



L-Università
ta' Malta

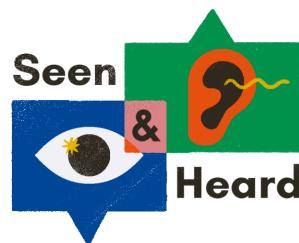


Uniwersytet
Wrocławski

HUMBOLDT-
UNIVERSITÄT
ZU BERLIN



AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



Seen and Heard: Young People's Voices and Freedom of Expression

An Interdisciplinary and Cross-sectoral Conference



Valletta Campus,



University of Malta

5th - 7th February 2026

Abstracts Booklet



Co-funded by
the European Union

Abstracts Booklet

Conference Programme

Thursday 5th February

Keynote 1 - Researching and Co-creating Children's Rights Activism through the Seen and Heard Project

Dr Giuliana Fenech (University of Malta), Dr Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak (University of Wrocław), Dr Farriba Schulz (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

Chair: Sarah Farrugia

Online Host: Rebecca Ganado

Keynote description: During this keynote, the academics of the Seen and Heard consortium will present the core research methodologies and data collection processes adopted in postmigrant classrooms in Malta, Poland, and Germany. We explore young people's understanding of freedom of expression and the role that literature and the arts play in co-creating more intergenerational agency and activism.

About the speakers:

Dr Giuliana Fenech is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Malta, specialising in work involving children and young adult literature and citizenship, agency, creative protest, and activism. She combines research with cultural and artistic community projects involving stories, multimedia, cultural heritage, and youth. Among these projects, as part of an Erasmus K2 project on Creative SDGs led by Esplora Interactive Science Centre in Malta, Giuliana directed a team of researchers and storytellers researching the representation of girls in science stories for children. In May 2022, Giuliana convened the circuit conference The Child and the Book, themed, 'The Role of the Child as Citizen: Constructing Childhood through Agency and Activism', in Malta. She is the editor of *Child as Citizen* (2025) and co-editor (with Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak) of forthcoming volume 'Geopolitics, Activism, and Citizenship in Children's and Young Adult Literature' (2026). Additionally, Giuliana runs a storytelling organisation, Lignin Stories, which has worked with diverse groups of children and youths in Malta and various other European countries, including Italy and Scotland.

Dr Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak is Associate Professor of Literature at the Institute of English Studies, University of Wrocław. She has published on children's culture, new materialism, and posthumanism. 'Intergenerational Solidarity in Children's Literature and Film' (2021), which Justyna co-edited with Zoe Jacques, received the 2023 Edited Book Award from the International Research Society for Children's Literature. She also co-edited (with Irena Barbara Kalla) 'Children's Literature and Intergenerational Relationships: Encounters of the Playful Kind' (2021) and 'Rulers of Literary Playgrounds: Politics of Intergenerational Play in Children's Literature' (2021), (with Macarena García-González) 'Children's Cultures after Childhood' (2023), and with (Terri Doughty and Janet Grafton) 'Children's Literatures, Cultures, and Pedagogies in the Anthropocene: Multidisciplinary Entanglements' (2025). In 2017-2021, Justyna served on the IRSCL executive board. In 2018-2024, she was the University of Wrocław coordinator of the Erasmus Mundus International Master: Children's Literature, Media and Culture. Justyna is also a Fulbright, Kosciuszko, and Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow and a grantee of the Polish Foundation for Science and the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange. Since 2025 she has been the University of Wrocław academic lead in CoREM: Collective Remembrance: Engaging Youth Through Curatorial Practices, an EU project coordinated by Macarena García-González at Pompeu Fabra University.

Dr Farriba Schulz is a Senior Lecturer in the Institute of Education at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Universität Potsdam. She was the Visiting Professor of Primary Education in the Department of German at Technische Universität Dresden, Germany, and worked as a guest lecturer at Freie Universität Berlin. Her main research interest centres on construction of childhoods, (visual) literacy and inclusion, working collaboratively together with schools, libraries, museums, the international literature festival berlin (ilb) and artists. She's worked in the past on several projects that explore issues of diversity and inclusivity working with children's literature, including an international research project with Maureen Maisha Auma and Melanie Ramdarshan Bold. She is a jury member of the GEW literature award "Lesepeter", a member of the advisory board of the circuit conference, The Child and the Book, and co-editor of the book 'Political Changes and Transformations in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Children's Literature' (2023).

Roundtable 1: Human Rights and Children's Publishing

Gvantsa Jobava (International Publishers' Association), Shannon Cullen (Walker Books), Nicky Parker (Amnesty International Poland), Dr Sandra Hili Vassallo (Malta National Book Council), Chris Grupetta (Merlin Publishers), Sita Brahmachari (Author), Matt Stroud (Illustrator)

Chaired by: Dr Giuliana Fenech

Online Host: Rebecca Ganado

Roundtable description: Experts in international and national publishing scenarios for children discuss how human rights are represented in books for young people, as well as the challenges and opportunities therein.

About the panel:

Gvantsa Jobava is President at International Publishers Association and the head of international Affairs at Intelekti Publishing, one of the biggest publishing houses in Georgia, previously – chairperson of the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association and the head of the publishing program for Georgia's activities as guest of honor at the 2018 Frankfurt Book Fair. In 2013-2022 she was the organizer of Tbilisi International Book Festival. Since 2013, Gvantsa Jobava has been lobbying for the Georgian publishing industry, advocating Georgian publishers' interests and rights, standing for copyright and freedom to Publish and Freedom of Expression in Georgia. She has managed a number of projects to promote Georgian publishing and literary industry at international level. She is a member of Women Publishers' International Network – PublisHer. In 2020 she joined PEN Georgia. She is a poet and a translator of works of John Steinbeck, Chinua Achebe, Saul Bellow, John Lennon and others. She has also translated Anna Politkovskaya's book "Putin's Russia" and "A Message from Ukraine" by Volodymyr Zelensky into Georgian. She is the author and editor of the publishing project "Banned Books Shelf" and the founder of Banned Books Week celebrations in Georgia.

Shannon Cullen leads the creative team at Walker Books, a dedicated children's publisher founded in 1978. After moving to London from New Zealand, Shannon has over 25 years of publishing experience, including roles at HarperCollins, Penguin Random House and Quarto. She represents Walker at the Empathy Circle, the advisory group of children's publishers for Empathy Day, and is Vice-Chair of the Independent Publishers Guild, representing the IPG on the industry-wide EDI Forum committed to upholding the professional values of the book and publishing industry.

Nicky Parker is a specialist in children's literature and human rights, who has worked with Amnesty International for over 20 years. She has developed many books and literary projects using a human rights lens, including 'We Are All Born Free: the UDHR in Pictures' (2008), published in 35 languages. With Cheltenham Festivals, she co-created 'Words That Burn' (2016), a spoken word resource for school students to explore and express human rights through poetry. She established the Amnesty CILIP Honour (2016-18), a human rights commendation for books on the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medal shortlist. She was lead writer of 'Know Your Rights and Claim Them: A Guide for Youth' (2021), with Angelina Jolie and Professor Geraldine Van

Bueren QC and is the author of 'These Rights Are Your Rights: An empowering guide for children everywhere' (2024). From 2016-22 she was Chair of Trustees of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) and is on the steering group of Reflecting Realities, a change-making annual survey of ethnic representation in British children's books. She is a trustee of English PEN.

Dr Sandra Hili Vassallo is the author of the IMELDINA series and of MIKELIN, winner of the National Book Prize. She also wrote books dealing with children in foster care and out-of-home care and financial literacy. Her latest publication tackles children's mental health. Sandra is passionate about children's rights, migration issues, social justice and the environment. She writes short stories for adults and is rediscovering poetry writing. Her stories were published in LEHEN il-MALTI and other publications. She graduated with a law degree and worked on child participation within the Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights. At present she is the Executive Director at the National Book Council.

Chris Gruppetta has for the past couple of decades been the publisher and editor at Merlin Publishers. He studied law at the University of Malta, followed by a Masters in Publishing Studies in Aberdeen where he researched the science of children's book cover design. His career at Merlin has been marked by efforts to professionalise the industry with focus on content, editorial and design aspects of the book, and a fresh approach to book marketing. He is a visiting lecturer at the University of Malta on literary editing and on the history of children's literature.

Sita Brahmachari is an internationally award-winning Children's and YA author whose work is translated into many languages. Since her Waterstone's Award Winning debut novel 'Artichoke Hearts' (2011) Sita's stories have been nominated for the Carnegie Medal and the UKLA Book Award. She has an MA in Arts Education and has worked widely in theatre and education with diverse communities to mentor young voices. Sita co-created and scripted a celebrated theatre production inspired by Shaun Tan's graphic novel 'The Arrival' (2013). Her YA novel 'When Shadows Fall' was shortlisted for the Yoto Carnegie Medal (2023). Her latest novel is 'Phoenix Brothers' (2025). Sita was shortlisted for the Ruth Rendell Literacy Award (2023). She has been Book Trust Writer in Residence, an Amnesty Ambassador and Associate Lecturer in Children's and YA Literature at Goldsmiths University. She is Writer in Residence at Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants. Sita is a Royal Literary Fellow and a Fellow of The Society of Authors and an Honorary Member of the Youth Libraries Group.

Matt Stroud is a Maltese illustrator, animator and folklorist with a focus on visual storytelling as entertainment and education aimed at children. With 10 years in the industry, Matt has illustrated over 30 children's books for various publishers and won 4 'Terramaxka' National Book Prizes for children's literature in the process. Matt has applied his storytelling and animation skills to various projects over the years. He has animated a series of 12 preschool nursery rhymes, in Maltese, for the National Literacy Agency to promote Maltese literacy. With assistance from the NLA, Matt co-created a Maltese animated web series for preschoolers 'Emme', with writer Clare Azzopardi. In 2017 he created a full animated show for The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra to accompany their classical 'Mussorgsky' concert, aimed at children. Matt has animated awareness videos for both the 'Women's Rights Foundation' and the 'Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' that focus on different human rights issues. From 2022 to 2025, Matt has been the illustrator for the children and youths festival 'Żigużajg', where he illustrated each year's primary festival poster along with the poster artworks for over 60 theatrical and interactive events that formed part of the festival. From 2024, Matt has undertaken a long term project 'Tori Tombi', supported by both Arts Council Malta and the National Book Council, to revitalise Maltese folktales, through translation and adaptation, for a new generation.

Panel 1 - Children's Voices in Literary Systems

Chair: Daniel Cini

Online Host: Juliette Roux

1. Mediating Freedom: Participatory Reading and Creative Protest in Ecuadorian Children's Literature (12)

María Alejandra Zambrano Murillo (Independent Researcher)

Abstract: This presentation examines how participatory research with young people, centred on children's picture books, can foster freedom of expression and human rights education in contexts marked by inequality, racism, and structural violence. Drawing on "Historia de la literatura infantil ecuatoriana: 1995–2025" ("History of Ecuadorian Children's Literature: 1995–2025"), an ongoing research-creation project at the Universidad de las Artes, I explore how collaborative literary mediation—particularly through the Trompo Mediation Initiative—has engaged children and adolescents in Afro-Ecuadorian and other historically marginalised communities as co-creators of art, literature, and media.

These interventions, inspired by Felipe Munita's notion of "mediación literaria" and A/R/Tographic methodologies, were designed as sustained, dialogic processes of creative pedagogy and co-creation, rather than isolated "reading promotion" activities. Children responded to carefully curated Ecuadorian and global picture books that address themes such as violence, gender inequality, environmental justice, and civic participation. Through guided discussions and creative protest pieces—illustrations, collective stories, and short films—they exercised their right to speak on matters affecting their lives, situating local realities within broader geopolitical contexts. The books during this stage of the project are: *Pelo bueno* (Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro), *Dreamers* (Yuyi Morales), *Cristobal Cologro* (Oriel Siu), *Islandborn* (Junot Díaz), and *Aquiles y la tormenta* (María Alejandra Zambrano and Daniela Meythaler).

The work reflects cross-collaboration between academics, artists, and activists, and between academia (Universidad de las Artes) and human rights organisations (Karibu, UNTHA, and Hilarte), to create authentic spaces for children's voices. Analysis highlights the role of children's literature in the battle for human rights, the complexities of geopolitics in shaping expression, and the methodological challenges and opportunities of participatory research with minors. The project demonstrates that when young people are supported to co-create literature and media, they produce narratives that resist marginalisation and contribute to public discourse, positioning children not as passive readers but as active citizens.

About the author:

Dr. María Alejandra Zambrano Murillo is an independent researcher. Writer, and cultural practitioner, she leads the research-creation project *Historia de la literatura infantil ecuatoriana: 1995–2025*, which examines children's literature as a tool for civic voice, human rights, and social transformation. Through the Trompo mediation program, she has co-created participatory reading workshops with children and youth in Afro-Ecuadorian and other underrepresented communities, fostering storytelling as a form of creative protest. Her current research focuses on the history of Ecuadorian Children's Literature and community-based arts pedagogies.

2. Care Is Key: Exploring Inclusive Child Participation in Patience Agbabi's Leap Cycle Series

(23) - online

Kayra Maes (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium)

Abstract: Children's literature, like all literature, does not exist in a vacuum, but rather stands in conversation with the socio-political climate in which it is produced (Dudek 2018: 364). Climate change is among the central concerns of our time, and children have been at the forefront of caring and making people care about this issue, with the school strikes for climate being a great example of children speaking up and taking action. However, children who raise their voices are not always taken seriously, especially by the adults around them, as some of the responses to the school strikes illustrate (Leysen 2019). Concerns around global warming and climate change have also made their way into children's literature (Oziewicz and Saguisag 2021: v-xiv), including in stories that imagine children as agents of change. While this representation of successful children's participation is positive, it also warrants a closer look. Therefore, this paper aims to explore which children's voices get to be heard and how inclusive participation is imagined in children's literature. In order to do so, I analyse Patience Agbabi's Leap Cycle series (2020-2024), which depicts the adventures of a group of child heroes – many of whom are racially diverse and/or neurodiverse – whose goal is to protect the planet's future. I argue that reading these stories through a lens of care sheds a light on how the children's heroic community also functions as a community of care that hinges on equality and accommodating each other's needs. It is this mutual care that ultimately ensures that all characters feel comfortable and supported enough to actually exercise their participatory potential and become full-fledged eco-heroes. Children's literature can thus model and encourage inclusive and child-led participation rooted in good care practices.

About the author:

Kayra Maes holds a Master's in Linguistics and Literary Studies from Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and an Advanced Master's in Literary Studies from KU Leuven. She has gained research experience through her participation in the competitive, extracurricular 'Talent for Research' programme at VUB. Kayra has prepared a funding application with the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) for a PhD project on the representation of care in contemporary Black British children's literature, a project for which she is currently already receiving interim funding from VUB for one year (2024-2025).

3. The Walks: Familiarizing Strange City through Memory of Reading Children's Book (15) - online

Chrysogonus Siddha Malilang (Malmö Universitet, Sweden)

Abstract: Literature-inspired excursion or literary walk, argues Nikolajeva (2024), allows us to formulate a better, deeper understanding of a specific literary text. As our memory of reading and the physical observation of the place interact, a holistic image of the experience beyond the book we read will be formed. In a cyclical relationship, the physical place triggers our memory of the book which will continually encourage us to explore the space further. The more we expand through the previously unfamiliar space, the familiarity from our reading memory gradually injects the area with intimate qualities and transforms the space into a place (Tuan, 1977 / 2013).

This study aims to map the a/r/tographer's experience of literary walk and the process of making sense of a strange new place with the help of children's books. Ouida's *A Dog of Flanders* is used as the literary foundation for the exploration of Antwerp, Belgium, a city in which the a/r/tographer had never visited before. The sense of displacement from the a/r/tographer is also echoed in the selection of the children's book. Despite the novella being popular in Asian countries and helping contribute to the reading memories of many child readers, it was relatively unknown in Belgium until the 1980s. This book has encouraged Asian tourists to visit Antwerp, driven by their childhood reading memories and

(re)introduced it to people living in the city where the story took place. These relatively foreign memories have even manifested in the creation of two statues in Antwerp, erected to answer tourists' curiosities.

In this walk, the familiar, the uncanny, and the strange are engaged, forming an assemblage continuously expanded through the reverberations of these three. The multisensory experience of the assemblage (which includes voices, thoughts, wanderlust, and physical movements) is captured through both and continuum of academic rumination, photographs, and poetry, following Malilang's (2019) suggestion of a/r/tographic essay.

The random trajectories resulting from it facilitate dialogues between reading, walking, creative process, and academic rumination. The attempts to capture things seen and heard through these different modes are expected to engage other people, including those who attend the presentation. In doing so, the inquiry over space and place through and in *A Dog of Flanders* is engaged and acted upon in the process of becoming researcher, creative writer and walking pedagogy of self.

About the author:

Chrysogonus Siddha Malilang is Senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education and Society, Malmö University, where he teaches children's literature and creative writing. His current research interests lie in play and children's literature. Additionally, he is the current editor of *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*.

4. The Forces: A/r/tographic Encounters with Students, Plants, and the Classics of Children's Literature (15)

Marnie Campagnaro (Università degli Studi di Padova, Italy)

Abstract: This research explores how a/r/tographic practices can engage alternative forces—intellectual, pedagogical, ecocritical, posthuman, critical, creative, and activist—in the study, research, and teaching of children's literature. Drawing on new materialist and posthumanist theories (Van Der Beek et al., 2025), as well as critical plant studies (Duckworth & Guanio-Uluru, 2022; Middelhoff & Peselmann, 2023), the project addresses the following research questions: What happens when we read children's literature beyond characters and themes; through the vegetal, spatial, and affective forces at play? Which new paths will open when students are invited to take up the mantle of nonhuman?

To explore these questions, the project “Erbario Letterario”, an a/r/tographic experiment conducted with pre-service teachers is discussed. Over several weeks, students worked as researchers, artists, and educators—forming an a/r/tographic assemblage—to map the presence of plant life in selected works/children's classics, published between the early 20th century and the first decades of the 21st. The project culminated in an Exam exhibition where students gave voice to their ideas and works by publicly exhibiting their literary herbaria and engaging in live dialogue with visitors from both inside and outside academia, in an event entirely conceived and curated by them.

Combining close reading, creative writing and illustration, ecocritical dialogue, botanical mapping, and walking inquiry (Lasczik et al., 2023) through the Botanical Garden of Padova and other open natural spaces, students' reflections—documented through videos, field notes, and artistic outputs—revealed how this approach unsettles conventional modes of researching and teaching (Campagnaro & Ferrari, 2024), foregrounding vegetal and material forces that reshape our relationships with literature, with place, and with knowledge itself. Excerpts of students' voices, visual documentation, and a/r/tographic reflections will be presented as part of ecocritical and transformative education.

About the author:

Marnie Campagnaro is Associate Professor at the University of Padova. She directs a Postgraduate Course in Children's literature at the same Institution. Embracing the JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) principles within children's literature research, she actively contributes to major international projects focusing on children's imagery and heritage, fairy tales and fashion, literary and visual literacy, design, object-oriented criticism, and environmental children's literature. With over 90 publications, she has held visiting professorships at numerous foreign institutions and serves on the scientific and editorial boards of prestigious children's literary magazines.

Panel 2 - Law and Policy 1

Chair: Prof. Anna Kérchy

Online Host: Amy Calleja / Cornell Raab

1. A Voice, Not an Echo: Children's Participation, Legal Representation and the Ethic of Care in EU Justice Systems (7)

Dominika Kuna (SWPS University, Poland)

Abstract: The paper explores the concept of child-friendly justice in the context of EU policy and legal standards, focusing on the child's right to be heard and to participate meaningfully in judicial proceedings. While this right is widely recognised in international and European legal instruments—such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child—its implementation remains inconsistent and often formalistic. A key factor affecting the quality of child participation is the role of the child's representative, whether a guardian ad litem, curator, or legal advisor. These figures can either amplify or filter the child's voice, raising important ethical and legal questions. The presentation analyses how the design and function of such representation influence the inclusion and interpretation of children's views within justice systems.

The analysis is grounded in doctrinal legal research and enriched by the author's professional experience, including active involvement in legislative processes related to child protection. Methodologically, the paper draws on legal texts, academic literature, and selected national legal documents to examine how various jurisdictions approach child participation and representation. The paper situates these challenges within broader theoretical frameworks of dialogical justice and the ethic of care, arguing that child-friendly justice requires not only procedural safeguards but also an ethical commitment to relational listening and shared decision-making. It emphasises the need to move beyond a protective paradigm and recognise children as rights-holders and social agents.

