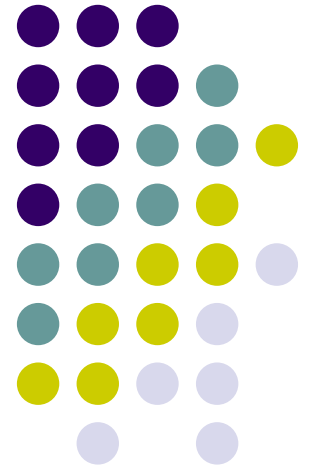


# Race and Ethnicity in Young Children's Lives

**Professor Paul Connolly**  
**Queen's University Belfast**

**Keynote Address**

**Diversity and Inclusion in the Early Years International Conference**  
**14-16 June 2006, Ramada Hotel and Queen's University Belfast**





# Outline of Presentation

1. What do we mean by 'race' and 'ethnicity'?
2. Why should we be concerned about race and ethnicity in young children's lives?
3. What should we be doing about it?
4. Example of the Media Initiative for Children – Northern Ireland

# 1. What do We Mean by 'Race' and 'Ethnicity'



An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups; it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because the people in it and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the *ins* and the *outs* talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group. This is possible only if there are ways of telling who belongs to the group and who does not, and if a person learns early, deeply, and usually irrevocably to what group [he or she] belongs. If it is easy to resign from the group, it is not truly an ethnic group.

(Everett Hughes 1994: 91)



# Idea of the ‘Ethnic Habitus’

- Adapted from the concept of ‘habitus’ in the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu
- Represents a particular set of predispositions and ways of behaviour (i.e. ‘habits’) that are learnt and internalised over time and that tend to structure the way people think about and interact with their social world.
- Many parallels with the Russian developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s notion of ‘internalisation’

## 2. Why Should We be Concerned about Race and Ethnicity and Young Children's Lives?



Connolly, P., Smith, A. & Kelly, B.  
(2002) 'Too Young to Notice?'  
(Community Relations Council)

Survey of a representative sample  
of 352 children aged 3-6 across  
Northern Ireland



Need to understand the distinction between:

