TOO YOUNG TO NOTICE? YOUNG CHILDREN’S ATTITUDES TOWARDS, AND AWARENESS OF, ETHNIC DIVISIONS

Professor Paul Connolly
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)
A large number of studies, stretching back to the 1920s in the US, have shown that:

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• Three questions emerge from this:
  – What role do young children themselves play in the development and reproduction of racial attitudes?
  – What is the situation for young children in societies where ethnic divisions are not marked by race but by religion or nationality?
  – What can be done to reduce prejudice among young children?
EXAMPLE 1: RACISM AND 5-6 YEAR OLD CHILDREN IN ENGLAND

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
**EXAMPLE 1: RACISM AND 5-6 YEAR OLD CHILDREN IN ENGLAND**

*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
EXAMPLE 1: RACISM AND 5-6 YEAR OLD CHILDREN IN ENGLAND

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!

Source: Connolly, P. (1998) *Racism, Gender Identities and Young Children* (Routledge)
**EXAMPLE 2: RACISM AND 5-6 YEAR OLD CHILDREN IN ENGLAND**

*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
EXAMPLE 2: RACISM AND 5-6 YEAR OLD CHILDREN IN ENGLAND

**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!

Source: Connolly, P. (1998) *Racism, Gender Identities and Young Children* (Routledge)
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But what about in situations where ethnic divisions are not marked by physical differences? How do young children’s attitudes develop then?
• 25 years of armed conflict (1969 – 1994)
• Over 3,500 killed and more than 45,000 injured
• Essential division between two ethno-religious groups: Unionists (Protestants) and Nationalists (Catholics)
• Paramilitary ceasefires and peace process 1994 onwards
• Legacy of conflict remains
  – 75% population live in segregated areas
  – 95% children attend segregated schools
A ‘peace line’ in Belfast
A security gate in Belfast
A loyalist wall mural in Belfast
A republican wall mural in Belfast
A loyalist residential area in Belfast
The Holy Cross Primary School Protests (2001)

Belfast school riots

- Loyalist area
- Nationalist area

Map courtesy of the BBC
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• Survey of 352 3-6 year olds undertaken in 2002 to listen to what children had to say in their own words.¹

• Showed children a range of symbols and photographs of events they were likely to see around them day-to-day and simply asked them what they could say about each one.
NORTHERN IRELAND: IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON YOUNG CHILDREN

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- Recorded responses verbatim and analysed them afterwards looking for overall patterns.
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• Findings suggested need to distinguish between:
  (i) ethnic preferences
  (ii) ethnic awareness
  (iii) ethnic identities
  (iv) ethnic prejudices
### Northern Ireland: Ethnic Preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of 3 Year Olds Who:</th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Protestants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not like Orange Marchers</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not like the Police</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer the British Union Flag</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer the Irish Tricolour Flag</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NORTHERN IRELAND: (II) ETHNIC AWARENESS

Most popular cultural events/symbols that 3-6 year olds could demonstrate awareness of:

- Flags (38%)
- Parades (49%)
- Irish Dancing (31%)
- Soccer Shirts (21%)
- Conflict-Related Violence (21%)
- The Terms Catholic & Protestant (7%)
- Colours (5%)
NORTHERN IRELAND: (II) ETHNIC IDENTITIES

• Responses to question "what is a Catholic/Protestant?":
  – "I'm a Catholic" (Catholic Boy, Aged 6)
  – "Yes that's what we are – Protestants" (Protestant Girl, Aged 6)

• 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)
NORTHERN IRELAND: (II) ETHNIC PREJUDICES

- ‘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)
WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THIS?

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- 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
The Programme:

- Programme developed by the Tim Parry and Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace
- 6-7 year olds in Warrington and Oldham
- Theatre group visit, workshops and followed up with specifically-designed activities for teacher
- Quasi-experimental research design with eight Year 2 classes: 4 going though programme (n=94) and 4 matched control classes (n=107)
CASE STUDY 1: ‘TINY STEPS FOR PEACE’ PROGRAMME

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
CASE STUDY 1: ‘TINY STEPS FOR PEACE’ PROGRAMME

Evaluation focused on the following three outcomes:

1. Ability to recognise instances of exclusion
2. Ability to identify similarities and differences between children
3. Willingness to be inclusive of those different to themselves (in this case, those from a different racial background)

Summary of findings:

1. Ability to recognise instances of exclusion
   - Significant increase in awareness found

2. Ability to identify similarities and differences between children
   - Some evidence on increased ability found

3. Willingness to be inclusive of those different to themselves (in this case, those from a different racial background)
   - No change found

• Importance of the distinction between general and specific effects
CASE STUDY 2: MEDIA INITIATIVE FOR CHILDREN

Short media messages ...

... followed up with: curricular resources; training and support for preschool settings; and emphasis on working with parents.
CASE STUDY 2: MEDIA INITIATIVE FOR CHILDREN

- Piloted in 2004 in 5 preschool settings (100 children aged 3-4). Small-scale trial showed that it was having positive effects in relation to:
  - Ability to recognise instances of exclusion
  - Ability to recognise how a child who is excluded feels
  - Willingness to play with children different to themselves

CASE STUDY 2: MEDIA INITIATIVE FOR CHILDREN

- Programme developed further and then evaluated with a large-scale cluster randomised controlled trial:
  - 1,181 children aged 3-4 years in 74 settings
  - 868 parents
  - 232 practitioners
  - Four indepth qualitative case studies

Key findings from large-scale trial (with effect sizes):

• Increased socio-emotional development (+.34 to +.61)

• Increased cultural awareness (+.38 to +.72)

• Increased desire to join in with cultural activities (+.17 to +.27) although no evidence found of changes in children’s willingness to be inclusive of others
CASE STUDY 2: MEDIA INITIATIVE FOR CHILDREN

- Effects found are those above and beyond the effects associated with normal preschool provision
- Effects were the same regardless of the characteristics of the children
- Effects were the same regardless of the characteristics of the settings delivering the Media Initiative
For the parents and practitioners:

• Some potentially encouraging signs found re:
  – Increase in awareness of the need to do diversity work with young children
  – Increased confidence in their own ability to do this

• However, for methodological reasons, none of these encouraging signs can be trusted without further research
CASE STUDY 2: MEDIA INITIATIVE FOR CHILDREN

- Practitioners valued the training, ongoing specialist support, curriculum and resources; felt the programme impacted positively on their own skills and confidence

- Parents welcomed the programme; felt it presented an important opportunity for their children to learn about diversity and develop respect for others

- Children were observed to find the resources and activities appealing; activities provided an important safe space for them to explore diversity issues
PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER: KEY MESSAGES

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For more information see: www.paulconnolly.net