

Seminar Series – Researching Peace, Conflict and Power in the Field

Practical Applications: short- and long-term outcomes and applications of field research

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# Researching children and young people's identities and social attitudes: Lessons learned

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# INTRODUCTION

- We are a group of researchers who have conducted applied social psychological research in Northern Ireland and other post-accord contexts
- In our chapter, we discuss the challenges and benefits of carrying out field research with children and young people in these settings:
  - The practicalities;
  - Thoughtful and sensitive engagement with children and young people, gatekeepers and parents/guardians at each stage of the research process;
  - Two case studies:
    1. The *Peace4Youth* programme: a 5-year peace and reconciliation intervention targeting marginalised young people in Northern Ireland and the border region of Republic of Ireland
    2. The *Helping Kids!* programme: promote the antecedents of peacebuilding for children growing up in Northern Ireland, the Republic of North Macedonia, and Kosovo, and Croatia
- **Lessons learned**

# LESSONS LEARNED (1)

## Preparation, preparation, preparation

- Consultation with stakeholders
  - May include children and young people's advisory groups
  - Time!
- Piloting
  - If not possible, be prepared to scrap any first wave or first school data collection



# LESSONS LEARNED (2)

## Be prepared to be flexible

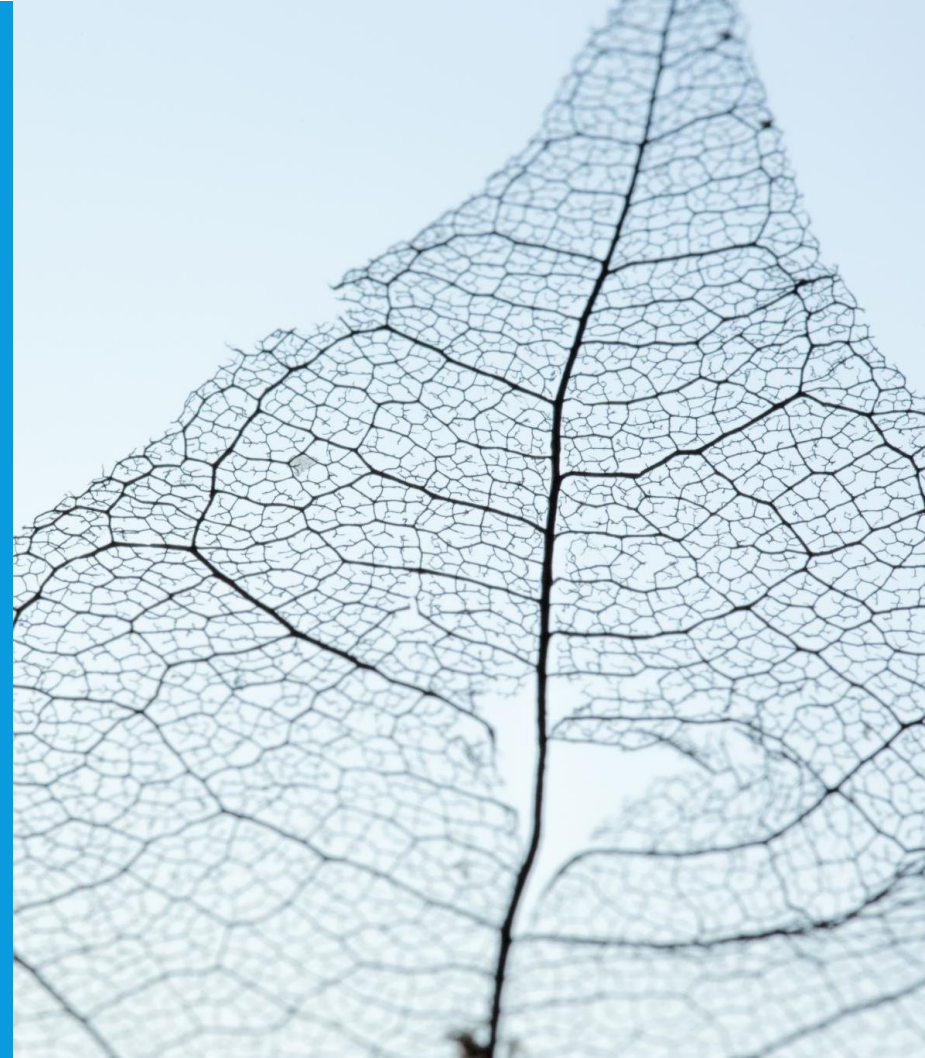
- Changes to the research process are likely
  - May be big changes (adding or removing a research phase) or small changes (adding or removing questions in a survey)
- May be implications for generalisation
  - But necessary to maintain engagement



