

# **Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in the Early Years**

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

**'Opening Doors' Conference: Exploring Values, Attitudes and  
Culture in the Early Years Sector, 26 November 2005**

# Outline of Presentation

1. Why should we be concerned about values, attitudes and culture in the early years?
2. What should we be doing about it?
3. What lessons can be learnt from existing initiatives?

# 1. Why Should We Be Concerned?

- From the age of three, children can and do recognise physical differences and can develop prejudices around these
- The picture in relation to cultural differences is a little more complex:
  - From the age of three, children begin to internalise the culture of their own community
  - From the age of five or six they begin to recognise their membership of a particular community and develop prejudices against those from another



**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

**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: Community Divisions in Northern Ireland

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%

## Example 2: Community Divisions in Northern Ireland

- 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)

## Example 2: Community Divisions in Northern Ireland

- ‘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)

## 2. What Should Be Done?

- Recognise young children's awareness and social competence
- Understand what young children's attitudes and perspectives are
- 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

# 3. Learning Lessons

- Look briefly at findings of evaluations of two initiatives:
  - Johnathan Ball Tiny Steps for Peace Project in Warrington and Oldham, England  
<http://www.childrenforpeace.org>
  - Media Initiative for Children - Northern Ireland  
<http://www.mifc-pii.org>

# Johnathan Ball Tiny Steps for Peace Project

- Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Trust
- 6-7 year olds in Warrington and Oldham
- Theatre group visit, workshops and followed up with specifically-designed activities for teacher
- Another quasi-experimental design with eight Year 2 classes: 4 going through programme (n=94) and 4 matched control classes (n=107)

# Johnathan Ball Tiny Steps for Peace Project

Before the programme:

- White children more likely to say they would be happy being friends with other white children rather than Asian children
- White children also more likely to rank white children above Asian children as friends
- No similar tendency found among Asian children

# Johnathan Ball Tiny Steps for Peace Project

Evaluation focused on measuring three effects:

1. Ability to recognise instances of exclusion
  - Significant increase in awareness found
2. Ability to identify similarities and differences between children
  - Some evidence of increased ability found
3. Willingness to be inclusive of those different to themselves (in this case, those from the other ethnic background to themselves)
  - No change found whatsoever

# Media Initiative for Children – Northern Ireland



Short media messages ...



... followed up with curricular resources



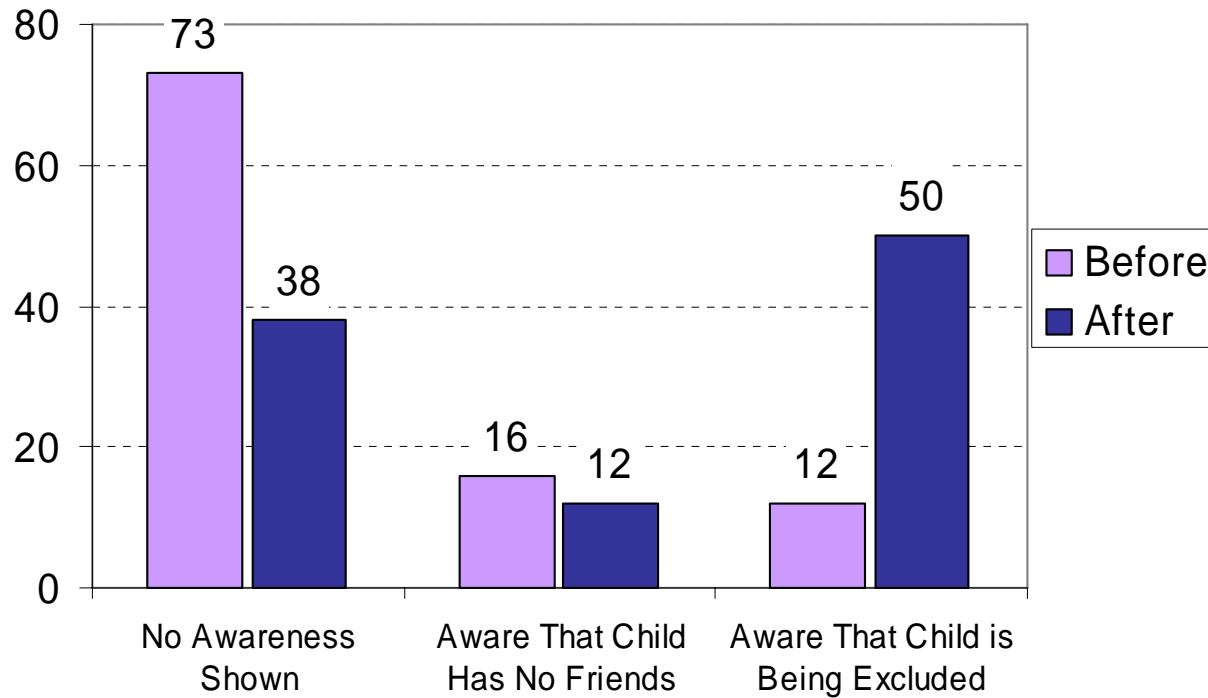
## Media Initiative for Children – Northern Ireland

Key objectives for initial pilot programme (2004):