- Ethnic Preferences
- Ethnic Awareness
- Ethnic Identity
- Ethnic Prejudice

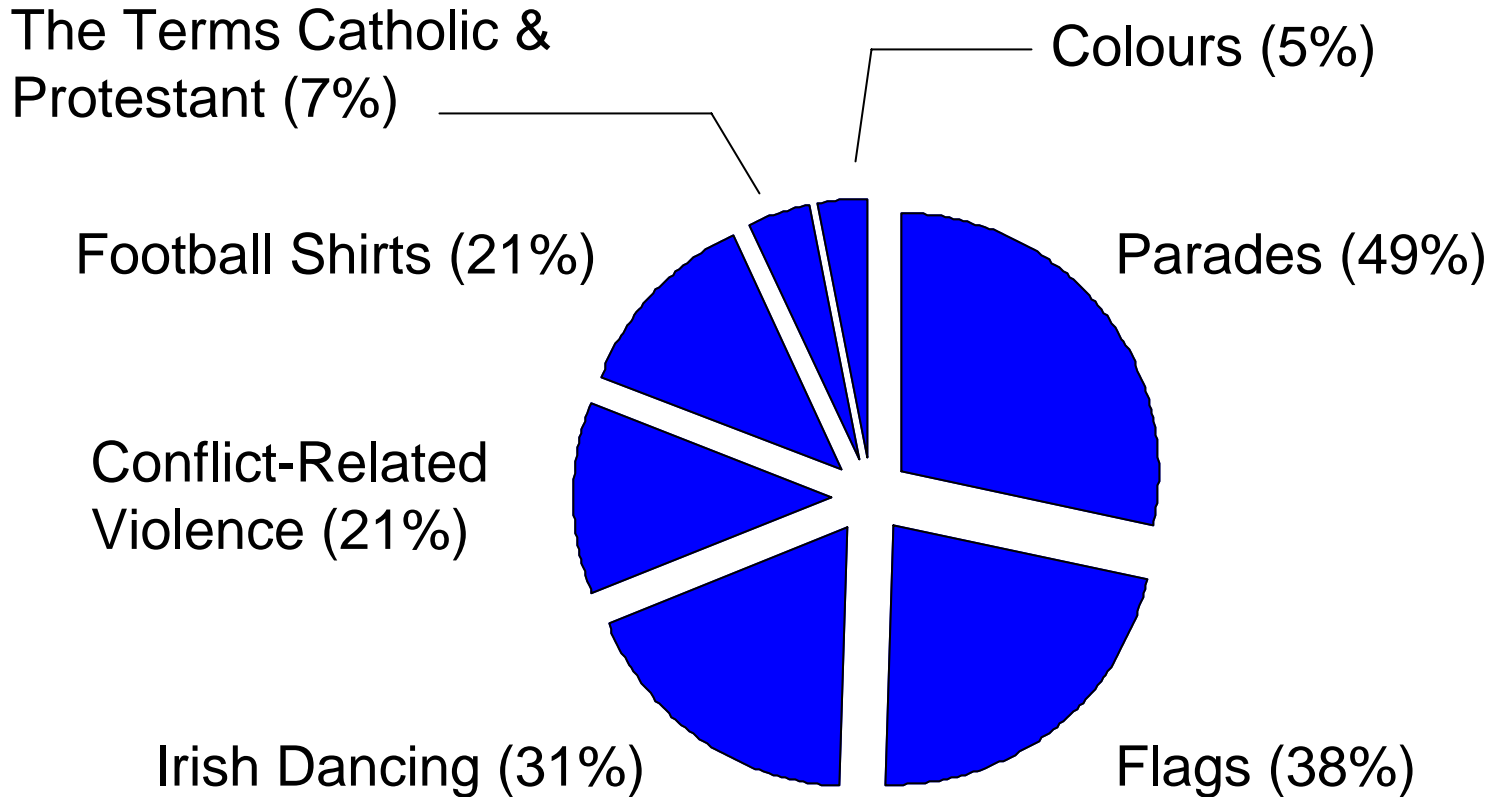


# Ethnic Preferences

Percentage of 3 Year Olds Who:	Catholics	Protestants
Do not like Orange Marchers	18%	3%
Do not like the Police	34%	15%
Prefer the British Union Flag	36%	60%
Prefer the Irish Tricolour Flag	64%	40%



# Ethnic Awareness



**Most Popular Cultural Events/Symbols that  
3-6 Year Olds could Demonstrate Awareness of**



# Ethnic Identity

- Responses to question "why do you like that flag the best?":
  - "That's our flag" (Catholic Girl, Aged 4)
  - "It's the one of our country" (Protestant Boy, Aged 4)
- Responses to question: "do you like/not like these [Orange] marchers?":
  - "They're not my land ... they've got all the colours that I hate" (Catholic Boy, Aged 5)
  - "Cos they're also Protestants as well. That's all I know about them" (Protestant Girl, Aged 6)

# Ethnic Prejudice



- ‘They [Catholics] rob’ (Protestant Girl, Aged 4)
- ‘It's a bad person [Protestants] because they want to kill all the Catholics’ (Catholic Girl, Aged 6)
- ‘Catholics are the same as masked men, they smash windows’ (Protestant Girl, Aged 4)
- ‘Catholics don't like Protestants and that's why they don't like them – they're bad’ (Catholic Boy, Aged 6)
- ‘That one's just yucky [referring to British Union flag]. I hate English and I love Irish’ (Catholic Boy, Aged 6)
- ‘It's the Fenian flag [Irish Tricolour]. It's only bad people that have that colour of flag’ (Protestant girl, Aged 6)

