

REDUCING PREJUDICE IN CHILDREN

-EXTENDED REPORT

Research Conducted: March 2001 – March 2005

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Funded by: University of Kent, Canterbury

Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC)

This research will also form the PhD Thesis of Lindsey
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AIM: The broad aim of our study was to design an effective prejudice-reduction intervention that is child-friendly and can be used easily in schools, as part of the school social education curriculum. We wanted to investigate ways in which children can be encouraged to become more positive towards minority groups who they are increasingly likely to come into contact with at school, such as refugees and the disabled.

BACKGROUND:

Prejudice and children:

Since the 1950's psychologists have studied prejudice in children.

Psychologists and educationalists were surprised to find that from a very young age children can identify their own and others gender and ethnicity. From the age of two children are also aware of and endorse gender stereotypes. Awareness and endorsement of ethnic stereotypes appears slightly later at around 5 years. Young children can also hold negative attitudes towards people who belong to different ethnic groups prefer their own ethnic group over others. Little research has been conducted examining children's perceptions of disabled people, though some research has shown that children hold many misconceptions about disability and would prefer to play with non-disabled children.

Interventions to reduce prejudice:

Despite more than 50 years of research in the development of prejudice in children, psychologists have yet to turn their attention to the *reduction* of prejudice in children. Few psychologists have translated their theories and research findings into the design of interventions to *reduce* prejudice. The study and design of prejudice-reduction interventions has been confined to those in the education sector, teachers and educational psychologists. These interventions are often based on the designer's own experience and common-sense. While common sense and experience are important for designing effective interventions, it is conceivable that interventions that also take psychological theory and research findings into consideration may be more effective. Psychological theories and research have identified some of the causes of prejudice and so it follows that psychological theories can also help identify the ways in which prejudice can be reduced, leading to more effective interventions.

In the present study we aimed to bring the two fields of prejudice research together to create more effective prejudice-reduction interventions. We aim to bring together intervention techniques that were devised by those in the education sector, with ideas from psychological research and theories which have not before been translated into intervention programmes. We used well-established prejudice-reduction techniques that have been used by practitioners for over 50 years, but revised them so as to take psychological theories and findings into consideration. In this way we hoped to create more effective interventions and also gain some insights into why these interventions worked and the psychological mechanisms behind prejudice-reduction.

TARGET GROUPS: THE DISABLED AND REFUGEES

We decided to focus on changing children's attitudes towards the disabled and refugees. These are two groups that children are increasingly coming into contact with inside and outside school. They are two groups that are increasingly visible in society and becoming part of British life. In this section I will outline the social context of our studies and why tackling prejudice towards refugees and disabled people is a pertinent issue in 21st century Britain.

The Disabled

Prejudice Towards the Disabled

In Britain today, the disabled are more visible and more included in society than ever before. However, they are still one of the most marginalized and oppressed groups in the UK, and despite recent Government legislation, they are often the targets of prejudice and discrimination.

In a national poll conducted by MORI for Citizenship 21, investigating the nature of prejudice in England, 24% of those interviewed reported that they thought people who are physically disabled experience prejudice. Furthermore, there appears to be little contact between non-disabled and disabled people. Very few non-disabled people in the UK know anyone who is disabled. In an NOP poll in 1999, commissioned by Leonard Cheshire, 61% of under-35 year olds said they have no contact with disabled people.

There may be two reasons for the scarcity of contact between disabled and non-disabled people: lack of opportunity to mix with disabled people, or apprehension and anxiety in non-disabled people about mixing with the disabled. This lack of

contact between the disabled and non-disabled, whether through lack of opportunity or through choice, may compound the negative relationship between disabled and non-disabled people. Psychological research suggests that one way to reduce prejudice towards other groups such as ethnic minorities, is through contact with members of other groups in the form of neighbours, work colleagues, friends or classmates.

Inclusion of Disabled Children in Schools

The Government is committed to creating a more inclusive society in which disabled and non-disabled people are given equal opportunities in life. They believe inclusion of disabled children in mainstream schools will help to achieve this goal and are increasingly committed to the inclusion in mainstream schools of children with Special Educational Needs (Department for Education and Skills, 1981, 1987, Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001).

In 1999, 59% of children with recognised Special Educational Needs were being educated in mainstream schools, and this number has increased throughout recent years.

The government is committed to inclusion as a means of creating a more equal and inclusive society and they believe inclusion in schools will help achieve inclusion in larger society in a number of ways.

Firstly, they believe that inclusion of children with SEN's in schools is a practice that will help reduce prejudice towards disabled people and encourage a more positive, tolerant attitude towards the disabled. In 1999 the Disability Task Force was set up to investigate and make recommendations for government action across all areas of disabled peoples lives, and they report that:

'inclusion of disabled people throughout their school and college life is one of the most powerful levers in banishing stereotypes and negative attitudes towards disabled people among the next generation'

The second perceived benefit of inclusion is that by attending mainstream schools, disabled children will be given the chance to learn and play alongside their non-disabled peers. This allows disabled children the chance to engage in important social interactions, improve their social competence and encourage social development. In *Meeting Special Needs: A Programme of Action*, David Blunkett, the then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, states that:

'Education is vital to the creation of a fully inclusive society, a society in which all members see themselves as valued for the contribution they make. We owe children - whatever their particular need and circumstances - the opportunity to develop to their full potential, to contribute economically, and to play a full part as active citizens'

