

Institution: Newcastle University		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Telling the Whole Story: Building Inclusive Collections, Exhibitions and Outreach at Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Matthew Grenby	Professor of 18th-Century Studies	2005-present
Lucy Pearson	Senior Lecturer in Children's Literature	2011-present
Kimberley Reynolds	Professor of Children's Literature	2004-present
Karen Sands-O'Connor	Leverhulme Visiting Professor, then British Academy Global Professor	2015-16; 2019-present
Aishwarya Subramanian	AHRC Creative Economy Postdoctoral Fellow	2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books, in Newcastle upon Tyne, is the UK's foremost museum and archive of modern children's literature. Established in 2005, it has attracted over 50,000 visitors a year, and holds an internationally significant collection of manuscripts, original artwork and editorial material relating to British children's books published from the 1930s to the present. The Children's Literature Unit (CLU) in the School of English at Newcastle works in close, mutually beneficial collaboration with Seven Stories.</p> <p>The recent focus of the partnership has been on understanding and expanding Seven Stories' collection so that it more fully represents the nation's children's literature, and on developing exhibition and outreach strategies to take the collection to a wider and more diverse audience. Research by CLU staff, as well as research collaborations undertaken with Seven Stories and other partners, have led to significant changes in the ways Seven Stories collects, curates and presents children's literary heritage. Specifically, CLU research has (i) underpinned Seven Stories' acquisitions strategy, with a particular focus on diversity and inclusion; (ii) ensured Seven Stories' capacity to gain funding to consolidate its commitment to protecting, developing and publicising its unique collections; and (iii) developed new ways in which the collection can be publicly presented, through research-led exhibitions and innovative digital resources.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>A major focus of research by members of the Children's Literature Unit (CLU) has been on how a <i>national</i> story of children's literature has been, and can be, told from the 18th century to today. In various ways, they have examined what such accounts include, and what they omit, using archival research and book history approaches to disrupt received understandings of the 'children's canon'. The aim of CLU research has been to move beyond a narrow focus on celebrated authors and illustrators to provide a more nuanced, inclusive and diverse understanding of children's books in Britain, past and present.</p> <p>Specifically, work by Grenby has sought to demonstrate the historical continuity of overlooked genres (fables, moral talks, picturebooks), showing how they have complied with evolving social structures from the 18th to the 20th centuries (PUB2). Reynolds' Leverhulme-funded work on progressive children's books published in Britain in the first half of the 20th century (GRANT1) overturned a prevailing narrative of stasis, and demonstrates the intersection between children's literature and the radical movements of the period. It draws attention to the mechanisms of cultural memory, showing the contributions of children's literature to national literary movements. The resulting monograph, <i>Left Out</i> (PUB4), extended her earlier work (PUB1) which had demonstrated how children's books have been at the forefront of stylistic, technological and social innovation. Reynolds drew on this work on experimental children's writers in a series of</p>		

collaborations with computer scientists to develop immersive digital experiences that brought children's stories, and the archival materials that lay behind them, to life for new audiences (**GRANT5, PUB7**).

Pearson's work on the 'second golden age' of children's literature in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrates the significant contributions of editors and publishers to shaping ideas of literary quality (**PUB3**). Drawing on extensive archival research, she has shown how children's publishing responded to changing social contexts and ideas of childhood, creating new understandings of the literary which made room for a more diverse range of childhood experiences. This work underpinned an AHRC/Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Partnership award designed to establish research pathways into the Seven Stories archives (**GRANT2**).

Sands-O'Connor first joined the CLU as a Leverhulme Visiting Professor. Her work seeks to uncover the untold story of publishing by and for Black British communities. Based on archival research conducted during her Visiting Professorship (**GRANT3**), it was published as *Children's Publishing and Black Britain* (**PUB5**). The importance of this work to understandings of race in contemporary Britain was recognised in the award of a prestigious British Academy Global Professorship (**GRANT4**), supporting a project to research radical activism and publishing to provide new ways to understand and address the lack of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) representation in mainstream children's literature and its impact on UK society. An early output of the project was the 'Diverse Voices?' symposium in 2017, bringing together academics, authors, publishers and heritage professionals to consider national histories of children's books. This led to a journal special issue dedicated to 'Curating National Literatures', edited by Sands-O'Connor, Pearson and Subramanian, a postdoctoral research associate on the 'Diverse Voices' project, featuring a range of international perspectives on heritage institutions' constructions of national identity – often at the expense of diversity – and including the editors' own articles on children's literature prizes and their effects (**PUB6**).