Finally, the presentation contributes to interdisciplinary dialogue by exploring innovative advocacy models and participatory mechanisms that support more inclusive, equitable, and empowering legal environments for children across Europe.

About the author:

Dominika Kuna is a lawyer and philosopher, serving as a teaching assistant at the Faculty of Law at SWPS University (Warsaw) and as a judicial assistant at the Court of Appeal. She is a member of the Family Law Codification Commission and a board member of the Sociology of Children and Childhood Section of the Polish Sociological Association. At the university, she also serves as a Youth Protection Officer. Her professional experience includes work at the Office of the Commissioner for Children's Rights, where she focused on child protection. Her research interests include children's rights, family law, and non-contentious proceedings.

2. Kid-testing Books for Children: The Experience of Aklat Alomid (14) - online

M.J. Cagumbay Tumamac (Independent Researcher, Philippines)

Abstract: Even though the children themselves are the primary target readers of children's books, it has been observed that children are typically treated as passive consumers of content produced by adults. In other words, the people who write, illustrate, and publish the books are usually adults, as are the people who buy and distribute them. Kid-testing, or having children assess the books before being completed, is one strategy to empower children as active actors in the production of books for them. This paper provides instances of kid-testing through the experience of Aklat Alomid, an independent publishing house of children's books written in the Philippine languages. In these instances, kid-testing has shown discrepancies between what adults believe children can accomplish and what they enjoy and what they actually can do and like. This paper also recommends kid-testing as a useful tool in producing other materials and content primarily for children.

About the author:

M.J. Cagumbay Tumamac is a book worker, social science practitioner, and educator from southern Mindanao. He currently teaches at the University of the Philippines.

3. Young Voices against Gentrification: Multiliteracies, Creative Protest, and the Right to the City (26) - online

Margarida Castellano (University of Valencia, Spain) & Helena Moros (Universitat Jaume I, Spain)

Abstract: Gentrification and touristification are global phenomena that displace communities, reshape urban identities, and intensify inequalities directly affecting young people's everyday lives (Kern, 2022; Pacheco, 2024). Beyond altering the cultural and economic fabric of cities, these processes restrict youth opportunities to imagine equitable futures and to participate in decision-making. This paper argues that multimodal children and young adult literature can create authentic spaces for expression, enabling young people to claim their right to the city and engage in creative protest.

The study focuses on the pedagogical uses of *Todo bajo el sol* (Ana Penyas, 2021), a graphic novel that critiques mass tourism and urban speculation in Spain, alongside other multimodal texts addressing displacement and resistance. Framed within the Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), the project implemented a learning situation with secondary students that fostered critical literacy skills through active citizenship. Participants analysed historical and contemporary narratives of urban transformation and produced creative outputs—including guerrilla marketing campaigns and literary cartographies—that reimaged their neighbourhoods through lenses of equity and sustainability.

Methodologically, the research employed qualitative tools such as focus groups and reflective questionnaires (Mercer & Littleton, 2007), capturing how students articulated concerns about belonging, environmental justice, and freedom of expression. Findings show that young people not only recognised exclusion mechanisms produced by gentrification, but also proposed alternative visions grounded in reimagining inclusive and sustainable futures.

By combining multimodal literary analysis and participatory methodologies, this paper highlights the transformative potential of youth voices in contesting urban inequalities and enacting creative forms of resistance that connect past, present, and future imaginaries. The research forms part of the ongoing I+D+i project CIGE 2023/75: Re)framing the gaze: Creative and critical strategies for implementing Multiliteracies Pedagogy in CLIL contexts with an ecosocial justice approach, from the University of València (Spain).

About the authors:

Margarida Castellano is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Language and Literature Teaching at the University of Valencia. She holds a PhD in Philology with an international distinction, supported by a grant at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. She has taught in the Valencian public education system and served as director of the teacher training centre for plurilingual education (CEFIRE) and as Director General for Innovation and Academic Planning in the Valencian government. A member of Lit(T)erart, ELCIS, and the ANILIJ network, her research addresses additional language learning in plurilingual contexts and the role of multimodal texts in literary and critical learning. She leads the project CIGE 2023/75.

Helena Moros is a PhD candidate in the Applied Languages, Literature and Translation programme at Universitat Jaume I, Castelló. She holds a Master's Degree in Applied Research in Feminist, Gender and Citizenship Studies (UJI) and a Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teaching (UV). Since 2019, she has been a tenured secondary school teacher of English as a Foreign Language and Equality and Coeducation Coordinator at her school. Her research project focuses on improving reading competence in English through the design of a reading pathway for adolescents that adopts a critical and multimodal approach.

4. Participation with Limits: When Children's Rights Meet Adult Control (19)

Shana Vanderveken (Ghent University, Belgium)

Abstract: The right to participation is recognised as one of the four foundational pillars of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), reflecting the Convention's commitment to acknowledging children as active rights-holders whose views must be meaningfully considered in all matters that concern them. However, translating this principle into practice is far from straightforward.

Legal, institutional, and societal barriers often complicate its implementation, particularly given the diversity among minors in terms of age, developmental stages, social backgrounds, and cultural contexts. Yet, existing legal frameworks often rely on uniform rules that fail to reflect this diversity and are shaped by a protective mindset that can conflict with the participatory rights granted by the UNCRC.

Using a Belgian case study, this presentation will explore how the right to participation can be applied in practice and examine the tensions that arise when children's evolving capacities challenge traditional adult-centric legal structures. These tensions may result in situations where children's rights are formally recognised but remain practically constrained. Throughout the presentation, the concept of decision-making will be approached in a broad and inclusive manner—not limited to legislative or legal frameworks. This analysis will examine the extent to which minors are capable of autonomous decision-making, encompassing their involvement in shared decision-making processes with parents or professionals and their consultative participation in administrative and judicial procedures.

About the author:

Shana Vanderveken is an academic assistant and PhD researcher at Ghent University, specialising in youth law, juvenile justice, and children's rights. Her research explores how legal frameworks can evolve to support minors in exercising their rights in line with their developmental capacities. She has been practising law since 2014 and holds a certificate authorising her to assist minors in legal procedures. From 2021 to 2023, she contributed to legal education as a teaching assistant at Ghent University. She earned her Master of Laws from Ghent University (2014) and won a national moot court competition (Georges Debra) in 2016.

Panel 3 - Power of Literature

Chair: Dr Farriba Schulz

Online Host: Ruby Peresso

1. Am I a Voice or a Traitor? Dialogues with Youth from Aggressor States - Using Picturebooks to Navigate Political Identity (17)

Chang Hasheminezhad-Li (University of Padova, Italy)

Abstract: Research on migrant youth identity has largely focused on processes of bicultural adaptation, heritage language maintenance, and everyday negotiation of belonging (Reynolds & Zontini, 2015; Alshihry, 2024). Studies on youth political expression and digital practices have likewise examined self-censorship and identity management across social media platforms (Lee, 2018; Chu & Yeo, 2018). However, little attention has been given to youth from states implicated in acts of geopolitical aggression, even when residing in democratic host societies, who continue to carry the burden of collective guilt and face political suspicion.

Guided by the framework of youth agency under constraint (Honwana, 2012; Jeffrey, 2010), this study examines how migrant adolescents from Belarus, China, and Russia negotiate political identity and self-expression under conditions of suspicion and risk. We ask: How do they reconstruct moral identity and boundaries of expression, and what role can picture books play in enabling safer dialogue on contested political issues?

During the recruitment process, all potential participants actively requested anonymous online interviews, expressing strong concerns about the potential impact on personal safety when discussing political topics. This dynamic prompted us to adapt our methodology: employing picture books as cultural identity negotiation catalysts. The selected texts, *The Enemy* (2007), *How War Changed Rondo* (2015), and *War* (2021) served as narrative entry points, enabling participants to explore political and moral questions within the safer framework of literary analysis.

Findings reveal recurring strategies of protective silence and language avoidance in daily interactions, deliberate compartmentalisation of identities across digital platforms, and the use of art and literature as safer channels of resistance. These practices illustrate fragile but resilient forms of youth agency under constraint, allowing participants to navigate precarious spaces between silence and expression. By demonstrating how picture books can break through barriers to discussing sensitive topics, this study contributes both substantively and methodologically. Substantively, it extends scholarship on migrant youth identity and political self-expression by foregrounding the marginalised voices of young people from states associated with geopolitical aggression. Methodologically, it validates picture books as innovative tools for eliciting authentic narratives on high-risk political issues while protecting participant safety. In doing so, the study underscores the importance of recognising youth agency under constraint and the fragile forms of resilience that emerge within it.

About the author:

Chang Hasheminezhad-Li is a PhD student in Children's Literature at the University of Padova, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology (FISPPA). His research focuses on how picture books present and utilise the concept of "hope" as a response to future uncertainty, and how European values are represented in European picture books. He holds an MLitt in Fantasy Literature from the University of Glasgow and the Erasmus Mundus International Master in Children's Literature, Media and Cultural Entrepreneurship (CLMCE). An Erasmus scholar and active member of the Arqus University Alliance, he is also engaged with NGOs concerned with internet censorship. His research interests include uncertainty, picture books, censorship and boundaries, hope education, and the politics and culture of children's literature.

2. **Missing Mirrors: Arab in Children's Literature and the Pursuit of Equitable Representation for Global Citizens (18) - online**
Dalia Mostafa Abdulrahman Mostafa (Cairo University, Egypt)

Abstract: Literature is a key element in early childhood education that supports cultural awareness and self-identity, in addition to developing essential pre-literacy skills. Moments of exposure to stories are key in children's first years of forming an understanding of themselves and others (Woolfolk & Perry, 2014). However, there is a significant lack of literature for early childhood that demonstrates an authentic representation of Arab children and families.

This research takes the form of a content analysis of numerous contemporary picture books to underscore the underrepresentation of Arab characters in early childhood literature. Current statistics from the Children's Book Collaborative (2023) show that there were 3,491 picture books published in 2023 and less than 1% of them portrayed Arabic characters or plotlines. This absence in representation is significant as it reflects a violation of Arab children's right to cultural identity (UNCRC Article 8) and development (UNCRC Article 6) and could impact how they see themselves and pride in their culture. In addition, this absence could restrict non-Arab children's right to receive diverse sources of information and ideas (UNCRC Article 17), which are vital for global contexts, geography and overall 'world view'. After investigating a number of picture books published by the major publishing houses, to show how the absence of "mirrors" for Arab children, and the absence of "windows" for others, does harm to the right of non-discrimination (UNCRC Article 2) in popular culture.

About the author:

Dr. Dalia Mostafa Abdulrahman: a lecturer (Assistant Professor) at the Faculty of Early Childhood Education, Cairo University, specializing in children's literature and early childhood development. Holds a Ph.D. in Education from Cairo University, where also earned master's and bachelor's degrees, all related to children's literature and education. In addition, a certified in the Montessori Method of Teaching and Diploma in Public Policy and children's rights.

3. **Hearing Young Voices: How Children Respond to Palestinian Stories of Displacement (49) - online**
Oguzhan Yilmaz (Erzincan Binali Yildirim University, Turkiye) & Tugba Okumus Arslan (Erzincan Binali Yildirim University, Turkiye)

Abstract: This paper investigates how children's voices can be foregrounded in discussions of global crises through their engagement with literature. Focusing on contemporary children's books that depict the experiences of Palestinian families forced to leave their homeland, the study examines how narratives of displacement, loss, and resilience provide young readers with opportunities to reflect upon questions of justice, equality, and human rights. These texts are not only representations of political and social realities but also serve as dialogic spaces in which children encounter perspectives that resonate with, or challenge, their own understanding of the world.

The analysis is guided by reader-response theory, which emphasises the active role of readers in constructing meaning. The study group consisted of 15 secondary school students, aged between 10 and 14, who engaged with selected Palestinian narratives in structured reading sessions. Their responses were collected and analysed using a qualitative approach, focusing on discussion and feedback to explore how they interpret the struggles of fictional characters and connect these struggles to broader global issues. Particular attention is given to how children articulate empathy, critique structures of inequality, and envision possibilities for resistance and solidarity. Such

reflections demonstrate that young readers are capable of sophisticated engagement with human rights concerns when they are provided with the means and space to respond critically to literature. By highlighting children's interpretative agency, this research contributes to ongoing debates on participation, representation, and co-creation within the humanities and social sciences. It underscores the value of literature as both an educational and ethical resource that enables young people to become visible participants in discourses from which they are often excluded. In doing so, the study points to the potential of children's literature not only to raise awareness of displacement and migration but also to amplify children's perspectives on urgent global challenges.

About the author:

Prof. Dr. Oguzhan Yılmaz is a faculty member at Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University in Türkiye. His research focuses on children's literature, with particular attention to problem-oriented themes such as migration, violence, and peer bullying. He has published numerous articles, book chapters, and coordinated projects in this field. As a visiting scholar at the University of Florida, he conducted a research project on migration and children's books. He is the founder and Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Children's Literature and Language Education, one of the leading journals in Türkiye, and is an active member of the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL).

Tugba Okumus Arslan graduated from Atatürk University with a degree in Turkish Language Teaching in 2015. She completed her master's degree in 2018 at Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, focusing on children's literature within the field of Turkish Education. Since 2023, she has been pursuing her doctoral studies at the same university, specializing in migration and children's literature. She has been working as a Turkish language teacher under the Ministry of National Education since 2015.

4. Seen but Not Heard: Children's Awareness of Social Justice and their Critical Responses to a Challenging and Thought-provoking Picturebook (32)

Janet Evans (Independent Researcher, England)

Abstract: Young children have an awareness of social justice, a knowledge of how it works in terms of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. They see social injustice and unfairness going on in the world around them, and they are exposed to ongoing images of conflict, social, physical and mental repression and increasing exposure to misinformation, which influences their ability to make sense of their personal world.

Picture books can be used to help readers question and understand more fully why these unsettling and unacceptable situations are going on around them. Cicada is one such picture book! It tells of a scorned insect who works in a sterile office with hostile human co-workers who see him as different. The book explores themes of migrant workers and workplace bullying through the voice of a hardworking insect who has toiled away, unappreciated and without promotion, alongside humans in a grey office block for 17 years. There is no justice, social or otherwise, in this place.

The book is a metaphor for the situation in which many people find themselves at the moment. As a character, Cicada keeps quiet, yet he seems to have a knowledgeable and thoughtful awareness of what is happening and where his future might be. His patience prevails, and when, after 17 years, he eventually escapes from his bondage, he feels the joy of being able to laugh at his bosses, the people in positions of power who do not even know that they themselves are prisoners in their own worlds. As Rousseau stated in 1782, Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.

Using a reader response approach, this presentation will consider the critical responses of some of the 8 & and 9-year-old children to issues raised by the book:

- Are some people seen but not heard? Why?
- Do some people feel like Cicada in "real life".

- Do people have to put up with social injustice and cruelty whilst keeping silent?
- What was Cicada thinking might happen to him?
- What did Cicada think of his bosses?
- Does this book make you think of anything that is happening today?

Tan evokes powerful emotional responses as he illustrates literally and metaphorically what it is like to be different, to be alone, and to be marginalised.

About the author:

Janet Evans is an independent researcher.

Workshop A - Artography and Activism Workshop

Prof. Kate Coleman (University of Melbourne)

Student Assistants: Juliette Roux, Cornell Raab

Abstract: This a/r/tographic workshop invites participants into a speculative and situated practice of a/r/tography as activism, where action, artful encounters, and metho-pedagogies collide. Anchored in the conference theme of Young People's Voices and Freedom of Expression, we will explore: What if the method was an uprising? What if pedagogy could protest? What if art was a whisper that split open silence?

Together, we will play with/in the obliques and excess of the a/r/tographic slants as an entangled practice of art/research/teaching and how the spaces in-between offer a way to do justice, to become-with others, while materialising the unseen/unheard. Through relational studio encounters, embodied mapping, sonic fragmenting, and collective design, participants will activate their own metho-pedagogical activisms: poetic tools, speculative prompts, or performative protocols that carry protest and possibilities.

This session is for educators, researchers, artists, and all those who traffic in the messy, beautiful business of becoming. Bring your voice, your questions, your longing. Leave with a practice that matters.

Workshop Aims:

1. To explore a/r/tography as a form of activism that entangles art, research, and teaching through speculative, embodied, and relational practices that foreground young people's voices and freedom of expression.
2. To engage participants in artful encounters and creative disruptions, including mapping, sonic fragmenting, and collective making as a means of materialising what is often unseen or unheard in educational, social, and political contexts.
3. To support the design of personal and collective metho-pedagogical activisms, enabling participants to craft speculative tools, performative protocols, or poetic gestures that can travel into their own practices, classrooms, and communities.

About the workshop moderator:

Prof. Kate Coleman is a neurodivergent artist, teacher educator, and researcher at the University of Melbourne, Australia where she teaches teachers and co-leads SWISP Lab, exploring speculative a/r/tography, climate justice, and creative activism. Kate's practice centres on transformative pedagogies, participatory methods, and making matter through art, action, and the voices of young people. She believes that a/r/t is inquiry, and that activism is metho-pedagogical.

Workshop B: Voices that Matter: Human Rights Education with and for Children

Katarzyna Salejko (Amnesty International Poland), Dominika Sokołowska (Amnesty International Poland),
Sita Brahmachari (Amnesty International Author)
Student assistants: Sarah Farrugia, Rebecca Ganado, Cornell Raab

Abstract: How can we, as educators, researchers and practitioners, support children not only in learning about their rights, but in living them? This interactive workshop invites participants to explore creative and participatory methods for teaching about human rights with a special focus on children's right to express themselves and to participate in civic life - including through protest. Blending artistic storytelling with hands-on educational practice, the workshop offers space for personal reflection, collective dialogue and concrete exploration of how adults can meaningfully support the voices of children aged 10–14. Participants will engage with real-life inspired scenarios, debate dilemmas, and co-create ideas for building supportive environments that centre children's agency and dignity. Rooted in the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and enriched by lived experience and imagination, this session is both a call to action and a space of care – for those who teach, and for those still growing into their voice.

Workshop aims:

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

1. Reflect on their own understanding of human rights and how these values resonate in their professional practice.
2. Experience creative and participatory methods for teaching about human rights.
3. Explore the role of adults in supporting children's rights, especially the right to express themselves and to take part in protests.
4. Co-create ideas for fostering environments where children's voices are genuinely heard and respected.

About the workshop moderators:

Katarzyna Salejko leads the Human Rights Education team at Amnesty International Poland, where she designs and coordinates educational programs for children, youth, and adults. As an educator, facilitator, and author, she develops a wide range of innovative learning materials—including e-learning courses and nanolearning content—focused on human rights, youth activism, and civic engagement. Her approach combines participatory and transformative methodologies that foster critical thinking, empathy, and a sense of global responsibility. She has extensive experience in curriculum development, teacher training, and supporting schools and educators in integrating human rights education into both formal and non-formal learning environments. Her work is grounded in a commitment to inclusive, learner-centered education that empowers individuals and communities. Katarzyna holds a Master of Arts degree in International Relations from the University of Warsaw. She is passionate about social justice, inclusive education, and creating spaces where young people can grow into active, conscious global citizens.

Dominika Sokołowska is Senior Human Rights Education Project Coordinator at Amnesty International Poland. Educator and activist passionate about human rights education, with hands-on experience working with young people and adults. Special focus on women's rights, minority rights, and addressing cyberbullying in digital spaces.

Sita Brahmachari is an internationally award-winning Children's and YA author whose work is translated into many languages. Since her Waterstone's Award Winning debut novel 'Artichoke Hearts' (2011) Sita's stories have been nominated for the Carnegie Medal and the UKLA Book Award. She has an MA in Arts Education and has worked widely in theatre and education with diverse communities to mentor young voices. Sita

co-created and scripted a celebrated theatre production inspired by Shaun Tan's graphic novel 'The Arrival' (2013). Her YA novel 'When Shadows Fall' was shortlisted for the Yoto Carnegie Medal (2023). Her latest novel is 'Phoenix Brothers' (2025). Sita was shortlisted for the Ruth Rendell Literacy Award (2023). She has been Book Trust Writer in Residence, an Amnesty Ambassador and Associate Lecturer in Children's and YA Literature at Goldsmiths University. She is Writer in Residence at Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants. Sita is a Royal Literary Fellow and a Fellow of The Society of Authors and an Honorary Member of the Youth Libraries Group.

