



Youth literature: a rich tapestry of storytelling

Stories provide transformative opportunities for exploring how we understand ourselves and our worlds. Literature for young readers provides an especially vital role in children's and young adults' emotional, cultural and imaginative wellbeing, particularly during Covid-19 and as we continue to recover from the pandemic.

Funded by a Royal Society of Edinburgh and Royal Society of Ireland-Scotland Bilateral Network Grant, our project explored the impacts of Covid-19 on the Scottish and Irish children's and young-adult literature creative and cultural communities and industries. The project also supported the collaborative exchange of learning and enhanced practice between these sectors. The cultural and creative sectors in Ireland and Scotland share many commonalities, including a shared respect for the importance of stories and vibrant traditions of storytelling across multiple indigenous languages, as well as differences in their respective national policy, educational, and publishing contexts.

As part of our project, we founded Lionra: The Ireland-Scotland Youth Literature and Arts Network. The network member organisations comprise key literature organisations in both countries: Moat Brae – the National Centre for Children's

Literature and Storytelling; the Scottish Book Trust; the Super Power Agency; Wigtown Book Festival; Children's Books Ireland; Fighting Words; and Poetry Ireland.

Collaboration, community and acting as agents of change are at the heart of creativity and creative experiences for young people, with young people, and by young people. While access to and availability of local and national community and peer networks are important for all creators, they are

key for supporting early-career and aspiring creators – especially for creators from socially marginalised groups – in order to support them establish their careers and develop their professional practice. Our project report¹ demonstrates how community and community-building at local as well as national levels are crucial

to establishing and sustaining authentic, meaningful collaborations, creative partnerships and intergenerational exchanges of perspectives and learning between adults and young people.

While the pandemic isolated individuals and placed great strain on our networks, it also highlighted the value and importance of communication and of developing and maintaining personal and professional communities. In our focus group discussions with Scottish and Irish children and young adults, the young participants discussed the important roles that access to a rich range of stories as well as

opportunities for creativity play in their lives.

Our interviews with Scottish and Irish arts organisation representatives and creators of literature for children and young adults highlighted the necessity of positive professional relationships between arts organisations and artists, and opportunities for formal as well as informal networking and community support. Many of our interviewees identified the potential enabled by Scotland's and Ireland's geographical size and affirmation of community. Our network members also affirmed the benefits and opportunities of international collaborations for knowledge co-construction and idea sharing.

Since its inception in September 2021, the network is flourishing and we intend to build upon this in future collaborative projects and to explore further opportunities for supporting and affirming Scottish and Irish creators, literature organisations, young readers and young creators.



Dr Melanie Ramdarshan Bold

Dr Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, Senior Lecturer & Associate Professor in the Department of Information Studies at University College London; co-authored with Dr Patricia Kennon, Associate Professor in children's and YA literature and youth culture in the School of Education, Maynooth University, Ireland; and Dr Siobhán Morrissey, Awards Administrator for Children's Books Ireland; recipients of the RSE Ireland-Scotland Bilateral Network Grant in 2021

References:

¹ <https://tinyurl.com/5ed4jdjx>

University of Glasgow and Charlotte Square illustrations by Eilidh Muldoon www.eilidhmuldoodles.com