# LESSONS LEARNED (3)

## Transparency

- Honesty about the purpose and potential implications of the research
  - Communicating this through small assemblies
- Transparency about identity questions
  - Essential for informed, opt-in consent



# LESSONS LEARNED (4)

## Take care with categorisations

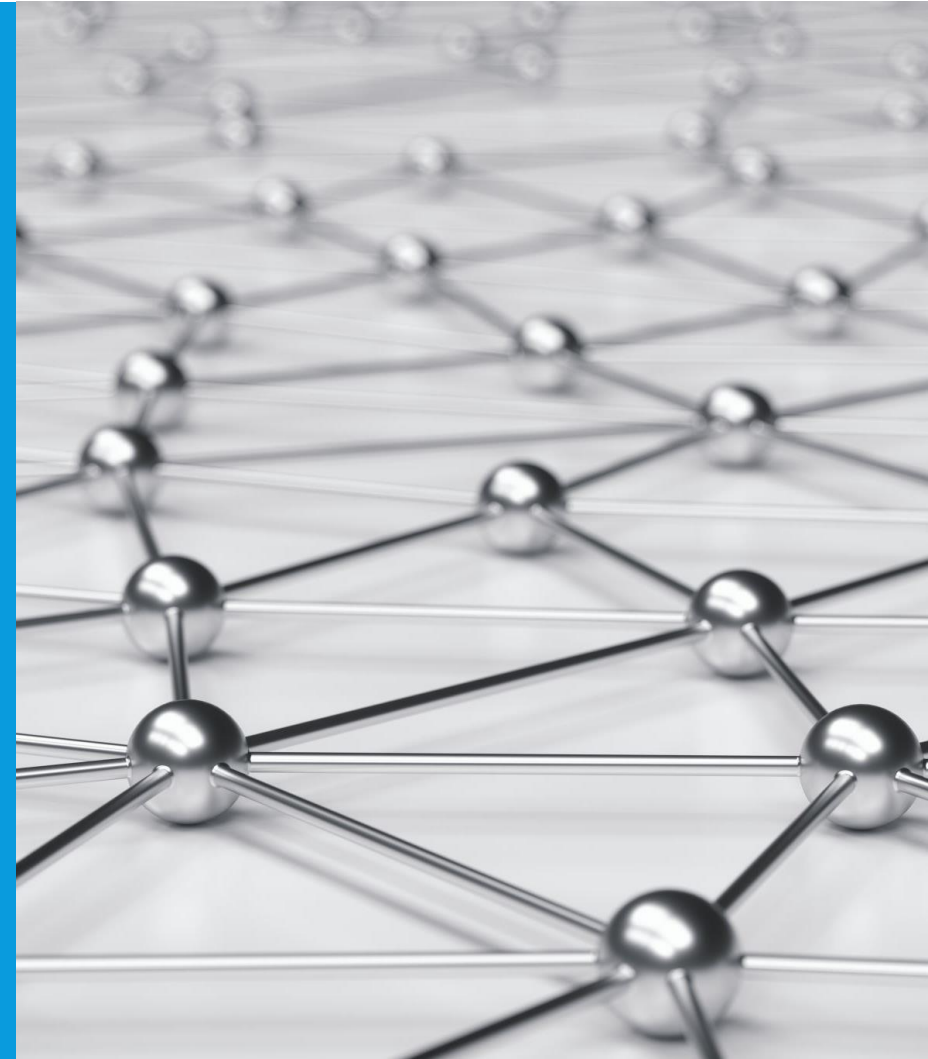
- Need awareness of local knowledge
  - Do not assume children will have the same understandings of group categorisations and labels as adults
- Measure the hybridity and fluidity of identities
  - Acknowledge that identities can change
  - Box-ticking identity categories may be necessary – but be reflexive – who wants to know, and why?
  - Consider use of open response boxes so that children and young people can explain what these categories mean to them
  - Voluntary response!



# LESSONS LEARNED (5)

## Taking a 'big picture' approach to research design

- Precision with measurement
  - Multiple, age-appropriate versions of surveys may be needed
  - Behaviour in addition to attitudes
- Matching datasets
  - Matching children's responses to parents/caregivers/teachers
- Ethical implications
  - Data protection laws when asking sensitive questions about political and religious identity



# THANK YOU

- All of the children, young people, parents/caregivers and professional staff who have advised and assisted us and participated in our research, and our research funders who have made this possible
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- Thank you for coming to the seminar!