

Institution: University of Cambridge		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Literature and Language		
Title of case study: Young Writers, Student Critics: Enhancing education and inclusion		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: January 2013 - December 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Kasia Boddy	Reader in American Literature	October 2012 – present
Sarah Dillon	Reader in Literature and the Public Humanities	April 2014 – present
Alex Houen	Senior Lecturer in Modern Literature	September 2009 - present
Louise Joy	Senior College Lecturer	September 2006- present
Helen Thaventhiran	College Lecturer, and then (as of 2016) University Lecturer in post-1830 Literature	April 2013 - present
Claire Wilkinson	College Lecturer University Lecturer	January 2018 - present
Ross Wilson	University Lecturer in Criticism	September 2013 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: October 2014 - July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Since 2016 the Faculty of English at Cambridge has collaborated with the BBC on the National Short Story Award (NSSA), and with the literary charity First Story on the Young Writers' Award (YWA). The Faculty's research expertise in short fiction and critical practice enhanced the reach and impact of NSSA and YWA (1,441 entrants to the latter in 2018-19), and enabled the creation and development of the Student Critics' Award (SCA). Through festivals, workshops and tailored electronic resources, the SCA and another follow-up project, the Cambridge Festival of Reading and Writing (CFRW), supported social inclusion in reading and critical thinking, and enabled significant impact on educational attainment, reaching more than 50 schools.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Colleagues in the Faculty of English at Cambridge have strong collective research expertise in the field of short fiction, and in the history, theory, and practice of literary criticism. Their research into short fiction attends to its nature, value, and importance, and in particular its</p>		

history and relationship to more dominant literary forms. In this case study, this focus combines with the Faculty's special research interest in the emergence and development of close reading as a critical and pedagogical practice. Boddy, Dillon, Houen, Joy, Wilkinson, Thaventhiran, and Wilson, who have participated in the Impact activities described in Section 4, have published on a range of key authors and related issues.

Kasia Boddy published in 2013 a detailed exploration of David Foster Wallace's first collection of short stories that discusses his engagement with the literary trends of the day (minimalism, dirty realism, yuppie fiction) and with the creative writing workshop culture in which he was educated [R1]. She has also discussed the short story anthology, particularly in the 1930s, as the form which best expressed (and encapsulated) American multiculturalism [R2]. Sarah Dillon's work on contemporary author Maggie Gee demonstrates how close reading Gee's short fiction, in particular attending to the changing significance of the title word of the collection *Blue* (2006), provides access to the key themes and concerns that manifest across her large body of long fiction [R3]. Claire Wilkinson's research on Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* includes discussion of the short story 'Laughing Annie', focusing in particular on the relationship between the story's structure and new economic forms [R4].

Wilson has researched theories of reading and critical practice [R5], and has contributed, with Thaventhiran, to Houen's edited collection *Affect and Literature* (2020). This project studies the experience of reading and how that experience informs the multiple practices of literary criticism [R6]. Thaventhiran's chapter explores the status of sincerity and the tactics of reading with fake feeling in the history of criticism in the twentieth-century. Wilson's contribution explores the formation of affect in capitalist societies and its function as a critical force. Thaventhiran's monograph, *Radical Empiricists: Five Modernist Close Readers* (2015), presents a new history of close reading criticism in its foundational years [R7]. Part I, 'How to Read', pays detailed attention to how critical authority, style and influence operates; Part II, 'How not to Read', revisits some tenacious orthodoxies about what critics can and cannot do. Louise Joy's *Literature's Children: The Critical Child and the Art of Idealisation* (2019) discusses pedagogy, close reading, and the child's emergence as a critic, articulating the relationship between reading and criticism in the experience of child readers and child critics – the latter a category that Joy innovatively articulates and defends [R8].