Indeed psychological research does suggest that if disabled children are not given these opportunities this may result in long-term delays in social development. However, evidence regarding the positive effects of inclusion is mixed. Inclusion does not always lead to a positive change in non-disabled children's attitudes towards the disabled. Furthermore, inclusion has been shown to have negative consequences for the self-concept and emotional security of disabled children attending mainstream schools. Also, inclusion does not always *mean* inclusion. Often inclusion occurs in word alone, and not in deed. Disabled children often attend the same classes as non-

disabled children, play in the same playgrounds and have lunch in the same dining hall, but they are still excluded by their peers in a kind of elective exclusion. There may be little actual interaction between the two groups, which can lead to feelings of isolation and anxiety in 'included' children.

Nevertheless, the potential benefits of inclusion of disabled children and children with SENs in mainstream schools are significant and despite mixed reports regarding the advantages of inclusion, the government continues to encourage and support inclusion in schools. While inclusion may help achieve equality for disabled people in the long-term, efforts should be made to protect disabled children attending mainstream schools from any negative consequences of inclusion. Indeed, in the Children's Act 2004, one of the Governments aims is to provide for children and young people safety from bullying and discrimination. One way in which this protection can be provided is through the administration of prejudice-reduction interventions that boost non-disabled children's positivity towards the disabled. Ideally these interventions should be implemented prior to disabled children's arrival at the school. In an atmosphere that is more accepting and understanding of the disabled and people with SENs, the positive effects of inclusion could perhaps be fostered, eliminating stereotypes and increasing actual inclusion of disabled people in schools and in society in general and creating a truly inclusive school possibly reducing prejudice further and.

Refugees

The second target group studied was refugees in England. Kent contains a high proportion of immigrants given it is the main port of entry into the United Kingdom. A significant number of the 72,430 people who claimed asylum in the UK

during 2001 arrived through East Kent. Furthermore it is a region where tension has arisen between the majority community and immigrants. As with the disabled, in the UK refugees are a group that children are increasingly coming into contact with at school and in their communities. Due to the influx of refugees in Kent schools, and the political situation in Kent, we thought refugee children are another group who may experience some prejudice or discrimination in schools. This may be one group towards which English children may hold negative feelings and attitudes. In “Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools” the government outlines it’s aim to allow “every child to fulfil their potential, regardless of their background or circumstances”. As with the disabled, refugees too should be provided with protection from bullying and discrimination. Therefore, tackling any negative feelings or any misconception and refugee children could benefit from a prejudice-reduction intervention that can be administered prior to refugee children arriving in the school.

INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE PREJUDICE IN CHILDREN:

Approaches to prejudice-reduction

1. MULTICULTURAL APPROACH: The multicultural approach takes the traditional problem with diversity, that of cultural differences and turns it on its head. The multicultural approach celebrates diversity and encourages children to accept and appreciate cultural differences. It draws attention to the differences between groups, such as different ethnic groups, but presents these differences as positive rather than negative things. According to this approach, prejudice will be reduced by teaching children that diversity is a positive thing that should be embraced. This requires a careful examination of social groups such as ethnic groups or different disabilities. In the present research, this theoretical approach was translated into an intervention using story-reading techniques. In multicultural stories, the minority groups included in the text are the main focus of the stories: the aim of the text is to explore various aspects of ethnicity, disability or nationality using the characters in the story to illustrate these issues. For example, many stories may look at a day in the life of a Chinese girl in China or will follow a group of disabled children at a 'Special' school. In the present research children read stories in which the groups to which the characters belong were emphasised and in a discussion following the story, children's group memberships are stressed.

2. COLOUR-BLIND APPROACH: Another approach to prejudice-reduction interventions is the colour-blind approach. According to this approach social group memberships are not discussed, and are almost incidental. This intervention focuses on treating people as individuals, rather than on the basis of social group membership, such as ethnicity or disability. By de-emphasising social group memberships, children will no longer focus solely on the social group membership of people when forming character judgements. Instead they focus on people as individuals, rather than group members. According to this theory reducing the salience of ethnicity or nationality or disability and focussing on the individual reduces prejudice. In the present research, this theoretical approach was also translated into an intervention using story-reading techniques. In colour blind stories, children read stories in which the groups to which the characters belong were not emphasised and the stories focus on the individual qualities of the characters. The disabled and non-disabled groups were not mentioned in the story or in the discussion.

3. COMMON GROUND APPROACH. According to this approach the best way in which prejudice can be reduced is by stressing the similarities between groups and emphasising membership of common groups, such as school, country, hobbies and other teams. These common groups should cross the groups that are in opposition, such as ethnic groups. According to the common ground approach the subordinate groups one belongs to, such as ethnic group or disabled / non-disabled, as well as the common group members of both groups belong to. This theoretical approach to prejudice reduction was translated into a story-reading intervention. The stories stressed the common groups that the participants, and the children in the stories belong to: their school.

