

MEDIA INITIATIVE FOR CHILDREN

09/02/04

Phone conversation with Paul Harris, Executive Director of Pii, re background to initiative, summarised below.

Eighteen months ago, Pii arrived in Northern Ireland to gauge interest in ads for young people with the theme of respect for difference.

At this time, Pii had no agreed formula for the programme. The organisation formed focus groups and asked whether it should focus on culture eroded by racism or religious practices eroded by sectarianism. The groups recommended a broader approach, namely to difference in general. They advocated measures to develop mental flexibility and physical skills to enable young people to cope with difference.

Pii then gathered an Advisory Council¹ (star-studded, apparently) from the NI community, to establish what direction to take. Paul Connolly was among its members. Connolly's research – primarily treating attitudes among young children – formed the basis of the agreed approach². With input from the Council, Pii decided to concentrate on preschool children, and linked up with the local early years organisation, NIPPA, to deliver the programme.

That programme is now the Media Initiative for Children, <http://www.mifc-pii.org/>

Harris explains that Pii chose Northern Ireland because of its peace-building process, and because it seemed that great progress was being made in that regard.

The pilot scheme was launched today, with the first of three short television ads dealing with physical difference; racial difference; and cultural difference. Curriculum materials to accompany the ads have been produced, and these will run initially in 10 local pre-primary schools.

The emphasis of both Connolly's research³ and the new ads is on reading the emotions on the faces of others, and awareness that we can cause those emotions. The aim is to encourage children to discuss their own emotions, understand how it feels to be excluded, and be more willing to include people who are different from them.

¹ Advisory Council Members of The Media Initiative For Children

Paul Connolly -- **Queen's University, Belfast**

Maurna Crozier -- **Community Relations Council, Belfast**

Siobhan Fitzpatrick -- **NIPPA, Belfast**

Tony Gallagher -- **Queen's University, Belfast**

Peter Logue -- **Channel Four 4 Television, Belfast**

Michaela Mackin -- **Community Relations Council, Belfast**

Martin Melarkey -- **The Nerve Centre**, *London/Derry*

Colin Parry -- **The Peace Centre**, *Warrington, England*

Alan Smith -- **University of Ulster**, *Coleraine*

Paul Smyth -- **Public Achievement**, *Belfast*

Ian White -- **Glencree Centre for Reconciliation**, *Wicklow*

Doug Borne -- **Peace Initiatives Institute (Pii)**, *Colorado*

Paul Harris -- **Peace Initiatives Institute (Pii)**, *Colorado*

David Mc Cay -- **Peace Initiatives Institute (Pii)**, *Colorado*

Diane Osgood -- **Peace Initiatives Institute (Pii)**, *France*

² Too Young to notice? The cultural and political awareness of 3-6 year olds in Northern Ireland', Community Relations Council, Connolly 2002.

http://www.paulconnolly.net/publications/report_2002a.htm

³ For Connolly on television and early years children, see 1998 extract at See extract at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/children/connolly/connolly98.htm>

Starting in early February 2004, a pilot programme will be launched whereby three separate television advertisements will run on television stations in Northern Ireland and the Republic, while at the same time the curriculum is taught at 10 preschools in NI. Additional adverts will continue to be run and preschools added throughout the next several years.

In June 2002, Paul Connolly, Alan Smith and Sam Kelly published a landmark report commissioned by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, in partnership with Channel 4. This report showed for the first time the significant effect that cultural and political influences has on the attitudes and behaviour of 3-6 year olds in Northern Ireland. The report also demonstrated the increased awareness of children to identity with a particular community as they grow older and significantly to make sectarian statements or take actions accordingly.

Preview our videos!

Video 1:
Tom helps out

Video 2:
Kim joins in

Video 3:
Playing the sa game

The above videos are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license. Click on the link above to download the application form.

Respect for those with physical differences	Respect for those with mental differences	Respect for those with cultural differences
		

Video 1: Tom helps out

The video shows a young boy with a physical difference being helped by a group of children and adults. The video is part of a series of three videos that are used in the curriculum to teach children about respect and diversity.



