

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of the West of England, Bristol</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 29 - English Language and Literature</p>
<p>Title of case study: Producing and promoting children’s literature: influencing writers, teachers and reluctant readers</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Butler’s work has three strands, each of which has made a substantial impact on readerships and audiences beyond the academy. She has actively promoted children’s literature pedagogy through her publications and her activities in promoting teaching aids arising from her research in the Learning and Teaching of Children’s Literature. Her work on place, history and landscape in children’s literature has been hailed as a practical benefit to working writers, and her research-as-practice has resulted in six novels for children and teenagers, as well as works commissioned and written in order to encourage reluctant teenaged readers, She has actively promoted children’s literature in schools, online and in society generally.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research of Dr Catherine Butler (Senior Lecturer 1993-2012, Associate Professor of English, 2012 to present) embraces a number of related fields, but all are united through their connection to children’s literature.</p> <p>Butler’s conventional academic research centres on questions of place, history and landscape in children’s literature, with a particular emphasis on fantasy literature [R1, R2]. Butler’s work has advanced knowledge through its distinctive combination of textual, cultural and historical analysis, social geography and ecocriticism, and has brought overdue critical attention to numerous important authors (e.g. Diana Wynne Jones, Catherine Fisher, Gillian Cross), as well as advancing the literary profile of children’s literature generally. Her collection on Roald Dahl, co-edited with UWE colleague Dr Ann Alston [R3], is the first ever to appear on this well-known author. As a critic, Butler has argued (amongst other things) that both writing and reading are practices can only be understood in terms of their historical, geographical and cultural contexts, and striven to bring such considerations to the forefront of critical conversations both inside the academy and beyond it.</p> <p>Butler has actively promoted children’s literature pedagogy, through editing <i>Teaching Children’s Fiction</i> [R4], and as Principal Investigator for an EU-funded project on the Learning and Teaching of Children’s Literature in Europe [R5]. This project involved working directly with 27 schools, 127 teachers and 2965 children. The outputs of this project include data and reports relevant to policy makers and schoolteachers, including detailed data on the teaching methods and priorities in the countries studied, analysis of children’s reading habits and preferences, lesson plans to encourage and share best practice, and materials designed at increasing understanding of different European cultures. Amongst other findings, this research demonstrated large differences between children of different nationalities and socio-economic groups, in terms of the amount and type of literature read, access to reading materials, preferred genres, and the extent to which children wished to read books that reflected their own lives. The research also showed the ways that the methods and culture of children’s literature within the school systems of different countries affected these outcomes. As the author of six full-length novels for children and teenagers, as well as shorter works, Butler has made it one of her continuing projects to diagnose and address the disconnect between “critical” and “creative” discourses. This is the subject of her current research as well as of some of her recent peer-reviewed articles, which have argued against the sharp divisions between these discourses and advocated the development of fora and registers to facilitate enable communication and respect between academic and non-academic writers [R6, R7].</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>[R1] Catherine Butler [writing as Charles Butler], <i>Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in the Children’s Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Susan Cooper, and Diana Wynne Jones</i>, Scarecrow Press/ Children’s Literature Association, 2006. i-viii+311pp. Winner of Mythopoeic Scholarship Award, 2009. ISBN 978-0810852426 – Available through UWE</p>

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[R2] Catherine Butler and Hallie O'Donovan, *Reading History in Children's Books*. Basingstoke: Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012. ISBN 978-0230278080

[R3] Ann Alston and Catherine Butler, eds. *Roald Dahl: A New Casebook*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012. ISBN 978-0230283619 <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/17428/> - Available through UWE.

[R4] Catherine Butler [as Charles Butler], *Teaching Children's Fiction*. Edited with introduction and appendices. (Palgrave, 2006), pp.1-5, 189-205. ISBN 978-1403944955

[R5] Catherine Butler et al. *The Learning and Teaching of Children's Literature*. This project (2009-11) was undertaken with the aid of a €175,000 grant from the Comenius sub-programme of EACEA Lifelong Learning Programme for the period 2009-11). The grant was awarded to a consortium of four universities in the UK, Spain, Iceland and Turkey, with UWE, Bristol taking the lead in the project, and Butler being Principal Investigator. Public Report: http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/project_reports/documents/comenius/multilateral/2009/com_mp_5035_89_itcl.pdf/ - Available through UWE. The project was given the high score of 80% by the EACEA's evaluators, and described as 'an excellent project with important and useful products which really can have a positive impact directly at school level for both teachers and children'. The project website ([Link](#)) can be used to access the project report, data sets, CPD packs, and Powerpoint introductions can all be accessed from this site.

[R6] Catherine Butler [as Charles Butler] 'Holiday Work: On Writing for Children and for the Academy.' Commissioned article for *Children's Literature in Education*. 38.3 (Sept. 2007): 163-72. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10583-007-9042-8>

[R7] Catherine Butler, 'Critiquing *Calypso*: Authorial and Academic Bias in the Reading of a Young Adult Novel' *Children's Literature in Education* (2012) 44: 264-279, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10583-012-9189-9>.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words, 788 as drafted)

Butler's work has a strong international dimension. Her 2009-11 EACEA-funded project involved addressing audiences in Spain, Iceland and Turkey, including the Turkish Board of Education, for whom she also ran a number of workshops in October 2010 that fed into the formulation of public education policy in Turkey. The project website is a permanent site from which to access the project report and data. Just as important as the series of downloadable Continuing Professional Development packs designed to spread best teaching practice in evidence-based teaching of children's literature, and the dissemination events in all four participating countries, organized in participating countries to engage working teachers with the research and its applications. (Typical feedback from teachers included: "As an experienced teacher, this workshop was very useful and gave me lots of ideas to develop in school".)[S10] This was a bottom-up project, involving focus-group discussions with over 2,000 pupils and 240 teachers in the four participating countries, and exemplifies Butler's marriage of theoretical and pragmatic perspectives. The same applies to Butler's volume *Reading History in Children's Books* (Palgrave, 2012), a contribution to current debates about multidisciplinary history teaching within schools, in which 'conventional' literary analysis is applied to classroom practice and the National Curriculum. She has been interviewed about the latter project for the BBC History Magazine podcast (100,000-150,000 downloads [S5], and has written on its applications for the teachers' journal *Primary History* (Nov. 2013).

