

The impact of the Northern Ireland conflict on young children

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THE STARTING POINT

- A large number of studies, stretching back to the 1920s in the US, have shown that:
 - By the age of two, children are able to recognise differences in skin colour
 - From the age of three onwards, children can begin to ascribe negative attitudes (prejudices) towards those differences
- Two questions emerge from this:
 - 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?

NORTHERN IRELAND: SOME CONTEXT

- 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 'PEACELINE' IN BELFAST



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A LOYALIST WALL MURAL IN BELFAST



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A REPUBLICAN WALL MURAL IN BELFAST



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NORTHERN IRELAND: IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN

- Large body of psychological research conducted in mid-1970s to 1980s suggesting that attitudes are not consistent and fixed until ages 10-11
- However, much anecdotal evidence from playgroups to suggest differently
- Survey of 352 3-6 year olds undertaken in 2002 to listen to what children had to say in their own words.¹

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.

NORTHERN IRELAND: IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN

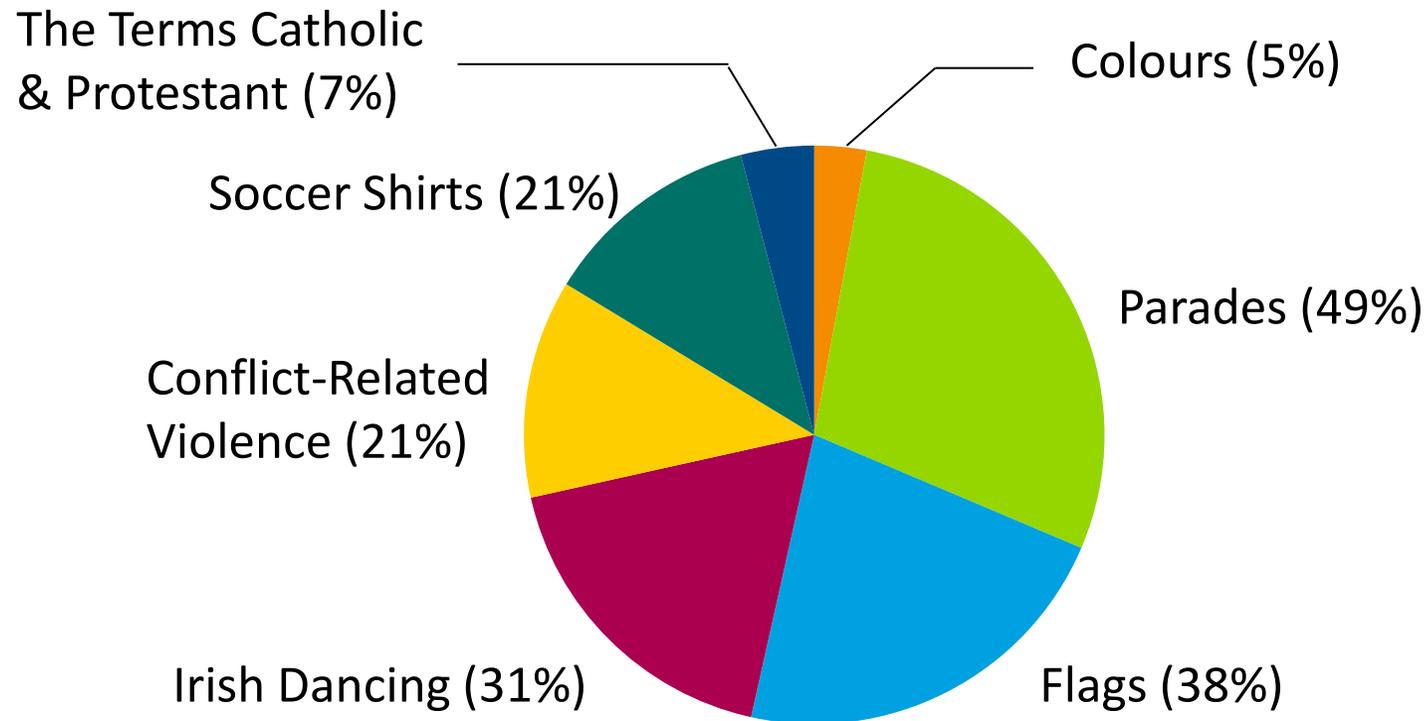
- Showed children a range of symbols and photographs of events they were likely to see around them day-to-day and simply asked them what they could say about each one
- Recorded responses verbatim and analysed them afterwards looking for overall patterns
- Findings suggested need to distinguish between:
 - (i) ethnic preferences
 - (ii) ethnic awareness
 - (iii) ethnic identities
 - (iv) ethnic prejudices

NORTHERN IRELAND: (i) 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%

See also: Connolly, P. (2011) Using survey data to explore preschool children's ethnic awareness and attitudes, *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 9(2): 175-187.