3. References to the research

Outputs have been peer-reviewed as at minimum 3* quality via internal/external quality assurance procedures. Grants have received public funding based on exacting peer-review. Outputs are available on request.

- PUB1. **Reynolds** K. (2007) *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- PUB2. **Grenby** M. (2008) *Children's Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Second, revised and expanded 2014.
- PUB3. **Pearson**, L. (2013) *The Making of Modern Children's Literature: British Children's Publishing in the 1960s and 1970s*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- PUB4. **Reynolds**, K. (2016) *Left Out: the Forgotten Tradition of Radical Children's Publishing in Britain, 1910-1949*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PUB5. **Sands-O'Connor**, K. (2017) *Children's Publishing and Black Britain, 1965-2015*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- PUB6. **Pearson**, L., **Sands-O'Connor**, K. and **Subramanian**, A. (eds.), (2019) 'Curating National Literatures', Special Issue of *International Research in Children's Literature*, 12 (1), including their essay, 'Prize Culture and Diversity in British Children's Literature' (90-106). <https://doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2019.0293>.
- PUB7. **Reynolds**, K., Schofield, T., & Trujillo-Pisanty, D. (2019). 'Children's Magical Realism for New Spatial Interactions: Augmented Reality & the David Almond Archives'. *Children's Literature in Education*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-019-09389-2>.

Grants

- GRANT1. Reynolds. K. (PI), 'Modernism, the Left, and progressive writing for children, 1900-1945' (2011), Major Research Fellowship, Leverhulme Trust (F00125AP). GBP83,616.
- GRANT2. Pearson, L. and Whitehead, A. (PIs), Knowledge Transfer Partnership with Seven Stories (2015-16). Funded by AHRC through Innovate UK. GBP55,846.

- GRANT3. Reynolds, K. (PI), Visiting Professor – Professor Karen Sands O'Connor (2015). Leverhulme Trust (VP2-2014-004). GBP37,399.
- GRANT4. Grenby, M. (PI), British Academy Global Professorship – Professor Karen Sands-O'Connor (2019). British Academy (GP2\190443). GBP548,298.
- GRANT5. Reynolds, K. and Schofield, T. (PI) 'Children's Magical Realism for New Spatial Interactions: AR & Archives' (2017). AHRC/EPSRC Development call for the Next Generation of Immersive Experiences (AH/R009155/1). GBP59,544.

4. Details of the impact

CLU staff are committed to supporting Seven Stories in its mission to be the preeminent national centre for children's books. This has meant collaboration across a range of activities, from collection development to exhibitions and public programming. At a high level, CLU research has supported Seven Stories in its successful applications in 2014 and 2017 for Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status, which provides major funding for organisations responsible for protecting and developing the nation's arts and culture. Seven Stories received GBP1,357,824 for 2015-18, and GBP2,310,408 (an uplift of 28%) for 2018-22. Both applications drew attention to the value of CLU expertise. The latter, for example, cited CLU research as 'enabling critical dialogue about the artform and the socio-political content that shapes the stories told' (**IMP1**). ACE's award letter noted that 'The application puts an excellent case as to strengthening the organisation's resilience and looking to the future in terms of investing in the partnership with Newcastle University' (**IMP2**). Indeed, uniquely among NPO organisations, both awards included an additional GBP25,000 per annum from ACE for the Vital North Partnership (VNP). Match-funded by Newcastle University, the VNP is designed to support research-driven collaboration contributing to the shared goal that Newcastle becomes a centre for excellence in children's literature. ACE's annual reporting notes VNP's success, stating in September 2017 for example that 'The growing partnership with Newcastle University through the Vital North project is strengthening the research behind exhibitions and enabling the growth of a more academic based programme of events' (**IMP3**).