Panel 4 - Storied Citizenship: Reimagining Civic Encounters among Children and Youth in the Post-digital Age

Chairs: Prof. Teresa Rogers, Dr Elizabeth Nelson, Prof. Harini Rajagopal, Prof. Amber Moore

Online Host: Amy Calleja

1. Transformative testimonies: Latinx Youth's Poetic Resistance through an Anti-citizenship Lens (33) - online

Colin Cole (Independent Researcher, USA)

Abstract: The experiences of Latinx youth in U.S. schools are well-documented, yet limited attention has been given to their engagement within Community-Based Educational Spaces (CBES). Despite their transformative potential, these CBES remain on the periphery of education research, often overshadowed by traditional school contexts (Baldridge, 2020). This chapter examines how Latinx youth in a youth-led social justice organization in Oregon, pseudonymously referred to as Para La Gente (PLG), utilized their hip-hop ill-literacies (Alim, 2011) to re/imagine and re/story citizenship. Grounded in ethnographic data collected over 14 months, this paper illuminates how participants enacted what they termed a "poetic resistance," leveraging their full linguistic repertoires to compose and perform poems as testimony at an online school-board meeting where they advocated for the removal of school resource officers (SROs) and challenged the school/prison nexus.

This paper situates these acts of resistance within the framework of storied citizenship, exploring how youth activism, social justice work, and creative expression can re/define dominant narratives of belonging and agency. In particular, this work aligns with the notion of storied citizenship as it conceptualizes how young people are not only storied with approaches to activism, resistance, and transformation but also actively engage in storying through creative practices like arts-based advocacy. In PLG, youth decided to make poetry a vehicle to challenge racialized, stigmatizing portrayals of Latinx Hip Hop youth as disengaged or dangerous. Exercising their agency and exemplifying their linguistic creativity, participants penned powerful poems that were critical of district policies and led to the suspension of contracts with SROs at the district level.

About the author:

Dr. Colin Cole, PhD University of Oregon, is an independent scholar, teacher and program manager of the Partnership and of Global Initiatives at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His research interests include youth activism, community-based educational spaces, and lived literacies. Current projects examine the Hip-Hop ill-literacy practices of LatinX youth and the experiences and insights of pre-service teachers in online Dual-Language Bilingual Education programs.

2. Mud and Monsters in the Early Years: Making Kin as Citizen Becoming (33) - online

Kim Linters (University of Calgary, Canada) & Ronna Mosher (University of Calgary, Canada)

Abstract: In this paper, we examine a group of young children's year-long, emergent relationships with mud, a fictional monster known as Mudkin, and with each other. We share stories of becoming:

encounters, we argue, that enlarged the children's capacities for befriending the monstrous. Thinking with a widened and diffracted understanding of monstrosity pertaining to both the material and social world sets the stage for our consideration of citizenship. This work is situated within the relational ontology of assemblage theory (e.g., Deleuze & Guattari, 2004; De Landa, 2006; Latour, 2005). We are grounded by an affirmative politics that seeks collective well-being and mutual flourishing for all members of this world's human and more-than-human assemblage (Braidotti, 2013). We work with a conceptualisation of citizenship as "a horizontal relation of mutual recognition" (Toscano, 2023, p. 146) and view children, not as "citizens-in-waiting" (Mulcahy & Healy, 2023, p. 1368), but rather as those always, already in the process of becoming citizen subjects.

Working with three troubled stories (Tsing, 2015), that animate the year-long relationship between mud, children, and play in the first grade classroom, and the affective entanglements that emerged with/in the monstrous assemblage, we explore what the children's (re)storying encounters with monstrous mud might have to say about embodied and sensorial experiences of citizenship with/in their human and more-than-human world. We consider mud as both odd and generative kin (Haraway, 2016), and as we map the children's unexpected experimentations and collaborations with it, we reflect on ways the emergent assemblage might constitute an aspect of citizen subject formation (Mulcahy & Healy, 2023). Advancing the proposition that citizen becoming is an affective process of embracing difference and making kin with the monstrous in an entangled human and more-than-human world.

About the author:

Kimberly Lengers is Professor and Canada Research Chair (Tier 2) in Language and Literacy Education at the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education, where her research focuses on the social and material worlds of children's literacy development. Her research has examined the relationship between humour and literacy in intermediate level students' learning, and most recently has engaged with play and literacy in spaces beyond the preschool and kindergarten setting. In addition to several chapters in edited volumes, her work has been published in journals such as: *Children's Geographies*, *The Reading Teacher*, *Literacy*, *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*. She is also co-editor of the volumes, *Affect and Embodiment in Critical Literacy: Assembling Theory and Practice* (2020) and *Decolonizing Literacies: Disrupting, Reclaiming, and Remembering Relationship* (2024). <https://profiles.ucalgary.ca/kimberly-lengers>

Ronna Mosher is an Adjunct Professor of Curriculum and Learning in the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Her research and teaching are oriented toward the ethical-ontological-epistemological questions and responsibilities of education and theory-practice encounters. Currently, she is exploring experiences of play and literacy learning and the production of literacy practices in classroom and community spaces through posthuman sociomaterial understandings. Ronna's work has been published in a range of curriculum and literacy journals such as: *Journal of Educational Thought*, *Educational Design Research*, *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, *Children's Geographies*, *Journal of Literacy Research*, and *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*. <https://profiles.ucalgary.ca/ronna-mosher>

3. Storied Citizenship in the Post-Digital Age: The Seen and Heard Project as a Case Study in Children's Social Movement Praxis (33)

Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak (University of Wroclaw, Poland) & Farriba Schulz (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

Abstract: In the post-digital age, where digital technologies are deeply integrated into everyday life and modes of political participation, children's roles in social movements demand urgent re-theorisation. This paper advances the concept of 'storied citizenship'—a form of civic engagement rooted in narrative practices—through video-based expression, including communal writing, participatory animation, and performance workshops. In the project Seen and Heard: Young People's Voices and Freedom of Expression, storytelling becomes platformed activism, creating a transmedia movement space where aesthetic production and civic identity-making coalesce. Operating interactively across generations, institutions, and cultural contexts, it constructively frames children not as passive recipients but as co-authors of public discourse living in a highly diverse Europe. Children's multimodal storytelling—particularly in post migrant and multilingual classrooms—offers embodied insight into how civic identity is felt, explored, and gradually performed through speech, art, and metaphor.

In this paper, we use Dieter Rucht's interactionist, constructionist, and process-oriented framework to analyse Seen and Heard as a dynamic social movement structure full of purposive action (Merton 1968) and consider Johanna Leinius's concept of cosmopolitan solidarity to illuminate the young people's experience. Here, children narrate experiences not merely for catharsis or classroom engagement, but to do something—to advocate, express, resist, and participate meaningfully in public life. Communicating through visual art, communal poetry, and video performance in ways that subvert traditional expectations of protest and persuasion, the Seen and Heard young people affirm storied citizenship as a legitimate, complex form of youth activism in the post-digital era. They challenge adultist assumptions about who may speak and act politically, proposing a model of movement-making grounded in rights, recognition, solidarity, and imagination.

About the authors:

Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak is an Associate Professor at the Institute of English Studies. She is the co-founder of the Center for Young People's Literature and Culture at the Institute of English Studies, University of Wrocław. Recent publications include (with Irena Barbara Kalla) Children's Literature and Intergenerational Relationships: Encounters of the Playful Kind (2021); Rulers of Literary Playgrounds: Politics of Intergenerational Play in Children's Literature (2021); (with Macarena García-González) Children's Cultures after Childhood (2023), and (with Terri Doughty and Janet Grafton) Cultures and Pedagogies in the Anthropocene: Multidisciplinary Entanglements (2025). <https://ifa.uwr.edu.pl/en/staff/dr-hab-justyna-deszcz-tryhubczak-prof-uwr/>

Farriba Schulz is a Guest Lecturer at Freie Universität Berlin, where she teaches Children's Literature and Media for Bachelor's and Master's students. Farriba is the author of a monograph on childhood in picture books nominated for the German Children's Literature Award from 1956 onwards. Previously, she was a Senior Lecturer in the Department of German at Universität Potsdam and a Visiting Professor of Primary Education in the Department of German at Technische Universität Dresden. Her research interests range from visual and linguistic narratives to the construction of childhoods in children's literature and second language acquisition with visual narratives. <https://www.childrensliterature-unipd.it/team-member/farriba-schulz/>

Friday 6th February

Keynote 2: Freedom to Read and Be Read

Nicky Parker (Amnesty International Poland), Gvantsa Jobava (International Publishers' Association)

Chaired by Dr Farriba Schulz

Online Host: Rebecca Ganado

Abstract: This shared keynote will look at the vital importance of children's freedom to read and writers' freedom to express themselves in a context of rising censorship of children's books. Children's right to read is inherent in their human rights to education, play, freedom of expression and freedom of thought. Access to a wide range of books gives them agency, helping them recognise themselves and developing the empathy, critical thinking and confidence to stand up for themselves and others. The conversation between writer and reader is supported by publishers but censorship of children's books is rising through state intervention, book challenges and self-censorship. Ideological constraints on authors, usually based on identity or perceived themes in their work, then affects the readers and is designed to be long-lasting. In this talk, we will share tools that all those involved in children's books may find useful in upholding freedom of expression and combatting censorship.

About the speakers:

Nicky Parker is a specialist in children's literature and human rights, who has worked with Amnesty International for over 20 years. She has developed many books and literary projects using a human rights lens, including 'We Are All Born Free: the UDHR in Pictures' (2008), published in 35 languages. With Cheltenham Festivals, she co-created 'Words That Burn' (2016), a spoken word resource for school students to explore and express human rights through poetry. She established the Amnesty CILIP Honour (2016-18), a human rights commendation for books on the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medal shortlist. She was lead writer of 'Know Your Rights and Claim Them: A Guide for Youth' (2021), with Angelina Jolie and Professor Geraldine Van Bueren QC and is the author of 'These Rights Are Your Rights: An empowering guide for children everywhere' (2024). From 2016-22 she was Chair of Trustees of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) and is on the steering group of Reflecting Realities, a change-making annual survey of ethnic representation in British children's books. She is a trustee of English PEN.

Gvantsa Jobava is a President at International Publishers Association and the head of international Affairs at Intelekti Publishing, one of the biggest publishing houses in Georgia, previously – chairperson of the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association and the head of the publishing program for Georgia's activities as guest of honor at the 2018 Frankfurt Book Fair. In 2013-2022 she was the organizer of Tbilisi International Book Festival. Since 2013, Gvantsa Jobava has been lobbying for the Georgian publishing industry, advocating Georgian publishers' interests and rights, standing for copyright and freedom to Publish and Freedom of Expression in Georgia. She has managed a number of projects to promote Georgian publishing and literary industry at international level. she is a member of Women Publishers' International Network – PublisHer. In 2020 she joined PEN Georgia. She is a poet and a translator of works of John Steinbeck, Chinua Achebe, Saul Bellow, John Lennon and others. She has also translated Anna Politkovskaya's book "Putin's Russia" and "A Message from Ukraine" by Volodymyr Zelensky into Georgian. She is the author and editor of the publishing project "Banned Books Shelf" and the founder of Banned Books Week celebrations in Georgia.

Panel 6 - Equitable Social Spaces

Chair: Sarah Farrugia

1. Everyday Politics of Movement: A Longitudinal Study with Girls in El Salvador and Dominican Republic (28)

Belen Garcia Gavilanes (Cardiff University, Wales)

Abstract: This paper explores girls' everyday politics in the Dominican Republic and El Salvador by looking at how girls' freedom of movement is limited by their caregivers due to their gender. Everyday politics is understood as a set of spatially and socially embedded practices and attitudes through which girls navigate, negotiate and contest social structures that shape their lives, such as family, community and educational institutions. By paying attention to girls' practices facing their caregivers, this study exposes how gender inequality is reproduced and contested through the control of mobility and the girls' bodies.

The analysis draws from a unique longitudinal study done by the NGO Plan International, following vulnerable girls and their caregivers for a period of 18 years. The data set analysed in this paper includes interviews with a total of 24 girls and their caregivers. This data set makes it possible to identify the changes throughout childhood to adolescence, especially how girls make sense of their subjectivities based on the expectations placed on them throughout their lives.

The findings suggest that girls face stricter rules than male relatives in their families, which is often justified through matters of safety, morality or reputation. This becomes more evident as the girls enter puberty. Some of the girls seem to accept and reproduce the narratives surrounding girls' social expectations, but other girls use different strategies to negotiate or challenge these rules. By focusing on two countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, the paper draws similarities and divergences in how gendered norms are reproduced within families and communities. This study sheds light on the ways that girls' mundane activities become political when sustaining or negotiating broader gender inequality practices.

About the author:

Belen Garcia Gavilanes is an ESRC-funded PhD candidate in the School of Politics and International Relations at Cardiff University. She holds an MSc in Media, Communications and Development from the London School of Economics and Political Science and an MSc in Social Science Research Methods from Cardiff University. Belen has over 5 years of professional experience in third-sector organisations in the fields of children's rights and biodiversity conservation. She is currently researching girls' everyday politics in El Salvador and the Dominican Republic by analysing the longitudinal data of Real Choices, Real Lives and doing fieldwork with teenagers in both countries.

2. Fostering Expression through Dialogic Reading of Disability Narratives in Picturebooks (41)

Mei Kee Chan (University of Edinburgh, Scotland)

Abstract: Freedom of expression is a fundamental right for children, yet in classrooms, this right is often mediated through adult authority. Picture books, with their multimodal interplay of words and images, can create opportunities for dialogic reading. The shared practices invite children to question, respond and co-construct meaning. This paper draws on focus group data with primary school teachers in the United Kingdom to examine how dialogic reading of picture books featuring disability representation shapes children's opportunities for voice and participation.

Teachers recognised the potential of these books to encourage awareness, empathy and critical reflection, while also noting the sensitivities of addressing disability in classroom dialogue. Dialogic reading can open spaces for children to interrogate ableist assumptions and resist dominant gazes that

frame disability as spectacle or deficit. At the same time, it can be influenced by adult caution or concerns about stigma, which may affect how freely children express their perspectives.

This paper highlights both the possibilities and challenges of dialogic reading in practice. Disability narratives in picture books should not be seen as prescriptive exemplars of positivity but as dialogic texts that invite multiple perspectives and critical engagement. Ultimately, this study shows that when teachers embrace dialogic reading as a participatory pedagogy, picture books can serve as powerful tools for advancing children's right to expression and participation in everyday life. This aligns with wider European commitments to freedom of expression and human rights education.

About the author:

Mei Kee (Maggie) Chan recently completed her PhD in Education at the University of Edinburgh. Her research, *Disability Representation in Picturebooks: A Study of Multimodal Narratives and Teachers' Perspectives*, examines how visual and verbal narratives of disability are constructed in contemporary picturebooks and how teachers perceive and use these texts in classrooms. Her work combines multimodal analysis with critical disability theory, focusing on power dynamics, ableism and children's right to expression. She has published on children's literature and disability and is also a picture book author who draws on both academic and creative practice to inform her research and teaching.

3. Deconstructing Digital Inclusion: Rethinking Children's Rights Through Disability Studies

Stine Liv Johansen (Aarhus University, Denmark)

Abstract: Despite widespread policy commitments to digital inclusion, dominant frameworks for children's digital rights continue to rest on ableist assumptions about participation, autonomy, and citizenship. These frameworks tend to treat access to technology as synonymous with inclusion, while sidelining the lived realities of children living with disabilities and their diverse ways of engaging with digital environments. As a result, the very policies and practices designed to "include" risk reproducing exclusionary norms and silencing children's voices.

This paper offers a critical theoretical analysis of children's digital rights through the lens of disability studies, crip theory, and critical media access studies. It interrogates three foundational assumptions embedded in mainstream rights discourse: first, that technical access automatically translates into meaningful participation; second, that autonomy and independence constitute the ideal form of digital citizenship; and third, that protection and participation can be considered separately from questions of power, representation, and justice. By exposing how these assumptions operate, the paper highlights the structural exclusions built into current digital rights debates.

Building on this critique, I propose an alternative theoretical framework of critical digital rights. This approach is grounded in principles of intersectionality, interdependence, and representational justice. It emphasises that digital environments are not neutral but inherently political spaces where norms of belonging and participation are constantly negotiated. Recognising the practices of children living with disabilities as valid forms of digital citizenship destabilises the binary between inclusion and exclusion, and challenges policy frameworks to move beyond accommodation toward genuine transformation.

The contribution extends beyond disability to offer insights into how other marginalised groups of children navigate digital spaces. By centering diverse forms of digital expression and participation, the paper provides a foundation for more inclusive approaches to rights policy, platform governance, and educational practice – approaches that take seriously children's voices as active producers of digital culture and citizenship.

About the author:

Stine Liv Johansen is Associate Professor at Aarhus University, specialising in children's media use with a focus on play practices. Her research takes a practice-oriented perspective on the role of media

and technology in children's everyday lives, particularly how digital and mobile technologies function as communicative tools across social and spatial boundaries. She is especially engaged in the intersection of media and disability, including representation and participation. Johansen collaborates widely with public and private organisations and has held several leadership roles. She teaches and supervises across media studies and international programs on children's literature, media, and culture.

4. My DNA My Say: Exploring Children's Beliefs and Attitudes towards Biobanking for Genomic Research (45)

Gillian Martin (University of Malta, Malta)

Abstract: A biobank is a repository of samples and associated medical / health data stored and shared for medical research under stringent, transparent and robust ethical governance protocols. Research using these resources enables cutting-edge personalised medicine, drawing on genomic understandings of patterns and manifestations of diseases with important potential impacts on the health of future generations. Social science research into beliefs and attitudes towards the sharing of samples through the biobank is challenged by the general public's poor understanding of the biobanking process - an issue amplified when exploring the viewpoint of children on the topic.

This paper will describe the use of a creative, interactive, child-centred research design aimed at giving children a voice in this context. A scripted puppet show is used as an interactive educational activity, which then serves as an elicitation tool in follow-up focus group discussions. Key research questions: What beliefs and 'feelings' do children hold in relation to giving blood and DNA for research? What beliefs, understandings and expectations do children hold related to voluntariness, 'fairness' and control in research? How do children conceptualise confidentiality? Thematic analysis on the emerging qualitative data will be used to explore the process of embodiment related to blood/DNA in young children, and their attitudes and expectations in relation to the ethicality of donating blood/DNA to biobanking for genomic research.

About the author:

Gillian M Martin is an associate professor at the University of Malta, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, and research associate at the Centre for Biomedical Medicine and Biobanking where she sits on the research ethics committee. She came to academia after a previous career in nursing in the UK, and has a doctorate in Sociology from the University of Manchester. She is an active member of the BBMRI-ERIC ELSI team - a pan-European research infrastructure for Biobanking and Biomolecular Research where she contributes expertise in social and ethical issues related to Biobanking.

Her research interests are rooted in the sociology of Health, Illness and Medicine, and on the social context and social impact of genomic research and donation to biobanks. She has expertise in qualitative methodology with experience in creative interviewing and child-centred data-generation techniques. She is an active member of the BBMRI-ERIC ELSI team where she contributes expertise in social and ethical issues related to Biobanking, and she is the lead social scientist on the DWARNA project at the Centre for Biomedical medicine and Biobanking, UM.

Panel 7- Law and Policy 2

Chair: Nicky Parker

1. (Non-)Childness and (Non-)Inclusivity of Children's Book Awards: The Polish Case (30)

Marta Niewieczerał (Warsaw Public Library – Central Library of Mazovia Province, Poland), Maciej Skowera (University of Warsaw & Warsaw Public Library – Central Library of Mazovia Province, Poland)

Abstract: The paper investigates the structures and practices of leading Polish literary awards for children's books: Książka Roku Polskiej Sekcji IBBY [Book of the Year by the Polish Section of IBBY], Lista Skarbów Muzeum Książki Dziecięcej [Treasure List of the Museum of Children's Books], Literacka Podróż Hestii [Hestia Literary Journey], Nagroda im. Ferdynanda Wspaniałego [Ferdynand the Great Award], Nagroda Literacka im. Kornela Makuszyńskiego [Kornel Makuszyński Literary Award], and Nagroda Żółtej Cizemki [Yellow Boot Award]. The study demonstrates that these awards are predominantly shaped by aetornormativity. While these competitions declare openness and inclusivity, in practice, they often, to varying degrees, reinforce established hierarchies of authority, privilege mainstream aesthetics, and marginalise the voices of child readers as well as alternative or minority perspectives in literature. As a point of contrast, the paper will turn to the Lista Skarbów Muzeum Książki Dziecięcej [the Treasure List of the Museum of Children's Books] to show how the analysis of both other awards and our own practices has prompted us, as members of the Museum team, to reconsider certain assumptions behind this initiative. We will outline how this reflection leads to the reconceptualisation of selected elements of the Treasure List. In this paper, we will suggest, therefore, that while the dominant model of Polish children's book awards remains institutionally entrenched and largely adult-oriented, emerging initiatives might signal possibilities for more inclusive and participatory approaches. Such practices point to the necessity of rethinking cultural policies of recognition in ways that foreground the multiplicity of voices and resist the reproduction of adult authority.