These colleagues' research into both the short story as a form for close reading, and the emergence of criticism out of the experience of reading, has thus been able to inform the experience of students – and their teachers – at a crucial juncture in their own development as fully reflective critical readers. Recognition of this expertise in the Faculty brought the collaboration with the BBC and First Story into being; these specialisms have underpinned the partnership throughout; and ongoing research in this area has enabled the impacts which have been catalysed by the partnership.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1.** Boddy, Kasia, 'Response is Good: Girl with Curious Hair in Context', in *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, eds. Stephen J. Burn and Marshall Boswell (Palgrave, 2013), pp. 23-41, ISBN: 9780230338111
- R2.** Boddy, Kasia, 'Variety in Unity, Unity in Variety: The Liminal Space of the American Short Story Anthology', in *Liminality and the Short Story: Boundary Crossings in American, Canadian, and British Writing*, eds. Jochem Achilles and Ina Bergmann (Routledge, 2015), pp. 145-56, ISBN: 9781317812456
- R3.** Dillon, Sarah, 'Beyond the Blue: The Sorrowful Joy of Gee', with Caroline Edwards, in *Maggie Gee: Critical Essays*, ed. Sarah Dillon and Caroline Edwards (Canterbury: Glyphi, 2015), pp. 1-29, ISBN: 9781780240336
- R4.** Wilkinson, C. L., 'The Empty Centre of Conrad's *Nostromo*: A New Economic Reading', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 47 (2018), 201-21. <https://doi.org/10.1093/camqtly/bfy018>
- R5.** Wilson, Ross, 'Reading Habits', *Thinking Verse*, 4:2 (2014), ISSN: 2049-1166 http://www.thinkingverse.org/issue04b/Wilson_ReadingHabits.pdf

- R6.** Houen, Alex, ed., *Affect and Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), which includes H. Thaventhiran, 'Feelings under the microscope', pp. 83-99 and Ross Wilson, "'We Manufacture Fun': Capital and the Production of Affect", pp. 100-115. ISBN: 1108424511
- R7.** Thaventhiran, Helen, *Radical Empiricists: Five Modernist Close Readers* (Oxford University Press, 2015), ISBN: 9780198713425
- R8.** Joy, Louise, *Literature's Children: The Critical Child and the Art of Idealisation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), ISBN: 9781472577191

These are all scholarly publications that have been through peer-review and editorial processes at journals or academic presses. They include two major monographs (R7, R8), essays in a ground-breaking essay collection (R6), and articles and chapters making significant interventions in their fields (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

This research has led to close collaborations between institutions and schools, leading to impact on education, social inclusion, creativity and culture, with beneficiaries including students, teachers, and young creative writers. It emerges from a collaboration with the BBC initiated by Dillon, to which Boddy, Houen, Joy, Thaventhiran, Wilkinson and Wilson contributed pedagogical material and online video resources drawing on their research expertise, and in the case of Wilkinson, the organization and delivery of new events as detailed below. In particular, the Student Critics' Award (SCA), which started in 2018, has been an innovative and successful 'experiential educational project' [E1] (p. 12), energised by research on the experience of close reading. It encourages students to read literature critically and to build confidence through the wider application of critical thinking.

In 2014-16, Sarah Dillon developed a series of 'close reading' segments for BBC Radio 4's flagship literature programme 'Open Book'. These examples of intense critical attention in practice ran for two seasons with an average audience of almost 1,000,000 listeners weekly across the UK [E2]. As a result, in Summer 2016, the Head of Books at BBC Radio 4 worked with Dillon to make the Faculty of English, and the wider University of Cambridge, the BBC's new partner for the NSSA, which included collaboration with the literary charity First Story on the YWA and SCA [E2]. Dillon's 'particular specialized knowledge of the genre and of contemporary writing was key to her involvement and her overview and understanding... [was] vital to the partnership' [E2]. The three-year partnership (2017-20) between the BBC and University of Cambridge has now been renewed for a further three years [E2] (p. 4).

Key events included the First Story Young Writers' Festival, held at the University of Cambridge in September 2018 and December 2019. In September 2018, the festival brought over 400 young writers and their teachers, 'from schools in areas that are economically and culturally deprived across England from Lancaster to Hull to Leicester to East London', to Cambridge for a day's celebration of creative writing [E1] (p. 17); a second festival followed in December 2019 [E3] (p. 13).