The Media Initiative For Children


[MIFC Overview](#)

[The Campaign](#)

[Partners](#)

Want more info? Go to [MIFC: The Fa](#)

The Media Initiative for Children is a joint effort between [NIPPA – the Early Years Organization](#) (Belfast, N.I.) and the [Peace Initiatives Institute](#) (Colorado, U.S.) to use mass media and classroom experience to teach in young children the value of respecting– and including– others who are different.

As a coordinated educational programme using a combination of 60 second television messages and preschool curricula, it focuses on three types of differences:

- Physical/disability (as often used in prejudice against disabilities)
- Racial (as often used in racism)
- Cultural (as often used in sectarianism)

Starting in early February 2004, a pilot programme will be launched whereby three separate television advertisements will run on television stations in Northern Ireland and the Republic, while at the same time the curriculum is taught at 10 preschools in N.I. Additional adverts will continue to be run and preschools added throughout the next several years.

In June 2002, Paul Connolly, Alan Smith and Berni Kelly published a landmark report commissioned by the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, in partnership with Channel 4. This report showed for the first time the significant affect that cultural and political influence has on the awareness and behaviour of 3-6 year olds in Northern Ireland. The report also demonstrated the increased likelihood of children to identify with a particular community as they grow older and significantly, to make sectarian statements or take actions accordingly.

Preview our videos!

Video 1: Tom helps out



Video 2: Kim joins in

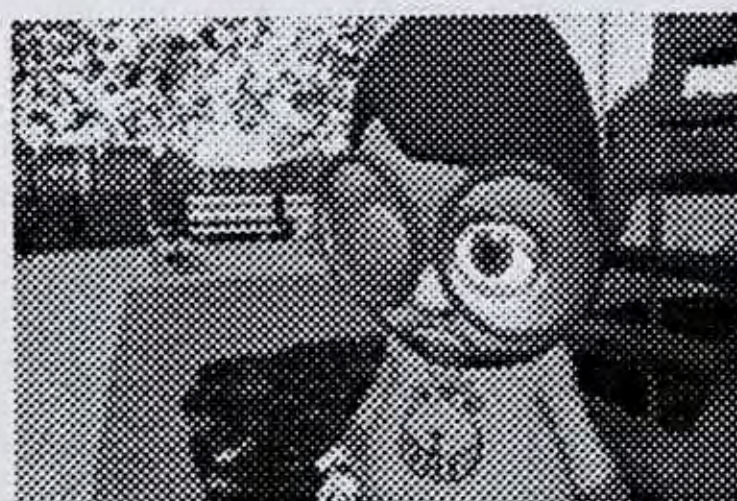


Video 3: Playing the sa game

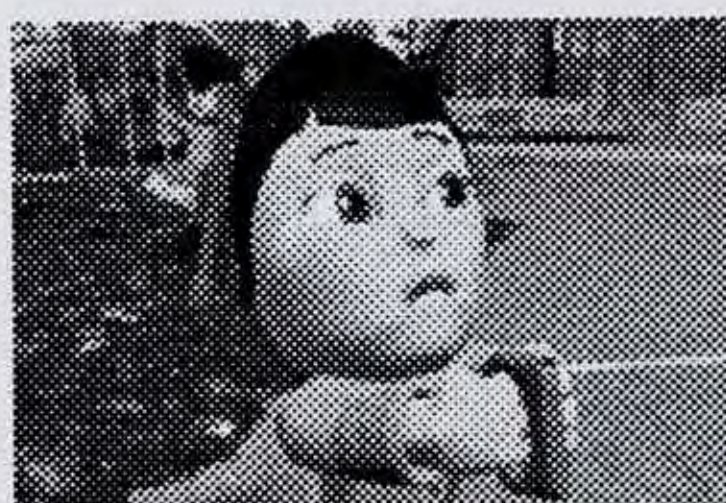


The above videos can be viewed with Quicktime. Click on the link above to download the application now.