In this REF period, the specific focus of the collaboration has been on enabling Seven Stories to interrogate what it means to be a 'national' organisation; and in particular on developing strategies to fulfil their mission to preserve and promote an inclusive and diverse history of British children's literature. Collection development has been a central element of this programme. CLU research has supported the development of a collection which takes account of both mainstream and marginalised voices. A member of the CLU sits on Seven Stories' Literature, Programme and Acquisitions Sub-Committee (Reynolds until 2016, then Grenby), and all acquisitions and exhibitions are discussed at the VNP steering committee. Individual collaborative projects, founded on CLU expertise, have led to targeted acquisitions, such as Seven Stories' successful 2014 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Collecting Cultures' programme. The case for support (drawing heavily on **PUBS 3-4**) specified that CLU research had helped Seven Stories to 'extend our knowledge and help us identify acquisition targets' which would make it possible 'to tell more fully the story of modern children's literature' (**IMP4**). The application secured GBP341,500, making it possible to radically expand the Collection (650 archive boxes of new material, increasing the total collection by a third), with a particular focus on areas identified on the basis of CLU research. Specifically, major acquisitions included:

- manuscripts, artwork and editorial material by or connected with BAME authors, illustrators and publishers. Acquisitions include the archives of major Black poets John Agard and Grace Nichols, and overall increased holdings of material relating to BAME creators by 87.5%. The strategy was underpinned particularly by **GRANT3** and **PUB5**.
- materials relating to contemporary children's book industry figures, including publisher David Fickling and author Michael Morpurgo, based on **PUBS1-3**.
- the Aidan and Nancy Chambers Collection, Seven Stories' largest to date, documenting the entire working lives of two major figures in UK children's literature. The acquisition was based on **PUB3**, and facilitated a further successful application in 2018 to the National Cataloguing Grants Scheme (GBP36,360) to enhance accessibility (**IMP6**).

As the 'Collecting Cultures' Final Evaluation acknowledged, Sands-O'Connor provided 'a comprehensive review of the Collection relating to diversity; this was used to inform the acquisition strategy' and put Seven Stories 'in a far stronger position to tell the diverse story of modern British children's literature and heritage in innovative ways to a wide range of audiences' (**IMP5**). The project 'consolidated [Seven Stories'] reputation and public profile as the major national collector of modern British children's literature, and the holder of a nationally and internationally significant Collection' (**IMP5**). Further Seven Stories funding applications confirm that the 'close partnership with the University has been vital to building the status of the Seven Stories archive as a world class resource' (**IMP6**).

A determination to use CLU research to empower Seven Stories to tell an alternative story of UK children's literature that includes overlooked and minority voices was the motivation behind the 2017 'Diverse Voices?' symposium. Drawing directly on CLU research (**GRANT3; PUBS 5, 6**), the symposium brought together authors, illustrators, publishers, librarians, museum professionals and CLU academics to interrogate how BAME voices are included/excluded in both popular and academic accounts of children's book history. It allowed Seven Stories to 'change [their] approach to collecting and creating work, creative programming and talent development, working with BAME writers' (**IMP1**). Their Collections Manager confirms that the symposium provided 'a unique opportunity ... to reflect on how we, as custodians of the National collection of children's literature, should better represent Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic voices, reflect the impact of race and racism within the children's publishing industry and use our collection to inspire positive change.' He adds that the project as a whole 'brought about a step change in our approach to issues of representation and diversity, not only to the development of acquisitions, but to every part of our work, from collection to outreach' (**IMP7**).

CLU research has also changed the ways in which Seven Stories draws on its collections for its exhibitions, to tell a new more inclusive, participative and questioning story of children's books. In 2015, an Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) supported a Research Associate to work directly with Seven Stories staff on their recently acquired archive of former Children's Laureate Michael Morpurgo, with a particular focus on his contribution to sharing the UK's history with young readers through historical novels such as *War Horse* (**GRANT2**). The project drew on scholarly understandings of historical fiction and metafiction (**PUBS1, 2**) to design 'Artefictions', which used material co-curated with 30 young people to provoke questions about historical authenticity and truth within the exhibition 'Michael Morpurgo: A Lifetime in Stories' (2016-18). The exhibition reached over 60,000 visitors while at Seven Stories and then other major national venues, including the V&A Museum of Childhood in London. It was singled out by Arts Council England as deserving 'particular mention in terms of the quality of exhibition that is produced in-house' (**IMP3**). (The KTP won the Times Higher Education Award for Knowledge Transfer in 2017, judges describing it as 'an exemplar of how a school of English could engage in knowledge exchange'.)

