

'Prison to Peace: learning from the experience of political ex-prisoners'

What impact does it have on young people?

What is Prison to Peace (P2P)?

P2P is an educational programme which was developed from the stories of political ex-prisoners (loyalists and republicans) who were involved in the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland. It looks at all sorts of issues like why they got involved, what prison was like, and what they do now to promote peace. The programme is a series of around 10 classroom based lessons with a DVD and young people who do the programme also have the chance to talk directly to the ex-prisoners and ask them questions.

What we wanted to know?

Researchers at Queen's University Belfast were funded by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister to evaluate the programme. That means we were asked to see if the P2P programme had an impact on young people's attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours.

How did we find out?

One method we used to find out if the programme had an impact was by using a 'randomised controlled trial', which involved 14 schools from across Northern Ireland.

Young people in the schools completed a survey, which asked them questions about things like their knowledge of the 'Troubles' and the peace process, how they felt about the use of violence, their attitudes towards people from the 'other community' and how they felt about participating in the school and community.

We also spoke to lots of different people

Other methods we used included case studies, interviews and focus groups. We spoke to lots of different people. For example, people involved with the schools using the programme, like:

- Young people
- Teachers
- Principals
- Parents

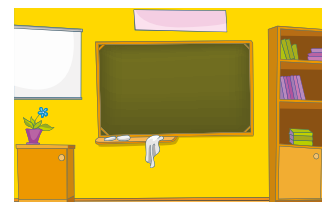
And people who work in education, for organisations like:

- CCEA
- Department of Education
- Education and library boards

7 of the schools then did the programme



7 of the schools didn't do the programme, they continued with lessons as normal. They were the 'control' group.



Then the young people in the 14 schools completed the same survey again.

We could then compare the 'before' and 'after' results of the survey for the young people who **did** the P2P programme with the results for the young people in the 'control' group who **did not** do the programme to see if any of their attitudes, behaviours or knowledge had changed because of doing P2P.

To make sure we were doing all of this in a way young people would understand, we also had a young persons' advisory group. They helped us design our survey and questions, and they helped us make sense of the results.

So..... what did we find out from the survey?

Impact on knowledge, attitudes and behaviours

The results show very clearly that **Prison to Peace** has a **positive impact** on young people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. The results showed that the programme significantly increased:

- young peoples' knowledge of the conflict;
- their support for using non-violent means to deal with conflict;
- their likeliness to become politically engaged (which we know by looking at things like their likeliness to participate in school, talk to others and seek information about politics)

The impact of Prison to Peace	
Knowledge of the conflict	↑
Support for Non-Violent means to deal with conflict	↑
Sectarian prejudice	↓
Likeliness to become politically engaged	↑
Talking to others about politics	↑
Taking part in school related activities	↑
Seeking information about politics and current affairs, e.g., from the news/ internet	↑

Young people enjoyed the programme

67% of young people said they enjoyed P2P quite a lot or a lot. Only 4% didn't like it at all.

The most popular part of the programme was learning about the prison experience and talking to the ex-prisoners.

What caused 'The Troubles'?

We asked young people what they thought caused 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland before they did the programme and after it. You can see how their views changed. They were less likely to just 'blame the other side' and more likely to see 'The Troubles' as part of an historical or political issue.