NORTHERN IRELAND: (ii) ETHNIC AWARENESS



***Most popular cultural events/symbols that 3-6 year olds
Could demonstrate awareness of***

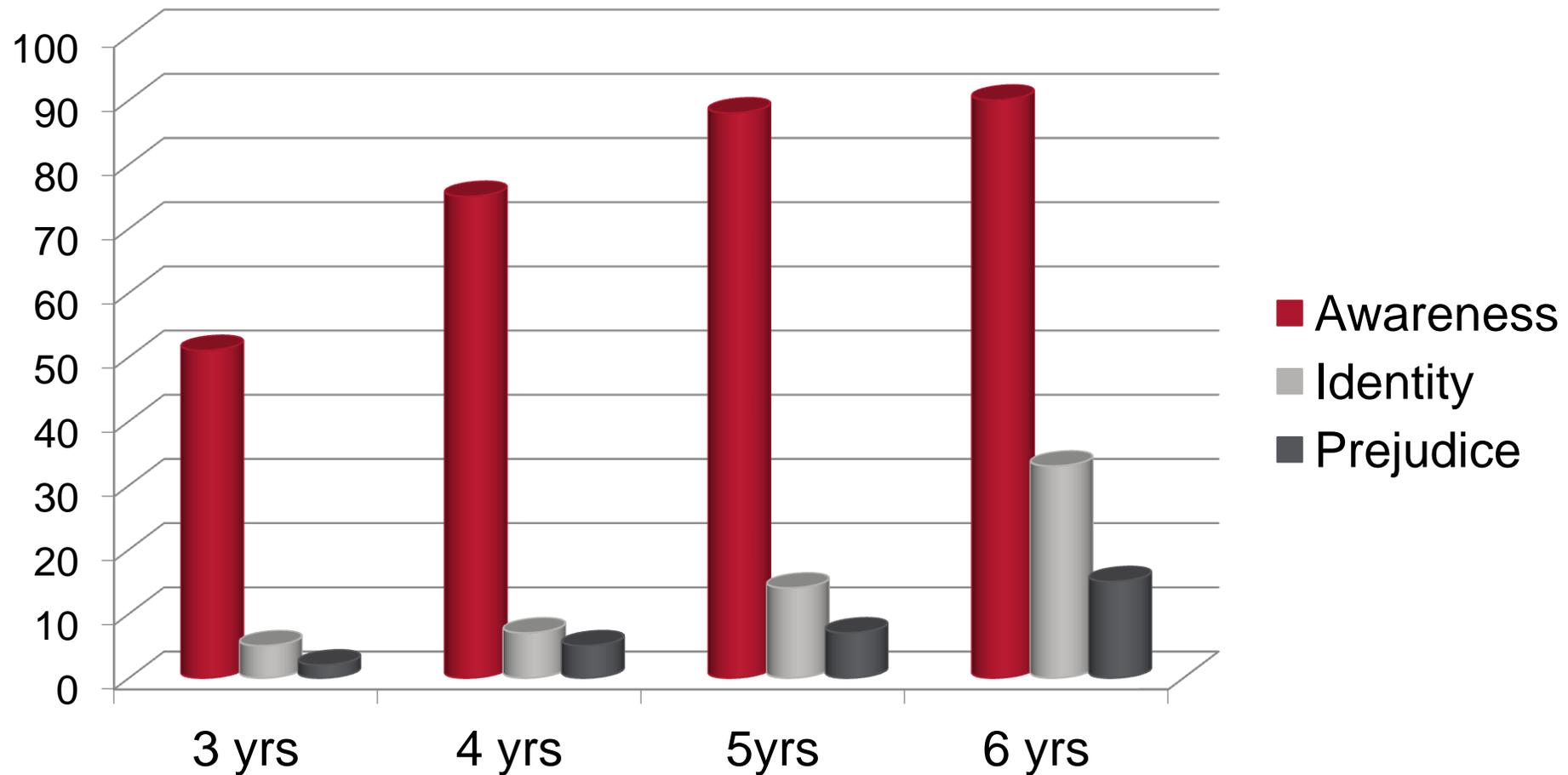
NORTHERN IRELAND: (iii) ETHNIC IDENTITY

- 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: (iv) 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)

NORTHERN IRELAND: SUMMARY



Social Cohesion and Peace Building in Early Years

Young Children Respecting Differences

Pauline Walmsley
CEO Early Years

Overview of Presentation

- **Background to Early Years Organisation**
- **Research start point to MIFC**
- **Implementation**
- **Our current work in other countries**

