

MEDIA RELEASE

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Experts debate how languages shape children's lives at special Edinburgh International Book Festival event

A special Children in Europe event at this year's Edinburgh International Book Festival will discuss how languages impact on the lives of children and young people.

In My Own Words, to be held on Tuesday 14 August at 5.30pm, will be a lively and provocative debate on how services for young children are responding to an increasingly multilingual society.

The multilingual panel will include Scottish Gaelic folklorist and singer Margaret Bennett, French writer and journalist Francois Chignac and Irish writer and broadcaster Manchan Magan.

The panel will discuss whether our encounters with languages help shape our lives and how we can create language friendly environments for children.

The event is a unique chance to hear from international language experts about how best to support identity and diversity in the early years — and about the benefits of encouraging the use of indigenous languages in increasingly multilingual classroom environments.

Bronwen Cohen, publisher of Children in Europe, said: "Language promotion policies are seldom aimed at young children, despite the fact that it's precisely this age group that is most open to different languages."

"From an early age young children should be encouraged to learn from and absorb linguistic diversity around them; this is a key issue to be addressed at the event."

Confirmed attendees include Jenny Dawe, leader, City of Edinburgh Council, Kathleen Marshall, Scotland's commissioner for children and young people, and Janine Hunt, programme manager, the Big Lottery Fund.

In My Own Words, 14 August 2007, 5.30pm (until 6.30pm), at the RBS Children's Theatre, Charlotte Square, Edinburgh

Tickets available for £3.50.

To book visit www.edbookfest.co.uk

or call the Book Festival box office on 0845 373 5888

For more information, contact:

Chris Small (until 5.30pm, Thursday 9th August)
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Lynn Gilmour (Monday 13th and Tuesday 14th August)
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Notes for editors:

The panel at *In My Own Words* will be:

Chair: Professor Sir Neil MacCormick

Scotland: Margaret Bennett is a prize-winning author and has published several books. She has sung at folk festivals and concerts worldwide and, as one of the world's foremost authorities on Scottish Folklore, features in several films, TV documentaries and on radio. Margaret has an MA in Folklore and a PhD in Ethnology and currently holds an honorary Research Fellowship at the University of Glasgow School of Scottish and Celtic Studies. She is interested in encouraging young people to learn through the exploration of culture and tradition. Songs, storytelling, music-making and dance form an essential part of this.

France: François Chignac is author of *Langues étrangères* the story of a young French boy who discovers the different levels of language - idiomatic, symbolic, geopolitical - through the relationship between his father and the Scottish girlfriend of his father. Through his curiosity, the young boy questions the world and is initiated in the art of distinguishing the difference between people. François is also News Editor, Producer and Journalist for the multilingual TV news channel EuroNews.

Ireland: Manchán Magan is writer, traveler and documentary maker. His programmes exploring the people and cultures of China, the Middle East, India, Greenland, South & North America, Ireland and Eastern Europe (for TG4, Irish language station) have been sold around the world. His first English book was the acclaimed, *Angles and Rabies, a journey through the America* (Brandon, 2006.) In September 2007 Brandon will publish *Manchán's Travel: a journey through India*.

His previous books *Manchán ar Seachrán san Ind* (1998) and *Baba-ji & TnaG* (2005) were the first modern Irish-language travelogues.

He is currently filming the second series of his controversial *No Béarla* TV series, in which he attempts to travel around Ireland using only Irish.

When not writing he tends his oak wood in Co Westmeath.

Children in Europe: Dr Bronwen Cohen OBE is Chief Executive of Children in Scotland, Scotland's national agency for voluntary and statutory organisations working with children, young people and their families. She was for ten years the UK member of the European Commission's Childcare Network and has been extensively involved in research at an EU level. She is a Visiting Professor at the Institute of Education, University of London and the author of a number of publications. She is a member of the Scottish Executive's Expert Reference Group on Children's Services and the Child Health Support group.

- Children in Europe is a magazine for everyone working with and for children from 0-10 and those interested in children's issues. It is published simultaneously in eight languages by a network of national magazines. It aims to provide a forum for ideas, practice and information and contribute to the development of policy and practice and European and national levels. It is published in the UK by Children in Scotland, the national agency for voluntary, statutory, and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland, with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.
- Issue 12 of Children in Europe, *In My Own Words: services for children in a multilingual society*, is available to buy. Visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk/cie to order a copy, or email npay@childreninscotland.org.uk for more information.
- *Equal Opportunities for All*, issue 13 of Children in Europe, is published next month
- Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisation and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies,

services and provision are of the best possible quality and able to meet the demands of a diverse society. For further information visit www.childreninscotland.org.uk