

Institution: Bath Spa University		
Unit of Assessment: 27 - English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Writing for Young People: developing empathy in young readers and shaping the discipline, industry and next generation of writers		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 - 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:
Professor David Almond	Professor of Creative Writing	1/9/2012 - 31/8/2020
Dr Lucy Christopher	Reader in Creative Writing	8/10/2004 - present
Professor Julia Green	Professor of Writing for Young People	10/5/1998 - 31/7/2019
Dr Joanna Nadin	Lecturer: Writing for Young People	25/9/2013 - present
Claire Skuse	Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing	1/10/2011 - present
Steve Voake	Senior Lecturer: Writing for Young People	1/10/2006 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Researchers in Bath Spa University's Writing for Young People faculty have demonstrated the importance of writing ambitious, wide-ranging, and experimental literature for young audiences. Their research increases readers' empathy for others and facilitates thoughtful engagement with the world around them – much needed qualities in the current global situation. Reading their books gave young people new understandings of the world, for example young readers had learnt about “facing our fears and having the courage to be different”, as well as gaining the knowledge that “our beautiful world is always around us, we just need to remember to appreciate it” (from a selection of over 45 online reviews, E3). The Writing for Young People research team are acknowledged as a distinctive force in the field of creative writing, disseminating their research through school visits, reading projects and an MA that has seen over 66 debut authors published by mainstream publishers since 2004. They have had a wide-reaching, impact on the publishing industry and a new generation of writers; a leading expert on children's literature stated that their “focus on developing the craft of writing has helped to ensure that writing for children, whether it is literary or commercial, is regarded as a serious genre of fiction” (E6).</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Research by the Writing for Young People team at Bath Spa University has explored the ways in which writing for young people helps to develop empathy and deepens readers' understandings of themselves and their relationship with the world around them. The researchers have also examined how experimentation and innovation across literature for multiple age groups can enrich the field of writing for young people and encourage distinctive voices in a new generation of writers. This research is significant and innovative within the field of creative writing, which often focuses on the effects of writing for adults. The Writing for Young People research team are creating new knowledge about the complexity, richness, and benefits of writing for young people.</p> <p>Empathy and new understandings of the world</p> <p>The research team employ writing as a research methodology, exploring the ways in which fiction can draw young readers into a story, creating empathy between readers and the characters as they navigate complex and challenging events and decisions. The research invites deep learning from the process of empathising with others and asks young people to consider what values and behaviours they would like to integrate into their own lives.</p> <p>Almond, Christopher, Green, Nadin, Skuse and Voake have developed original approaches to narrative and structure in order to engage their readers and to address universal themes and important issues through the specific experiences of young protagonists. In <i>A Song for Ella Grey</i> (2014, R1), Ella's best friend Claire is employed as the narrator. This narrative choice compels the reader to watch with Claire from the side-lines as Ella is caught up in a tragic tale, and draws the reader into Claire's process of grieving, her desire to celebrate Ella's life, and her discovery of how to move forward after the loss of her friend.</p>		

The Killing Woods (2014, R2) employs two narrators, each with different knowledge of events, highlighting the difficulty of knowing the truth about the world and exploring the ways in which an individual's choices, words and actions influence others, while *The Deviants* (2016, R5) makes use of an unreliable narrator who gradually reveals the uncomfortable truths she is trying to hide from herself, the world, and the reader. *To the Edge of the World* (2018, R3) and *The House of Light* (2018) both make use of close narrative, employing the third-person in a carefully controlled manner that makes the reader feel that they are travelling alongside the protagonist and viewing the world from his or her perspective.

The Writing for Young People research team have explored empathy through the process of writing, employing characters' partial knowledge of events and their limited, sometimes unreliable, perspectives in order to compel the reader to ask questions, fill in the gaps and relate to the characters. The discoveries made through this research has deepened the researchers' knowledge of how to draw young readers into a close relationship with the story's narrator. These discoveries provide new knowledge for other practitioners and future generations of writers and are shared through academic papers and attendance at conferences and workshops, including an annual, collaborative research conference with Vermont College of Fine Arts and presentations at Association of Writers and Writing Programs conferences (USA), which included a 2013 session on 'Sex, Love and Censorship in Young Adult Fiction'.

Experimentation, depth and breadth

As well as exploring narrative and empathy, the research team are known for their experimentation with language and form, and their determination to write meaningful works for readers across all age ranges and multiple genres within the discipline of Writing for Young People. Experimentation with language and form by the researchers includes the playful use of language and inclusion of regional dialect, showing that universal themes can be explored through the speech and culture of people in a very specific place and time. Researchers have developed expertise in specific areas, including the evocation of place and experimenting with the role of setting as a key component of storytelling.

