

Institution: University of Bolton		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Accessing Literature: widening cultural participation and improving mental health awareness through theatre and poetry		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: Jan 2014-Sept 2018		
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:
Mary Cooper	Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing	03.04.2002 - 06.10.2017
Ed Jones (Ed Edwards)	Lecturer in Creative Writing	06.04.14 - present
Ben Wilkinson	Lecturer in Creative Writing	18.07.16 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2014 - December 2018		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact This study outlines the benefit to new audiences and the broader social and cultural impact of three aligned projects: <i>The Political History of Smack and Crack</i> , <i>Way More Than Luck</i> , and <i>Clueless</i> . Each brought new writing of thematic relevance to often marginalized or non-literary audiences: football fans, mental health service users, prisoners, and substance misuse group participants. Through drama and poetry, the projects helped to raise these groups' cultural quality of life and mental wellbeing, and helped increase their participation in literary culture. The three works also had significant impact in improving public awareness of mental health issues.		
2. Underpinning research The underpinning research for this case study consists of three independent but closely-aligned projects: <i>The Political History of Smack and Crack</i> , <i>Way More Than Luck</i> , and <i>Clueless</i> . Research for <i>The Political History of Smack and Crack</i> was conducted by Ed Jones (writing as Ed Edwards) from 2017-2018. The play developed out of research in to the decades-long collusion between western governments and organised drug crime (explored in more detail in 'Narcotics and Counter-revolution', the postscript essay in the published play text). The play explores these connections through the story of two working-class characters in the North of England during the Thatcher administrations. Original research insights came from Jones's interviews with former substance misusers and ex-offenders to source material. Their stories were used to focalise the socio-political narrative and to foreground the micro-politics of addiction. Research for <i>Way More Than Luck</i> was completed by Ben Wilkinson from 2014-2018. The draft project received funding from New Writing North in 2014 and Arts Council England in 2015, enabling Wilkinson to conduct archival and experiential research towards the writing		

of a debut book of poems, including two sequences of public relevance: 'An Ordinary Game' and 'Way More Than Luck'. The former explores sport's role in society, through the socio-political history of Liverpool Football Club from 1950 to the present day whereas the latter maps experiences of clinical depression, with the aim of widening understanding of mental illness. A distinctive finding of the research was the value of poetic practice as a means of interrogating received ideas and preconceptions around these social issues. Here Wilkinson drew on his research into Don Paterson's theoretical positioning of poetry as 'language's self-correcting function ... occurring whenever the human encounters a reality it cannot properly articulate by the usual means' (Paterson, 2018).

Research for *Clueless* was completed by Mary Cooper from 2014-2016. The project was commissioned by Healthy Young Minds as part of M6 theatre company's *StaySafe* monologue delivery programme, tasking North West writers to produce compelling single voice plays that tell powerful contemporary stories of the pressures facing young people. *Clueless* was written to tour secondary schools in the Rochdale borough, with the aim of raising awareness around serious self-harm and mental health issues. A distinctive insight of Cooper's play is that self-awareness is best achieved when personal issues are identified in others. Accordingly, the play positions the audience as 'observers' at a counselling session of a young girl whose sister has tried to commit suicide. The performance is followed by an interactive workshop in which the audience are encouraged to share and discuss their feelings and views on the emotionally complex situation presented in the play.

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

1. Mary Cooper, *Clueless* (2016).
iv.) Performance [Drama]
Performed to Falinge Park, Wardle Academy, Matthew Moss, Kingsway Park, Hollingworth Academy, St Cuthbert's, Cardinal Langley RC. November 2016.
Access to film and resource pack is available on request via the project's website:
[Clueless \(m6clueless.co.uk\)](http://Clueless(m6clueless.co.uk))
[M6 Clueless Resource | REAL Trust](#)

After its highly successful tour of schools in Autumn 2016, *Clueless* won the Rochdale Borough Award for Culture and Health 2016/17

[Link4Life News - Rochdale Borough Sports & Culture Awards 2016/2017](#)

2. Ed Edwards, *The Political History of Smack and Crack*
i.) Book [Drama]
Nick Hern, 2018. ISBN 9781848427815.
[Listed in REF 2]

A completed draft of the play was a finalist in Theatre503's Play Writing Award 2017. The published text is based on the critically acclaimed production that toured national venues including the Edinburgh Fringe and Soho Theatre, London, in 2018. Winner of the Summerhall's Lustrum Award 2019, it received four and five star reviews in a range of local and national newspapers, including *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Stage*.

