

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Edge Hill University
Unit of Assessment: 36 - Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management
Title of case study: <i>The Unforgotten Coat</i> . visual storytelling to engage and give voice to disenfranchised and disadvantaged groups in society, and influence literacy practice.
1. Summary of the impact <i>The Unforgotten Coat</i> , winner of the 2012 <i>Guardian</i> Children's Fiction Prize and German Children's Book Award 2013, has been praised for highlighting the plight of young asylum seekers. It remains a core text for the Reader Organisation (RO) reading groups in the community and in prison. It was launched on World Book Day 2011, distributed to approximately 50,000 disenfranchised children and has been translated into several languages, receiving worldwide acclaim. The subject matter, and creative process underpinning it, fed directly into important learning initiatives and materials for schools in the North West, workshops at Liverpool's Bluecoat Arts Centre and for Merseyside's the Haven Project. The international reach of the book is reflected in its victory in the aforementioned <i>Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis</i> 2013 and a further nomination for the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) for the prestigious 2014 IBBY international Honours List in Mexico 2014, a nomination based on its highlighting of the lives of today's young asylum seekers.
2. Underpinning research The practice-led research was conducted in 2010 by Carl Hunter and Clare Heney, Senior Lecturers in the Department of Media, in collaboration with writer Frank Cottrell Boyce. Both Hunter and Heney joined Edge Hill University in November 2008 and have been employed throughout the assessment period. The research underpinning <i>The Unforgotten Coat</i> , which was published in 2011 by Walker Books, examines the performative and affective nature of photographs. Based on prior collaborative research with Cottrell Boyce on <i>Accelerate</i> , a 2009 film that investigated how photography could be used as a methodological approach to explore time and movement, this project draws on theoretical writings by filmmaker Andrej Tarkovsky in <i>Instant Light</i> . This was a collection of Polaroids and reflections on their effects, in which he stated: 'Never try to convey your idea to the audience, it is a thankless and senseless task. Show them life, and they'll find within themselves the means to assess and appreciate it.' Drawing on this approach, Hunter and Heney explored both the way in which Polaroids represent life to people, which they compare to working with actors searching for motivation for their characters, and how the images created can be used in various ways by creators or viewers. In the context of the story, two boys use Polaroids to create a spectacle of a home they cannot remember, reconstructing artificial memories of Mongolia from the sights of Bootle to combat the psychological effects of being displaced persons, and create a self-defence mechanism and a means to fit in with their new surroundings. They show their school peers an illusory life, a spectacle that these children, especially Julie, the narrator, can assess and appreciate. The choice of Polaroid photography, by its very nature a fragile medium, underlines the fragility of this survival strategy. The additional use of Photoshop lends aesthetic emphasis to the impossibility of inhabiting a world they do not remember, by accentuating the illusory nature of the photographs. Importantly, this was a collaborative project between the writer and the researchers. Unlike traditional illustrative photographs, the original photographs were integral to the development process; the author often responded to the images in developing the narrative: 'The whole climax [...] came from trying to make use of their pictures' (Factual Statement 1). Word and image thus sit in a complex relationship of traditional and reverse ekphrasis, stimulating and responding to each other. Investigating Tarkovsky's theory of photographs as metaphors rather than symbols, the Polaroids provide a significant visual stimulus to complement the verbal, thus creating a narrative of greater accessibility for an audience not used to engaging with verbal stories on this topic, as well as for migrants whose experiences mirror those recounted in the book. The research process was underpinned by discussion with the Reader Organisation about how to engage more effectively with people with little or no experience in reading. Its success in finding an audience, being critically acclaimed and translated into several different languages, suggests that the creative interplay between text and photograph that underpins its content is rich, and has driven

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the impact, as testified by a series of workshops run in collaboration with the Haven Project and Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust.

The insights gained in the research are that:

1. Stories developed from visual material allow for greater access to verbal narratives for groups with little experience of reading stories
2. The specific and unique texture of the narrative helped convey the refugee experience more accessibly to wide audiences
3. Such approaches to narrative help displaced individuals understand their situation and represent their problems to a wider audience, thus contributing to public debates around migration.

These aspects explain the Reader Organisation's use of the book, and the Haven Project/Alder Hey NHS Trust's deployment of photographs in therapeutic storytelling workshops (see Factual Statement 2).