About the authors:

Marta Niewieczerał - PhD, is an Assistant Professor in and the Head of the Museum of Children's Books (Warsaw Public Library – Central Library of Mazovia Province, Poland), where she researches young adult fantasy fiction, in particular, as well as imaginary geographies in children's books. An editorial assistant of the scholarly journal *Dzieciństwo. Literatura i Kultura* [Childhood: Literature and Culture].

Maciej Skowera - is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Polish Literature, Faculty of Polish Studies (University of Warsaw) and at the Museum of Children's Books (Warsaw Public Library – Central Library of Mazovia Province, Poland) where he lectures on and researches children's, YA, and popular literature and culture. A co-founder and the Managing Editor of the journal *Dzieciństwo. Literatura i Kultura* [Childhood: Literature and Culture]

2. Why does Poland Establish Pupil Rights Ombudspersons When There Already is the Ombudsperson for Children? (29)

Mikołaj Wolanin - (University of Warsaw, Poland)

Abstract: In March 2024, the Minister of Education of Poland appointed the Pupils' Rights and Duties Team. Its aim is to prepare the bill reforming the system in this regard, as well as to establish the system of the Ombudspersons for Pupils (at the National, Regional and School levels). However, Polish system of bodies safeguarding human rights and freedoms is fairly developed. Poles may turn not only

to the general ombudsperson, but also to e.g. the national ones for children, patients, and even passengers. Thus, the question arises whether it is really necessary and useful for Poland to establish another national ombudsperson (this time: for the pupils' rights) while there, already operates the general one, as well as the one for the children. Obtaining an answer to that question will be the scientific goal of this speech. The author will use the dogmatic method, with particular usage of the purposive and systemic methods. It will also be helpful in the speech that the author is the president of the Polish Foundation for the Pupil Rights, as well as one of the experts appointed to the ministerial team mentioned at the beginning of the abstract.

The preliminary hypothesis is that the appointment of such an ombudsperson is useful because pupils in Poland are not only minors, so not all of them may benefit from the Ombudsperson for Children. The General Ombudsperson, on the other hand, has too many cases from different fields to effectively deal with problems in education. Hence, the need for a separate Ombudsperson for Pupils.

About the author:

Since 2019 president and founder of the Foundation for the Pupil Rights. In March 2024 appointed by the Polish Minister of Education to the Pupils' Rights and Duties Team. Academically, a master's student in law at the University of Warsaw and author of more than 17 publications, including 2 monographs written during his high school education (M. Wolanin, *Prawa ucznia* [Pupils' rights], Kraków 2020; M. Wolanin, *Obowiązki ucznia* [Pupils' duties], Kraków 2021). One of 10 finalists (the only one from Europe) of the 2024 Global Student Prize.

3. From Symbolic to Meaningful Participation: Youth Voices and Adults' Willingness to Share Decision-Making (52)

Sabīne Ozola, Laura Brutāne (Latvian Academy of Culture)

Abstract: Youth participation has become a central theme in contemporary debates on democracy (Bessant, 2004), citizenship, and the future of society (Honkatukia & Rätilä, 2024). Yet much of the discourse continues to frame participation primarily from an adult perspective, emphasizing institutional expectations rather than young people's lived experiences and priorities. Building on this debate, Cahill and Dadvand (2018) reconceptualize youth participation as a multidimensional practice, highlighting the need to analyse not only whether young people are included but also how their agency and voice are enacted within specific institutional contexts.

This paper examines how participation is conceptualized and practiced in educational environments and addresses two central questions: What issues do young people identify as most important in their school environment, and how do these align with or diverge from teachers' perspectives? How do adults in formal and non-formal educational settings conceptualize youth participation, and to what extent are they willing to share decision-making power with young people?

The study employs a mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected through two surveys: one with 1000 young people (aged 13–25) studying in formal and non-formal secondary and higher education institutions, and another with 300 representatives of student self-governments and municipal youth councils. To complement these findings, qualitative research was carried out in eight educational institutions. Here, focus groups and workshops were organised with teachers and students separately, as well as in joint sessions, enabling exploration of both distinct perspectives and interactive dynamics in co-developing context-specific solutions.

The findings reveal both convergences and tensions between youth and adult perspectives. The paper argues that meaningful participation requires institutional cultures that foster dialogue, trust, and shared responsibility in decision-making.

This research was carried out within the State Research Programme "Preconditions of Authentic Youth Participation in Formal and Non-formal Education / UNFRAMED" (No.

About the authors:

Sabīne Ozola, Mg.sc.soc., is an early-career researcher working as a research assistant at the Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies of the Latvian Academy of Culture. She has been involved in the development of both academic and applied research projects focusing on participation, youth studies, culture and arts education, cultural diversity, and employment issues. In addition, Sabīne serves as an expert for the cultural and arts education programme “Latvian School Bag”, promoting opportunities for students to experience culture and the arts as part of the learning process in school.

Laura Brutāne, Mg.sc.soc., has been working as a research assistant at the Institute of Arts and Cultural Studies of Latvian Academy of Culture. Recently, Laura has been focusing more and more on research issues related to cultural participation, connections between culture and youth, well-being and social inclusion. As part of her PhD studies, Laura is working on her dissertation on “Cultural practices as an environment for the development of authentic youth participation”.

4. Building Stronger Child Protection Systems through Child-Led Research (55)

Holly Doel-Mackaway (Macquarie University Law School)

Abstract: Children’s and young people’s participation in research about matters affecting them ‘is a human rights obligation’ (Jamieson et al, 2021, p1). There is growing recognition of the valuable role children and young people can play in research processes as agents and experts in their own lives and as vital contributors to the expansion of knowledge to increase understandings of the world we live in (Cuevas-Parra, 2025). This paper highlights the importance of children and young people’s role in co-designing and leading research about matters affecting them.

Violence against children remains one of the most serious barriers to the realisation of young people’s human rights. Although a substantial body of research documents the nature and prevalence of violence against children globally, most of this scholarship has been conducted on rather than with or by children. Research is no longer the exclusive domain of adults or research institutions; children are ‘increasingly taking on different roles within research processes, from advising research studies as consultants, to peer researchers collecting and analysing data, to research collaborators’ (Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall, 2019). Kellett describes child led research as research that children ‘design, carry out and disseminate themselves with adult support rather than adult management’ (2010, p 95). In 2023-4, the Nossal Institute for Global Health (University of Melbourne) together with Macquarie University Law School and in-country collaborators were commissioned by Save the Children to undertake a regional situational analysis of child protection in the Pacific. The research identified significant knowledge gaps and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of existing frameworks. This paper details the Child Led Research (CLR) component of that project conducted in Fiji and the Solomon Islands by 16-17-year-old adolescent facilitators with participants aged 8-16 years old. It examines the role young people undertook as co-researchers, the possibilities CLR offers to enhance young people’s participation and realise their right to freedom from violence. It highlights the child friendly research tools used and seeks to promote discussion about the value and limitations of conducting CLR.

About the authors:

Holly Doel-Mackaway is an Associate Professor of Law at Macquarie University, specialising in

children's rights, with a focus on child participation in legal and policy contexts. She has extensive experience with UNICEF and Save the Children, leading research and projects that amplify children's voices. Her work explores intergenerational collaboration, decolonial approaches, and the realisation of children's rights globally.

Panel 8 - Child-centered Research

Chair: Dr Mar Sanchez

Online Host: Juliette Roux

1. Between Academic Freedom and Institutional Constraint: Student Perspectives on Human Rights and Palestine (40) - online

Huria Jalalzai (University of Calgary, Canada), Yayha El-Lahib (University of Calgary, Canada)

Abstract: This study examines the tensions between academic freedom and institutional constraints experienced by students discussing Palestine at the University of Calgary. Employing a narrative, episodic interview methodology, it centres the lived experiences of students who have faced censorship, racialised scrutiny, and suppression when engaging in political and human rights discourse on campus. Using Critical Race Theory as an analytical lens, the study investigates how systemic inequities, institutional bias, and embedded racism influence which topics are considered acceptable for scholarly and public discussion.

Participants' narratives reveal that the suppression of Palestinian discourse is intertwined with broader patterns of marginalisation, including encounters with encampment evictions and police brutality, highlighting how students' political engagement is shaped by multiple forms of structural oppression. The findings demonstrate that institutional policies on academic freedom often operate selectively, privileging dominant narratives while constraining the voices of racialised and politically active students.

This research underscores the importance of creating equitable intellectual spaces where all students can engage critically and openly with contentious global issues. By amplifying student experiences, the study advocates for a re-examination of university policies, faculty training, and administrative practices to ensure that academic freedom is meaningfully extended to marginalised communities. The insights generated have implications not only for the University of Calgary but for higher education institutions more broadly, emphasising the need to confront embedded systemic barriers that limit critical discourse and civic engagement on campus.

About the authors:

Huria Jalalzai is Afghan and an immigrant in Canada. Huria is completing her Bachelor of Social Work at the University of Calgary (2025), and she also holds a Master's in Public Policy and Administration from Toronto Metropolitan University (2007) and an Honours Bachelor of Arts from the University of Toronto (2006). Her career spans public service and international development: she has served as a Senior Advisor with the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training & Skills Development, where she provides expert guidance on contractual and policy matters, and as a consultant with USAID in Afghanistan, where she supported the development and evaluation of the country's first Master's in Public Policy and Administration program. In addition to her policy and academic work, Huria is also a writer with certifications in Creative Writing and Creative Book Publishing from Humber College (2024). Her research and creative work are informed by her lived experience as a Muslim immigrant woman, with a focus on social justice, representation, and the intersections of mental health and addiction

Yayha El-Lahib is a social worker, researcher, and long-time disability activist whose work bridges practice, policy, and scholarship. His career has focused on disability issues across multiple levels of intervention, ranging from direct support for individuals and families to community organizing, policy development, and academic research. His areas of focus include education, employment, poverty, political and civic engagement, and the impacts of war on disabled communities. Deeply connected to the disability movement in Lebanon, Yahya approaches his work from a grassroots, social justice perspective. This transnational lens continues to shape his teaching, research, and community involvement in Canada, where he brings forward critical insights on disability, equity, and inclusion.

2. Youthful Urban Natures in the Arrival City: The Youthful Making of New Political Ecologies in the Anthropocene (35) - online

Philip Roth (University of Bremen, Germany)

Abstract: While urban studies now address the diversity of socio-ecological relations in spaces like arrival cities, young people's "natures" are still approached through a modernist lens, neglecting their diverse experiences of urban nature amid socio-ecological change. It remains largely unexplored how segregated youth co-create "natures/cultures" (Latour 2015, 89) in arrival neighbourhoods, what kinds of nature(s) they engage with, and how they experience and influence socio-ecological transformation processes. This paper explores how more-than-human approaches can illuminate urban collectives in socio-ecological transition. Thus, the article presents more-than-human politics of the everyday life of segregated young people and challenges the authority of the usually dominant voices and recognised forms of agency in processes of transformation.

In this context, despite the added value of methodological approaches such as ANT and multispecies ethnographies, there is a lack of qualitative research addressing more-than-human geographies of young people. What is missing are approaches that systematically incorporate the non-human and youth. Situational Analysis (Clarke et al. 2018) methodologically addresses this complexity beyond modern dualisms, offering tools for a more-than-human urban ecology of youth.

Using participant observation and go-along interviews with young people in an arrival district in Bremen, Germany, the study applies Situational Analysis and presents vignettes of youthful urban nature assemblages in the postmigrant city. These vignettes highlight entanglements of displacement and "attentive noticing" (Tsing 2024, 341) within "urban trouble" and urban green spaces. Here, their relational engagement with urban green spaces shows how young people associate with non-humans to dwell in the city, find more-than-human ways of expression, and resist intersecting forms of marginalisation.

This paper demonstrates the potential of more-than-human approaches, both for the study of sustainable transformation processes in arrival neighbourhoods and for transitions of young people in terms of participation, inclusion, and the recognition of their voices in the Anthropocene.

About the author:

Philip Roth (MA) is a doctoral researcher at the artec – Sustainability Research Center, University of Bremen. He holds a Master's degree in Sociology. His doctoral project combines political ecology with critical migration studies, qualitative research, and youth studies, examining how young people's ecological voices and practices contribute to urban transformation in postmigrant contexts. He previously worked in the Social Citizen Science project GINGER at the University of Bremen, which focused on participation and social cohesion. His broader research engages with new political ecologies, participatory methods, and critical urban studies.

3. Art Created by Children at Terezín Concentration Camp as a Path to Understanding Human Rights (3) - online

Abstract: The main aim of the paper is to point out the possibilities of using artistic monuments created by children and adolescents who were forcibly interned in the Terezín concentration camp in the contemporary world through a content literary analysis. We are convinced that the authenticity of the respective artistic accounts has considerable potential for raising awareness of the rights of children and adolescents in the contemporary world, as parallels can be found in the historical stage of one line of the Second World War, with the current problems of today's children. We draw on memoirs that were published in the clandestinely published magazine *Vedem*, since a digitised version of this journal is freely available on the website. Through this paper, we try to show that one can draw from history and can look to it for models to solve contemporary problems.

About the author:

Mgr. Milan Mašát, Ph.D., MBA, Ed.D. is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Education of Palacký University. In his scientific, publishing, conference and teaching activities, he mainly deals with the possibilities of implementing the theme of the Shoah (Holocaust) into teaching at various levels of education. He publishes in this field, among other things, in impact journals.

4. Indian Child-authors' Representation of Human & More-than-human Rights & (In)justice (4) - online
Aneesa Jamal (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia)

Abstract: Ecofiction and climate fiction are dominated by adult narratives from the Global North, which replicate the ontoepistemologies of the Global North and obfuscate the role of colonialism, capitalism and climate injustice (Craps, 2024; Tavella, 2024). These literary forms are anthropocentric and fail to challenge the (White) human mastery and exceptionality, which eventually restricts alternative imaginations and responses (Caracciolo et al., 2022). If, as Freire (2000) argues, challenging and changing systems of oppression, including of the Earth, must emerge from the oppressed, there is a need for authors from indigenous and Global South communities (Death, 2022), the usage of non-Western narrative forms and non-Western conceptions of humans in ecofiction and climate fiction (Caracciolo et al., 2022). Caracciolo (2022) further argues for incorporating children's perspectives in climate fiction as a way for decentering an adultist perspective on ecological and climate crisis, but their research does not refer to child-created fiction. Children can engage in critical research to unveil reality to contest and resist dominant powers (Wager, 2025). Hence, children's moral authorship about the Anthropocene needs to be taken seriously, and pedagogical affordances need to be provided to create spaces for their expression (Sporre et al., 2022). This research uses an ecopedagogy lens to qualitatively examine 44 storybooks authored by Indian children on nature, environment and climate change written as a part of three children's book-authoring programs. The research explores how children represented human and more-than-human rights, environmental & climate (in)justice, d/Development, and planetary citizenship in their storybooks. Emergent themes included Voices for the Voiceless, In solidarity, and Resilient Responses. The research reiterates the importance of pedagogies which foreground and amplify perspectives of children from the Global South in the field of human, and we argue, more-than-human rights.

About the author:

Aneesa Jamal is a doctoral student with the School of Education, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Her research focuses on the intersection of ecopedagogy and project-based learning for climate & environmental education. She was a CEE-Change Fellow at the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) & is a Global Fellow at the Center for Climate Literacy, University of Minnesota. More at <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2673-4024>

Keynote 3 - Pedagogies of Critical Protest Across Borders and Generations

Prof. Tanu Biswas (University of Stavanger)

Chair: Dr Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak

Online Host: Rebecca Ganado

Abstract: In this keynote I reflect on the resonances I find in Seen and Heard as a cross-border initiative where young people engage in creative protest for human rights. Its intergenerational approach invites me to reflect on how learning migrates not only across borders, but between generations; challenging adults to reconsider their roles in education, research, and civic life. Age diversity in creative protest, though, does not guarantee progressive change. An essential part of creativity in creative protest is the critical: the courage to question not only the world around us, but also our own collective opinions and assumptions. For creative protest to lead to transformation, there needs to be space for discomfort, disagreement, and critical thinking that unsettles power, not only between generations, but within them too.

About the speaker:

Prof. Tanu Biswas is an associate professor in pedagogy at the University of Stavanger (Norway) and mentor for early career researchers at the Doctoral College for Intersectionality Studies at the University of Bayreuth (Germany). She also serves as the co-director of The Childism Institute (University of Rutgers Camden USA). Her work as an interdisciplinary philosopher of education is dedicated to challenging children's historical marginalization by transforming scholarly and social norms, especially in the areas of pedagogy, childism, decoloniality, children's rights, intergenerational climate justice and qualitative methodology. Her publications include: 'Children as environmental actors - A generational perspective on climate activism in an overheated world' (with Thomas Hylland Eriksen. In Routledge Handbook of Childhood Studies and Global Development 2024), 'Developing Disobedience: A Decolonial Childist Perspective on School Strikes for Climate Justice' (with Liola Nike Mattheis. In American Behavioral Scientist 2024), 'The Adultcentrism Scale: A Potential Contributor to Advancing Children's Participation Rights in Nordic Contexts' (with Eleonora Florio, Letizia Caso, Ilaria Castelli, Serena Iacobino. In Social Sciences 2024), 'Childist theory in the humanities and social sciences (Editorial)' (with John Wall. In Children & Society 2023), 'Childism and philosophy - A conceptual co-exploration' (with John Wall, Hanne Warming, Ohad Zehavi, David Kennedy, Karin Murris, Walter Kohan, Britta Saal, Toby Rollo. In Policy Futures in Education 2023).

Panel 9 - Symbolism and Representation

Chair: Prof. Melanie Ramdarshan Bold

Online Host: Cornell Raab

5. Freedom of Expression in the Classroom: Creative Writing as a Space for Children's Voices (25) - online

Tereza Parizkova (Palacký University, Czech Republic)

Abstract: In many schools, writing is reduced to fulfilling formal requirements, leaving little room for genuine freedom of expression. As Healey (2019) notes, the process of creativity itself is rarely evaluated, which diminishes opportunities for students to experience writing as a meaningful and self-driven act. In contrast, literary creation has the potential to bring children into the centre of educational practice, encouraging them to see their texts as genuine starting points rather than mere

reflections of teacher-imposed expectations (Hník, 2021). This research highlights the risk of overlooking children's perspectives in both literary and educational contexts, where authentic child expression is often neglected in favour of adult-controlled outcomes.

The study investigates whether teachers' personal experience with creative writing can improve the quality of their students' literary texts at the lower secondary level. Specifically, it examines whether participation in a creative writing course by teachers contributes to richer student writing in terms of dialogue, atmosphere, and originality. Evaluation is carried out by two juries: one composed of adult writers of children's and young adult literature, and another composed of children engaged in creative writing programmes. This dual evaluation directly addresses the ambivalence of children's literature, which is typically written, published, and assessed by adults while being intended for young readers (Shavit, 2009; Enciso, 2011).

The project adopts a cluster randomized experimental design with both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The sample will consist of approximately 20 teachers of Czech language and literature and 400 students in grades 6 and 7. Students produced flash fiction texts.

By foregrounding children not only as authors but also as evaluators, the project emphasizes free literary expression as a vital form of freedom of expression. The results of the study will be presented at the conference, contributing to debates on participation, creativity, and the rights of children in education and literature.

About the author:

MgA. Tereza Parizkova, MA, is a PhD candidate at Palacký University in Olomouc, where she focuses on creative writing at schools, reading engagement, and children's literature. She holds a master's degree in film screenwriting and dramaturgy from FAMU and a master's degree in children's literature from Roehampton University London. She is the author of numerous books for children and young adults and the owner of a children's bookstore.