Background to Early Years – the organisation for young children

- Formerly known as NIPPA founded 1965
- Shaped and influenced by 40 Years of conflict and 700 years of history!
- Cross community /community development organisation
- Commitment to the implementation of UN Convention on Rights of the Child

- Currently supports over 1200 early years services in NI and ROI
- Employs 270 staff directly and supports the employment of 10,000 staff in the sector
- 1994 - now Recognised by European Union as part of the Peace Process/ Investment of over £50 million (\$70 million) in building and sustaining the Peace

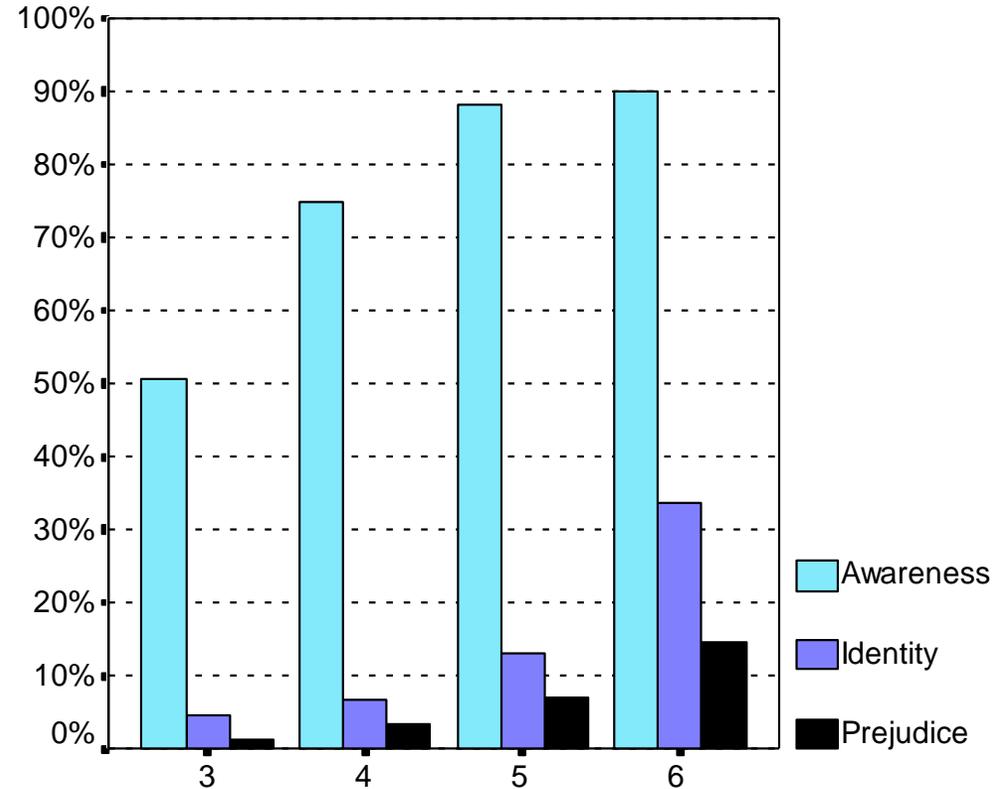
Early Years Organisation Values

- Children are strong, competent and visible in their communities
- Children are physically and emotionally healthy
- Children are eager and able to learn

- Children are respectful of difference
- Children grow up in a peaceful, prosperous and shared region

Too Young to Notice?

a challenge to the sector





Child Rights Ecology Model

Pilot Programme 2003

Do no harm

- Quasi experimental design with 10 preschool settings
- 5 received the programme 5 were in a control group
- Measured children's attitudes before and after the programme

- ✓ ability to understand how being excluded made some one feel
- ✓ ability to recognise instances of exclusion
- ✓ willingness to play with others who were different

MIFC Respecting Difference Programme

Programme Goal

- To increase awareness of diversity and difference amongst young children, early childhood practitioners and parents and to promote more positive attitudes and behaviours towards those that are different.



MIFC Respecting Difference Programme

Service Design Components

- 6 x 60 second cartoons
- New Respecting Difference curriculum
- Resource Pack for early years services and parents
- Training Programme for teachers, parents and management boards/ actors of change
- Support for implementation by Early Years Specialist staff who acts as critical friend/ agent of change.