3. Ben Wilkinson, *Way More Than Luck*
i.) Book [Poetry collection]
Seren, 2018. ISBN 9781781724255
[Listed in REF 2]

This celebrated debut volume of poetry by 'an upcoming voice on the UK poetry scene' (Poetry Book Society) was highly commended in the Forward Prizes for Poetry 2018,

The Poetry Review. [Way More Than Luck in <i>The Poetry Review</i> \(benwilkinson.org\)](http://benwilkinson.org)

Funding

2014: New Writing North, Northern Writer's Award, £2,000 awarded to Ben Wilkinson to develop a debut collection of poetry.

2015-16: Arts Council England, Grants for the Arts, £4,980 awarded to Ben Wilkinson for 'An Ordinary Game and Way More Than Luck'.

2016 *Clueless* received Arts Council England funding through M6 theatre company's *StaySafe* monologue delivery programme

2018-19: Arts Council England, Grants for the Arts, £31,476 awarded to Ed Jones for *The Political History of Smack and Crack*.

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

The Political History of Smack and Crack, *Way More Than Luck*, and *Clueless* have each brought significant benefits to often marginalized and non-literary audiences in addition to raising awareness of mental health issues more broadly.

Described by *The Guardian* in a four-star review as 'an unsparing portrait of addiction' (1) and following performances at national theatres throughout 2018, *The Political History of Smack and Crack* was brought directly to audiences comprising ex-addicts and reformed convicts at The Mustard Tree homelessness centre, Manchester, in association with The Lowry (1-17 November 2018). These performances benefited The Mustard Tree's growth and development as an organization. As the Creative Programmes Manager commented, service users benefitted from not simply watching the play but being able to attend workshops with the troupe and work alongside them over 10 days (2). He added: 'our involvement with this project was a catalyst event in our vision for The Mustard Tree: namely, that alongside maintaining and growing as a charity, dedicated to addressing and combatting the causes of poverty within communities, we become a place of cultural excellence' (2). The play was also performed as part of the International Arts and Homelessness Summit festival (17th November 2018). As the Director Matt Peacock MBE commented: '*Political History* had a huge reputation coming into the Festival [...] The projects I believe that that have the biggest impact are the ones that have equal social and artistic merit. *Political History* was such a project and no one who was there will ever forget it' (3). He also commented that 'there was a lot of recognition of the lives of the characters' amongst the homeless people who attended but equally 'those members of the public who came without the same frame of reference left having assumptions challenged, awareness widened while also having laughed and cried' (3)

Performances of *The Political History* to current convicts at HMP Thameside (29th October 2018) was beneficial cultural engagement and raised awareness of the struggles of drug addiction. As Neil Barclay, Prison Library Manager, commented: 'The 'back-story' undoubtedly hit a chord with the audience on the day as the entertaining and poignant drama explored the history of hard-drug use in Manchester during the early 1980s'. He also commented that the play gave an 'empathetic insight into a hidden existence' and that the production had 'the potential to change minds' (4). The play was also taken to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (3-26 August 2018) and the Soho Theatre, London (4-22 September 2018) reaching a total audience of 3,300 across all venues. Other indicators of reach and significance include the 4 and 5 star ratings of the play in a wide range of theatre reviews in national newspapers including *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Scotsman* and *The Stage* (1).

Way More Than Luck connected with wide established audiences through national publications (*The Guardian*, *The Spectator*, the *TLS*) but also with often marginalized and non-literary audiences: football fans and mental health service users. The poem 'An Ordinary Game' won first place in the 'Offside Stories: The Pride and the Passion' competition, held in conjunction with Derby County Football Club in 2015. Judge Ian MacMillan described the poem as 'a truly accomplished piece [...] revealing the way that football can be a prism of history and, yes, a conduit of passion and pride' (5). The poem featured in an anthology by Derby Quad as part of their freely accessible 'The Pride and the Passion' exhibitions (26 May – 7 September 2014). Similarly, poems titled 'This is Anfield' and 'Kenny Dalglish' commanded full-length features in *Liverpool FC Monthly* magazine in April and November 2014, a publication with a circulation of over 11,000 per issue. This led to creative responses sent in by football fans, an example being Paul Buxton, who commented that he was compelled to write a tribute to Steven Gerrard having read Wilkinson's poetry in the magazine (6).

