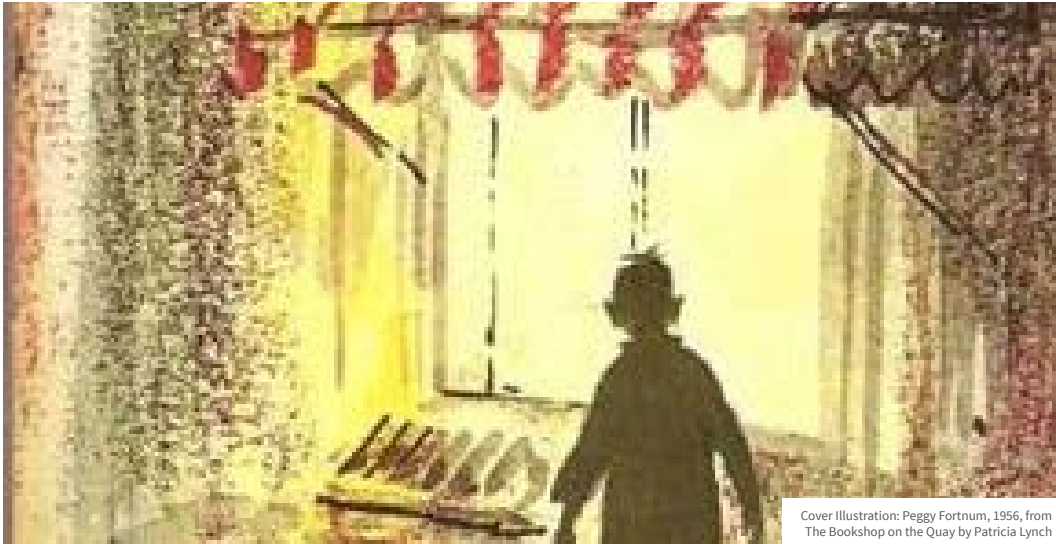




Research Impact Case Study



Cover Illustration: Peggy Fortnum, 1956, from *The Bookshop on the Quay* by Patricia Lynch

National Collection of Children's Books: Repositioning Children's Literature in Ireland

Children's literature collections occupy significant and interesting liminal spaces: between 'private' and 'public', 'national' and 'international', 'instruction' and 'knowledge', 'history' and 'possibility', and 'archaeology' and 'architecture'. Although increasingly relevant as literary, educational, and cultural resources, no central mechanism for researchers to simultaneously search for and explore children's books across the various collections held in Dublin's libraries existed until 2015. This represented a major barrier to the development of research in the area, as the material lay undiscovered and under-researched.

The [National Collection of Children's Books \(NCCB\) Project](#) created an online open-access platform with information on over 250,000 children's books in more than 90 languages from five Dublin libraries. NCCB showcases the cultural heritage that is children's literature in Ireland, not only by providing a platform and thus encouraging and facilitating new research, but also by featuring Irish researchers in its platform and publications, and by including Irish language material. Through its internationalisation activities and capacity building in Irish Higher Education Institutions, the project is contributing to the development of the strong Irish profile in children's literature research.

This project showcases both Trinity's expertise in children's literature and leadership in creating digital research infrastructures in the Humanities, promoting open access to cultural artefacts and enabling innovative research.

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Arts & Humanities
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Cregan Library, St Patrick's
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Research Summary

The NCCB online platform consists of two main components: a catalogue and a database. The main catalogue of records includes all titles of children's books collections in the five libraries: The Library of Trinity College Dublin; Church of Ireland College of Education Library (CICE); the National Library of Ireland; Dublin City Library and Archive, Pearse Street; and Cregan Library, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra (DCU), according to data provided by each library, up to 2014. Activities to build the catalogue included identifying the children's books, standardising and curating records, and validating imported data.

The database includes a detailed analysis of more than 500 educational and literary texts, including books from Ireland or about Ireland, and books explicitly targeting girl readers. An analysis of the scope, range, and extent of each collection and its holdings in each library is also provided.