# Racism and Young Children: Example 1



**PC:** So I'm just trying to figure out who plays [football] - so Prajay plays does he?

**Paul:** Yeah

**PC:** [...] What about, er, Ajay and Malde [*both in another, parallel class*]

**Daniel:** Urrr no!

**Paul:** Nah!

**Daniel:** They're rubbish!

**Jordan:** They're always playing crap games!

**PC:** Why are they rubbish though Daniel?

**Daniel:** Because they're Paaa-kis!/  
/Continued



/Continued

**Stephen:** /No, no no! Because they can't run fast! [...]

**Paul:** Because they're small! [*laughs*]

**Stephen:** No! [...] Cos, cos they're Pakis and Pakis can't run fast!

**PC:** Why? Why aren't they the same as everybody else?

**Daniel:** Don't know!

**Stephen:** Cos ...

**PC:** Well they are aren't they?

**Stephen:** [*Shouting frustratedly*] Cos they're slow and everything!

**Jordan:** An' they want to be on your side cos you're fast ain't it Stephen?

**PC:** [...] But you let Prajay play - is he slow?

**Paul:** No!

**Stephen:** He's quite fast!

/Continued



/Continued

**PC:** Yeah but he's Indian?

**Stephen:** Yeah, so, he ain't got a dot on his head!

**Jordan:** His mum has!

**PC:** Yeah but Ajay hasn't got a dot on his head!

**Stephen:** Yes he has!

**Daniel:** No he hasn't!

**Stephen:** He's got a black one so there!



## Example 2

**Clive:** I don't like Pakis!

**Amit:** You do like Pakis, stupid!

**Clive:** No, I don't - I only like you!

**PC:** Why don't you like them?

**Mark:** 'Cos they speak Gujerati!

[...]

**PC:** Clive, why don't you like them?

**Mark:** Because they smell horrible.

**Amit:** 'Cos they smell like a clock!

**Clive:** Yeah, like Amit does!

/Continued



/Continued

**PC:** You like Amit, don't you Clive?

**Clive:** Yeah.

**PC:** You like Amit, and yet Amit's an Asian as well, isn't he?

**Clive:** Yeah.

**PC:** So, you said you don't like them - why not?

**Clive:** 'Cos he ain't a proper Paki!

**PC:** Why isn't he a proper one?

**Clive:** Because he doesn't smell right!



### 3. What Should We be Doing About It?

- Recognise the importance of the early years as a period within which the foundations of ethnic identities are laid
- Recognise young children's awareness and social competence
- Understand what young children's attitudes and perspectives are within particular contexts
- Work from where the children are at:
  - Deal explicitly and directly with existing negative attitudes and prejudices
  - Encourage awareness of and positive attitudes towards diversity and difference
  - Begin helping children to 'deconstruct' notions of ethnicity

# 4. Example of the Media Initiative for Children – Northern Ireland



Short media messages ...



... followed up with curricular resources



peace initiatives institute



# Evaluation of Pilot MIFC-NI

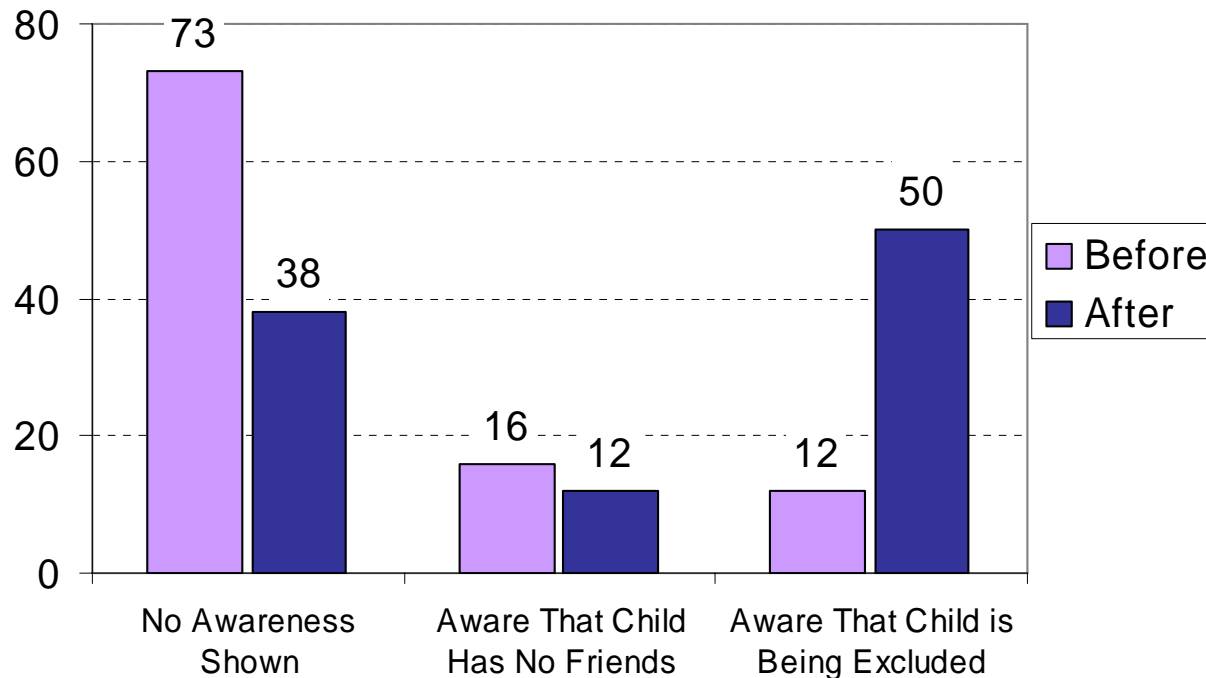
Key objectives for initial pilot programme (2004):