Respect for those with physical differences



Respect for those with racial differences



Respect for those with cultural differences



Acknowledgements

The Media Initiative for Children in Northern Ireland was created by a partnership of talented and committed people who are listed below. It owes a special debt to the imagination and talents of Carol McNamara, former NIPPA Training Manager, who died in December 2003 after inspiring the team with her wisdom and humour.



peace initiatives institute

[Who We Are](#)[What We Do](#)[Where We Are](#)[Partners](#)

What is the Peace Initiatives institute (Pii)?

The Peace Initiatives Institute (Pii) was founded in 1998 with a vision to create greater understanding and less strife among populations in conflict throughout the world. Pii is a non-profit (c)3 dedicated to generating a different dialogue among active and inactive participants in these conflicts. It holds a worldview that convincing young children to respect differences between themselves and others—and to act accordingly—will reduce violence in any conflicted society over the long term.

What distinguishes Pii is its strategy of creating a better future for young children by using various media combined with classroom curricula to help shape children's values and ultimately, their perspective and actions as adults.

Photo from 'Children of Belfast' by Tom Quinn Kumpf, © 2000, www.tomkumpf.com

Respecting Difference The United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child Article 2 states: State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians or family members.

The Media Initiative for Children

The Media Initiative for Children is a joint effort between NIP, the Early Years Organization (Belfast, N.I.) and the Peace Initiatives Institute (Colorado, U.S.) to use mass media and classroom experience to teach in young children the value of respecting—including—others who are different.

As a coordinated educational programme using a combination of second television messages and preschool curricula, it focuses on three types of differences:

- Physical/Disability
- Racial
- Cultural



The Media Initiative for Children in Northern Ireland is the first many to be developed by Pii and its partners worldwide.

It is expected that the site of Pii's next MIFC will be selected by year-end 2004.

Partner Philosophy

It is important that Pii understand the basis for the conflict before we begin the actual work of crafting and distributing messages. We accomplish this by going into the area and starting dialogues with people and organizations involved in the various aspects of peace building. Since January 2003 we have been presenting our vision and a local plan to the people and organizations in Northern Ireland from whom we have gathered information.

Partner organizations are participating with us either by delivering on-the-ground support or financial or in-kind support.

What Pii does as an organization

History of Conflict

In areas of longstanding conflict, members of the community are invariably held hostage to the current version of "why we're right and they're wrong." Changing this dialogue is essential to building peace and that requires replacing prejudice and stereotyping with a different awareness of and even respect for another's differences. Pii believes that the very young are the best hope for an enduring break from the eviscerating reality of exclusionary thinking because it is between the ages of four and eight that children acquire the core values that drive their actions for the rest of their lives.

Pii Rationale

Since children live at the center of any community, they are influenced by—indeed inundated by—the opinions and modeling behaviors of parents, teachers and others who protect and nurture them. It is important, therefore, to offer messages that, while illustrating the advantages of mutually respectful attitudes and behaviors, are sensitive to the entrenched beliefs of the adult community.



Executive Summary

Connolly, P., Smith, A. & Kelly, B. (2002) *Too Young to Notice? The Cultural and Political Awareness of 3-6 Year Olds in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

The Report

This report presents the findings of a large scale survey of a representative sample of 352 children aged 3 to 6 drawn from across Northern Ireland. It is the first report of its kind to provide a detailed insight into the cultural and political awareness of young children.



The children were shown a range of objects and photographs representing some of the most common events and symbols associated with the Protestant and Catholic communities in the region and were asked what they knew about each one. The children's responses were then coded and statistically analysed.

The Main Findings

The report identifies four main levels of awareness among children of this age range and organises its findings in relation to these:

1. Preference for particular cultural events and symbols

From the age of three, Catholic and Protestant children were found to show small but significant differences in their preferences for particular people's names, flags and in terms of their attitudes towards Orange marches and the police. Five and six year olds also showed differences in terms of their preferences for particular combinations of colours and football shirts.

