking this programme to scale across its network of 1200 members in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland with support from the government and the European Union.*' The beneficiaries have been the 1200 members and the children they teach and look after in the pre-school settings. As noted above this is saturation in terms of numbers of trained staffs for pre-school and nursery settings in Northern Ireland.

Another impact of the research has been that it also provided the evidence base that enabled US-based Sesame Workshop to collaborate with the BBC to produce a local production of Sesame Street for Northern Ireland – named *Sesame Tree* – that promoted respect for ethnic diversity. Two series of *Sesame Tree* have been produced so far and they have now also been broadcast UK-wide on the BBC's CBeebies channel. The methods developed to evaluate the pilot of the Media Initiative for Children were subsequently employed to undertake an impact evaluation of *Sesame Tree*, commissioned by Sesame Workshop and conducted in 2008 (£100,000, led by Connolly). The ability of the TV series to impact on children was provided in publicity material produced by Sesame Workshop. In addition the impact of the research in shaping Sesame Workshop's approach to increasing respect for ethnic diversity can be evidenced by a short video clip interview of Connolly by 'Hilda the Hare' (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g71eekNt844>). Two series have been aired. Series One ran in Northern Ireland (Aug 2008), the whole of the UK (Oct 2008), Series Two ran in the whole of the UK in Nov 2010. Connolly's work also led to him becoming an international adviser to Sesame Workshop in the field of promoting respect for ethnic diversity.

Impact E: International impact of the programme of research on the development of early childhood programmes in other countries. The Media Initiative for Children programme was funded to go to scale (i.e. be available to all schools as a package) on the island of Ireland. Pilot studies have been undertaken in several other countries including Colombia and Serbia. The

Atlantic Philanthropies, state on their website that: *'The [Media Initiative] programme has also generated considerable interest from post conflict societies and Early Years will roll out the programme in Serbia, to complement its work in Albania and the Ukraine. In addition, Early Years has received \$15 million in funding to collaborate with a partner in Turkey to roll out the media programme there, among other work.'*

The collaborative approach to research and practice modeled through the evaluations of Media Initiative for Children led to the funding of an international initiative: Una: A Global Learning Initiative on Children and Ethnic Diversity. Led by Connolly and Gallagher (both QUB), the initiative represents a network of over 80 practitioners from 33 different countries and facilitates knowledge exchange between professional workers with children and academics. Professionals share good practice and promote the development of new early childhood programmes that promote respect for diversity in areas divided along ethnic and racial lines. Three 'Una Associate Projects' have been initiated in Colombia, Kenya and Indonesia. This shows impact within a framework of knowledge exchange and the ability of university researchers and education professionals to work effectively in this area.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Impact B

Press release of the Irish Ombudsman for Children welcoming the cross-border element of the Media Initiative for Children and acknowledging the links to Connolly's research:

<http://www.oco.ie/whats-new/media/press-release-archive/cross-border-pre-school-project-aims-to-promote-diversity---childrens-ombudsman-.html?mo=1&yr=2012>

Impacts C & A

i) Early Years website that refers explicitly to the significant influence of the research on the development of the Media Initiative for Children programme. See: <http://www.early-years.org/mifc/research.php> Corroboration could also be provided from Siobhan Fitzpatrick, OBE, the CEO of Early Years.

ii) Pii website that refers explicitly to the research findings on their home page and carry an interview with Connolly on their 'research' page. See: http://www.pii-mifc.org/frameset_research.htm. Corroboration could also be provided from Paul Harris, Executive Director, Peace Initiatives Institute.

Impact D

i) The following links from Sesame Workshop webpages demonstrate how research impacted on programme production in Sesame Tree in that they: i) show findings of the evaluation of Sesame Tree <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/our-initiatives/northern-ireland.html>; and ii) carry a short video interview of Connolly on findings <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/our-results/respect-and-understanding.html?print=1> Corroboration could also be provided from Dr Charlotte Cole, Vice President (Global Education & Research), Sesame Workshop.

Impact E

i) The Atlantic Philanthropies website providing evidence of the importance of the evaluation of the Media Initiative programme and how it is being rolled out in other countries:

<http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/learning/evaluation-executive-summary-findings-media-initiative-children> Corroboration could also be provided from Paul Murray, Programme Director, The Atlantic Philanthropies (GB) Ltd, (funders of the Media Initiative for Children programme).

iii) The website of 'Una: A Global Learning Initiative on Children and Young People' describes the work of the international network, how it was inspired by the research of the Media Initiative for Children. It also details of the three "Associate Projects" in Colombia, Indonesia and Kenya.

<http://www.unaglobal.org>. Corroboration could be provided from Selim Iltus, Programme Director, Bernard van Leer Foundation and/or Paul Murray, Atlantic Philanthropies (co-funders of the Una).