Respecting the intelligence of their young readers, researchers have reworked and re-presented classic stories for a new audience. *Storm-wake* (2018, R2) revisits *The Tempest*, merging aspects of Shakespearean theatrical form with conventions of modern YA (Young Adult) novels, while *A Song for Ella Grey* (2014, R1) retells the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice in present day Tyneside, making it accessible and relevant to a young adult audience. Researchers are also introducing classic works of literature to a younger audience, with an illustrated retelling of Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility: Awesomely Austen* (2020, R4).

The research team are committed to exploring the breadth of writing and publishing for young people. They have produced picture books tackling themes of loss and fear (*The Dam*, 2018; *Shadow*, 2019, R2) and series fiction for younger readers (*Flying Fergus* series, 2016-19, R4; *Hooley Higgins* series, 2014, R6; *Maxwell Mutt* series, 2016-2019, R6) that encourage a love of reading for pleasure. They are also inspiring young audiences to gain new knowledge of the world through non-fiction publication (*Alan Turing, A Life Story*, 2020, R4).

Knowledge arising from the research (including research on empathy, setting, voice, narrative, tone, and process) is communicated to Writing for Young People MA students, enriching the work of a new generation of writers. This research is also disseminated through the teaching of language, creative writing and literature in schools and other organisations, as well through festivals and events related to the publishing industry.

3. References to the research

R1 Almond, D (2014) [A Song for Ella Grey](#). Hodder Children's Books. London

R2 Christopher, L (2021) [Facing the Darkness: Developing empathy and maturity in young readers through emotional realism](#) [research portfolio on: *The Killing Woods* (2014); *A Wisp of Wisdom* (2014); *Storm-wake*, (2018); *Three Strikes* (The Darkness) 2018; *Shadow* (2019)]

R3 Green, J (2021) [To the Edge of the World](#). Oxford University Press. Oxford

R4 Nadin, J (2021) [A Question of Identity: Middle Grade writing that catches the heart and lifts the spirits](#) [research portfolio on: *Joe All Alone* (2015); *Flying Fergus* series (2016-2019); *The*

Incredible Billy Wild (2017); *The Worst Class in the World* (2020); *Alan Turing, A Life Story* (2020); *Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility* (Awesomely Austen) (2020)]

R5 Skuse, CJ (2021) [Absurdity and Reality in YA Fiction](#) [research portfolio on: *Monster* (2015); *The Deviants* (2016)]

R6 Voake, S (2021) [Series Fiction: Capturing and holding the attention of emerging readers](#) [research portfolio on: *Hooy Higgins and the Storm* (2014); *Hooy Higgins and the Christmas Crash* (2014); *Maxwell Mutt and Downtown Dogs* series (2016-2019)]

4. Details of the impact

The impact of Bath Spa University Writing for Young People research is demonstrated in three key, interlinked ways: impact on young readers, impact on practitioners and impact on industry.

Developing young readers' capacity for empathy and opening up new perspectives

The team's research has impacted on the richness, range and quality of books available to young people. Experimentation with narrative, language, setting and form have led to numerous prize nominations and awards: Almond won the Andersen SuperPremio (Italy) in 2019 and the Guardian Children's Fiction Award (UK) in 2015 and was nominated every year from 2014-2020 for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award (the world's largest award for children's and young adult literature); over the same period, research team members have received 6 nominations for the UK's most prestigious award - the CILIP Carnegie Medal - amongst many other nominations (E1, p1). Bath Spa University researchers sold 196,411 copies of 40 publications in the UK between August 2013 and December 2020 (using Nielsen Bookscan TCM data, which covers approximately 90% of all UK retail print book purchases) and they have been published in over 20 countries, including Germany, Italy, Australia, the USA, Brazil, Vietnam and China (E1, p1). In encouraging reading for pleasure, researchers have supported young people's learning and opportunities in life, as well as developing their capacity for empathy (E2; E3). Researchers have an "incredible respect" for young audiences (E5, p1), resulting in research that opens up new worlds, new knowledge, new approaches to language and new ways of thinking, as evidenced by readers' responses to their work (E3). The BBC adaptation of Nadin's *Joe All Alone* (published 2015; TV adaptation 2018) reached a wide audience (CBBC reaches c. 500k weekly visitors) and won a BAFTA (2018) and an NI Royal Television Society Award (2018), as well as being nominated for an International Emmy in 2019 (E1, p1; E9). Comments posted on the CBBC website by young viewers showed that they were deeply involved with the storyline and themes, and that they empathised with the problems faced by its characters, with some offering advice on how Joe should deal with his situation (E9, p1).