6. In Search of a New Migration Identity: Contemporary Polish Narratives for Young Adults in Transnational Families and Spaces (46) - online

Dorota Milchuka (University of Wroclaw, Poland)

Abstract: This paper analyzes the depiction of child, childhood and adolescence in the face of migratory experience shown in the context of complex family relations and practices (Chambers, 2012), from the perspective of liminality and resilience of characters and new migration identity (Czapliński, Makarska & Tomczok, 2013). At the centre of my investigation are narratives about children who are growing up in transnational families (Slany, Ślusarczyk and Pustułka, 2017; Danilewicz, 2013). For my analyses, I have chosen examples from contemporary Polish texts written for the YA audience with an emphasis on the process of the description of children left behind in their home country in the care of grandparents or other relatives when their parents go abroad for work (the so-called 'euro-orphans'). Among the narratives I plan to analyse: "Nigdzie" by Małgorzata Boryczka, 2022, "Strupki" by Paulina Jóźwik, 2019 and Ma być czysto by Anna Cieplak, 2016. All three YA novels use retrospective narrative, culture of remembrance, micro-stories, and depict mental returns to the land of childhood past, memories of a difficult childhood, and images of Euro-orphans from the perspective of already adult characters (Rembowska - Płuciennik, 2024). Literary characters in contemporary transnational realities prove that new migration identity can thus be discussed in relation to four categories: its psychological aspects, its relations with other people, its confrontation with socio-cultural values (ethical perspective) and sociological approach. All four elements indicate a kind of transition/transformation of the adolescent's behaviour from a state of liminality to resilience. Literary characters illustrate difficult life situations faced by young protagonists when they have to choose between a new modus vivendi and modus adaptandi, with special attention to the formation of

his/her skills in the process of adapting to changing conditions (without parents), the ability to adapt to the new family situations (without parents), resilience to stress and problems, open-mindedness, etc., thus calling the topic of emigration a kind of "existential project." (Czapliński, Makarska&Tomczok, 2013).

One part of my research is also connected with the empirical aspect to show the reaction of young readers of migration literature. This part of the work considers the analysis of the essays written by children. The theoretical framework for my paper is based on current research on the sociology of childhood (with family studies) (James & Prout 1997; Bühler-Niederberger, 2010) on the sociology of emotions (Janik 2017), literary studies (with cognitive narratology) (Rembowska – Płuciennk 2009), affective and engaged humanities (e.g. Nycz 2017) but also on practice of reading (reader response) (Felski 2008) and reception of the text and identification with the character according to the theory of H. R. Jauss referring to following categories: (1) associative (empathizing with the character), (2) admiring the character (3) sympathizing, (4) experiencing catharsis (having the power to purify, shocking, causing laughter), (5) ironic.

About the author:

Dorota Michułka - Associate Professor at the University of Wrocław in Poland (Institute of Polish Studies), literary scholar and historian; Head of Department of Polish Language Education; member of Polish Scientific Academy (Section of Education), IRSCL and Advisory Board of „The Child and the Book” Conferences; she was a lecturer of Polish literature, culture and language at Tampere University (Slavic Studies) in Finland (2000- 2005); she was a fellow of universities in USA and in Germany; she has more than 200 publications (include monographs, edited books and articles) on children's literature, children's culture, literary education and reader response theory (e.g. in Brill, Routledge, "Children's Literature in Education", "Bookbird", "Teksty Drugie"); she is editor -in -chief of the international journal of children's literature – cultural mediation – anthropology of childhood "Filoteknos"; she is a leader of two international grants: Growing up in transnational families. "Good childhood" from the children's perspective". Narodowe Centrum Nauki/ Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Beethoven Classic 4 (project number: 2020/39/G/HS6/01633) and "(Self-)Positioning in transnational spaces - Children's narratives and narratives about children living transnationally", Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft/ Narodowe Centrum Nauki (project number: 2023/05/Y/HS6/00266).

7. Fostering Authentic Youth Participation through Contemporary Art Practices (54) - online Anda Laķe, Valts Valters Kronbergs, Anete Liepiņa (Latvian Academy of Culture)

Abstract: The issue of approaches to promoting youth participation has been the focus of many theoretical and practical discussions. One direction of academic thought is linked to the idea that young people have become alienated from the public sphere (Banaji 2008), while other studies challenge this notion and outline innovative forms of democratic engagement, particularly online (Barber 2007; Banaji & Buckingham 2012). In describing youth participation practices, researchers introduce the concept of authentic participation, which is defined in various ways but often points to a greater opportunity to implement one's real priorities, emphasizing the importance of context (formal education, non-formal education, leisure activities, etc.) (Walther et al. 2019; Lenzi et al. 2014). Several researchers have emphasized contemporary art practices as an effective method of fostering youth participation (Campos 2024; Linzer 2014; Illeris 2005), complementing the content of formal education.

One of the research goals of our project is to evaluate the role of art-based participation methods—specifically contemporary art practices—in fostering authentic participation. The main research questions are: (1) whether and how experimental forms of co-creation based on

contemporary art foster authentic participatory practices, and (2) how they can serve as a foundation for the development of similar initiatives in the future. The study employs a case study design: in Valmiera, Latvia, we implemented unmediated collaboration and experimental co-creation between artists, students (aged 14–16, n = 50), and researchers, culminating in a process-based participatory performance in which the work format relied on self-initiative and self-performance. We applied qualitative methodology: reflexive group interviews, unstructured observations, and focus group discussions at several stages of the project.

The study found the conditions under which contemporary art can serve not only as a creative form of resistance but also as a tool for representing young people's individual priorities, for identity exploration, social critique, and collective action. In such a setting, participation becomes multi-layered and gains the potential for authentic expression.

About the authors:

Doctor of Sociology (PhD, dr.sc.soc.), **professor Anda Lake** is the leading researcher and Vice-Rector for Scientific Work of the Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC) and the Head of the Institute of Art and Cultural Studies of the LAC. Anda Lake's scientific interests are related to research methodology in social sciences and humanities, including methods of assessing social and economic impact and arts-based ones. In recent years, she has participated in and led several academic and applied research projects on cultural participation and consumption, intangible cultural heritage, with a special focus on youth participation. She is currently leading the national research programme project "Preconditions of Authentic Youth Participation in Formal and Non-formal Education."

Valts Valters Kronbergs is a third-year student of Sociology and Management of Culture, at the Latvian Academy of Culture. Valters works with contemporary art and the humanities both in practice and academia, with research interests covering contemporary art systems of meaning and value production, their contextualization, and ideas of posthumanism. Thus far, Valters has worked as a visiting research assistant in state research programmes and self-initiated research projects.

Anete Liepiņa is a third-year student of Cultural Sociology and Management at the Latvian Academy of Culture. Her research focuses on community studies, place identity, and collective memory in relation to contemporary art, exploring how artistic practices shape social experience and shared meaning. Her academic interests include socially engaged and participatory art, art-based research, and contemporary cultural practices. She has been exploring contemporary art practices in collaboration with young people, both within and beyond school environments, focusing on how creative processes can cultivate dialogue, self-expression and collective learning.

8. From Silence to Symbols: Visual Literacy Projects as Pathways to Youth Expression and Civic Engagement (48) - online

Laima Lisauskienė (Vilnius County Adomas Mickevicius Public Library, Lithuania)

Abstract: This presentation explores how visual literacy can empower young people to express their voices and participate meaningfully in democratic societies. Drawing on two participatory art-education projects conducted in Vilnius—"BARRICADES. Posters, Caricatures, Manifestos" and "Memory is Alive: Remembering January 13th"—this paper examines how students engaged with themes of freedom, protest, and identity through creative visual expression.

The projects, implemented in collaboration with public schools and the Lithuanian State Modern Archives, invited students to reinterpret historical events and symbols using collage, caricature, and flag design. Working with authentic archival materials, students examined past struggles for freedom, created protest-inspired visuals, and constructed personal and collective responses to civic themes.

This process offered not only historical reflection but also a platform to articulate contemporary concerns such as political apathy, civic responsibility, and the right to be heard.

The paper situates these projects within the broader discourse on freedom of expression, youth participation, and creative pedagogy. It argues that engaging with archival visual culture through art enables students to question dominant narratives, construct alternative representations, and develop critical awareness of both history and present-day civic life. Drawing from A/R/Tography and care-informed participatory practice, the presentation discusses the balance between adult facilitation and youth autonomy in co-creative learning environments.

This contribution responds directly to the conference questions regarding how schools support (or restrict) youth expression, how literature and visual art can serve as tools for human rights education, and how interdisciplinary collaborations can create authentic spaces for young people to be seen and heard.

About the author:

Laima Lisauskienė is Chief Methodologist for Projects at Vilnius County Adomas Mickevičius Public Library. She holds a Master's degree in Visual Design from the Vilnius Academy of Arts and has over two decades of experience in education, design, and cultural project management. Her work focuses on visual literacy, civic engagement, and participatory education. Laima leads resilience initiatives based on the 2015 Lithuania-Germany Foreign Ministers' joint action plan, including the project "Strengthening Civic Resilience: Dialogue on Public Libraries", funded by the German Embassy in Lithuania (€20,000). She is also project leader for the "Libraries Empowering Climate-Smart Communities" project proposal submitted under the Climate-KIC program, Horizon Europe (Grant Agreement No. 101093942). A member of the Lithuanian Design Association and former lecturer in visual communication, Laima bridges education, art, and civic activism to foster inclusive and reflective learning environments.

Panel 10 - Digital Co-Creation and the Right to Learn

Chair: Sarah Farrugia

1. Aesthetic Bridges: Uncovering the Creative Pedagogical Potentials of Children's Literature and Digital Informal Learning (13)

Hooria Rezaei (Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany)

Abstract: This paper examines how the aesthetic dimensions of children's literature and digital, informal learning environments can enrich each other within the framework of creative pedagogy. Here, aesthetics is not viewed as a mere decorative addition but as a fundamental principle that shapes imagination, attention, and emotional engagement, fostering deeper learning processes. Children's literature contributes narrative depth, visual harmony, and material richness, while digital spaces offer interactivity, personalisation, and a participatory culture. Together, these two domains reveal opportunities for mutual inspiration and innovation.

The paper follows a three-step approach. First, it provides a theoretical review of how both fields define and frame aesthetics. Children's literature is examined as a cultural and narrative space, while digital informal learning is examined as learner-driven, flexible, and technology-mediated. Second, it presents a comparative analysis identifying intersections, such as multimodality, narrative coherence, and emotional activation, as well as distinctions, such as the material grounding of literature versus the interactive and collaborative qualities of digital environments. Third, it highlights hidden potentials that remain underexplored, arguing that creative pedagogy can systematically draw from these strengths to design richer learning experiences. Selected case studies demonstrate how these potential applications can be realized in practice.

Digital projects like *Wuwu & Co.* and *Green Riding Hood* demonstrate how the narrative and visual elements of children's literature can be transformed into immersive, multisensory experiences. Conversely, print works such as *Press Here* and *Mi pequeño hermano invisible* adapt digital interactivity into analogue form. Hybrid projects like the AR-enhanced *Mur* demonstrate innovative ways of merging both modalities.

The paper concludes that aesthetics serve as a bridge between the literary and digital domains, creating fertile ground for creative pedagogy. By integrating narrative, visual, and interactive elements, educators and designers can encourage children to take charge of their learning, become more motivated, and participate in cultural activities.

About the author:

Hooria Rezaei is currently enrolled in the Master's program in Educational Science at Ruhr-University Bochum in Germany. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Educational Science from the University of Tehran and has completed introductory and advanced courses in children's literature at the Children's Book Council of Iran. She has acquired research experience at Ruhr-University Bochum in the domain of non-formal and informal learning spaces, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sandra Aßmann. Her research interests are focused on children's literature, digital media, and creative pedagogy. Her research is driven by an objective to unearth latent potentialities in the aesthetic interplay between literary traditions and digital learning practices.

2. More-Than-Human Sex Education: Young People, Online Sexually Explicit Content and the Right to Learn (37)

Deevia Bhana (University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa)

Abstract: How do digital affordances shape young people's understanding of sexuality? This paper focuses on 13–15-year-old South Africans as they express their right to experiment with online sexually explicit content while demonstrating how such attempts are regulated by risk and shame. The study draws from an arts-based qualitative study with 40 teenage boys and girls to illustrate how they forge the right to know about, learn and express sexuality in a context where sexuality education and intergenerational sexual communication are limited and muted. Using a new feminist materialist lens, young people's understanding of sexuality is approached as an ongoing intra-action between bodies, gender norms, peers, devices, images, school rules and moral surveillance. The paper advances three findings. First, sexual desire and learning in networked spaces are co-produced by human and more-than-human forces; agency is distributed across materials and is not simply the result of young people's actions. Second, sexually explicit materials function as informal sex education and pleasure-seeking within constrained and regulated environments where sexual silence and sexual innocence are normative. Third, participatory collaborations can create alternate spaces where young people make and circulate rights-affirming creative sexual content to illustrate both their desires and shame, illustrating how their online experiences are not only about harm or the expansion of sexual rights and knowledge. The paper concludes with recommendations for education, social justice and co-created arts-based interventions that make space for sexual desires, safety and rights in virtual life for young people.

About the author:

Deevia Bhana is the South African Research Chair in Gender and Childhood Sexuality at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her research focuses on how gender and sexuality shape children's and young people's lives across schools, communities and digital spaces in the Global South. She is the author or editor of more than a dozen books, including *Young Masculinities and Sexual Health in Southern*

Africa (Routledge, 2025), *Gender and Young People's Digital Sexual Cultures* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2025) and *Gendered and Sexual Norms in Global South Early Childhood Education* (Routledge, 2024).

3. South African Teenage Girls' Responses to Unsolicited Violent and Sexually Explicit Content Shared on Social Media (47)

Raksha Janak (University of Pretoria, South Africa)

Abstract: In the context of deepening digital entanglements, social media platforms have become critical spaces where gendered and sexual violence is both enacted and navigated by teenage girls (Henry & Powell, 2015; Salter, 2017). While much research positions girls as passive recipients of online harm (Renold & Ringrose, 2011), this study foregrounds the situated ways South African teenage girls actively responded to unsolicited violent and sexually explicit content. Drawing on new feminist materialism, girls' responses are conceptualised as assemblages of human and more-than-human forces, including smartphones, emojis, screenshots, bodies, histories, and socio-cultural norms that shaped their capacities to act, resist, or remain silent. The study draws on qualitative data with 40 teenage girls (aged 15– 18) from a peri-urban high school in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Using semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation, it examined how girls encountered and responded to harassment, image-based abuse, sexual coercion, and revenge pornography. Findings revealed that girls employed strategies such as blocking, deleting, reporting, forming peer alliances online, and disengaging altogether. These strategies reflected resilience and creativity but also reinforced unequal gendered power relations. Blocking and deleting placed the burden on girls to manage violence, absolving perpetrators of accountability. Reporting occurred in contexts where platforms and authorities routinely failed to intervene, producing further silences. Disengagement from digital spaces restricted girls' participation in peer networks, consolidating male dominance in online interactions. Even peer alliances, while offering protection, sometimes reproduced exclusionary dynamics that left certain girls more vulnerable. These responses were deeply entangled with South Africa's historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid, which entrenched racial and gender hierarchies, regulated sexuality, and continue to shape how violence is normalised, silenced, or contested in digital spaces. The findings advance an expanded vision of education research, one attentive to histories of gendered harm while also imagining futures where young people's digital capacities and collective care practices are foregrounded. Repositioning teenage girls as active agents, it demonstrates how their everyday digital practices resist harm and offer decolonial alternatives for rethinking education research in digitally mediated worlds.

About the author:

Raksha Janak, PhD Senior Lecturer at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Her research focuses on gender and sexuality education, particularly the shape and form of sexual violence among girls in South African schools and on social media platforms, using new feminist materialism. She has published in *Children and Society*, *International Journal of Educational Development*, *Journal of Gender Studies*, *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, and *NORMA*.

Panel 11 - Freedom of Expression in Educational Contexts

Chair: Rebecca Ganado

Online Host: Ruby Peresso

1. Transmedia Activism and/in Children's Literature: From the Harry Potter Alliance to Hungarian Ecofiction's Green Readers (43)

Anna Kérchy (University of Szeged, Hungary)

Abstract: While Henry Jenkins initially defined transmedia storytelling in 2007 as the strategic expansion of a storyworld beyond the pages of a book and across multiple media platforms to create a unified, coordinated yet heterogeneous entertainment experience, aiming to foster interactive engagement among audiences, his later work centres on transmedia activism. This field studies how the participatory potential of multimodal content's "fluid continuum" may contribute to raising political awareness and promoting social change by facilitating an immersive understanding of sensitive issues ranging from migration to climate change. This mobilisation toward civic political practices through transmediation is particularly interesting in the case of children's literature, which we traditionally associate with a pedagogical agenda in line with the *dulce et utile* tradition, and repeatedly revisit in light of debates on children's rights and freedom of expression. My paper investigates how contemporary children's literature and its transmedial extensions can empower young readers as active citizens and amplify their voices on urgent global issues, aligning with UNICEF's notion of child participation as an "ongoing process" of expression and decision-making.

My paper has a threefold purpose. First, it traces a brief history of transmedia activism in children's literature, starting from early calls for "fan-based citizenship" (Hinck), such as the Harry Potter Alliance, an innovative cultural campaign founded in 2005 that mobilized the Potterverse fandom to fight for fair trade, justice, human rights, and global democracy, turning bookworms into heroes of the Muggle world. Second, I study a corpus of contemporary Hungarian eco-conscious children's literary texts – all nominees or awardees of HUBBY's Best Children's Book of the Year prize in the past five years, often incorporated in national libraries' green reading programs – creative protest pieces, dedicated to explicitly advocating environmental protection, sustainable practices, and ecological concerns. When the Trashcans Left for a Journey to the End of Nowhere, an anthology of "modern tales for a green future" (2020) edited by Szabina Ughy, depicts a waste-free utopia about aimlessly wandering trashcans and channels book profits into a civil campaign to cleanse the River Tisza (<https://petkupa.hu/eng/#>); István Kerékgyártó's Emma Saves the World with Leo Cabrio (2022) enters into a cross-media dialogue with Before the Flood, National Geographic's documentary film hit about global warming produced in collaboration with UN climate change ambassador Leonardo DiCaprio; while Margit Schmöltz's Blue Imago (2022) gamifies environmental action in the story of a mysterious creative app that lures the protagonist and young readers into the off-line analogue sphere to explore nature, save earthworms, photograph spiders, and collect leaves. Third, I argue that these books are not only exciting from an ecocritical perspective (as literary representations of nature impacting human mind and action), but their transmediation tactics (turning reading into a playful yet political performative experience) also serve as efficient edutainment tools, adequate means of reaching screenagers, the digital natives of Generation Z, to cultivate good readers and environmentalists. My analysis asks whether such transmedia strategies can move beyond the adult fantasy of "the child saving the world" to grant authentic agency to young voices in shaping the future. I contend that these hybrid texts strike a balance between cautionary tale and literature of hope, aesthetics and politics, wishful fantasy and harsh realities, positing children's literature not only as an educational tool but also as a platform for freedom of expression, creative protest, ethical engagement, and human rights advocacy.

About the author:

Anna Kérchy, PhD DrHabil DSc is a Full Professor of English literature at the University of Szeged in Hungary, where she is the head of the Doctoral Program in Literatures and Cultures in English, leader of the Gender Studies Research Group, and founding director of Children's and Young Adult Literatures and Culture Research Centre. Her research areas focus on Victorian and postmodern fantastic imagination, corporeal narratology, humanimal studies, transmedia storytelling, nonsense, and children's/YA literature. She authored the monographs *Body-Texts in the Novels of Angela Carter* (2008), *Alice in Transmedia Wonderland* (2016) which won the HUSSE book award, *Essays in Feminist*

Aesthetics and Narratology (2019) The Poetics and Politics of Victorian Nonsense. Metamedial Play in Lewis Carroll's Oeuvre (2024), and edited thirteen essay collections, including The Fairy-Tale Vanguard (with Stijn Praet, 2019) and Translating and Transmediating Children's Literature (with Björn Sundmark, 2020).