- a. To increase young children's ability to recognise instances of exclusion
- b. To understand how being excluded makes someone feel; and
- c. To increase young children's willingness to be inclusive of those who are different to themselves.

# a. To Increase Young Children's Ability to Recognise Instances of Exclusion



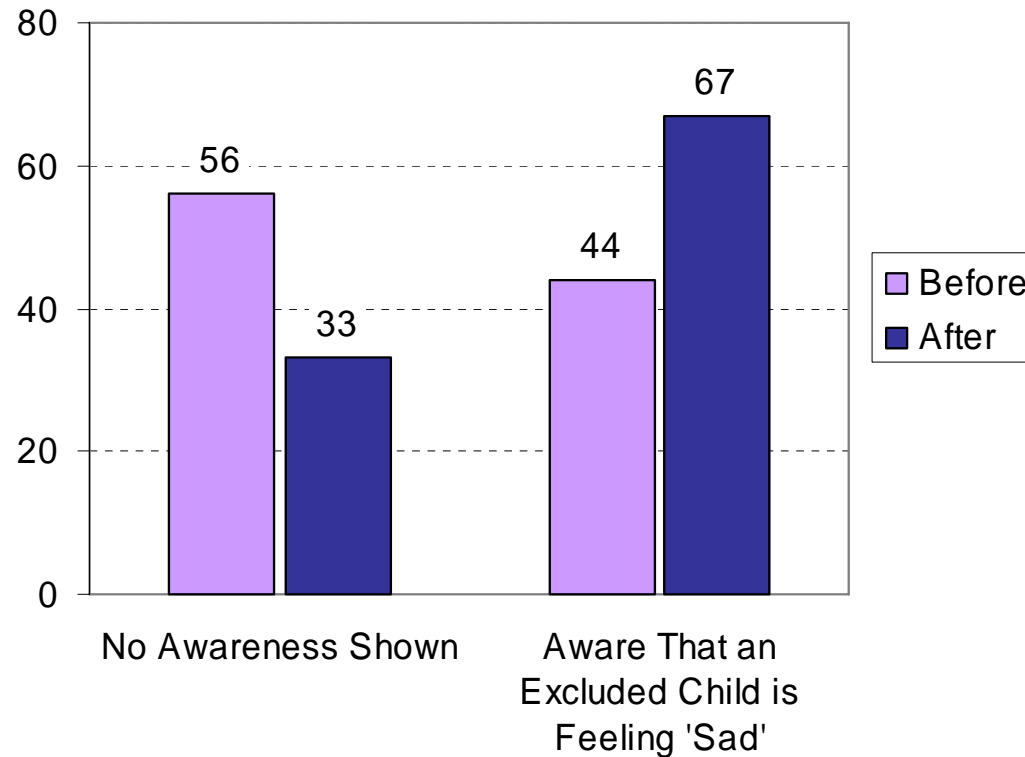
*Preschool Children's Ability to Recognise that a Child is Being Excluded (%)*