Research Methodology

Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial: Findings – Children (1)

Key findings (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)

Research Methodology

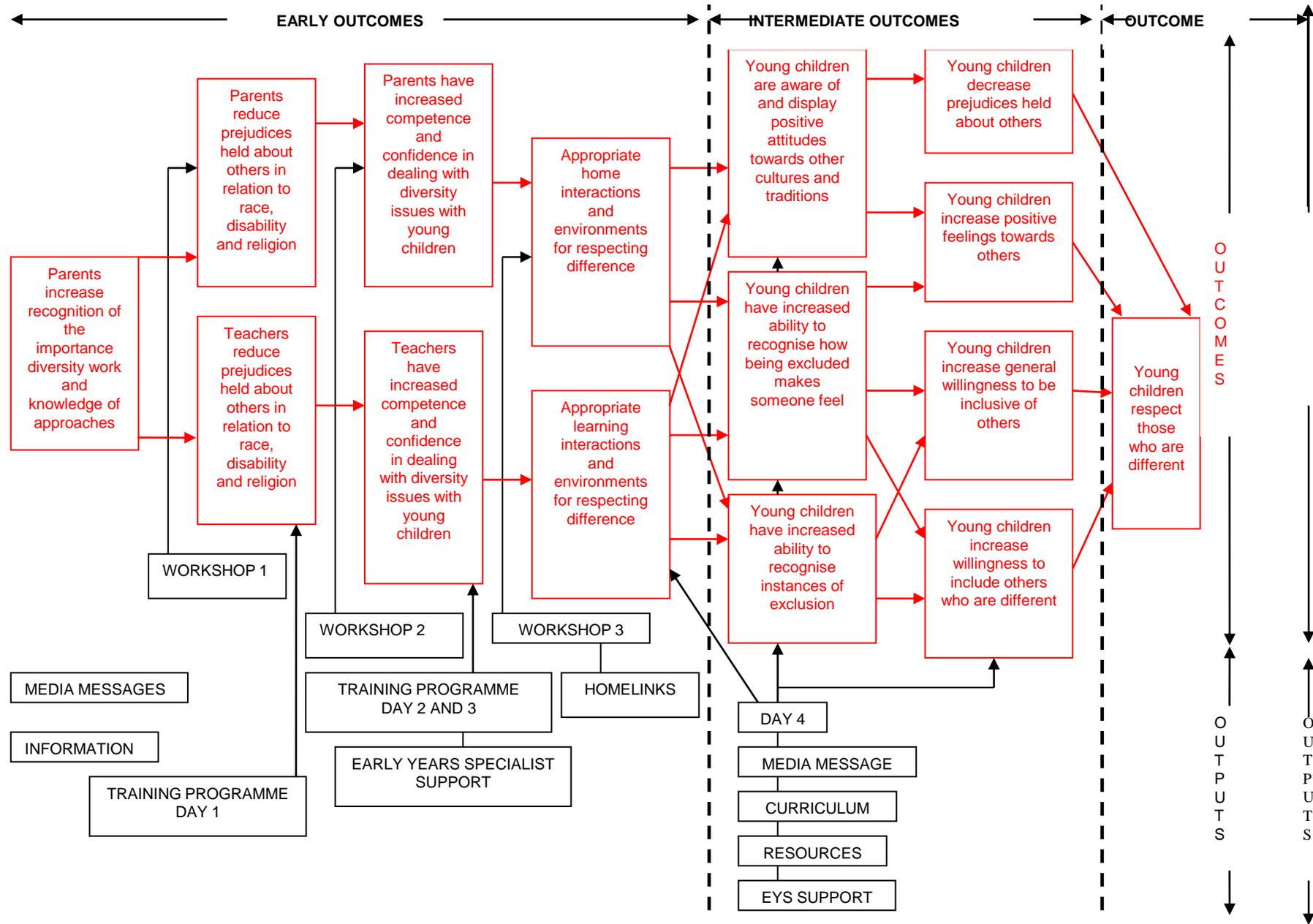
Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial: Findings – Children (2)

- 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

Research Methodology

Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial: Findings – Practitioners and Parents

- 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





Messages

Lessons Learnt

- Recognition of the importance of early intervention with young children in peace building and social cohesion
- Importance of rigorous evaluation and research
- Complexity theory and the importance of an ecological approach
- The importance of being able to measure success
- Need for institutional change and institutional capacity building
- Implementation issues as we go to scale

- Continued significant investment linked to the thoroughness of ongoing research and participative evaluation
- Usefulness of the model for other conflict regions.
- Still a lot more to be done in Northern Ireland but we continue

International Programmatic Toolkit

- Builds upon the evidence based Northern Ireland Media Initiative Respecting Difference Programme
- Growing awareness that the impact of conflict on our youngest citizens has traditionally been overlooked.
- Emerging knowledge that the early childhood sector has potential to contribute to meeting the needs of young children, families and communities in whatever conflict situation they find themselves in.