2. The Dos and Don'ts of Practicing Artivism: Pedagogical Insights for Embedding Child Rights and Addressing Social Issues in Early Childhood Education (5) - online

Carolyn Bjartveit (Mount Royal University, Canada), Emmie Henderson Dekort (Mount Royal University, Canada)

Abstract: In an era marked by global uncertainty and environmental degradation, early childhood education (ECE) offers powerful opportunities and space for hope, healing, and transformative action. This paper explores “artivism”—the fusion of art and activism—as a pedagogical approach that empowers young children to engage with complex social and environmental issues through artmaking critically. Positioned within a children’s rights-based framework, the study emphasises how artivism in ECE settings can foster agency, build resilience, and amplify children’s voices as they participate in social change. Utilising a duoethnography methodology and drawing from child rights-based frameworks that emphasise children’s relational and co-constructive learning and meaning-making (Taylor & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2015; Welty & Lundy, 2013), this research investigates how young children used artivism to respond to social issues such as environmental sustainability. These experiences were rooted in child-led explorations and were supported by an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, enabling children to engage with ethical and political questions through multisensory processes. The study challenges dominant constructions of childhood as a time of innocence and passivity, and positions children as capable, rights-holding citizens in alignment with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. By integrating artivism into early childhood curricula, educators can create spaces where children’s creative expression becomes a vehicle for advocacy, empathy, and critical thinking. The paper examines the pedagogical responsibilities of fostering children’s activism, including ethical considerations, power-sharing practices, and culturally responsive approaches. It concludes with practical recommendations for early childhood educators, offering strategies to co-construct knowledge with children, facilitate meaningful discussions, and support sustained, flexible engagement in activist inquiry. Ultimately, this work calls for a shift in ECE that embraces artivism as a transformational force—one that cultivates hope, supports children’s rights, and positions young learners as vital contributors to a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

About the authors:

Carolyn Bjartveit, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor and coordinator of the Bachelor of Child Studies, Early Learning and Child Care program in the Department of Child Studies and Social Work at Mount Royal University (Alberta, Canada). She has experience teaching pre-K to post-secondary graduate levels in early childhood education. Her research areas include curriculum studies, cultural studies, history and philosophy of early childhood education, visual art and teacher education. Her current research focuses on social justice, human rights, and how students' cultural identities intersect with the curriculum in Canadian post-secondary education settings.

cbjartveit@mtroyal.ca

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1753-1862>

Emmie Henderson-Dekort, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at Mount Royal University in the Department of Child Studies and Social Work Department at Mount Royal University (Alberta, Canada). She has experience working with children and youth in educational, clinical, and community

settings. Her research areas include Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Children's Rights-Based research, play-based methodologies, and trauma-informed practices. Her current research focuses on the meaningful participation of young individuals in policy formulation.
ehendersondekort@mtroyal.ca
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3759-4909>

3. A Science of Freedom: Reconciling Educational Professionalism with Children's Playfulness Using Self-Determination Theory (36)

Don Berg (Independent Researcher, USA)

Abstract: Most people are taught that schooling is serious business that requires children to develop rigorous discipline. Adults are often expected to impose disciplinary rigour independent of how children feel about those impositions. This can create the expectation that the educational professionalism of adults must be diametrically opposed to children's playfulness. If this expectation is taken too seriously, it creates schooling situations that are detrimental to the psychological well-being of both students and teachers. (Headden & McKay, 2015)

With a proper psychological perspective, the opposition of playfulness and professionalism turns out to be false. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains how our universal human needs shape our motivations, which in turn shape our engagement with the activities we have available. (Ryan, Deci, Vansteenkiste, & Soenens, 2021) A proper understanding of SDT implies that playfulness and professionalism have the same root causes; therefore, they are culturally distinct manifestations of the same underlying psychological phenomena. (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; & Berg, 2022, Chapters 16 & 22)

A proper understanding of SDT also provides us with an empirically sound concept of "freedom." The nature of being human must be inherently determined by what we require in order to have well-being. This means that the rigorous model of human needs provided by SDT necessarily gives us insights into human nature. Humans are universally recognised as yearning to be free. Having a more precise model of how that yearning occurs in human experience through the lens of a well-established psychological model means we can more precisely define our "freedoms" in a way that can actually deliver the goodness, truth, beauty, and joy that all of us humans ultimately want.

About the author:

Don Berg is an award-winning author, education psychology researcher, alternative education practitioner, and leader. His award-winning book is *Schooling for Holistic Equity: How to Manage the Hidden Curriculum in K-12*. His research has been published in peer-reviewed journals. He has over 20 years of experience leading children in self-directed educational settings. As the Executive Director of Deeper Learning Advocates, he is on a mission to embed the psychology of learning in policy so that policy stops undermining learning. Internationally, he has presented his work at conferences in the USA, Canada, Chile, the Netherlands, and China.

4. Collaboratively Designing Child Rights Education Curricula with Educators and Children through a Participatory Action Research Study in Uganda and Canada (39)

Kathleen Manion (Royal Roads University, Canada)

Abstract: Despite its recognised importance, child rights education remains largely absent from teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning in global contexts. In an attempt to partially fill this gap, in this presentation, we share findings from a five-year (2022–2027) participatory action research project funded by SSHRC entitled Child Rights Education in Diverse Global Contexts and Times of Crises - A decolonising, participatory action research project with educators, children, and

community members in Canada and Uganda. In this study, we leveraged the opportunity to explore collaborative curriculum development across culturally and geographically diverse settings and to create authentic spaces of co-creation.

Education is universally affirmed as a fundamental right—enshrined in both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999). The right to be educated about children's rights is further enshrined in General Comment 13.

As such, we worked in partnership with 38 teachers from 21 schools, NGOs, families, community stakeholders, and well over 2,000 children across three Ugandan regions and one Canadian region. Together, we advocated for the deliberate and context-sensitive integration of rights-based education into primary schools, emphasising its role in fostering children's agency and empowerment, healthy development and protection. Drawing upon the cultural, economic, geographic, linguistic, political, and environmental conditions of each of the four communities, we developed and used multimodal activities to nurture children's awareness and enactment of their rights within their lived realities. Together, we continue to co-develop dynamic, arts- and play-based curricula that promote meaningful dialogue and creative exchange, including physical and board games, books, songs, poems, plays, postcards, videos, shared play materials and other creative activities. This multimodal approach has allowed children to meaningfully share their ideas and understandings of children's rights with each other, in their schools and communities.

About the author:

Kathleen Manion is a professor at Royal Roads University, specialising in social justice and children's rights. Her career spans academia, government, non-profits, and consulting. She bridges practitioner experience, academic theory, and policy in teaching and research. Her work centres on systems that help children thrive, using diverse methodologies and community engagement. Kathleen has led projects on child protection, rights, socioemotional learning, digital safety, homelessness, climate and environmental justice, early development, service innovation, trafficking, family violence, inclusion, youth justice, and child migration across North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. Her approach is both global and deeply child-centred.

Panel 12 - Tracing Echoes of Childhood in Highly Vulnerable Contexts through the Symbolic Bond of Literature

Chair: Prof. Evelyn Arizpe

Online Host: Rebecca Ganado

1. The Poetic and Political Act of Opening Doors in Migrant Shelters for Children to Reclaim their Voice (16) - online

Manuela Cantú Mendívil (Reading Mediator and UN Peace Ambassador, Mexico)

Abstract: As adults, we must recognise that we are not the ones to grant children 'a voice': children are born with a voice. Our challenge is to listen to it and create safe environments where they can exercise their right to express themselves (Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child) without fear or censorship. This talk describes an example of a cultural intervention developed by Juguemos a Leer, a mobile reading room that provides reading mediation in refugee shelters in the city of Tijuana on the Mexican-American border. Due to recent policies on the part of both governments, thousands of migrants, including unaccompanied minors, find themselves entrapped in precarious and dangerous conditions, with most of their human rights denied (Silva & Alfaro, 2022). Studies have noted the positive effect of cultural interventions on the psychosocial well-being of children in adverse situations such as forced migration (Sánchez-Jofras et al., 2025) where they often experience 'de-voicing'

(Adnams, 2018). 'Clothesline of Words' is a reading mediation activity based on the picture book *Ruga: El mundo de las palabras olvidadas* by García Haros (2018), written in both Spanish and Rarámuri (an Indigenous language of northern Mexico). The story encourages a reflection on the value and memory of words. Through the accompanying activity, the silences imposed by fear and uprooting are broken, and a collective memory is woven that recognises childhood as a protagonist, not a spectator. The 'safe space' allows children to begin to reclaim their voices; on another level, it facilitates communication and advocacy. Thus, listening to these words becomes a political and poetic act.

About the author:

Manuela Cantú Mendívil is a reading mediator who holds a Diploma in Children's Rights from the University of Valencia, Spain, and is a children's rights promoter for the Baja California State Human Rights Commission as well as UN Peace Ambassador. She is the Founding Director of an itinerary community reading room, "¿Jugamos a leer?" and facilitator of the Children in Crisis program at Reforma USA. Manuela co-authored the Binational Anthology Women of New York-Tijuana. She is the coordinator of the OneBook Without Borders program at KPBS USA and co-founder of the Network of Peace Builders; she is also a member of the "Seguimos Creando Enlaces" committee, San Diego-Tijuana.

2. Imagining Other Worlds with Milo (16)

Brenda Denisse Renteria Cervantes (Autonomous University of the State of Morelos, Mexico)

Abstract: This presentation is based on reading experiences with children who live with incarcerated adults, as well as with children and adolescents who visit their mothers in prison. In Mexico, at least 50% of women deprived of liberty report having children (no official data is available), and around 400 minors live in prison with their mothers (Reinserta 2019). Their voices are hidden behind bars. The topic of incarcerated adults is little explored in the public agenda, in the arts, or in literature; therefore, firsthand references are needed to raise awareness and reflect on how prisons are inhabited by children. The representation of this complex reality is essential to make visible these experiences, which are usually silenced or stigmatised. Through accessible characters, metaphors, and narratives, literature allows children to recognise themselves, name their emotions, and redefine their experiences from a place of understanding and empathy (McAdam et al, 2020). The picture book *Milo imagina el mundo* by de la Peña and Robinson (2021) invites us to distrust superficial judgments and first impressions. The symbolic representation of children visiting their mothers in prison in children's and young adult literature not only makes visible a silenced reality but also promotes a sensitive, critical, and inclusive reading of childhood. Through the use of narrative and visual symbolism, emotional identification is facilitated without resorting to harsh or moralising approaches. The illustrator worked closely with the author, drawing on his own reality. As de la Peña says of the result of this co-creation: "I think the book has the potential to be healing, to spark conversations, to generate empathy and compassion." Reading this book allowed the children and adolescents to discuss their anxieties about being judged, about visiting their mother and relating to other children. It also allowed them to share memories from the time before prison. In other words, it offered them the opportunity to imagine the world in a different way.

About the author:

Brenda Denisse Renteria Cervantes holds a Master's degree in Attention to Diversity and Inclusive Education and is currently a doctoral student at the Autonomous University of the State of Morelos. She is a certified facilitator of peace circles and restorative processes, specialising in justice for adolescents. She is also a certified reading mediator in critical contexts of violence and crime. She has represented the collective "Algaraza" as an expert in the Citizen Observatory of the Rights of Children

and Adolescents of the Federal Public Defender's Office since 2022. Currently, she is the Social Reintegration Officer for "Algaraza", working towards social and restorative justice.

3. Narrative Moons: Symbolic Resistance against Hostile Worlds (16) - online

Juan Felipe Torres (Educator and Cultural Mediator, Colombia)

Abstract: This presentation addresses some of the social, political, and cultural realities that have historically impacted childhood in Colombia, particularly in the conflict and post-conflict zones located in the departments of Chocó, Bolívar, Antioquia, Caquetá, and the city of Bogotá. It describes how initiatives focused on strengthening the political voice of children through reading mediation and the appropriation of public space have provided opportunities for redefining experiences linked to various types of violence. The reflections and approaches shared are linked to the various stages of the moon through a symbolic connection that situates a reflective and testimonial journey that embraces the transition from darkness to light as a stage of transformation and enunciation of childhood. The first part covers early childhood songs against fear and discusses how this recognition becomes crucial to recognising their value in the transmission of oral knowledge and practices of symbolic reparation. The second part addresses the ways in which conflicts have silenced the victimising events in contexts of war and will invite attendees to "look twice" at the stories that make this presence invisible. This space will also address how phenomena such as orphanhood, forced displacement, and armed conflict in schools have been constant in the children's life trajectories. The third part presents the strategy "The City of Monsters," an experience in Bogotá, influenced by the work of Francesco Tonucci and his proposal for a "Children's City" (<https://lacittadeibambini.eu/en/>), and based on Maurice Sendak's picture book *Donde viven los monstruos*. This creative initiative links the importance of appropriating public space in childhood with reading mediation strategies that have helped consolidate a political movement of children who create assemblies and marches, and create poetic manifestos to make visible the world they wish to inhabit.

About the author:

Juan Felipe Torres Barrios is an educator, reading promoter, and cultural mediator. He has worked on various reading initiatives which took place in parks, market squares and other public spaces in Bogotá, such as: "Libro al Viento", "Paraderos", "Paralibros", "Paraparques" and "Puntos de lectura". He worked on the "Lectores ciudadanos" project and the national network of mediators, "La paz se toma la palabra". He is the creator and director of the "Biblioteca Digital La Caja Viajera/Escritura" and the project "La ciudad de los monstruos: infancias que transforman", since 2015. He is currently the pedagogical coordinator of national educational innovation programmes in Colombia.

4. Children's Literature as a Human Rights Laboratory: War Witnessing and Youth Voices from Syria and Palestine (31)

Alperen Avcı (Muş Alparslan University, Turkiye) & Duygu Yalman Polatla (Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakif University, Turkiye)

Abstract: Children's literature can serve as a powerful medium for political expression and human rights testimony—especially for young people affected by war. This paper explores this potential through qualitative research with children and youth in the Middle East. Drawing on data from two distinct groups—Syrian preschool children residing in Turkey and Palestinian university students reflecting on their wartime childhoods—the study examines how creative expression enables young people to articulate experiences of displacement, violence, and resilience.

Syrian children participated in visual storytelling workshops centred on "home, family, and happiness," producing drawings and oral narratives. Palestinian students contributed autobiographical short stories about formative wartime experiences. Thematic analysis revealed recurring metaphors such as broken homes, missing family members, and birds symbolising freedom, alongside narratives of state violence, invisibility, and survival.

These accounts are interpreted through the lens of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and UNICEF's framework for youth participation. Literature is analysed not only as a reflection of trauma but also as a form of non-institutional civic resistance and youth witnessing—particularly for those denied access to formal political participation. The paper argues that children's literature functions as a "human rights laboratory" where suppressed voices become visible and politically meaningful. It reflects on the role of imagination and literary agency in contexts where basic human rights, including the right to life, are often under threat, foregrounding the ethical and political challenges of listening to and representing children's war narratives. This interdisciplinary study contributes to the conference theme by highlighting storytelling as a transgressive youth politics rooted in creativity, memory, and resistance.

About the authors:

Alperen Avcı is a lecturer in the Department of Child Development at Muş Alparslan University. He is pursuing his doctoral studies in the field of early childhood education. His research concentrates on children's rights, migration, and the educational and developmental experiences of war-affected children. He particularly focuses on supporting vulnerable groups of children in the areas of literacy, rights-based representation, and participation rights.

Dr. Duygu Yalman Polatlar is a faculty member in the Department of Early Childhood Education at Fatih Sultan Mehmet Vakıf University. Her research focuses on children's literature, the relationship between media and children, intercultural communication, and ethical representation in early childhood. In particular, she examines how children are represented through literary works and media texts, and how these representations intersect with developmental and ethical dimensions.

Panel 13 - Elevating Children's Voices: Critical Attention as Method

Chair: Dr Farriba Schulz

Online Host: Juliette Roux

1. Critical Attention as Method: SWISP in a Science Gallery Living Lab (50)

Kate Coleman (University of Melbourne)

Abstract: This paper situates SWISP Lab's residency at Science Gallery Melbourne, Australia (July 2025 - May 2026) as a living laboratory for young people's (14-29) participation across entangled sites. We argue that young people's freedom of expression requires spaces that are simultaneously invitational, speculative, aesthetic, imaginary, procedural, and political. In these spaces and places, young people do not merely feature in human rights narratives; they author them.

Working with hundreds of young people in Australia, India, and the United States, we mobilise a/r/tography as a living inquiry and ethic to locate tipping point stories and co-create zines, badges, collages and drawings that hold the moment a young person realises the climate catastrophe is personal and political. Our approach treats co-creation not as engagement or outreach but as a rights practice. For SWISP, making is a mode of speaking, exhibiting is a mode of being heard, and the gallery becomes the site/cite/sight for youth voices to be seen and heard.

We seek to contribute three provocations to the conference theme:

1. Curriculum-as-rights-infrastructure: studio protocols of consent, care, co-authorship and risk mapping enable young people to exercise voice with safety, care, reciprocity, and action.
2. Iterative folding as a process: cycles of sketching, making, and exhibiting move young people's speech about climate in/actions from the ephemeral to durable by transforming participation into material presence within public space.
3. Hacking time: Geo-pedagogies of constraint, where school timetables, platform policies, and cultural norms shape and sometimes silence youth expression can be hacked through playful creative tactics, from wandering walks and emoji data-coding to collage zines that travel between Melbourne, Bengaluru, Jaipur, Delhi, and Atlanta.

Methodologically, we will braid participatory art-based educational research, care and walking for critical attention with other-than-human collaborators. Empirically, we will draw on fieldnotes and [d]a/r/tefacts generated during our Science Gallery residencies in Atlanta, Bengaluru and Melbourne and linked actions as Tipping Point Stories at COP.

About the author:

SWISP Lab (Speculative Wanderings in Space and Place) is a living laboratory for art-based climate research at the University of Melbourne. Co-founded by Associate Professor Kathryn Coleman and Dr Sarah Healy, the living lab works with young people, educators, and artists across Australia and India to reimagine climate futures through speculative participatory methods such as zine-making, tipping point stories, and Wondering Walks. From Science Gallery residencies to international climate summits, SWISP Lab creates spaces of co-creation and protest, positioning imagination, art, and pedagogy as vital tools for justice, freedom of expression, and systemic change.

Profs. Kate Coleman is a neurodivergent artist, teacher educator, and researcher at the University of Melbourne, Australia where she teaches teachers and co-leads SWISP Lab, exploring speculative a/r/tography, climate justice, and creative activism. Kate's practice centres on transformative pedagogies, participatory methods, and making matter through art, action, and the voices of young people. She believes that a/r/t is inquiry, and that activism is metho-pedagogical.

2. **More Than a Seat at the Table: Who is Actually Listening? A Comparative Study of Adult Engagement with National Youth Councils in Europe (24) - online**
Amy Calleja, Matthew Baldacchino, Cherise Sultana, Alexandra Tabone (Kunsill Nazzjonali taż-Żgħażaq - National Youth Council of Malta)

Abstract: The right of young people to participate in civic society is enshrined in international law, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Article 12 of the UNCRC, which mandates that their views be given "due weight".

National Youth Councils were set up to act as the national representatives for youth and are often invited to stakeholder consultations to provide the youth perspective. Despite this, the lived experience of many youth representatives indicates a persistent gap between the rhetoric of inclusion and the reality of influence. Thus, this paper investigates whether the engagement of National Youth Councils (NYCs) in high-level stakeholder forums is a genuine exercise in participatory rights or a performative act of tokenism.

Through a comparative study of NYCs across Europe, we investigate the structural and attitudinal barriers that constitute adult resistance to meaningful youth engagement. Through surveys and in-depth interviews, we ask: When are youth voices genuinely heard and acted upon, and when is their presence merely decorative? This paper analyses the quality of adult engagement in spaces such as the EU Youth Dialogue and national and local consultations. The study also maps the selective nature of

youth inclusion, questioning why youth voices are often welcomed in policy areas like education but systematically excluded from critical discussion on health, finance, and security.

This paper is uniquely positioned as research by a National Youth Council, for the youth sector. As KNŻ, we bring an insider's perspective based on years' experience navigating these spaces. Our positionality as peers allows for a level of trust from other NYCs often inaccessible to external academics. This ensures that our findings reflect the authentic voice of European youth representatives to provide an honest and transparent analysis that speaks directly to the conference theme of "adult resistance to child power".

About the authors:

Established in 1992, the **Kunsill Nazzjonali taż-Żgħażaqħ (KNŻ)** serves as the national representative body for Maltese and Gozitan youths aged 13 to 35. With over 50 member organisations, our mission is to ensure the youth voice is heard, valued, and acted upon. As a crucial link between 130,000 young people and policymakers, we engage in national policy discussions on a wide range of issues, from health to the environment. We also organise events and activities that promote active citizenship, such as our flagship event, the National Youth Parliament.