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

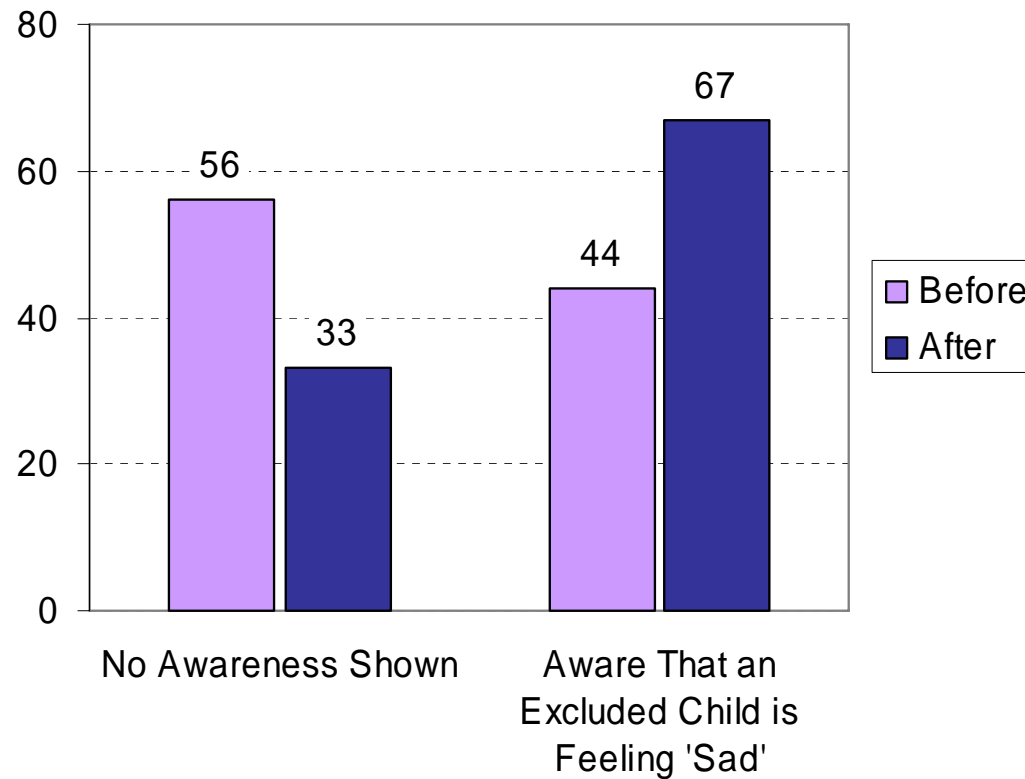
# 1. To Increase Young Children's Ability to Recognise Instances of Exclusion

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



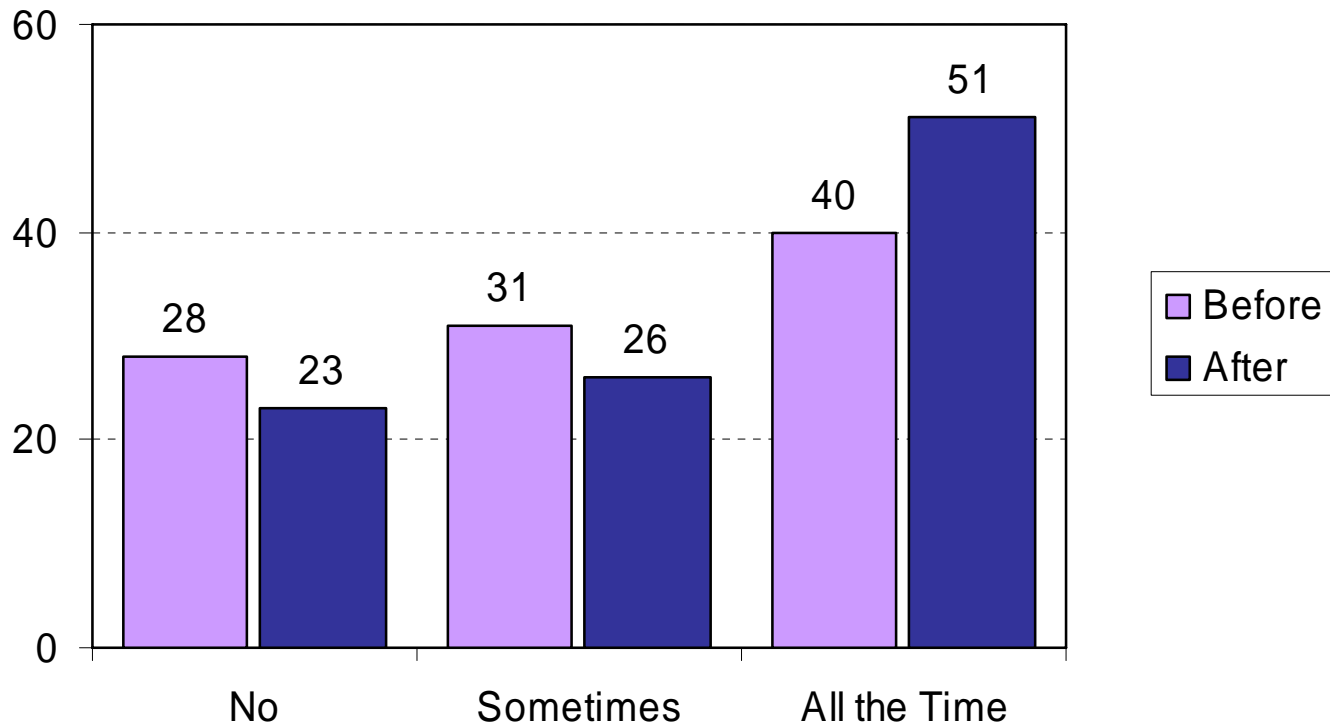
## 2. To Understand How Being Excluded Makes Someone Feel

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



### 3. 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 values, attitudes and culture in the early years?
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 involve initiatives that involve parents and local communities

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