The project began in December 2013 and ended in December 2015. The core research team comprised two principal investigators, Dr Pádraic Whyte (TCD) and Dr Keith O'Sullivan (formerly CICE, now DCU); two postdoctoral researchers, Dr Ciara Boylan and Dr Ciara Gallagher; and, a research assistant/catalogue developer, Mr Paolo Defant.

Over the course of two years, the NCCB team worked closely with TCD computer scientists in creating the catalogue and ensuring national and international expert evaluation of the catalogue by researchers, librarians, academics and students informed all stages and aspects of the project. As well as the online platform, other research outputs included a symposium, a public exhibition, and an academic volume of essays, the outcomes of which are highlighted in this case study.

“The NCCB project has made a significant and unique contribution to Irish bibliography and to the study of Irish children's literature. It draws together holdings from a number of libraries, making searching more efficient, and sometimes throwing up interesting contrasts between what libraries have chosen to collect. It widens access to Irish children's books, allowing those outside the country to carry out research before visiting the collections.”

Valerie Coghlan

Author, librarian and lecturer, a founder member of the Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature, Children's Books Ireland, and IBBY Ireland

Impact Summary

Before the project began, the extent and scope of the holdings of the various collections were largely unknown as not all catalogues in the participating libraries were open access and available online. As a result, this material lay largely undiscovered and under-researched. The project provided a new digital infrastructure, with enriched data and metadata about the collections, opening new areas of potential research and increasing access to this aspect of Ireland's cultural heritage. Since 2015, over 73,300 people have accessed the platform.

The project also resulted in a public exhibition and the first substantial academic volume to bring collections out of the dark of literary scholarship. [*Children's Literature Collections: Approaches to Research*](#) has been downloaded over 5,200 times and is held in 159 libraries across the world. Published with Palgrave Macmillan in 2017, it won the International Research Society for Children's Literature Edited Book Award, in 2019, at the 24th Biennial Congress of the International Research Society for Children's Literature in Stockholm, Sweden.

“The NCCB project had a number of positive impacts for our Library. It was an exciting and rare opportunity for us to be involved with a collections-focused research project like this. The rich collection-level descriptions provided were very useful for appraisal of research value and importance. Seeing the collections presented alongside those of other libraries provided further context and perspective on our own holdings. As well as collection-level considerations, the descriptions highlighted various individual gems that we may otherwise not have been aware of and assisted in selection for exhibitions such as Culture Night.”

Liam O'Dwyer and Orla Nic Aodha
Cregan Library, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra,
Dublin City University



Details of Impact

“The NCCB project showed me that there is great value in bringing together information about books in a common discipline from disparate libraries. The NCCB promotes the visibility of materials such as the Pollard Collection by linking to many more contemporaneous and related works. I think of the NCCB as a very smart proof-of-concept - easy to navigate and with great faceting for focusing in on key information.”

Timothy Young, Curator of the Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection of American Children’s Literature, Yale University, USA

“The edited collection based on the NCCB project *Children’s Literature Collections: Approaches to Research* has also been a very valuable tool in my research and to support my preparation for teaching specialist children’s literature modules at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The material on the representation of the Irish famine in textbooks for Irish schoolchildren – chapters such as those by Ciara Boylan and Jarlath Killeen and Marion Durnin – was incredibly helpful for students to set contemporary texts about the Irish famine in context.”

Dr Sinéad Moriarty, Teaching Fellow, School of English, Trinity College Dublin

“The NCCB project has provided an accessible and easy to use database, one which empowers early career researchers like myself to pursue new and exciting avenues in the study of Irish children’s literature.”