Amy Calleja (she/her) is an MSc. Computer Science and Engineering student at the Technical University of Denmark with a focus on Cybersecurity research. Amy currently serves as the Director for Internal Affairs in Malta's National Youth Council, the Maltese Delegate for the ASEF Youth Leaders Summit & the P&R Marketing Coordinator for the IAESTE Connect Region. With a strong background in youth representation, she was a founding member of Malta's Commonwealth Youth Taskforce and has represented young people at key events like the EU Youth Conference in Alicante and the Council of Europe Training Course on Advocacy for Human Rights and Democracy. Amy also assisted with conducting research and running the mentoring programme for the Seen and Heard Project.

Cherise Sultana (she/her) is the President of the National Youth Council of Malta, the representative body for young people aged 13 to 35 across the country. With over five years of experience in youth advocacy, she has played a leading role in ensuring meaningful youth participation in policy-making, both nationally and at the international level. Through her role, she continues to champion co-creation over tokenism, working to embed youth voices structurally into democratic processes. She is currently pursuing her Master's in Advocacy at the University of Malta.

Alexandra Tabone (she/her) is a BA in Sociology and Communication Studies student at the University of Malta. She has a keen interest in research and social policy, particularly within the field of education. Alexandra is passionate about social justice, especially when it impacts children and young people. Alongside her studies, she works as a journalist at SideStreet, where she reports on social issues impacting Maltese society and develops her skills in research and communication. Alexandra also assisted the Maltese academic team in conducting research and running the mentoring programme for the Seen and Heard Project.

Matthew Baldacchino (he/him) is a medical doctor and Global Health graduate based in Glasgow, with an interest in policy on queer, sexual and reproductive human rights. He currently serves as the Director for Policy with the National Youth Council of Malta (KNŻ), an EU Climate Pact Ambassador for Malta and Gozo, and is a board member of the International Youth Health Organisation. His previous work include roles as Director for Health, and Commissioner for the Youth Community with KNŻ, and as a social media content volunteer with Din L-Art Ħelwa.

3. **Hum Hindustani: Listening to Children's Voices on Citizenship (42) - online**

Samina Mishra (Independent Arts Practitioner, India), Vivek Vellanki (Indiana University, USA) & Renae Lesser (Indiana University, USA)

Abstract: We live in a moment in which citizenship and democracy are being fiercely contested - in parliaments, streets, workplaces, homes, and classrooms. Our everyday is constantly being shaped by politics - who can move freely, who may speak without fear, who has access to food and healthcare, what we are allowed to teach and learn in schools, whose voices are included in public life.

Although children are deeply impacted by political decisions, they are often dismissed as incapable of meaningfully contributing to civic life. Children's sensitivities to (in)justice and (un)freedom call attention to the political nature of everyday life: the tyranny of the household or the classroom, the joyful anarchy of street games, or the democratic care exercised when we break bread with friends. These very qualities that lead many adults to ignore children's voices can be radical openings that help us understand our own social reality with fresh eyes, pointing us to the possibility of a radically different world.

This presentation offers a conceptual argument about listening to children and supports it with findings from a multi-site, arts-practice-based project, Hum Hindustani, that began with middle-school children in India creating artwork and poetry on the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. The project has now grown to include a website, a poetry podcast, a book for children, arts-based workshops with educators in India and the US, leading to a zine that is currently under production, and outreach workshops with children across India that are also currently underway.

The presentation locates our work within a larger historical and global conversation about the role of children's voices and art. Drawing on the various forms of media emanating from the project, we discuss why listening to children matters and how the arts can be one way for adults to attend and attune to children's voices. It demonstrates how practices of listening to children can be transformative and politically vital for children and adults, enabling cross-cultural dialogue and an understanding of childhood cultures with the active presence of the child.

About the authors:

Samina Mishra is a documentary filmmaker, writer, and teacher based in New Delhi, whose work uses the lens of childhood, identity and education to reflect the experiences of growing up in India.

Vivek Vellanki is an Assistant Professor of Qualitative Methodology and Curriculum & Instruction in the School of Education at Indiana University, Bloomington.

Renae Lesser is a PhD candidate at Indiana University, where she is pursuing a dual major in Curriculum Studies and Social Research Methodology.

4. **The Role of Children's Literature in Human Rights Education: A Case Study of Eswatini Schools (53) - online**

Novuyo Nkomo & S.K. Thwala (University of Eswatini)

Abstract: Children's literature is a significant yet often overlooked resource in the education of human rights, especially in situations where formal educational frameworks may neglect these essential subjects. This research explores the impact of children's literature in raising awareness and instilling values related to human rights, empathy, and equity among primary school students in Eswatini, a low income country grappling with social disparities and shifting educational focuses. Utilising a qualitative case study approach, the study examines how culturally relevant children's books—both traditional and modern, are employed in classrooms to foster comprehension of rights, compassion, and social

justice. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with educators, focus group discussions with students, and document analysis of selected books and curriculum materials. The study employed purposive sampling, including 15 teachers from 5 schools and 30 students aged 8 –12, ensuring representation across diverse socio-economic and geographic contexts. Ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymity, and cultural sensitivity, with approval sought from relevant local authorities. Thematic and content analysis were used to identify key themes and educational impacts.

By assessing teaching methods, student reactions, and the themes of selected literature, the research underscores the capacity of literature to align cultural stories with universal human rights concepts. The findings indicate that carefully selected children's literature not only improves literacy but also nurtures a mind-set focused on rights, empowering young students to act as advocates for fairness and inclusion within their communities. The outcomes of this study have broader implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and policy suggestions for Eswatini and similar contexts.

About the authors:

Dr. Novuyo Nkomo is an accomplished expert in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and currently serves as a lecturer at the University of Eswatini. Her expertise is underpinned by a multidisciplinary academic background, featuring a PhD in ECE from the University of Pretoria and an MPhil in Childcare and Protection from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Dr. Nkomo's influential research is centred on developing inclusive educational practices, with a specialized emphasis on autism, alongside the development of children's literature and the societal impacts of climate change on young children. As a dedicated advocate, she merges advanced scholarship with profound community engagement to inform and shape ECE policy and practice across Southern Africa.

Prof S'lungile K. Thwala is an Associate Professor and Dean in the Faculty of Education at the University of Eswatini. She specializes in Special and Inclusive Education with expertise in Early Childhood Education. Holding a PhD in Psychology of Education and an MEd in Special Educational Needs, she has over 20 years of teaching experience. Prof Thwala has published widely, reviewed for international journals, and supervised numerous postgraduate students. Her research focuses on inclusive education, managing inclusive schools, and psychosocial support for disadvantaged children. She is an active member of international research bodies and a passionate advocate for educational inclusion.

Saturday 7th February

Keynote 4: A Festival of Children's Rights and Communal Writing with Children

Seen and Heard Child Authors, Sita Brahmachari (Amnesty International Author), Leanne Ellul (Author), Chris Riddell (Amnesty International Illustrator)

Online Host: Amy Calleja

Visual Artist (Online): Julia Bakay

Keynote description: Following an introduction by author Sita Brahmachari, a group of young people who have participated in the Seen and Heard project will share a communal poem that they co-crafted with the author, as well as the illustrator Chris Riddell.

About the speakers:

Sita Brahmachari is an internationally award-winning Children's and YA author whose work is translated into many languages. Since her Waterstone's Award Winning debut novel 'Artichoke Hearts' (2011) Sita's stories have been nominated for the Carnegie Medal and the UKLA Book Award. She has an MA in Arts Education and has worked widely in theatre and education with diverse communities to mentor young voices. Sita co-created and scripted a celebrated theatre production inspired by Shaun Tan's graphic novel 'The Arrival' (2013). Her YA novel 'When Shadows Fall' was shortlisted for the Yoto Carnegie Medal (2023). Her latest novel is 'Phoenix Brothers' (2025). Sita was shortlisted for the Ruth Rendell Literacy Award (2023). She has been Book Trust Writer in Residence, an Amnesty Ambassador and Associate Lecturer in Children's and YA Literature at Goldsmiths University. She is Writer in Residence at Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants. Sita is a Royal Literary Fellow and a Fellow of The Society of Authors and an Honorary Member of the Youth Libraries Group.

Leanne Ellul is a poet and prose writer whose work spans both adult and children's literature. She is keen on storytelling and language, and brings these interests to life in her writing for young readers. She has authored several children's books, including 'L-Istorja ta' Seb it-Tieni' (u ta' Seb I-Ewwel ukoll), 'Il-Mostru tal-Bajja tal-Ġnejna', and 'Il-Każ tal-Kappell Ikkalibrat'. Her stories often blend humour and curiosity with themes that encourage children to explore the world around them. She is a regular contributor to the children's magazine: Is-Sagħtar. Over the years, Leanne has also written theatre for children and has been actively involved in the production and management of projects for ŽiguŻajg, Malta's International Arts Festival for Young Audiences. Her poetic play 'sitt ġrajjiet u naqra għala spicċajna' (kif spicċajna) was produced by ŽiguŻajg and ŻfinMalta in 2022 and will be published in the coming months. In that same year, she presented her work during The Child and the Book Conference which was organised in Malta. Her works for children have been recognised with various literary awards. She has collaborated closely with Clare Azzopardi on several children's books, including 'Il-Fatat Kaħlani' and 'Kaħlani u I-Fatati Kull Kulur'. She has also contributed to Maltese children's literature through translations of foreign works, some of which were translated in collaboration with Clare Azzopardi, including 'Teresa', 'L-Ispettaklu Stupend Żanżan Kelma', and 'Alice fl-Art tal-Għeġibijiet'. Her writing for young adults includes 'Gramma', published in 2015, and 'be;n il-kmiem', released a decade later. Both novels were awarded the Novel for Youths Prize, organized by Aġenzija Ĝuhażagħ and the National Book Council. Beyond her writing, Leanne regularly visits schools for reading sessions and delivers workshops to children and adults. She lectures in Maltese literature and creative writing. She is also actively involved in literary and cultural initiatives through organisations such as Inizjamed and the HELA Foundation.

Chris Ridell is a multi-award winning artist and one of the UK's top contemporary illustrators and cartoonists, he is often celebrated for his inclusion of themes of 'otherness' and tolerance in books for young audiences without ever becoming didactic or pedantic. His own books include the highly-acclaimed Ottoline titles and

the 2013 Costa Children's Book Award-winning *Goth Girl*. He was appointed the UK Children's Laureate in 2015 in recognition of his outstanding achievements in children's literature.

Us Children Have Questions!

Seen and Heard Child Interviewers, Gvantsa Jobava (International Publishers Association), Shannon Cullen (Walker Books), Dr Sandra Hili Vassallo (Malta National Book Council), Chris Gruppetta (Merlin Publishers), Sita Brahmachari (Author), Claudia Aloisio (Author), Leanne Ellul (Author), Matt Stroud (Illustrator)

Chairs: Dr Giuliana Fenech (University of Malta) and Sandy Calleja Portelli (Seen and Heard Research Support Officer)

Online Host: Amy Calleja

Visual Artist Online: Julia Bakay

Panel description: During this panel, young people in Malta interview grown-ups working in the publishing industry, internationally and nationally. They investigate how literature for children reflects human rights and freedom of expression, while challenging the professionals to create more space for children's voices in the sector.

About the panelists:

Gvantsa Jobava is a President at International Publishers Association and the head of international Affairs at Intelekti Publishing, one of the biggest publishing houses in Georgia, previously – chairperson of the Georgian Publishers and Booksellers Association and the head of the publishing program for Georgia's activities as guest of honor at the 2018 Frankfurt Book Fair. In 2013-2022 she was the organizer of Tbilisi International Book Festival. Since 2013, Gvantsa Jobava has been lobbying for the Georgian publishing industry, advocating Georgian publishers' interests and rights, standing for copyright and freedom to Publish and Freedom of Expression in Georgia. She has managed a number of projects to promote Georgian publishing and literary industry at international level. she is a member of Women Publishers' International Network – PublisHer. In 2020 she joined PEN Georgia. She is a poet and a translator of works of John Steinbeck, Chinua Achebe, Saul Bellow, John Lennon and others. She has also translated Anna Politkovskaya's book "Putin's Russia" and "A Message from Ukraine" by Volodymyr Zelensky into Georgian. She is the author and editor of the publishing project "Banned Books Shelf" and the founder of Banned Books Week celebrations in Georgia.

Shannon Cullen leads the creative team at Walker Books, a dedicated children's publisher founded in 1978. After moving to London from New Zealand, Shannon has over 25 years of publishing experience, including roles at HarperCollins, Penguin Random House and Quarto. She represents Walker at the Empathy Circle, the advisory group of children's publishers for Empathy Day, and is Vice-Chair of the Independent Publishers Guild, representing the IPG on the industry-wide EDI Forum committed to upholding the professional values of the book and publishing industry.

Dr Sandra Hili Vassallo is the Executive Director of the Malta National Book Council. A lawyer by training, Hili Vassallo brings with her a wealth of experience in diplomacy, policy, and the cultural sector. She has previously served as a diplomat at Malta's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York, and as a director within the Ministry for the Family, Social Policy and Children's Rights, and the Ministry for National Heritage, the Arts and Local Government. A published author of several award-winning children's books and short stories, she is also a visiting lecturer at the University of Malta and an advocate for social justice and environmental causes.

Chris Gruppetta has for the past couple of decades been the publisher and editor at Merlin Publishers. He studied law at the University of Malta, followed by a Masters in Publishing Studies in Aberdeen where he

researched the science of children's book cover design. His career at Merlin has been marked by efforts to professionalise the industry with focus on content, editorial and design aspects of the book, and a fresh approach to book marketing. He is a visiting lecturer at the University of Malta on literary editing and on the history of children's literature.

Sita Brahmachari is an internationally award-winning Children's and YA author whose work is translated into many languages. Since her Waterstone's Award Winning debut novel 'Artichoke Hearts' (2011) Sita's stories have been nominated for the Carnegie Medal and the UKLA Book Award. She has an MA in Arts Education and has worked widely in theatre and education with diverse communities to mentor young voices. Sita co-created and scripted a celebrated theatre production inspired by Shaun Tan's graphic novel 'The Arrival' (2013). Her YA novel 'When Shadows Fall' was shortlisted for the Yoto Carnegie Medal (2023). Her latest novel is 'Phoenix Brothers' (2025). Sita was shortlisted for the Ruth Rendell Literacy Award (2023). She has been Book Trust Writer in Residence, an Amnesty Ambassador and Associate Lecturer in Children's and YA Literature at Goldsmiths University. She is Writer in Residence at Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants. Sita is a Royal Literary Fellow and a Fellow of The Society of Authors and an Honorary Member of the Youth Libraries Group.

Born in 1982, **Claudia Aloisio** is an author of children's books, including Terramaxka Prize winner *Glenda u I-Magna tal-Granita* (KKM, 2024) and finalists *II-Pupa tax-Xelter* (KKM, 2021) and *II-Bebbuxa Trumbetta* (KKM, 2022). She has also authored the seasons series *Bett u Mike* (KKM, 2023) and is currently working on another set of picture books, which is about to be published in the coming months. Over the years, Claudia has also contributed to local children's magazine *Sagħħiġar* with two short-story series, *Storja Bejn Tlieta* and *Da' ġanni, Ukoll!*, and two tales, *Kelb u Qattusa* and *Luċċija u Antida*. Her publications include works in the timeslip genre, short stories and picture books. She writes in Maltese, and her writing marries imagination with history, culture, nature, emotions, adventure, and anything else that may leave a significant mark on our lives. Although her writing is aimed at children, she does not sugar-coat life's realities but presents them instead as part and parcel of her storyline, always blending in that touch of humour in her narrative. Claudia also serves as subject coordinator for History at Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary, Naxxar. She is currently reading for a doctorate at the University of Malta. Claudia is also a mother to Daniel and Nina, who often serve as an inspiration for her stories, as does the very old house in which she lives and for which she has a great fondness, to go along with her love for family, food and, naturally, books.

Matt Stroud is a Maltese illustrator, animator and folklorist with a focus on visual storytelling as entertainment and education aimed at children. With 10 years in the industry, Matt has illustrated over 30 children's books for various publishers and won 4 'Terramaxka' National Book Prizes for children's literature in the process. Matt has applied his storytelling and animation skills to various projects over the years. He has animated a series of 12 preschool nursery rhymes, in Maltese, for the National Literacy Agency to promote Maltese literacy. With assistance from the NLA, Matt co-created a Maltese animated web series for preschoolers 'Emme', with writer Clare Azzopardi. In 2017 he created a full animated show for The Malta Philharmonic Orchestra to accompany their classical 'Mussorgsky' concert, aimed at children.

Matt has animated awareness videos for both the 'Women's Rights Foundation' and the 'Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' that focus on different human rights issues. From 2022 to 2025, Matt has been the illustrator for the children and youths festival 'Ziguzajg', where he illustrated each year's primary festival poster along with the poster artworks for over 60 theatrical and interactive events that formed part of the festival. From 2024, Matt has undertaken a long term project 'Tori Tombi', supported by both Arts Council Malta and the National Book Council, to revitalise Maltese folktales, through translation and adaptation, for a new generation.

Panel 14 - Digital systems and systems of care

Chair: Prof. Kate Coleman

Online Hosts: Rebecca Ganado, Cornell Raab

1. Success, Hope and Adulthood: A Participatory Action Research Study with Young People with Experience of Care (27)

Elle Scott (University of Glasgow, Scotland)

Abstract: Dominant global narratives about young people with experience of formal care are frequently deficit-focused, emphasising risk and predicting poor outcomes in adulthood. While grounded in a long-standing evidence base, these narratives often homogenise diverse lives and can negatively shape young people's sense of self and hope for the future. Such negative framing risks entrenching fatalistic expectations and may limit young people's visions of what their future can be. This study adopted a participatory action research design, underpinned by youth work values and principles, to work alongside young people with experience of care in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland. Using story-making as a collaborative methodology, young people acted as co-researchers to critically examine how "success" is traditionally defined, measured, and narrated by adult-centric systems. Together, we explored how these dominant constructions influence both personal identity and collective expectations of adulthood.

The findings highlight the limitations of individualised approaches that locate responsibility for success within young people themselves by focusing on resilience and agency. Participants challenged these narrow definitions and offered alternative framings of success rooted in their lived realities, aspirations, and strengths.

The research calls for a reframing of success that moves beyond deficit-based models towards narratives of possibility and hope. Adopting a youth work approach to research has positioned young people as drivers of change, whereby they are encouraging adults and systems to promote more hopeful, strengths-focused stories about the future. This reframing of narratives not only validates lived experience as a form of knowledge but also creates space for young people to influence policy, practice and societal understandings of what it means for them to thrive in adulthood.

About the author:

As a PhD researcher and youth worker, I adopt participatory approaches grounded in youth work values of relationship-based practice and social justice. My research centres on story-making as a collaborative methodology, working with young people to co-create knowledge that challenges dominant narratives. With extensive experience in community and youth settings, I am committed to recognising young people's strengths, amplifying their voices through research and creating spaces where their lived experiences drive knowledge, disrupt systems and foster meaningful change.

2. Co-production and Inclusion at the Margins (2) - online

Melissa Stepney (University of Oxford, England), Kanwal Mand (University of Birmingham, England), Roisin Mooney (University of Oxford, England), Anna Lavis (University of Birmingham, England) & Kam Bhui (University of Oxford, England)

Abstract: Co-production and co-creation seek to emphasise the importance of inclusive, empowering, and equitable ways of conducting health research. Creative and adaptive co-creation is often used to develop more emphatic and democratising research processes that place a high value on the experiences and knowledge of research participants, especially young people. However, little research exists on whether this is effective or relevant for vulnerable or marginalised youth, particularly in the UK. Our research focuses on developing methods that listen to marginalised young people in the UK

whilst examining the different co-production and co-creation approaches that other researchers have used to engage marginalised young people.

About the authors:

We are a mixed team with expertise spanning social and medical anthropology, human geography, psychiatry, qualitative data analysis, ethics and participatory methods. The Chimes research group has a number of transdisciplinary research projects dedicated to health inequalities in mental health research using creative and co-production approaches. This research project 'INSiGHTS' is about finding innovative and inclusive ways to do research with young people, families and communities in the UK. It aims to focus on the experiences of people taking part in research and work collaboratively to develop better research processes and methods that can be shared internationally.