## b. To Understand How Being Excluded Makes Someone Feel



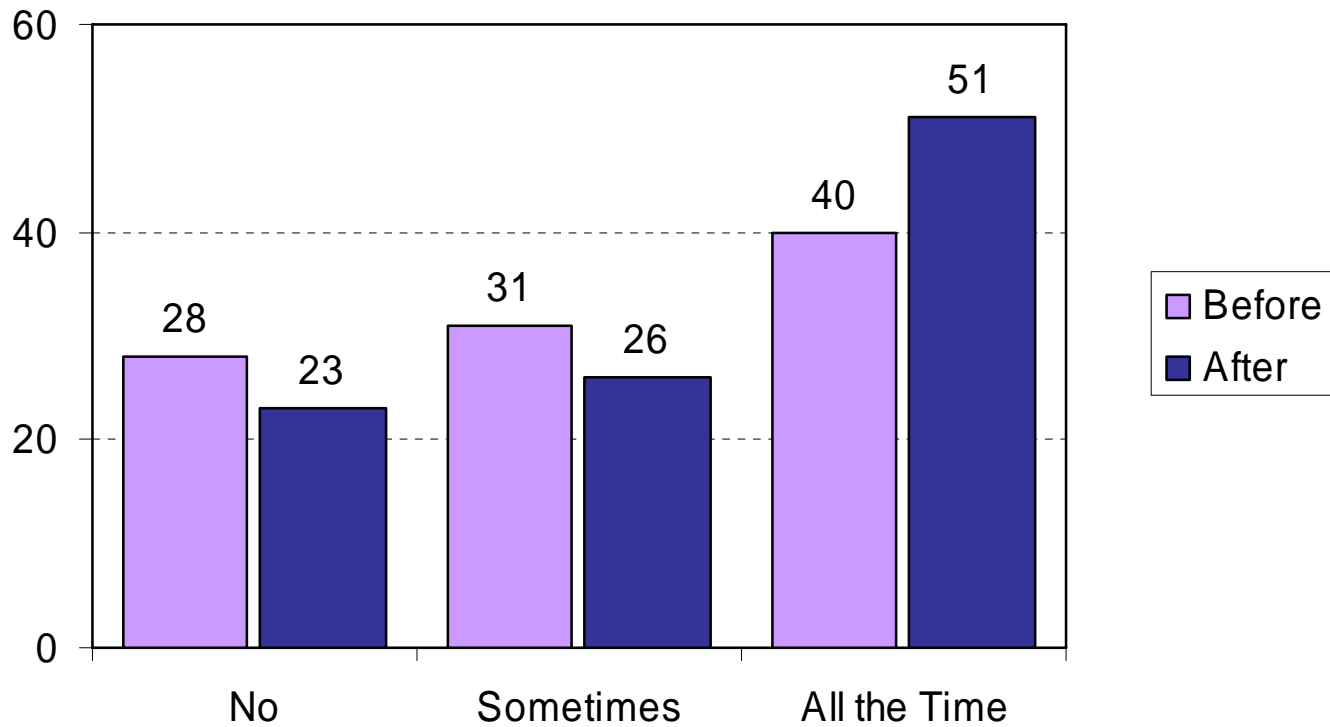
*Preschool Children's Ability to Recognise How a Child Who is Excluded Feels (%)*

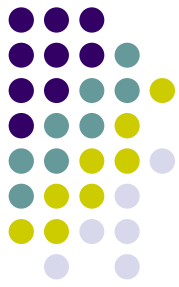


# c. To Increase Young Children's Willingness to be Inclusive of Others Different to Themselves



*Preschool Children's Willingness to Play with a Chinese Girl (%)*





# Conclusions

1. There is a need for us to be concerned about race and ethnicity in young children's lives
2. We need to recognise young children's social competence and deal directly and explicitly with their experiences and concerns
3. There is evidence that we can make a difference ...
4. ... But it needs to be based around initiatives that involve parents and local communities

For more information see: [www.paulconnolly.net](http://www.paulconnolly.net)