4. COUNTER- STEREOTYPE EDUCATION

This approach to prejudice-reduction is slightly different from the previous three discussed. In common ground, colour-blind and multicultural approaches to prejudice, prejudice can be reduced by changing children's perception of the relationship between their own group and other groups, or by changing the perceived similarity between the groups. According to this approach to prejudice-reduction, prejudice can be reduced by dealing directly with stereotypes, rather than changing children's perceptions of the relationship between their own and the other groups. According to this intervention prejudice can be reduced by teaching children directly that their pre-conceptions about different social groups are false. This approach to prejudice reduction involves training children common stereotypes children and adults may hold about certain groups are false. For example, children may be taught that women can also hold traditionally-male occupations and that people belonging to ethnic minorities can also hold high status occupations.

In the present study we used a technique based on this theoretical approach called counter-stereotype training. This involved a categorisation task that aims to break down stereotypes of a group of people, such as disabled people. Children were presented with photographs of members of these groups, such as disabled and non-disabled children, or refugees and English people. The people in the pictures vary along several stereotype-relevant dimensions such as happy and sad. This means there are pictures of happy and sad non-disabled and happy and sad disabled children. Children are trained to categorise the children along the different dimensions i.e. divide the pictures into disabled and non-disabled piles and also divide them into happy and sad piles. They are then taught to divide the pictures up along both dimensions simultaneously creating four piles of pictures, happy-non disabled, sad-non disabled, happy disabled and sad disabled.

STUDY OUTLINE

PARTICIPANTS: 621 children aged 5 to 11

SCHOOLS: 22 schools from all over Kent

INTERVENTIONS: the interventions occurred once a week for six weeks and each session lasted twenty minutes.

MEASURES:

We measured the effectiveness of interventions by asking children about their orientation towards the target groups, refugees and disabled. Our two main measures of orientation towards the different social groups were ATTITUDE and INTENDED BEHAVIOUR. These measures give an indication of how children feel about refugees and disabled people.

Attitude:

This measure involved presenting children with a range of adjectives. They were read each of these adjectives by the experimenter, along with a short story to illustrate the meaning of the adjective. For example: 'helpful. Some children are really helpful and help to tidy up the toys in the playroom'. Children are then either asked to indicate whether they thought the group in question (refugees or disabled people) could be described as being that word (yes / no, Study 1) or were asked to indicate the NUMBER of people in that group who they thought could be described using that word (responses: none / some / most / all, Studies 2, 3 and 4).

Intended behaviour:

This is an important measure because it indicates how much children would like to interact with other children belonging to the two target groups, refugees and disabled. Children were presented with a hypothetical scenario: They were asked to imagine they were playing in the park one day and a disabled child was also in the park. Children were asked to rate on a 'smiley face' scale how they would feel about interacting with the child, with responses going from 1 (very sad face) to 5 (very smiley face). The questions were: How much would you like to play with them? How much would you like them? How much would you like to have them over to your house for tea? How much would you like to have them stay overnight? The overall intended behaviour score mean score of the responses to these four questions.

STUDY 1

Aim: The aim of this study was to find out whether story-reading improves attitudes towards the disabled. We wanted to compare interventions based on two approaches to prejudice-reduction: multiculturalism and colour-blind. Both interventions are story-based.

Number of participants: 69 participants

Number of schools: 2 schools

Age range: 5-11 years.

Target group: In this study we investigated children's attitudes towards disabled people, including physically disabled and people with learning difficulties and mental disabilities.

Study description:

Intervention: STORY READING: MULTICULTURAL and COLOUR-BLIND
Children were read one of 2 types of stories:

1. **MULTICULTURAL APPROACH** – ‘Group focussed Story Reading’ – this intervention maps on to the multicultural approach to prejudice reduction. Children read stories that stress the groups the characters in the story belong to (disabled and non-disabled) and discussion after the story focussed on how representative characters were of disabled and non-disabled people

2. **COLOUR BLIND APPROACH** – ‘Individual Focussed Story Reading’ - this intervention maps on to the colour-blind approach to prejudice reduction. Children read stories in which the groups to which the characters in the story belong were not emphasised and the individual qualities of the story characters were the focus of discussion. The disabled and non-disabled groups were not mentioned in the story or in the discussion.