Siobhán Callaghan, PhD Student in Children’s Literature, School of English, Trinity College Dublin

POSITIONING IRELAND AS A LEADER IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH ON CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

Since 2015, the NCCB has grown Ireland’s reach and position as a leader in children’s literature post graduate education and research. The project’s website and exhibition ‘Come Closer: The Darker Side of Children’s Books’ were launched by Timothy Young, curator of the Betsy Beinecke Shirley Collection of American Children’s Literature at Yale University. The connection with Timothy is reinforced by a long-established student exchange relationship between Trinity College Dublin and Yale University. NCCB also directly informed the development of the European [PicoBoo project](#) which focused on 19th century European picture-books, led by Dr Francesca Tancini (Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at Newcastle University) in partnership with the Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

FOSTERING ENGAGED RESEARCH, TEACHING AND LEARNING

As a resource for taught modules and independent research, the NCCB has been used by students from undergraduate modules as well as postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers from right across Trinity. A session on NCCB is built into the core module for the MPhil programme in Children’s Literature at Trinity and, over the years, students have continued to write entries for the NCCB database, providing a chance to participate in the wider field of children’s literature studies in a meaningful way. As a direct result, there has been a significant increase in the number of researchers consulting children’s literature collections at Trinity College Library. The NCCB has also been used by staff and students to facilitate civic engagement projects, such as the [Bold Girls initiative](#) delivered by national charity and arts organisation, Children’s Books Ireland. As part of this initiative, staff and students from the MPhil in Children’s Literature at Trinity used the NCCB catalogue and database as they mounted the exhibition *Story Spinners: Irish Women and Children’s Books* in the Long Room at Trinity Library. The exhibition, of which a [version is available online through the Google Cultural Institute](#), explores the role of women and girls in Irish children’s literature across several centuries, a literary history often marginalised.

ATTRACTING RESOURCES AND TALENT TO ADVANCE HUMANITIES RESEARCH

Awarded more than €350,000 by the Irish Research Council, the project employed two Postdoctoral Fellows from Ireland and one Research Assistant from the European Union for the period of two-years. Since the completion of the project, the School of English at Trinity has appointed an additional lecturer in Children’s Literature, who now runs an annual Summer School, a strategic hire adding capacity to this area of research excellence.



TARGET 4.7

PROMOTE A CULTURE OF PEACE AND NON-VIOLENCE, GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND APPRECIATION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The project advanced a digital research infrastructure that enables and fosters a global appreciation of cultural diversity in children's literature. Additionally, many of the *Children's Literature Collections: Approaches to Research* insights are applicable to other UNESCO Cities of Literature, since they highlight how such Cities articulate a vision of children's literature through particular collection and institutional practices.

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TARGET 5.1

END ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS EVERYWHERE

In the development of all aspects of the NCCB project, special attention was paid to the role of gender. By questioning the gender stereotypes and the idea of girlhood, and making this a central theme in its research infrastructure, the project enabled greater understanding of the barriers and potential for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. The project also informed the development of the 'Story Spinners' exhibition as part of the *Bold Girls initiative* and highlighted the important contribution of female authors to the development of Irish literature and children's literature, as covered by [The Irish Times](#).

"I consult the NCCB database habitually for certain areas of my research, for example, the cultural history of the fairy tale and Maria Edgeworth's stories for children. I have a general interest in women's writing for children in the eighteenth century, and the NCCB allows a fascinating perspective on diverse library holdings in this area."

Aileen Douglas, Professor,
School of English, Trinity
College Dublin, and one of the
authors in the edited volume



TARGET 11.4

STRENGTHEN EFFORTS TO PROTECT AND SAFEGUARD THE WORLD'S CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

The NCCB increased worldwide access and understanding of the rich cultural heritage held in Dublin. The project is part of a growing theoretical as well as practical interest in children's collections and archive studies and opens a new frontier for children's literature with opportunities to investigate these catalogues.



TARGET 17.16

ADVANCE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS THAT MOBILIZE AND SHARE KNOWLEDGE, EXPERTISE, TECHNOLOGY AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES, TO SUPPORT THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

An interdisciplinary project between Trinity College Dublin and the Church of Ireland College of Education since its inception, the NCCB team partnered with five libraries across Dublin and worked closely with computer scientists, librarians, academics and students at all stages and aspects of this IRC-funded project.