

**Irish News:
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Celebrating racial diversity...

■ **EDUCATION:** Pre-school children find something of interest in an anti-bigotry schools programme at the Odyssey yesterday. The programme is aimed at educating very young children about cultural and racial diversity. Story P5.

PICTURE: Niall Carson

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Innovative racial drive

By Simon Doyle
Education Correspondent

A GROUND-BREAKING programme encouraging children to respect physical, racial and cultural differences was launched yesterday.

The Media Initiative for Children, aimed at three to five year olds, combines TV adverts and interaction.

A successful pilot was carried out last year and experts hope every child in the early years sector on both sides of the border will be able to access the scheme by 2008.

A joint effort between Nippa – the Early Years Organisation

and Peace Initiatives Institute (PII), the programme involves children watching a series of cartoons called Together in the Park.

The animated characters act out situations of exclusion and inclusion which can happen while children are playing together.

Dr Paul Connolly from Queen's University said: "After just three weeks the evidence showed that the children were more aware of children being excluded because of their differences, became more empathetic to those being excluded, and were more willing to play with and be inclusive of others."