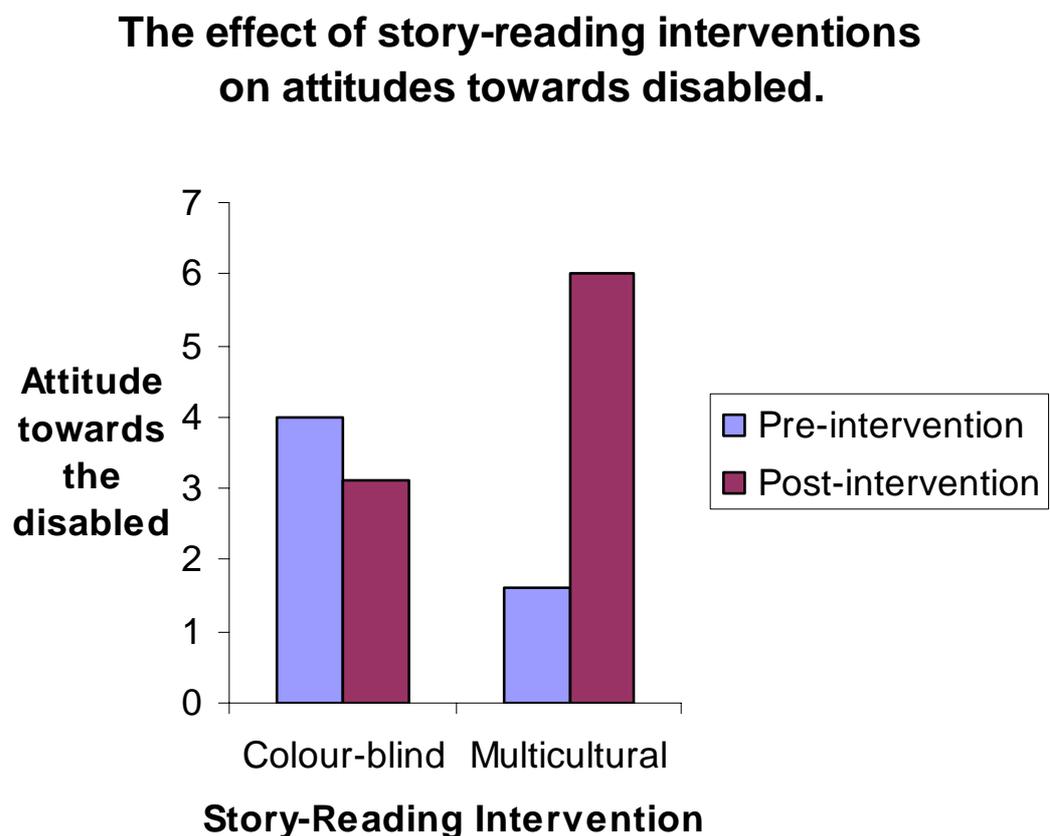
We interviewed children before and after the story reading took place to see whether there was any change in attitude towards the out-group as a result of the intervention.

Measures: attitude towards the disabled and intended behaviour.

Results:

Attitude Towards the Disabled

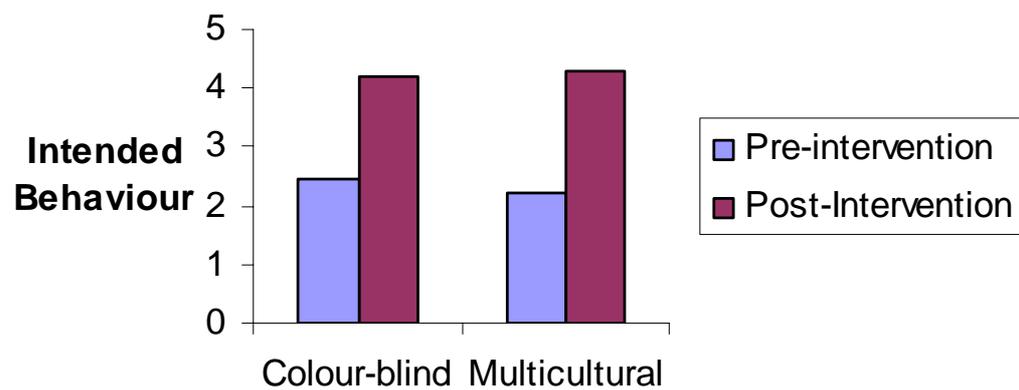
We found that the multicultural story-reading intervention that stressed the disabled and non-disabled group memberships was more effective than the colour blind story-reading intervention that stressed the individual characteristics rather than group memberships. In the multicultural group, after the intervention the children were more positive towards the disabled than they were before the intervention. There was some change in the attitude towards the disabled in the colour blind intervention but this was not significant.



Intended Behaviour

Intended behaviour scores are obtained by calculating the mean of the 4 intended behaviour items. For both the colourblind and multicultural conditions intended behaviour scores towards the disabled were more positive after the intervention than before the intervention. However, this difference was larger in the multicultural intervention.

The effect of story reading interventions on intended behaviour towards the disabled.



Story-reading intervention

CONCLUSIONS:

- Story-telling is an effective method of intervention with young children.
- Attitude change towards the disabled was greater in the story-telling intervention that adopted a **MULTICULTURAL** approach.
- Support was found for the multicultural approach to prejudice-reduction and results point to the importance of discussing the social groups to which people belong, such as disabled and non-disabled.

STUDY 2

Aim: Having established multicultural story reading as an effective prejudice reduction technique we decided to test another prejudice reduction technique: counter-stereotype training. In this study we decided to compare the effect of multicultural story-reading interventions with counter-stereotype training on children's orientations towards the disabled. Children's post-intervention attitudes towards the disabled were compared with a control group who receive no intervention. The control group is a baseline of children's orientation towards the disabled.

Number of participants: 71 participants

Number of schools: 6 schools

Age range: one age group: 6 – 9 years.

Target group: As in Study 1, in this study we investigated children's attitudes towards the disabled.

Study description:

Intervention: MULTICULTURAL STORY READING and COUNTER STEREOTYPE TRAINING

Children were read one of 2 types of interventions:

1. **MULTICULTURAL STORY READING** – children read stories that stress the groups the characters in the story belong to (disabled and non-disabled) and discussion after the story focussed on how representative characters were of disabled and non-disabled people.