Further, CLU research has underpinned a completely new approach to the design of Seven Stories' first permanent exhibition (originally scheduled to open April 2020; postponed due to Covid-19). Its development was informed by **PUBS 2, 3, 4, 5**, channelled through knowledge exchange activities including the 'Diverse Voices?' symposium, the KTP, and a series of 3 specially designed 'Knowledge Exchange Workshops' and Seven Stories staff training evenings delivered by CLU staff (July 2018, November 2018, June 2019). Through a focus on the Collection, and innovative ways to make its holdings more accessible to core audiences, these activities have supported a rethinking of what a permanent exhibition in the 'National Centre for Children's Books' could do. In successful applications to the Wolfson Foundation and the Heritage Lottery Fund to support the exhibition, Seven Stories noted that 'ongoing research undertaken in partnership with Newcastle University has highlighted scope for the collection to reveal important new or alternative histories of children's books – for example changing approaches to the representation of Black and Minority Ethnic characters in children's books or the treatment of LGBTQ+ themes' so that 'it is neither possible nor desirable to tell a single "national" story or history of children's books.' (**IMP8**). The resulting exhibition was conceived therefore as 'a space in which the curatorial perspective is in constant dialogue with the voices and experiences of audiences, researchers and other creative practitioners': a dialogic approach

facilitated by creative engagement with archives, building on the KTP's needs analysis and the methodologies it pioneered (**IMP8**).

CLU research also underpinned Seven Stories' drive to develop digital platforms to facilitate much wider engagement with its collections, both locally and nationally. In 2017, Reynolds' work on the ground-breaking children's author Catherine Storr (**PUB1**) led to the development, with computer scientists and Seven Stories curatorial staff, of an online resource that uses mobile phone motion sensors to allow a visual exploration of Storr's archival materials held at Seven Stories. This led to an AHRC/EPSRC-funded project (**GRANT5**) to produce an immersive experience that digitally situated items from Seven Stories' David Almond archive in the landscape of the Ouseburn Valley (where the Seven Stories Visitors' Centre is located). The project engaged 82 young people aged 10-15 through three schools and two community organisations in Seven Stories' neighbouring wards (two of the most deprived areas in the UK). Seven Stories' Creative Producer noted the value of the research in developing 'different interesting ways to interpret and use [archival materials], but also identified the project as 'really valuable in the work that we're doing in Byker and Walker [where] we're trying to reach out and do much more work on in our doorstep community' (**IMP9**).

Finally, in 2018, based on the historical depth of the CLU's research and its commitment to producing inclusive literary histories, the British Library commissioned CLU staff to co-curate a major new online resource aimed at children and young people. Using the Knowledge Exchange Workshop method, BL curators and CLU staff together devised the organising themes and selected the items to be included in the resource, with the aim of telling a new, more complete history of British children's books. Items ranged from the medieval to the contemporary, with the preponderance of manuscript materials being drawn from Seven Stories. *Discovering Children's Books*, launched in February 2020, presents digitised images of these items, contextualised by research-led articles by CLU staff, jointly written with children's book authors such as Yu Rong, Michael Rosen and Farrah Serroukh. The resource has had immense national, and indeed global, reach, with 534,000 unique users in the 11 months to the end of 2020, with an unprecedented 55% of UK traffic coming from outside of the South East of England (**IMP10**). As well as its impacts on users, the site provides a gateway for UK and global users to access Seven Stories collection materials. In this way – as in all the ways set out above – CLU research has done much to enable Seven Stories to demonstrate the significance of its Collection, to bring the material to new audiences, and to establish it as the UK's preeminent centre for children's books that presents an exceptionally diverse, inclusive and reflective account of the nation's children's literary heritage.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- IMP1** Seven Stories funding application to Arts Council England for NPO funding, January 2017.
- IMP2** Arts Council England NPO Assessment (additional investment request), June 2017.
- IMP3** Arts Council England NPO Annual Feedback Letter to Seven Stories, September 2017.
- IMP4** 'Collecting British Children's Literature: Strategic Acquisitions to Develop the Seven Stories Collection', second round application to Heritage Lottery Fund, 1 May 2014.
- IMP5** Collecting Cultures – Final Evaluation for the Heritage Lottery Fund, November 2018.
- IMP6** Seven Stories funding application to The National Archives' 'Archives Revealed Cataloguing Grant' scheme, April 2018.
- IMP7** Testimonial letter from Collections Manager, Seven Stories, March 2021.
- IMP8** Seven Stories funding applications for 'Where Stories Come From' gallery' to (a) The Wolfson Foundation, Sept. 2018, and (b) the Heritage Lottery Fund, October. 2018.
- IMP9** 'Children's Magical Realism for New Spatial Interactions': Evaluation: Stakeholder Interview, Creative Learning and Engagement, Seven Stories, 2017.
- IMP10** Email from Digital Learning Programmes Manager, British Library, 17 February 2021.