Psychology research has demonstrated that reading for pleasure develops empathy and can provide readers with significant improvements in their emotional vocabulary and emotional knowledge, leading to positive changes to their real-world helping behaviours (Kumschick et al., 2014; E2, p1-2). An examination of reviews by book bloggers and reading group members demonstrates that young readers have been deeply engaged by the narrative voices and characters in books written by Bath Spa University researchers. One 15-year-old reviewer of *A Song for Ella Grey* described how "I found myself with an ache in my chest as I was reading it, and I realised that I was feeling what the characters did" (E3). Many readers appreciated the complexity of the books' protagonists ("[the] main character is so flawed and complex"; "I sympathised with her so much"; "Something about how he so desperately wanted to believe the story he was telling struck me so hard I literally had to stop and reread the passage a couple of times"; E3, p1) and stated that they had gained new perspectives on the world as a result of their reading ("The story handled really serious and sensitive topics that really got me thinking"; E3, p2). Adults also gained empathic insights from reading these books, reconnecting with their younger selves, and gaining vital understandings of the emotions and issues that challenge young people today. These adult reviewers included teachers and school librarians, whose ability to connect and empathise with young people is fundamental to their jobs. A secondary school teacher wrote of *The Deviants*: "so many incredibly important issues are touched upon in this one book but they are all made to feel so relevant and significant, it was a real reminder of what life can be like for a teenager" (E3, p1).

Faculty members extended the reach of their research through school visits, author residencies and festival appearances, reaching over 20,000 people through in person events, and at least

15,000 more through events broadcast on television, radio and online (E4). Visits ranged from workshops for small groups of children, to class events for 30-60 children, and festival events for audiences of 150-300. During a residency with The Literature Centre (Australia's only centre for young people's reading and writing) Christopher spoke to over 3,000 gifted and talented students across Western Australia in 2014, and another 3,000 in 2018 (E4, p5-6). Meanwhile, Christopher's *The Killing Woods* (2014) is used as a set text on 2 curriculums across 4 secondary schools in Mexico City (reaching approximately 2000 students from 2014 - 2019). A teacher from one of these schools said that the reading program focused around Christopher's books and author visits makes their students "better human beings" (E7, p1). Confirming the importance of author publications and visits, a primary school librarian discussed a 2018 visit from Green, saying: "Her visit definitely had an impact on the children and me, and we talked about her ideas afterwards, and about challenging stereotypes and looking for other new children's books that were doing the same" (E7, p2).

In 2018, The Reading Agency sent 100 packs featuring Green's *To The Edge of the World* (2018) to Chatterbooks reading groups in public and school libraries across the UK (Chatterbooks is the UK's largest network of children's reading groups, with almost 9,000 members). 10 and 11-year-old group members described the book it as "A heart-warming read. Daring and joyful emotions all in one book" and felt that the story was "all about facing our fears and having the courage to be different" (E3, p2). Another of Green's books, *The Wilderness War* (2016), was a key text used by East Ayrshire Council to encourage learning outdoors; a councillor stated that this reading program created: "memorable, meaningful times that help young people enjoy their learning, so it stays with them into adulthood" (E3, p2). One 10-year-old reader said that *The Wilderness War* was "a wonder of a book that teaches you a crucial lesson about the wilderness and is a must read for anyone interested in animals, books and the wilderness" (E3, p2).

Environmental researchers have argued for the importance of narrative in children's books in promoting the development of environmental empathy and environmental literacy, while psychologists have demonstrated that resilience and empathy are very closely related to psychological wellbeing in young people (McKnight, 2010; Vinayak and Judge, 2018; E2, p5-6). A primary school teacher reviewing Green's *The House of Light* said: "the resounding message is one of hope and the belief that individuals can make positive changes and shine their light in a challenging world" (E3, p2).

Impact on practitioners: developing a new generation of writers

Research through experimentation in form, language and subject is disseminated to other practitioners through the MA in Writing for Young People at Bath Spa University, festival workshops, school visits and exhibitions.