2. **COUNTER-STEREOTYPE TRAINING** – children take part in a categorisation task that aims to break down stereotypes of disabled people. Children are presented with photographs of disabled and non-disabled children. The children in the pictures vary along several stereotype relevant dimensions such as happy and sad. This means there are pictures of happy and sad non-disabled and happy and sad disabled children. Children are trained to categorise the children along the different dimensions ie divide the pictures into disabled and non-disabled piles and also divide them into happy and sad piles. They are then taught to divide the pictures up along both dimensions simultaneously creating four piles of pictures, happy-non disabled, sad- non disabled, happy disabled and sad disabled.

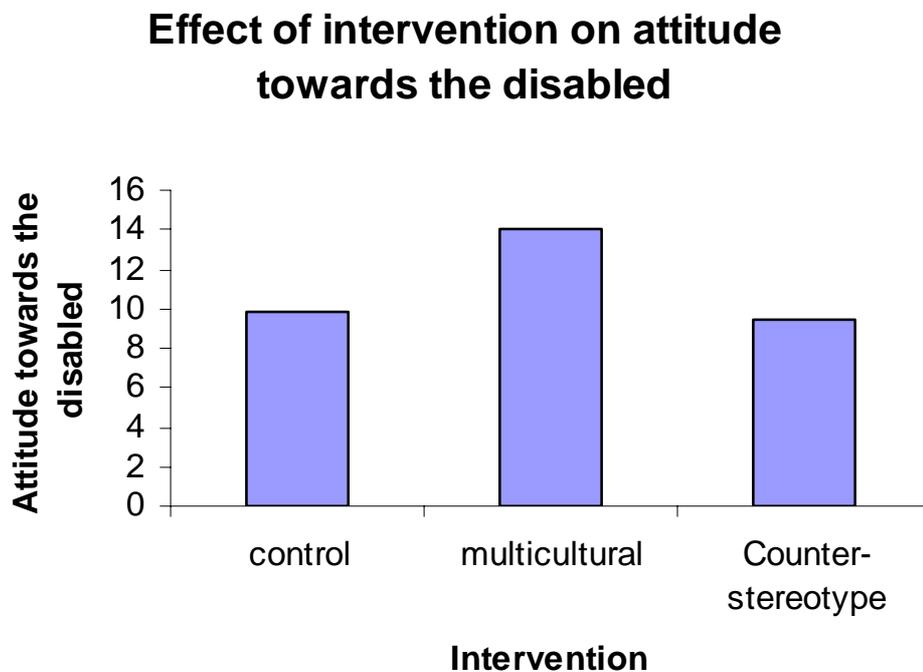
We interviewed children after the story reading took place and compared their scores with a control group who received no intervention. The control group is the base line for children's attitudes towards the disabled to which children who have received the intervention can be compared.

Measures: attitude towards the disabled and intended behaviour towards the disabled.

Results:

Attitude Towards the Disabled

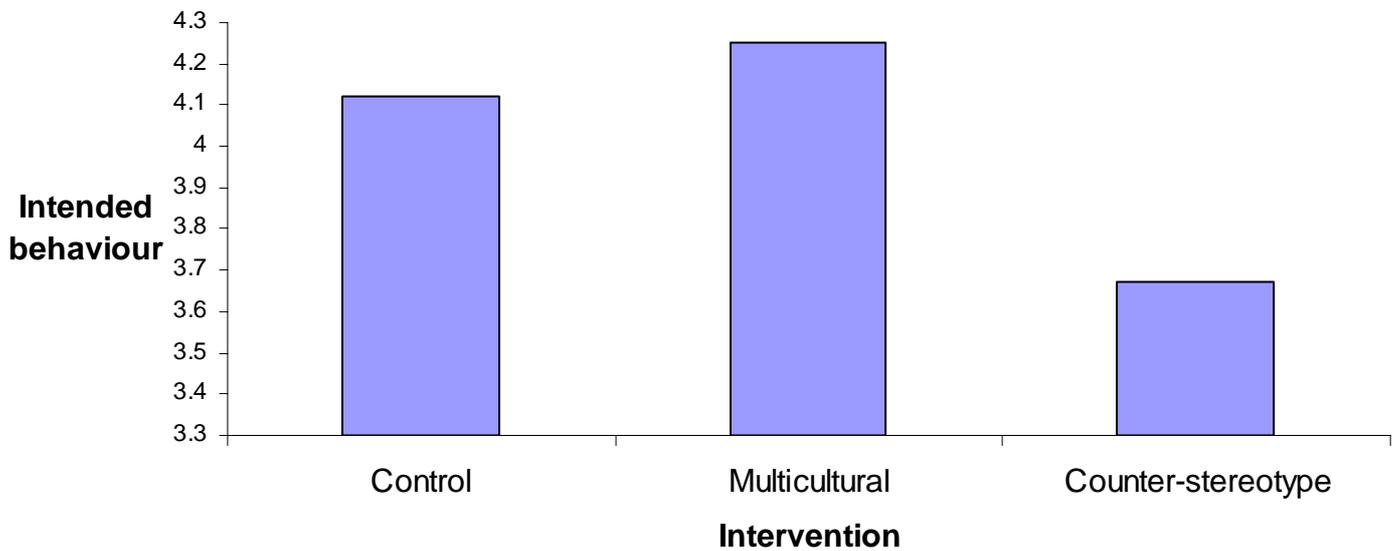
We found that children in the multicultural story-reading intervention had significantly more positive attitudes towards the disabled. That is children in this condition were more positive than children who received the counter-stereotype training or were in the control group. Children who received counter-stereotype training did not differ from children in the control group who had no intervention training.