Way More Than Luck also impacted on those seeking mental health support. 'Hound', a poem which addresses clinical depression, was published by the mental health charity *Mind* on their website, receiving 1.3K 'likes' and over 300 shares on the charity's social media (7). One user commented: 'That was wonderful to read. Thank you for sharing this beautiful poem', while another posted: 'Thank you for sharing this, what an inspiration you are to others'.

Clueless impacted significantly on the mental health wellbeing, awareness and cultural participation of secondary school students aged 13+ in the Rochdale borough. M6 theatre company delivered 24 performances of *Clueless* and accompanying interactive workshops at seven participating high schools during November 2016. The project engaged 500 young people in Year 9/10 and 130 adults in a mix of teaching and pastoral-support roles. Feedback from students following performances illustrates that mental health and serious self-harm are a valuable topic for them to explore: 'I hadn't realized someone else was in this position', commented one student; another recognized that 'there are people who are there to help even if you feel there is no hope' (8). Debra Madden of Rochdale Connections Trust commented: 'The *Clueless* Monologue had a huge impact on those present, both young people and adults in training as mentors. The theme opened up conversation and raised awareness of the impact on self and others' (8).

Janet Palmer, National Lead for PSHE education, commented in her independent evaluation report: 'a key aim was to provide a creative intervention that would raise awareness around support for suicide, self-harm and mental health issues in targeted secondary schools in Rochdale [...] It is overwhelmingly clear from M6 Theatre Company's and my own analyses of the responses of pupils, teachers and others that the commissioning body's key aim was realized' (9). *Clueless* enjoyed significant secondary reach as part of M6's 'Curriculum for Life', a digital version of three live performances (two written and one dramaturged by Cooper) and facilitated workshops to be used as a learning resource (10). The film of *Clueless* is still being used in schools and by Young Mind nationally.

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

1. Media Reviews of *The Political History of Smack and Crack*. [Provides evidence of raised public awareness of issues surrounding addiction]
[The Political History of Smack and Crack review – an unsparing portrait of addiction | Edinburgh festival 2018 | The Guardian](#)
[The Political History of Smack and Crack - HOME \(homemcr.org\)](#)
[Edinburgh Fringe: A round-up of shows at Paines Plough - Sticks and Stones, Island Town.](#)
[The Political History of Smack and Crack | The Independent | The Independent](#)

[REVIEW: The Political History Of Smack and Crack, Edinburgh Fringe ★★★★★ \(britishtheatre.com\)](#)

[The Political History of Smack and Crack - THE LIVE REVIEW](#)

2. Testimonial from Graham Hudson, Creative Programmes Manager, The Mustard Tree homelessness centre, Manchester. [Provides evidence of the community benefits of the workshops surrounding the play, including cultural participation with a professional drama group].
3. Testimonial from Matt Peacock, CEO of *With One Voice*, the international arts and homelessness charity. [Provides evidence of the impact *Political History* had on 'widening awareness' of the issues that the play addresses].
4. Testimonial from Neil Barclay, Prison Library Manager, HMP Thameside. [Provides evidence of the value of a performance which offers an empathetic look at issues affecting audience members].
5. Ian McMillan and Alex Davis (eds), *Offside Stories: an anthology of poetry and short stories reflecting on the beautiful game* (Derby: QUAD, 2014). A limited-edition copy is available on request. [Provides evidence of the impact of Wilkinson's poetry on football fans].
6. Ben Wilkinson, 'Poetry in Motion: The Write Stuff' (poem and feature). *Liverpool FC Monthly* (Issue 27, November 2014), 87. PDF [Provides evidence of Wilkinson's reach to the football fan community].
7. Ben Wilkinson, '@Depression and power of words', Mind.org.uk (online), 1 April 2015.
<<https://www.facebook.com/mindforbettermentalhealth/photos/a.10150117403078614/10153114166278614/>>; <<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/depression-and-the-power-of-words/>> (Both accessed September 2020). Screenshot available. [Provides evidence of the reach of Wilkinson's poetry to people with mental health needs].
8. M6 Youth Theatre company 'Clueless Project Evaluation Report', November 2016. PDF [Provides evidence of impact of Cooper's play on raising mental health awareness amongst students and mentors].
9. Janet Palmer, 'M6 Clueless Project Independent Evaluation Report', December 2016. PDF [Provides evidence of impact of Cooper's play on raising awareness around support available for students with mental health needs].
10. Curriculum for Life ([Curriculum for Life - m6 Theatre Company](#)). [Provides evidence of the reach of Cooper's research in raising mental health awareness].