Before P2P



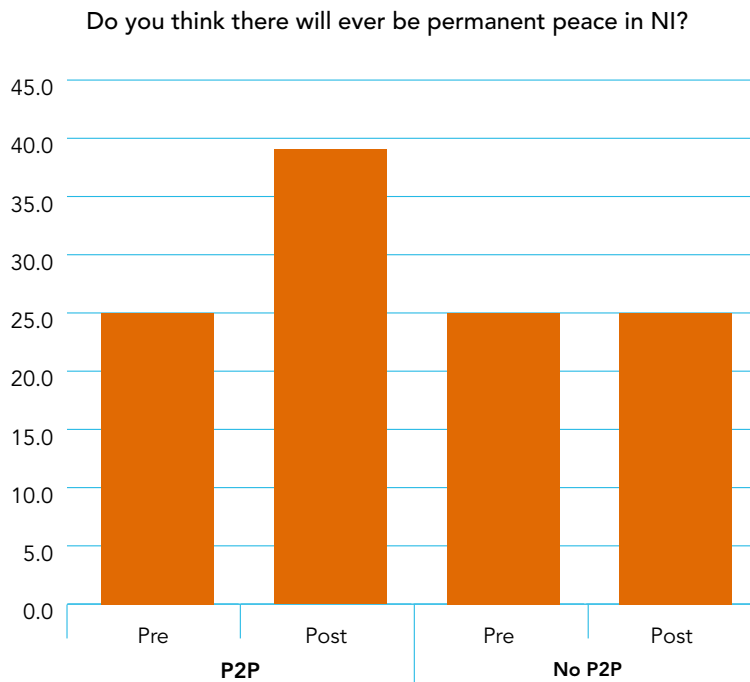
After P2P

- Individuals (no motivation other than doing wrong)
- Individuals (influenced by revenge and/or peer pressure)
- Blaming the 'other' side (total)
- Two communities disagreeing (no reason offered)
- Two communities disagreeing over religion
- Two communities disagreeing over politics/national identity
- Historical reasons
- Don't know

What else did we find out from the survey?

P2P can encourage optimism for peace in NI

After going through P2P more young people thought there could be peace in NI. However, those that didn't get the programme, their answers stayed the same



Recommendations for the programme

In the survey the young people had an opportunity to comment on recommendations to improve the programme, these included:

- Input from other people involved in the conflict, e.g., prison guards, victims and female ex-prisoners
- More detail on how the 'Troubles' started, and more information on the different groups involved
- A visit to a prison
- More videos, debates, activities and games

'not all prisoners were...bad people'

'violence is never the way', there are other 'ways to deal with conflict instead of using violence'

'there is 2 sides to each story and it is a lot more difficult for people than I thought'.

'jail is a bad place to go'

I learned 'why people decided to use violence', for example, because 'a lot of people did not want to get involved back then but they did not want their friends and family hurt'.

'I learned what paramilitary groups were' and 'what happened back then'.

What did the young people learn from P2P?

We asked the young people in the survey what they thought they had learned from the programme. The results show that the young people learned about:

- the 'Troubles' in general'
- alternatives to violence
- that Catholics and Protestants are similar
- both sides of the communities did bad things during the 'Troubles'
- that ex-prisoners are working to improve their communities today
- the impact of prison.

Here are some examples of what the young people said....

What did we find out from talking to the young people who did the programme?

Young people felt ready to learn about the conflict, they felt mature enough to fully appreciate the sensitivities and issues of the P2P programme

'you need to be old enough to understand...to be able to listen level headedly'

'you can't really move on unless you know about it'

They felt that they needed to learn about their own history. Some felt it was important because they argued that you need to learn about the past to move on. Others thought it was helpful to understand what it was like for their parents and grandparents back then

'it did happen, and now we're living it'

'I think it should be taught in classes...it's Northern Irish history... it still happens today, it's still going to happen in a few years...so you have to know about it'

'it's what your families grew up on'

Some commented that P2P helped them understand the perspectives of both sides of the community and they appreciated that it was from first-hand accounts

'it brings...reality to it... they're (ex-prisoners) telling us about it from their views'

'so I found out that there...just wasn't only one side, it was both sides and it's both sides to blame'

Also, it helped them make up their own mind about issues related to the conflict and division in NI

'your mummy and daddy would tell you stuff about it and then you just think that's automatically right, but then you learn about other people's opinions so then you second guess yourself'

The results showed that the young people trusted their teachers to deliver the programme in a fair and balanced way

Because if they [teachers] have certain views they can't really be biased about it they have to have the middle zone of things

Conclusion

Overall, the Prison to Peace programme had a positive effect on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of those young people who completed the programme. The young people involved in this research trusted their teachers to give them a non-biased account of the 'Troubles', which they felt might not happen at home or in their community. Finally, the young people found the programme enjoyable, and they see the value it holds for teaching young people about the past, so that they can move on to a better future.

If you would like to find out more about the programme or this evaluation you can contact

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