Intended Behaviour

Intended behaviour scores are obtained by calculating the mean of the 4 intended behaviour items. Children who received the multicultural story-reading intervention were significantly more positive towards the disabled compared with the children who received the counter stereotype training intervention.

Effect of interventions on intended behaviour towards the disabled



CONCLUSIONS:

- The multicultural story-reading intervention is again effective at changing children's perception of disabled people as attitude scores are significantly different from the control group.
- The counter-stereotype intervention appears to be ineffective as a prejudice reduction intervention.

STUDY 3

Aim: To re-test the counter-stereotyping and multicultural story-reading interventions with a different target group, refugees. We also wanted to test a combined intervention, which used both of these techniques. Children in each of the interventions were compared with each other to determine the relative effectiveness of the interventions, and were also compared with the control group who received no intervention.

Number of participants: 199 participants

Number of schools: 7 schools

Age range: two age groups: 5 – 8 years and 9 – 11 years.

Target group: In this study attitudes towards refugees were examined.

Study description:

Intervention: STORY READING and COUNTER STEREOTYPE

TRAINING

Children were read one of 3 types of interventions:

- 1. MULTICULTURAL STORY READING** – children read stories that stress the groups the characters in the story belong to (refugees and English) and discussion after the story focussed on how representative characters were of refugees and English people.

2. COUNTER STEREOTYPE TRAINING – children take part in a categorisation task that aims to break down stereotypes of refugees. Children are presented with photographs of refugees and English people. The individuals in the pictures vary along several stereotype relevant dimensions such as occupation (cleaner vs doctor). This means there are pictures of refugees who are cleaners and doctors and English people who are cleaners and doctors. Children are trained to categorise the children along the different dimensions ie divide the pictures into refugee and English piles and also divide them into cleaner and doctor piles. They are then taught to divide the pictures up along both dimensions simultaneously creating four piles of pictures, refugee doctors, refugee cleaners, English doctors and English cleaners.

3. COMBINED – children in this group received both the story reading intervention and the counter stereotype training intervention.

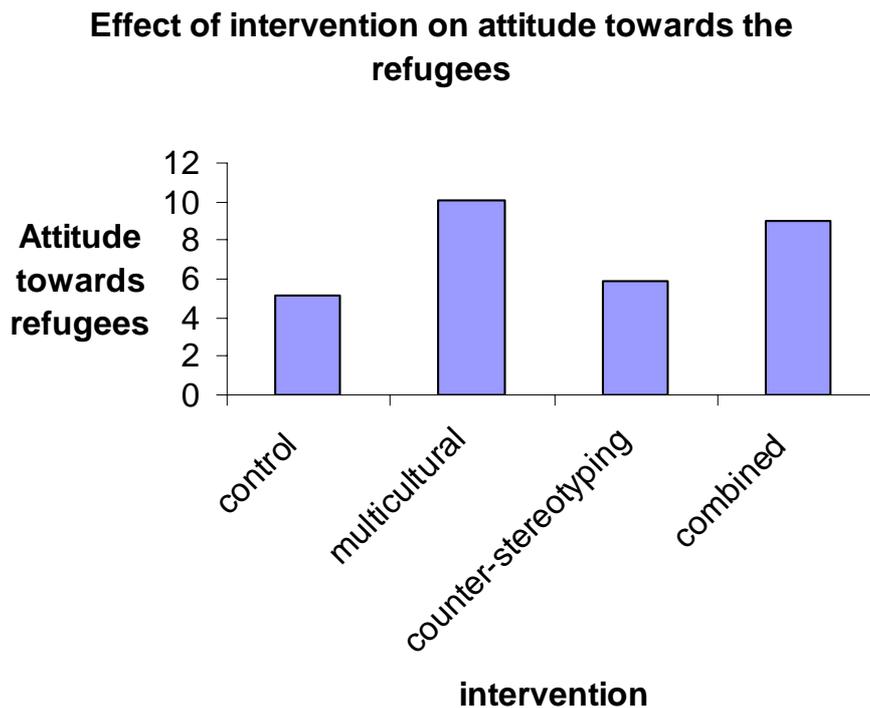
Measures: attitude towards refugees and intended behaviour towards refugees.

Results:

Attitude Towards Refugees

Attitudes towards refugees in the multicultural story-reading intervention were significantly more positive than attitudes in the control group and the counter-