The MA in Writing for Young People has impacted on a new generation of writers for young audiences. Alumni published 43 debut books between 2014-2020 and have been nominated for and won many awards (including winning the 2019 Costa Children's Book Award; E1, p1). These writers are appreciative of the impact of faculty research expertise on their own practice and how the research team's strengths have enhanced and added to their own skills as writers: "[my book] would not have been this good, if it were not for the things I've learned on this course"; "The MA was key to my writing journey - from start to end - I would not have written my debut without it"; "I have learned to become a better more conscious writer"; "Getting my Costa Award would not have happened without the MA" (quotes from interviews and feedback from over 30 alumni; E5, p1). An agent for children's writers and illustrators at United Agents stated that some alumni might have got published without the course but "I think they are better writers because of the course" (E6, p6). the publishing director of David Fickling Books sees a "strong pattern" in the work of alumni: "stories that are given a special edge, a truly distinctive and original twist, by singing with the author's own truth" (E6, p1).

Numerous local, national and international events between 2014 and 2020 have established the faculty research as a cornerstone of excellence in writing for young people (E4). *Where Your Wings Were* (2018), an exhibition of Almond's work, was held at Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books in Newcastle (approximately 80,000 visitors a year). A YA writer,

who interviewed Almond in an author event at Seven Stories, said of the exhibition: “the power of stories and the ancient human instinct to tell them flies with you out of this gallery” (E8).

Shaping the industry of Writing for Young People

The research team’s work has been published and sold in large quantities (E1); but it is the experimentation, depth and breadth of their research that has had most impact on the industry. Award-winning books (E1, p1) and research have played an important role in raising public and industry awareness of quality writing for children and young people and its reappraisal as a significant and meaningful form of literature. An annual event, with a panel of recently published alumni, takes place at the Bath Festival of Children’s Literature (Europe’s largest dedicated children’s literature festival). The event involves discussion of MA writing and research on the industry, provides a barometer of writing for young people, and brings together researchers, writers, editors and potential new authors (E4, p13).

Industry experts are clear on the far-reaching impact of Bath Spa University research on the children’s publishing industry and on literary culture. *The Bookseller* writes of Green’s name “being whispered in the halls of... Bologna Children’s Book Fair” (the key global children’s publishing event; over 1,400 exhibitors; approximately 30,000 professional visitors) due to the success of MA graduates (E6, p8). Chicken House publisher and managing director discussed the impact of specific researchers on the industry, saying that Skuse’s writing “has had profound influences on new generations of writers”, while Christopher’s research has helped to change the way publishers look at the YA market “encouraging a more mature level of content with a high level of personal identification with themes and characters” (E6, p5). He also talked about the “unique blend of adventurous content” combined with firm style and structure that makes Bath Spa alumni distinctive (E6, p5). A children’s book expert and director of the Hay Children’s Book Festival noted that alumni’s publications were “extending inclusivity by portraying all kinds of childhood experiences not just the ones that are most likely to attract headlines” (E6, p3), while the publishing director of David Fickling Books confirmed that they were contributing to diversity within the industry and offered “a wider perspective than many others on the market in this area” (E6, p2). An agent for children’s writers and illustrators at United Agents stated that Bath Spa University’s research “is taken extremely seriously in the industry” putting “a mark of quality against them that is rare, or kind of unique” and “has impacted the wider field of children’s literature” (E6, p6).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1 Lists of all eligible publications and major awards and nominations for researchers; UK publication numbers for eligible publications captured using data Nielsen book scan (data covers Total Consumer Market (TCM) data, which covers approximately 90% of all UK retail print book purchases) for the periods of 1 August 2013 - 21 March 2020 and 14 June - 31 December 2020; alumni debut publications (2013-2020)

E2 Empathy Literature Review; document summarising research into empathy and reading fiction, based on academic studies from psychology, education and literary studies.

E3 Report on the impact of faculty work on readers; Summary and dataset of online reviews

E4 Database of faculty events and engagement (including festivals and schools). Numbers for attendees; PDF document, with links to websites of major events.

E5 MA Alumni impact statements; PDF document with summary, interviews and feedback.

E6 Evidence on the impact of research on publishing industry: Industry experts’ testimonials; Bookseller article on Bath Spa MA Graduate Success 26/4/19.

E7 Testimonials stating the importance of researchers’ books and author visits in schools (2014-2019): teacher, Mexico; primary school librarian, UK.

E8 Response to exhibition of David Almond’s work at Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children’s Books: *Literary Treasure: David Almond's 'Where Your Wings Were' June 2018.*

E9 *Joe All Alone*: evidence relating to awards and impact on young viewers.