3. Navigating Adversity and Enhancing Resilience through Digital Mental Health Resources: A Co-production Study with Marginalised Young People in Ireland (6)

Carmen Kealy (University of Galway, Ireland)

Abstract: Digital mental health tools offer potential to bridge gaps in service access and support, but youth uptake remains inconsistent, with concerns around cultural relevance, privacy, and user trust. This study explores how co-production with marginalised young people can enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and inclusivity of digital mental health resources to navigate adversity and enhance resilience. Framed within the "discover" phase of the Design Council's co-production model, this research is part of Atlantic Futures Research Stream 4, a broader initiative focused on accessible digital and blended mental health supports across the island of Ireland.

Using creative workshops and interviews involving photo-elicitation methods, young people aged 18–25 from marginalised backgrounds shared their experiences with mental health, their needs, and perspectives on digital resources. Findings highlight digital tools as double-edged: while platforms like SpunOut.ie (Irish youth information and support website run by young people, for young people) and mental health apps offer accessible support and psychoeducation, participants voiced concerns about misinformation, privacy, developmental appropriateness, and the impersonal nature of AI. There was strong demand for co-produced, culturally sensitive tools promoting peer connection, emotional regulation, and community-based mental health support.

Participants emphasised the importance of digital tools that reflect diverse identities and intersectional needs. Structural barriers—such as poverty, stigma, and inaccessible services—underscore the need for digital tools to be embedded within an equity-driven mental health infrastructure. Importantly, young people advocated for platforms that enable not just access to services, but participation in shaping them—highlighting the link between mental health, social justice, and youth advocacy.

This study demonstrates that co-production with marginalised youth is essential for creating authentic, engaging, and effective digital mental health supports. The insights generated offer valuable implications for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to leverage digital platforms to support young people navigating adversity and building resilience in an increasingly digital world.

About the author:

Dr Carmen Kealy holds a Doctorate in Sociology from the University of Galway. Her research interests include children, youth and parenting, as well as inequality among marginalised groups. Carmen worked on various collaborative projects relating to e.g., children with disabilities, COVID-19's impact on learning, and STEM education. In 2022, Carmen received one of 17 COVID-19 Global fellowships from the Society for Research on Adolescence. Since 2023, she is leading the Digital Mental Health

Supports for Young People project, which is funded by the Higher Education Authority and a collaboration between the University of Galway, Ireland, and Ulster University, Northern Ireland.

4. **From Passive Viewers to Active Choosers? Children's Autonomy in Consumption Across TV and Digital Platforms in Jordan (56)**

Kholod Saleh Mohd Huneiti (Umm Al Quwain University / UAE)

Abstract: This paper examines how Jordanian children exercise autonomy in their consumption decision-making across both traditional television and emerging digital media platforms. Building on a larger Ph.D. study investigating the "Jordanian Children's Decision-Making Process in Consumption," the research situates children not as passive media recipients but as active social and media participants navigating persuasive environments shaped by advertising, influencers, and algorithmic recommendation systems.

Using a mixed-method design that combines quantitative data from 420 parents in Amman with qualitative insights from child-parent interviews, the study identifies a significant shift in children's agency. While parental mediation remains a central influence, children increasingly assert their preferences based on digital exposure, peer influence, and interactive platform features that encourage choice-making. Findings reveal that digital environments create a form of "selective autonomy," where children perceive themselves as empowered to choose, yet their preferences are subtly shaped by platform logics, targeted advertising, and algorithmic cues.

The paper contributes to international debates on children's rights, freedom of expression, and voice in media-saturated societies by offering a culturally grounded perspective from the Middle East an underrepresented region in child-media scholarship. It argues that digital consumer environments simultaneously expand and constrain children's autonomy, blurring boundaries between genuine choice and commercially driven persuasion.

By integrating media psychology, consumer socialization theory, and emerging research on algorithmic childhood, the study proposes an analytical framework to better understand how children construct agency within hybrid media systems. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening children's informed autonomy through media literacy, parental guidance, and culturally relevant policy interventions.

About the author: is an Assistant Professor of Mass Communication at Umm Al Quwain University, UAE. She holds a Ph.D. in Communication & Media Studies (Public Relations & Advertising) from Eastern Mediterranean University, Cyprus. Her research focuses on media psychology, children's consumer behavior, and digital well-being. Dr. Huneiti has published in SSCI/Scopus-indexed journals such as Children & Society and Kurgu, and has presented at international conferences in Turkey, Canada, and the UK. Her current work examines children's autonomy and algorithmic influence in digital consumption contexts across the MENA region.

Workshop C: LOUD & CLEAR: Zine-Making as Protest, Voice, and Participation

Dr Mar Sanchez (University of Surrey), Prof. Melanie Ramdarshan Bold (University of Glasgow)

Student Assistants: Amy Calleja, Ruby Peresso, Juliette Roux & Sandy Calleja Portelli (RSO)

Visual Artist Online: Julia Bakay

Abstract: Join us for a fun, hands-on workshop where children, young people, and families can discover the power of zines (mini magazines you make yourself) as a way to speak up, get creative, and share what matters most to you.

Rooted in the Seen and Heard project, this session celebrates how zines have been used around the world to amplify voices, tell untold stories, and stand up for change. Together, we'll ask: how can we help young people speak truth to power through art and storytelling?

Using prompts inspired by children's books, protest posters, and our own lives, we'll create bold, expressive mini-zines on topics like identity, belonging, climate justice, censorship, education, or hopes for the future. Whether you're a young activist, a curious parent, or just someone who loves making things, this workshop is for you.

We'll also talk about how zines can be shared in schools, libraries, and communities, as ways to celebrate young voices and challenge the idea that adults always have the final word.

Everyone will leave with their own handmade zine, some exciting ideas to try at home or school, and (we hope!) a renewed belief in the power of creativity, courage, and listening to each other.

No art or writing experience needed: just bring your voice and your imagination. All materials provided. Come ready to cut, collage, write, and make some noise!

Workshop Aims:

1. By the end of the session, participants (children, young people, families, other interested parties) will:
2. Discover what zines are and how they've been used around the world to share stories, raise awareness, and speak up for change.
3. Use art, collage, and writing to explore themes like identity, belonging, climate justice, censorship, and hopes for the future.
4. Think about the power of creativity and storytelling as ways for children and young people to express themselves and take part in conversations that matter.
5. Create their own zines, using prompts inspired by books, protest posters, and lived experiences.
6. Share ideas and inspiration for how zines can travel beyond the workshop - into classrooms, libraries, and communities - to help young voices be seen and heard.

About the workshop moderators:

Mar Sánchez Fernández is a childhood and children's literature researcher at the University of Glasgow who is passionate about crafting and making things with her hands. Mar is interested in how literary and artistic creation by children and young people can teach us about the state of the world, particularly around social justice, education, and gender. During her PhD, she explored the role of children and young people in independent and politicised publishers in Latin America, working with these collectives to handmake books in diverse contexts—from public spaces to schools and prisons—alongside young people affected by inequality and injustice. She has a keen interest in art as protest and catalyst for change. She also works for an NGO as a researcher and advocate for the rights of young women and girls. When she's not working, you can find her engaged in activism fighting for people's right to housing in Scotland and promoting women's rights to engage in cultural and social life through volunteering.

Profs Melanie Ramdarshan Bold is a children's book lover, zines enthusiast, and Professor of Youth Literature and Culture at the University of Glasgow. Her work explores how young people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, engage with reading, writing, and creative culture, with a focus on identity, self-expression, and social change. She is committed to helping young people express themselves through reading, writing, and creative projects: especially zine-making! Mel has run many hands-on zine-making workshops in schools, libraries, and community settings, using zines as a fun and powerful way to explore identity, creativity, and change, and to support youth voice and everyday activism. She has written five books and works closely with schools, publishers, and organisations like CLPE, BookTrust, and The Reading Agency to make children's publishing more inclusive and inspiring for everyone. Whether she's folding paper, talking

to young readers, or researching inclusive book culture, her work centres youth creativity and the belief that stories - and who gets to tell them - matter.

Screening: The Seen and Heard Docu-narrative and Experience Sharing

Discussants: Charlie Cauchi (Independent Artist and Filmmaker), Nicky Parker (Amnesty International Poland), Sita Brahmachari (Amnesty International Author), Sandy Calleja Portelli (Seen and Heard Research Support Officer), Amy Calleja (Student Assistant)

Chair: Dr. Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak

Online Host: Ruby Peresso

Description:

Seen and Heard Docu-Narrative pulls back the curtain on interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral EU initiative where human rights, art, education, and activism converge. This docu-narrative follows a collective of academics, artists, and educators as they co-create the full life cycle of a social movement grounded in one powerful principle: the human right to freedom of expression.

Each episode below shares an inside view of the opportunities and challenges at the heart of co-creating change with young people. Whether through literary workshops, classroom transformations, or film protest pieces, the *Seen and Heard Docu-Narrative* doesn't just document a project—it amplifies a movement, where being truly seen and heard is both a right and a revolutionary act.

Discussant bios:

Charlie Cauchi is a multidisciplinary artist and filmmaker living in Malta. Her work encompasses video, sound, text, archive and built environments. Her practice is a hybrid, amalgamating documentary practices, academic research, and fantastical construction. She holds a BA and an MA in Film Studies from Queen Mary University of London. She is also co-founder of Rosa Kvir, Malta's first dedicated LGBTQI+ gallery and archive.

Nicky Parker is a specialist in children's literature and human rights, who has worked with Amnesty International for over 20 years. She has developed many books and literary projects using a human rights lens, including 'We Are All Born Free: the UDHR in Pictures' (2008), published in 35 languages. With Cheltenham Festivals, she co-created 'Words That Burn' (2016), a spoken word resource for school students to explore and express human rights through poetry. She established the Amnesty CILIP Honour (2016-18), a human rights commendation for books on the Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Medal shortlist. She was lead writer of 'Know Your Rights and Claim Them: A Guide for Youth' (2021), with Angelina Jolie and Professor Geraldine Van Bueren QC and is the author of 'These Rights Are Your Rights: An empowering guide for children everywhere' (2024). From 2016-22 she was Chair of Trustees of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) and is on the steering group of Reflecting Realities, a change-making annual survey of ethnic representation in British children's books. She is a trustee of English PEN.

Sita Brahmachari is an internationally award-winning Children's and YA author whose work is translated into many languages. Since her Waterstone's Award Winning debut novel 'Artichoke Hearts' (2011) Sita's stories have been nominated for the Carnegie Medal and the UKLA Book Award. She has an MA in Arts Education and has worked widely in theatre and education with diverse communities to mentor young voices. Sita co-created and scripted a celebrated theatre production inspired by Shaun Tan's graphic novel 'The Arrival' (2013). Her YA novel 'When Shadows Fall' was shortlisted for the Yoto Carnegie Medal (2023). Her latest novel is 'Phoenix Brothers' (2025). Sita was shortlisted for the Ruth Rendell Literacy Award (2023). She has been Book Trust Writer in Residence, an Amnesty Ambassador and Associate Lecturer in Children's and YA Literature at Goldsmiths University. She is Writer in Residence at Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants.

Sita is a Royal Literary Fellow and a Fellow of The Society of Authors and an Honorary Member of the Youth Libraries Group.

Sandy Calleja Portelli is a Research Support Officer with the Department of English at the University of Malta. She has a Diploma in Social Studies (Gender & Development), a BA (Hons) in English and a MA in English, Culture and the Media. Sandy has experience in working with schools to coordinate storytelling as part of the Culture Pass programme organised by the Malta Arts Council. She was previously involved as a researcher in an Erasmus K2 project led by Esplora Interactive Science Centre in Malta, researching the representation of girls in science in children's literature. Sandy was a member of the organising team of The Child and The Book Conference 2022.

Amy Calleja (she/her) is an MSc. Computer Science and Engineering student at the Technical University of Denmark with a focus on Cybersecurity research. Amy currently serves as the Director for Internal Affairs in Malta's National Youth Council, the Maltese Delegate for the ASEF Youth Leaders Summit & the P&R Marketing Coordinator for the IAESTE Connect Region. With a strong background in youth representation, she was a founding member of Malta's Commonwealth Youth Taskforce and has represented young people at key events like the EU Youth Conference in Alicante and the Council of Europe Training Course on Advocacy for Human Rights and Democracy. Amy also assisted with conducting research and running the mentoring programme for the Seen and Heard Project.

Workshop D: From the Perspective of Educators: Human Rights Education in Schools (closed workshop)

Prof. Kate Coleman (University of Melbourne), **Dr Farriba Schulz** (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

Student assistants: Sarah Farrugia, Cornell Raab, Rebecca Ganado, Juliette Roux

Visual Artist Online: Julia Bakay

Abstract: Nurturing a movement to defend young people's human rights is central to the Seen and Heard project. As part of the conference in Malta, educators from all contexts are invited to come together for a creative workshop on human rights education in schools. This will be an opportunity to connect with colleagues who are engaged with human rights education and to foster a community of practice. Workshop participants will learn with and from each other through creative activities centred on sharing experiences, challenges and aspirations. We hope everyone will leave with new ideas and resources as well as approaches for building solidarity in educators' schools and communities.

Workshop Aims:

1. To build connection and solidarity between educators from different contexts
2. To share experiences and reflect together on human rights education practice
3. To gain ideas and resources for activities and approaches to teaching

To help us prepare the activities, please respond to the following questions:

- What is your role?
- What would you like to take away from the workshop?
- In which way would you like to share your experiences?
- What would interest you the most in terms of respecting children's rights, educating children in the context of and empowering children to claim their rights?

About the workshop moderators:

Profs. Kate Coleman is a neurodivergent artist, teacher educator, and researcher at the University of Melbourne, Australia where she teaches teachers and co-leads SWISP Lab, exploring speculative a/r/tography,

climate justice, and creative activism. Kate's practice centres on transformative pedagogies, participatory methods, and making matter through art, action, and the voices of young people. She believes that a/r/t is inquiry, and that activism is metho-pedagogical.

Dr Farriba Schulz is a Senior Lecturer in the Institute of Education at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Universität Potsdam. She was the Visiting Professor of Primary Education in the Department of German at Technische Universität Dresden, Germany, and worked as a guest lecturer at Freie Universität Berlin. Her main research interest centres on construction of childhoods, (visual) literacy and inclusion, working collaboratively together with schools, libraries, museums, the international literature festival berlin (ilb) and artists. She's worked in the past on several projects that explore issues of diversity and inclusivity working with children's literature, including an international research project with Maureen Maisha Auma and Melanie Ramdarshan Bold. She is a jury member of the GEW literature award "Lesepeter", a member of the advisory board of the circuit conference, The Child and the Book, and co-editor of the book 'Political Changes and Transformations in Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Children's Literature' (2023).

Roundtable 2: Children's Literature and Children's Rights: Intersections of Research, Ethics, Agency, and Advocacy

Prof. Evelyn Arizpe (University of Glasgow), Dr Cristina Correro Iglesias (Nantes University), Prof. Mel Ramdarshan Bold (University of Glasgow), Dr Stine Liv Johanson (Aarhus University), Dr Elizabeth Nelson (University of Glasgow), Dr. Sara Van den Bossche (Tilburg University)

Chair: Dr. Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak

Online Host: Rebecca Ganado

Roundtable description: This panel explores how children's literature can be critically engaged through the lenses of children's rights and human rights. Drawing on diverse scholarly perspectives, we explore how rights-based frameworks inform our research, teaching, and ethical responsibilities as scholars. Our discussion will address the following key questions:

- How do we conceptualize the relationship between children's literature and children's rights in our work?
- How do rights-based approaches influence our selection of texts and analytical methods?
- What does it mean to foreground children's agency and voice in literary analysis?
- What ethical responsibilities do researchers bear when engaging with children's literature through the lens of rights?
- How do we address the political dimensions of children's literature, especially in contexts of conflict, migration, or systemic injustice?
- How do we integrate children's and human rights into our teaching practices?
- Finally, how can research in children's literature contribute to broader societal conversations about justice, equity, and inclusion?

By engaging with these questions, the panel aims to foster a dialogue that highlights the transformative potential of children's literature scholarship and university teaching in advancing rights-based thinking and social justice.

About the panel:

Evelyn Arizpe is Professor of Children's Literature at the School of Education, University of Glasgow. She is the Programme Lead for the Erasmus Mundus programme, "Children's Literature, Media and Cultural Entrepreneurship". Her research examines picturebooks alongside themes of displacement, conflict and peacebuilding. She has been on the jury for the Hans C. Andersen Award (2022 & 2024) and is Past President of the International Research Society on Children's Literature (IRSCL). She is currently external

consultant for the project “Rutas de la palabra y la vida” Regional Project for migrants through reading, writing and orality for CERLALC UNESCO.

Dr Cristina Correro Iglesias holds a PhD in Education, a Master's in research in Language and Literature Teaching, a BA in Philology and a BSc in International Finance and Law. She works at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain), Université de Nantes (France) and she is one of the coordinators of the first Erasmus Mundus Master on Children's Literature, Media and Culture. Her areas of research include children's literature (0-8) and digital literature. Publications and teaching resources developed by Dr. Cristina Correro Iglesias can be found at academia.edu and orcid.org/0000-0002-0934-7858. Her edited volumes include *La formación de lectores literarios en la Educación Infantil* (with N. Real, 2019) and *Digital Literature in Early Childhood. Reading Experiences in Family and School Contexts* (with N. Real, 2015).

Prof. Melanie Ramdarshan Bold is a children's book lover, zines enthusiast, and Professor of Youth Literature and Culture at the University of Glasgow. Her work explores how young people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, engage with reading, writing, and creative culture, with a focus on identity, self-expression, and social change. She is committed to helping young people express themselves through reading, writing, and creative projects: especially zine-making! Mel has run many hands-on zine-making workshops in schools, libraries, and community settings, using zines as a fun and powerful way to explore identity, creativity, and change, and to support youth voice and everyday activism. She has written five books and works closely with schools, publishers, and organisations like CLPE, BookTrust, and The Reading Agency to make children's publishing more inclusive and inspiring for everyone. Whether she's folding paper, talking to young readers, or researching inclusive book culture, her work centres youth creativity and the belief that stories - and who gets to tell them - matter.

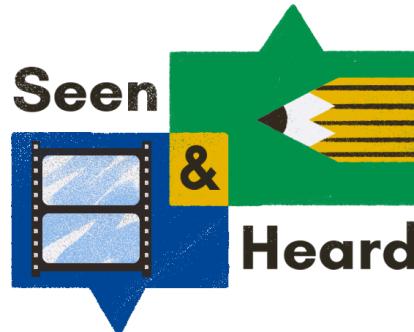
Dr Stine Liv Johnason is Associate Professor at Aarhus University, specializing in children's media use with a focus on play practices. Her research takes a practice-oriented perspective on the role of media and technology in children's everyday lives; particularly how digital and mobile technologies function as communicative tools across social and spatial boundaries. She is especially engaged in the intersection of media and disability, including representation and participation. Johansen collaborates widely with public and private organizations and has held several leadership roles. She teaches and supervises across media studies and international programs on children's literature, media, and culture.

Dr Elizabeth Nelson is a Lecturer of Multimodal Literacies at the University of Glasgow. Her research examines play and new technologies in the hands of children drawing on historical and literary representations of children's play and culture to understand experiences of childhood today. She has published on young people's relationship to digital technologies, historical accounts of play, and creative methodologies in research encounters with children and young people. Her current work focuses on children's everyday culture, post-digital childhoods and understanding co-presence through sharing picturebooks online and off and digital play.

Dr Sara Van den Bossche is Assistant Professor of Youth Cultures and Literatures at Tilburg University (the Netherlands). Her main teaching and research topics are ideology criticism, ethnic-cultural diversity and inclusion, feminism, queer criticism, cognitive criticism, canonisation, and adaptation. Since 2019, she has been teaching in the Erasmus Mundus International Master “Children's Literature, Media, and Cultural Entrepreneurship” (CLMCE). She has co-guest-edited special issues of Children's Literature Association Quarterly and Barnboken. She is the co-author of Routledge Engagements with Children's and Young Adult Literature (2025) and [Searchlights for the Study of Children's Literature] (2025), and author of *Pippi Longstocking, Critically* (forthcoming).



GOVERNMENT
OF MALTA



Project Ref no.: 2023-1-MT01-KA220-HED-000154169

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.



Co-funded by
the European Union

The Seen and Heard

Young People's Voices and Freedom of Expression organising committee would like to extend its sincere thanks to the following sponsors and collaborators for their support in helping us to enrich our cultural programme for our esteemed guests:



CASA
ROCCA
PICCOLA
*Where A Way Of Life
Comes To Life*