2. Awareness of particular cultural events and symbols

Differences between Protestant and Catholic children in relation to their preferences for specific events and symbols does not necessarily mean that they are actually aware of their cultural and/or political significance. The report therefore analysed the children's comments to assess their levels of awareness of each of these events and symbols.

Just over half (51%) of all three years olds were able to demonstrate some awareness of the cultural/political significance of at least one event or symbol. This rose to 90% of six year olds. The children demonstrated the greatest awareness of

the cultural/political significance of parades (49% of the sample), flags (38%) and Irish dancing (31%). One in five (21%) were able to demonstrate awareness of football shirts and of the violence associated with the conflict more generally.

3. Tendency to identify with a particular community

Such levels of awareness cannot, in themselves, be taken to imply that the children see themselves explicitly as a member of either the Catholic or Protestant communities. The children's responses were therefore analysed further to identify any instances where the children directly made reference to their membership of one of these two groups.

Overall, while only small numbers of three and four year old children demonstrated some identification with either the Protestant or Catholic communities (5% and 7% respectively), 13% of five year olds did, rising sharply to just over one in three six year olds (34%).

4. Tendency to make sectarian statements

Finally, the fact that some children may see themselves as being part of one of these two communities does not mean that they are necessarily prejudiced or hold sectarian attitudes. The children's responses were therefore analysed to identify any explicitly sectarian and/or prejudiced comments that they may have made about the other main religious tradition.

While such comments were rare among three and four year olds (only 1% and 3% being found to make such statements respectively), the tendency to express sectarian statements appeared to increase quite significantly for the older children with 7% of five year olds being found to do so and 15% (just under one in six) of all six year olds.

Influences on Children's Attitudes

In analysing the responses of the children, three particular factors appeared to be influential in increasing children's awareness and attitudes in relation to these matters. These were: the family, the local community and the school.

In some ways, the fact that the family and local community have an influence on the attitudes of young children is a rather obvious point. However it does highlight the limitations of strategies aimed at addressing prejudices and discriminatory behaviour among children that are not oriented towards the family and local community.

As regards the role and influence of the school, the most significant finding from the study is the rapid rate of increase in the proportions of children

beginning to identify themselves with one particular community and also to make sectarian comments at the ages of five and six. The fact that these represent the first few years of compulsory schooling is unlikely to be a coincidence. Further research is required to help us understand the precise ways in which schools contribute towards children's increasing awareness and attitudes at this early age. However it certainly seems reasonable to suggest that one explanation is likely to be the *de facto* segregated nature of the school system itself. It remains the case in Northern Ireland that only a handful of children (4%) attend integrated schools. The vast majority (96%) continue to attend schools that are either Protestant or Catholic (Smith 1995).

For any child, entering school for the first time represents a significant milestone in their lives. It is likely to be the first time that many will begin to interact with much larger numbers of other children and also to come under the influence of their older peers. When such environments are overwhelmingly Catholic or Protestant in their ethos, then it is not surprising to find that they can represent a fertile learning ground within which children's awareness about cultural and political events and symbols as well as the attitudes and prejudices that often accompany these increase rapidly.

Implications

The report concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for community relations work with young children. It reaches three broad conclusions:

1. Children, from the age of three, should be encouraged to explore and experience a range of different cultural practices, events and symbols and to appreciate and respect difference and cultural diversity.
2. From about the age of five onwards, children should be encouraged to understand the negative effects of sectarian stereotypes and prejudices and to be able to identify them in their own attitudes, where appropriate.
3. For such strategies to be successful, nurseries and schools need to find ways of engaging and working closely with parents and the local community and, where appropriate, connecting with community relations and cultural diversity initiatives in the wider community.

Copies of the report

Copies of the full report (priced at £5) can be obtained from the:

Community Relations Information

Centre
21 College Square East
Belfast
BT1 6DE

Tel. (028) 9022 7555

ISBN 1-898276-30-7

June 2002

FOR THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