The inspiration for the story was derived from the ongoing research Hunter and Heney have undertaken in giving voice to the disenfranchised since researching the experience of refugees in the UK for their fundraising film for the Family Refugee Support Project. It led in turn to Channel 4 commissioning a documentary series entitled *Putting Down Roots* as part of the *3-Minute Wonder* series, exploring the experiences of refugees on an allotment project in Liverpool and Hunter's involvement with the Merseyside community group "Art in Action". The real-life stories were adapted by Hunter and Cottrell Boyce into the full-length feature film *Grow Your Own* (2007).

3. References to the research

As practice-led research, there is a portfolio of activity associated with the book and the methodology used, including:

1. Authored Book: Frank Cottrell Boyce, photographs by Carl Hunter and Clare Heney *The Unforgotten Coat* (2011), London: Walker Books.
2. Carl Hunter and Clare Heney, 'Representing the Migrant Experience in *The Unforgotten Coat*', at the *Ethnicity, Race and Racism Annual Symposium*, on 12 June 2012 - discussion of the creative processes for the book, as well as outlining the original research that was driven by work for the Family Refugee Support Project, which fed into the Channel 4-commissioned *Putting Down Roots* and the BBC-produced feature film *Grow Your Own*.
3. Carl Hunter and Clare Heney, *PaR Portfolio*, containing notebooks, photographs, workshop plan and other materials relating to their work on *The Unforgotten Coat*.
4. Carl Hunter and Clare Heney, Workshop discussion at The Bluecoat Centre as part of the *Read 2011* event, which explored the use of photographs to tell stories, instil self-confidence and aid social integration.
5. Carl Hunter and Clare Heney, *Accelerate* (2009) – research deploys still photographs in adapting text by Frank Cottrell Boyce. <http://vimeo.com/6863015>

Items 1 and 3 available to panel members on request.

The Unforgotten Coat: 2013 *Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis* Jury citation praises the work for its highly original aesthetic, combining text and photograph to convincing and thought-provoking effect, in relaying 'an extraordinary story' about the plight of young asylum seekers, and 'the opportunities and difficulties of intercultural understanding'.

4. Details of the impact

Published by Walker Books, the only book ever commissioned by the Reader Organisation and the third chosen for their shared read, *The Unforgotten Coat* has been distributed throughout the UK and across the world including Australia, Hong Kong, Bulgaria and Denmark. The book has been translated into several languages, nominated for several prizes, winning *The Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize in 2012, the *German Children's Book Awards* in 2013, and nominations for the Costa Children's Book Award in 2011 and the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) for the prestigious 2014 IBBY international Honours List in Mexico 2014. The book was used by three projects with three beneficiaries of transformational impact:

- The organisations involved
- The therapists and community workers
- The readers.

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The book's worldwide distribution and awards demonstrate its global reach. The Good Read website offers further evidence of the book's impact on a general international readership, with testimony from teacher trainees *inter alia*, and observations about the significant, and integral, role of the photography, and the book's reception and use as a tool for stimulating creativity and debate, especially in the school setting. (Other sources 4-7)

The research, and a programme of *impact* activities which followed, aimed to:

- Improve literacy and reading skills
- Foster public engagement with creative storytelling through photography
- Highlight the plight and experience of young asylum seekers.

Beneficiary 1: The Reader Organisation – literacy and reading (Corroboration: Factual statement 1; Other sources 1-2)

The Reader Organisation, a Liverpool-based charity, advocates the benefits of communal reading and being read to, to promote self-esteem, self-confidence and wellbeing. They have used the book widely with their *Get Into Reading* groups across the UK, which bring people together in weekly read aloud groups. Stories and poems are listened to, thoughts and experiences are shared, and social connections are made. They work in mental health settings, prisons, and with looked-after children. *The Unforgotten Coat* was central to RO's *Our Read* project in 2011, in conjunction with the Bluecoat Arts Centre in Liverpool. On 3 March 2011, 50,000 free copies of the book were given away on World Book Day. That day, Hunter and Heney took 25 young people from Merseyside, all members of *Get Into Reading* projects, to London on the 'Story Train' for the book's premiere. They gave a presentation to schoolchildren in the British Library, and with Cottrell Boyce, they explained why and how the photography was important to the creation of the narrative. In the Bluecoat Arts Centre in Liverpool on the same day, schoolchildren from the *Get Into Reading* group, members of the public, and staff from the Bluecoat and the Reader Organisation participated in four readings throughout the day. Evidence supplied underlines the book's benefit and impact, e.g. a secondary teacher in Toxteth used the book with Year 7s, describing how the pupils 'had lots to say about the photographs and how they related to the story'. It stimulated 'a successful debate' where the group, 'who usually talk over each other and rarely enter into proper discussion, each started asking other group members their opinions and listening to their answers'. Project workers for children on the story train offered examples of how the book stimulated reading. One foster carer reported: 'B. read the book. I'm amazed. He's never read a book before [...] but this one he took to show everyone at [an alternative education programme] and finished it by himself'. (Other Source 2, Section 5).