Butler has frequently addressed semi/non-academic audiences, not least from continental Europe. For example, in November 2012 she was invited to take part in a forum on Children's and Young Adult Literature as part of the International Istanbul Book Fair, organized by the Turkish Publishers Association, while earlier in 2012 was hired by the Danish Cultural Agency, to run a day-school at Oxford University with Danish high school teachers. In March 2013 she was invited to write for the French magazine *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, aimed primarily at booksellers, teachers, and librarians.

The international aspect of her work supplements Butler's advocacy for children's literature and contribution to the field at home. She has been an invited guest of the British Science Fiction Association (2010) and of Eastercon (2011). She has frequently visited schools as a guest author,

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encouraging reading and running workshops with pupils. She writes a popular blog and is a regular contributor to “An Awfully Big Blog Adventure” a community blog maintained by professional children’s writers, where her entries can garner over 1000 page views. Their influence on practising children’s authors is evidenced by the fact that they (amongst other plaudits) have been called works of “genius” by the award-winning children’s writer Meg Rosoff [S7]. She has been a “talking head” and consultant for programmes on children’s literature topics on national and local radio [S6]. In 2009 she was a member of the panel to select the Children’s Laureate, a significant appointment in setting the tone and the public face of children’s literature within the UK.

The impact of Butler’s work on children’s literature can be measured by the numerous references to her writings, not only within academia but in journals such as the children’s book magazine *Armadillo*, and teachers’ journals such as *NWE News*, *Primary History* and *School Library Journal*, which wrote of *Four British Fantasists*:

This important title should not be limited to academic libraries supporting graduate and undergraduate children’s literature courses. It belongs in any library that serves a liberal-arts curriculum. It is highly readable, commandingly intelligent, and refreshingly jargon-free. A seminal work of criticism. [S1]

A notable strength of Butler’s work is that she has established lines of communication between academia and the wider community of readers and writers. In 2009 she co-organized a two-day conference devoted to the writer Diana Wynne Jones, which attracted speakers from 14 countries and four continents and catered to Jones’s fan-base as well as an academic audience. The majority of those attending (and around half those giving papers) at the conference were not affiliated to any academic institution, and the event was notable for the fruitful interaction that took place between academia and fandom, and the widely-articulated sense that different kinds of expertise were here being brought to bear on each other in a productive and unusual way that promoted mutual learning and respect between people of different cultures and backgrounds. The conference drew attention from the national press [S2].

Butler has contributed to several publications that have achieved this kind of “crossover” audience, for example an introduction and interview for a collection of Diana Wynne Jones’s speeches and essays published by the children’s publisher David Fickling [S3]; and work for the Journal of the British Science Fiction Association, *Vector* [S4], all of which have promoted understanding and communication across the academic/non-academic divide.

Butler’s research-as-practice as a fiction writer has given pleasure to many and has also effectively promoted literacy, not least in her work with the publisher Barrington Stoke, which specializes in producing books for reluctant readers. Her two volumes of fiction designed for this market continue to sell approximately 1,000 copies per year. [S9]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] *School Library Journal*, 1 Oct 2006. – **Available through UWE.**

[S2] “A Fantastic Weekend with Diana Wynne Jones”, Imogen Russell Williams 9 July 2009. – **Available through UWE.** [Link](#)

[S3] “Reflecting on *Reflections*’ and ‘A Conversation with Diana Wynne Jones’, in Diana Wynne Jones, *Reflections* (David Fickling, 2012). ix-xviii, 255-79 – **Available through UWE.**

[S4] “Diana Wynne Jones: A BSFA Discussion.” Transcribed by Shana Worthen. *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association*. 268 (Autumn 2011): 21-26. – **Available through UWE.**

[S5] Interviewed for the BBC History Magazine Podcast (published 4 October, 2012) - **Available through UWE.** [Link](#)

[S6] *The Return to Brisingamen*. Introduced by John Waite. BBC Radio 4. 24 March 2009.

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[Link](#)(See sixth entry on this page.) BBC Radio Bristol on Children's Literature and the Southwest, 30 May 2012. – **Available through UWE.**

[S7] *An Awfully Big Blog Adventure.*, "Recommending Books for Grown-Ups" [Link](#) (endorsement by children's writer Meg Rosoff in the comments at the bottom) – **Available through UWE.**

[S8] 'La Fantasy pour la jeunesse dans les îles britanniques.' *La Revue des Livres Pour Enfants* (Feb 2013): 104-109 – **Available through UWE.**

[S9] Feedback from Barrington Stoke "consultants" (reluctant teenage readers) for *Kiss of Death* (2007) – **Available through UWE.**

[S10] Feedback from participant at 'Learning and Teaching Children's Literature in Europe' dissemination event – **Available through UWE.**