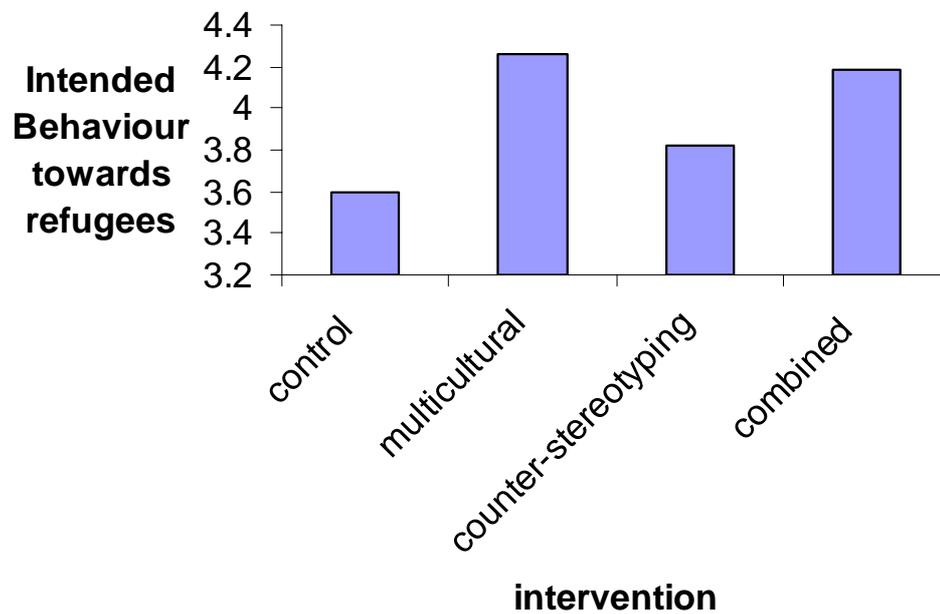
stereotype training group. Attitude scores in the combined condition were also significantly higher than the control group and the counter-stereotype training group. Attitude scores in the counter-stereotype training condition did not differ significantly from the control group.



Intended Behaviour Towards Refugees

We found that intended behaviour scores in the multicultural story-reading intervention were significantly higher than the control group. Children's intended behaviour scores were significantly more positive towards refugees in the Combined intervention were significantly than the control group. Children's intended behaviour scores in the counter-stereotype intervention were not significantly different from the control.

Effect of intervention on intended behaviour towards the refugees



Conclusions:

- Children who receive multicultural story-telling interventions that emphasise refugee group membership are more positive towards refugees, compared with children who receive no intervention.
- Children who receive the multicultural story-telling intervention are more positive towards refugees than children who receive the counter-stereotype training intervention.
- The multicultural story-reading intervention is the most effective intervention

STUDY 4

Aim: Having established multicultural story-reading as an effective prejudice-reduction intervention that can be used to change children's attitudes towards refugees and English people, we wanted to examine a further theoretical approach to prejudice reduction: the common ground approach. We also wanted to examine the effectiveness of an intervention that combined multicultural story reading and common ground story reading.

Number of participants: 253 participants

Number of schools: 7 schools

Age range: two age groups: 5 – 8 years and 9 – 11 years.

Target groups: In this study attitudes towards refugees were examined.

Study description:

Intervention: STORY READING

Children were read one of 3 types of interventions:

1. **COLOUR-BLIND STORY READING** – children read stories in which the groups to which the characters in the story belong were not emphasised and the individual qualities of the story characters were the focus of discussion. The refugee and English groups were not mentioned in the story or in the discussion.

2. **COMMON GROUND STORY-READING INTERVENTION**– The common ground approach emphasises the common groups to which people belong. For instance, when trying to encourage Welsh children to be more positive towards English children, one may wish to emphasise the common membership they hold in both being part of the United Kingdom. In a similar way, one could encourage non-disabled children to hold a positive view of disabled classmates by emphasising the common membership of that school: that is they have a common group membership, their school.

3. **MULTICULTURAL - COMMON GROUND STORY - READING INTERVENTION (Multi-Common Ground)** – children in this group received both the story reading intervention and the common ground story-reading intervention.

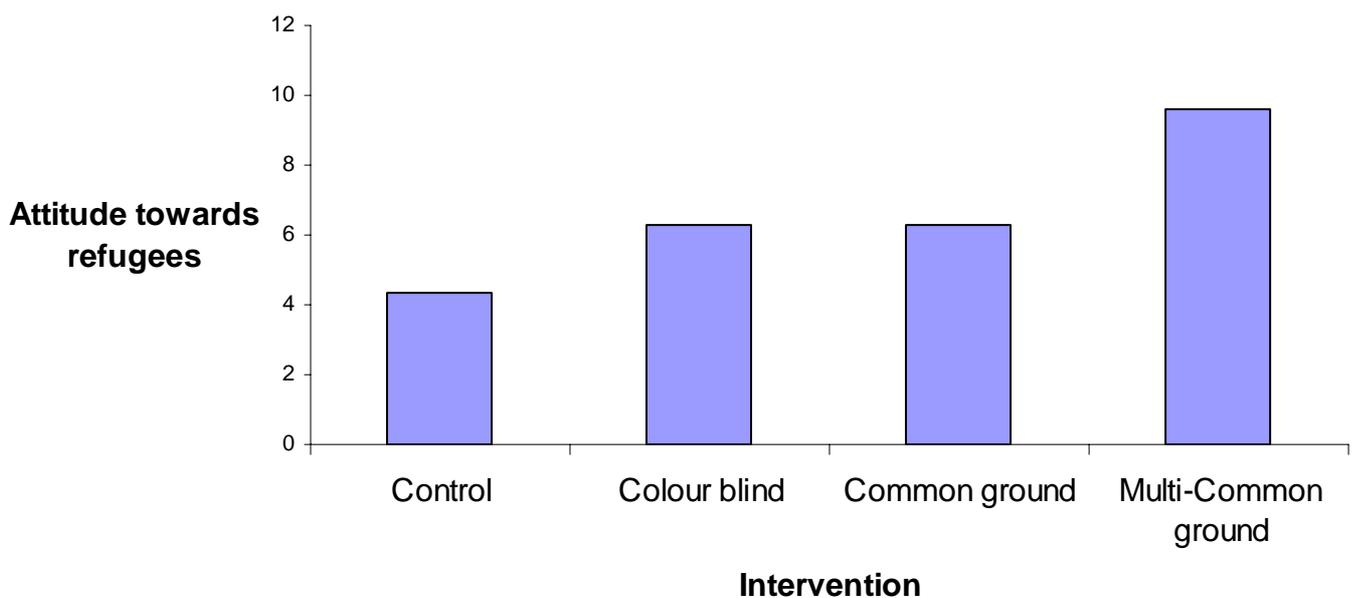
Measures: attitude towards refugees and intended behaviour. We also measured children's feelings of closeness to refugees.