Beneficiary 2: Haven Project/Alder Hey Children's NHS Trust – therapeutic storytelling (Corroboration: Factual Statements 1-2; Other sources 1)

In 2011, the book was used by Liverpool's arm of the UK-wide Haven Project, established by the charity Action for Children in Conflict (AfCiC) that provides psychological, emotional and educational support to the survivors of conflict. The Haven Project, AfCiC's UK programme, worked specifically with young asylum seekers and refugees in selected British schools, including Liverpool. Some refugee children are at risk of developing mental health difficulties due to their experiences. They may have experienced bereavement, be coping with harsh memories, separation and loss, and have experienced traumatic events such as seeing people killed or injured.

Working with a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service psychotherapist (Alder Hey Children's NHS Trust), Hunter and Heney ran a workshop on photo-elicitation (using photographs to stimulate stories) with 15 refugee children and those with mental health problems in Toxteth. Drawing on the same creative process as the book, the workshop focused on the children taking three Polaroids and weaving stories from them. The Alder Hey Children's hospital's evaluation report states: 'All participants [in the workshop] said they would like to do more photography in the future. Scores on the 10-point likert scale asking how happy or sad each child felt after the session yielded an average of 9.5' (p. 8). In conclusion, it states: '[...] The evidence here provided further attests to the positive impact these activities have upon children and young people who otherwise face barriers to becoming involved in these types of communal activities. As an essential engagement and wellbeing activity the evidence indicates that the use of group workshops promoting positive physical and mental wellbeing should remain central to the provision of community-based services more broadly' (p.11). (Other Source 1, Section 5).

**Beneficiary 3: *The Bluecoat Arts Centre* – educational; storytelling; creativity
 (Corroboration: Other source 3)**

The Bluecoat ran a series of workshop events for schoolteachers and pupils through the summer term of 2011, producing a Teachers' Pack derived specifically from the book replete with learning activities predicated on KS2 and KS3 curriculum links to English (Writing), History, Geography and R.E. One of the proposed exercises, called 'Map Your Imagined World', involved the use of photographs as the inspiration for their own creative projects. Hunter and Heney participated in one of the events, giving a presentation on their role in the production of the book. Using the learning activities, pupils benefited from the encouragement to engage creatively with their environment by means of photography and using their imagination as the starting point for the creative process, mirroring the same process undertaken by the researchers in producing the Polaroids. Additionally, the activities raised the children's awareness of debates about migration.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Factual Statements

1. Author (*The Unforgotten Coat*) – addresses the process of collaboration in the creation of *The Unforgotten Coat*.
2. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service psychotherapist, The Haven Project/ Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust – addresses use of process applied in the underpinning research to design and deliver photo-elicitation workshops with children (refugee children and children with mental/emotional health problems).

Other Sources

All available on request.

1. Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust evaluation report into impact of *The Unforgotten Coat workshops* for the Haven Project.
2. The Reader Organisation (charitable social enterprise working to connect people with literature through shared reading) – *The Unforgotten Coat* feedback and activity reporting.
3. The Bluecoat Arts Centre teachers' packs and activities based on *The Unforgotten Coat*.
4. Good Reads reviews. Available at: <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10844367-the-unforgotten-coat> . [Accessed 22/11/13]. Copies of reviews up to August 2013 available on request.
5. *Guardian* Children's Critics reviews. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2012/oct/24/the-unforgotten-coat-frank-cottrell-boyce-guardian-young-critics-awards-reviews> [Accessed 22/11/13].
6. Sales figures, Walker Books.
7. Jury citation, *Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis* 2013.