Impact on education and social inclusion

Involving 900 sixth-form students, their teachers and librarians, from more than 50 schools and colleges in 2018 and 2019 [E1, p. 12 and E3, p. 24], the SCA shadows the NSSA. Students are given the opportunity to read, listen to, discuss and critique the five shortlisted stories, making use of teaching resources designed to convey Faculty members' research, both into the short story form and into the history and experience of close reading, in a form suitable for students aged 14-18. These include creative cross-curricular activity ideas, films, and podcasts, and the BBC's bespoke discussion guide for the shortlisted stories. Dillon led on 'a guide to how to read better for young people, which the UL [University Library] and the Faculty also contributed to with ideas and resources' [E2]. This guide is now an 'invaluable

online resource [...] available to all secondary schools across the UK and [...] disseminated to those schools that take part officially in the Student Critics Award' [E2].

The diverse schools from across the UK that participated in the SCA included a college which prepared 18 year-olds on a range of academic pathways to re-sit their English GCSE [E1] (p. 12). Some teachers selected 'lower-attaining students and reluctant readers' in order to 'make them feel as if they were "part of a national book club all reading the same thing"' [E1] (p. 12). A teacher comments that participation in the SCA 'was such a tonic for students who have been jaded by public examination and sedated by a summer holiday. It energised them and imbued them with a vigour for academic debate that we are still running off weeks later' [E1] (p. 13). Teachers noted that 'Every student felt it had enhanced their love of literature and given them access to stories and ideas that they would have ignored otherwise' [E3] (p. 25).

The impact of the partnership has been furthered through CFRW, three twelve-month long widening participation projects (August 2018-July 2019; August 2019-July 2020; continuing August 2020-July 2021) that work to improve attainment and engagement in English. It centres on a partnership with the West Norfolk Academies Trust (11 schools) [E4], focusing on schools with low progression to higher education, 'where over 50% students fall into quintiles 1 and 2 of POLAR4 [Participation of Local Areas], and OAC [Output Area Classification] supergroup 8, groups 3a, 3b, 3c, 4b, 7a, 7b and 7c, and subgroups 4a1, 4a2, 4c2 and 6b3' [E6] (p. 12). Led by Wilkinson, these projects used the resources prepared for the SCA, alongside the annual NSSA shortlist, as core materials. An assistant headteacher from a school in an area of the country with lower progression to Higher Education explains the project's function as 'to use University research in English to help students in Years 9 to 13 gain a better understanding of the subject, learn new techniques for analysing literature, and to introduce the students to University level study' [E4].

From feedback on activities in 2018-19 [E5], 95.65% (44) of students agreed that 'this project has taught me things I didn't know before about short stories', and 78.26% (36) of students agreed that 'this project has helped make me a better writer' (p. 3), further commenting 'This has really expanded my knowledge, both of university life and of English and short stories, authors and my own writing' (p. 1). 100% of teachers 'strongly agree' (40%, 2) or 'agree' (60%, 3) that 'my students feel more excited about reading new writing and better equipped to analyse unfamiliar texts' for higher-ability students, and 60% (3) of teachers 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that the same is true for average-ability students (p. 5). Teachers' responses to a range of questions showed >80% of participating students had higher attainment in English (p. 2); all teachers reported increased engagement in English as a curriculum subject as a result of the project (p. 3). The 2018-19 Festival culminated with 67 'highly commended' competition entrants (a small percentage of those who participated through the year) attending a prize event [E5] (p. 1); the 2019-20 Festival of Reading and Writing culminated with a virtual event due to COVID restrictions [E6] (p. 2). A teacher commented 'this project has been a lifesaver for our English teachers during lockdown! [...] We used the complete set of modules with years nine and ten to work on at home' [E6] (p. 8). An assistant headteacher also noted how this change supported 'curriculum learning across our Trust, in particular adapting the research provided to our schools during the Coronavirus lockdown to support our students' remote learning' [E4], and concluded that more generally the pedagogy that they were able to deliver 'using Dr Wilkinson's research has led to concrete benefits for our students, in terms of academic achievement, raising aspirations, and engagement with English Literature' [E4].

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

E1. BBC reports and feedback 2018. 2018 BBC Short Story Awards for First Story and Cambridge University: Highlights Report

E2. Testimonial from BBC books editor about the BBC / Cambridge partnership 19.02.2020

E3. BBC reports and feedback 2019. Evaluation of the 2019 BBC Short Story Awards with First Story and Cambridge University

E4. Testimonial from West Norfolk Academies Trust

E5. Widening Participation Project Evaluation Report 2018-19 (internal report)

E6. Widening Participation Project Evaluation Report 2019-20 (internal report)