Results:

Attitude Towards Refugees

In *all* the story-reading interventions, children's attitudes towards refugees were significantly more positive than in the control group. Attitudes were significantly more positive after the multicultural- common ground story-reading intervention than the other story-reading interventions.

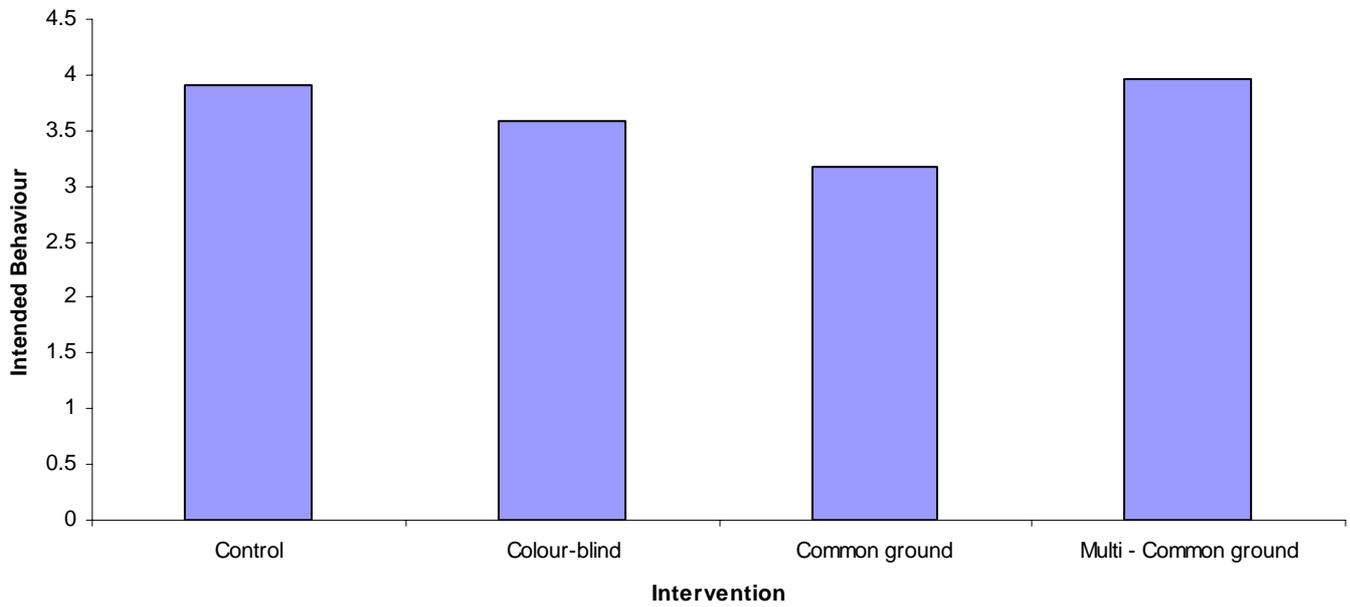
Effect of intervention on attitude towards refugees.



Intended behaviour Towards Refugees

We found that intended behaviour scores in the multicultural story-reading intervention were significantly higher than the control group. Children's intended behaviour scores were significantly more positive towards refugees in the multicultural- common ground story-reading than the other story reading interventions.

Effect of intervention on intended behaviour towards refugees



CONCLUSIONS:

- All story reading interventions lead to more positive attitudes towards refugees.
- Of the story-reading interventions, the most effective is the multicultural-common ground story-reading intervention.

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS:

- Children are positive towards disabled people and refugees, but this positivity can be boosted with prejudice-reduction interventions.
- Story-reading is an effective prejudice-reduction intervention.
- The most effective type of story reading is based on the multicultural approach to prejudice-reduction and the combined multicultural – common ground approach.
- Counter-stereotype training is ineffective at changing children's attitudes and intended behaviour towards refugees and the disabled.
- This series of studies provides support for the 'Multicultural' theoretical approach to reducing prejudice. This suggests that in order to reduce prejudice the social groups to which people belong, such as ethnic group or disabled / non disabled should be discussed and emphasised, rather than being ignored as in the colour-blind approach and common ground approach.
- Multicultural stories are an excellent opportunity to boost children's positivity towards members of stigmatised groups such as refugees and disabled people, before children from these groups arrive at their school. This will hopefully help foster inclusion rather than exclusion in schools, and encourage co-operation and interaction between pupils and their new arrivals who may be disabled or from another country.