

Institution: University of Liverpool		
Unit of Assessment: D27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Improving Mental Health/Wellbeing Through Shared Literary Reading		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2017		
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:
Josie Billington Philip Davis	Professor Emeritus Professor	2002 – present 1980 – 2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Long-term health problems, including chronic pain, dementia, and self-harm, have reached epidemic proportions in recent years creating a pressing need for innovative treatment options. Research undertaken at the University of Liverpool by the Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society (CRILS), has led to the implementation in clinical, residential and secure contexts of a literary reading intervention, reaching up to 500 beneficiaries per week between 2013 and 2020, with measurable impacts on health and wellbeing. CRILS' research has also played a fundamental role in the professional development of approximately 1,000 reading-in-health practitioners and service providers internationally. At a time when mental ill health is the second largest source of burden (Public Health England, 2019) and failure to address long-term mental health issues is estimated to cost the NHS in England more than GBP11,000,000,000 per year (The King's Fund, 2019), CRILS' research has demonstrated the viability of literary reading as an inexpensive, humane and replicable alternative to costly pharmacological interventions.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society (CRILS) was instituted in 2011, inspired by and founded upon a successful partnership between University of Liverpool English Literature specialists, a national reading charity (The Reader) and NHS healthcare providers. Prior to CRILS' establishment, research published by CRILS' founder and Director, Prof. Philip Davis, and by Deputy Director, Prof. Josie Billington, on the value of literary reading beyond the academy and on reading aloud, had helped to inform the development of a unique model of Shared Reading, pioneered and delivered by Liverpool-based charity, The Reader. In Shared Reading, literary works are read aloud in real time (not read in advance), with regular pauses for group members to share thoughts and responses, in small, weekly groups in community and health settings. The literature is not chosen for its targeted relevance as in self-help bibliotherapy or reading interventions which seek to treat particular cases, conditions or moods. Rather, poems, short stories and novels from the whole range of the literary heritage down the ages are read aloud, together, live.</p> <p>From 2011 to date, CRILS has carried out multiple interdisciplinary research studies to understand and assess the benefits of Shared Reading for a range of mental health conditions. All studies of Shared Reading have adopted a mixed methods approach, providing quantitative and qualitative evidence of the value of literary reading for health, and have been undertaken in collaboration with colleagues in Psychology, Sociology, Medicine and Linguistics, and in partnership with external professionals, practitioners and service-users.</p> <p>Since its foundation, CRILS has undertaken and published:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two studies (between 2012 and 2015) of Shared Reading for dementia, funded by Headley Trust and NHS North-West (3.1, 3.5). • a study of Shared Reading in prisons (between 2012 and 2013), funded by Ministry of Justice/Dept of Health (3.4). • two studies (between 2013 and 2016) of Shared Reading for people living with chronic pain, funded by Department of Culture, Media and Sport/Public Engagement Foundation and British Academy (3.2, 3.6). • an AHRC Cultural Value Project on Shared Reading for mental health (between 2013 and 2014) plus a follow-on impact award for research-based training of reading practitioners (between 2017 and 2018) (3.3). 		

Our qualitative findings show that there are generic, as well as specific (see quantitative results below), benefits of Shared Reading which apply across the mental health conditions represented. Literature offers a stimulus to buried emotional matter as well as a language in which to express it (of particular significance in relation to alexithymia, or the inability to articulate feelings, which commonly accompanies chronic pain and self-harm) (3.6). Literary reading awakens specific autobiographical memory (3.1, 3.3, 3.4) (the loss of which is often a symptom of poor mental health) or recovery of lost aspects of being (of particular note and significance in relation to participants with dementia as well as chronic pain), where the reading matter helps bridge the gap between a current unwell self, and a past healthy self and encourages integration of fragmented parts of the self into a functioning whole (3.2). Literature also fosters mental agility and emotional flexibility: 'mentalisation' (the capacity to make sense of oneself and others in terms of subjective states and mental processes) was found to be an intrinsic psychological mechanism of Shared Reading (3.4). The group setting and the literature offered within it by a Reader leader provide a compassionate alternative (and partial antidote) to the experience of being judged, exposed, or disregarded within the world (3.3). Addressing meaning-of-life issues through very specific felt instances, literary reading enables a freedom of personal reflection and verbal realization not offered in the prescribed stages of a step-by-step top-down therapeutic agenda or self-help programme (3.3, 3.6).

Our quantitative findings have demonstrated improvements in pain and mood for up to two days following participation in Shared Reading by chronic pain sufferers (3.6). Literary reading also produced a significant reduction in dementia symptom severity and positive effects on well-being and quality of life for people living with dementia (3.1, 3.5). These results are supported by a study of the benefits of Shared Reading for mild to moderate mental health difficulties which showed a statistically significant increase in the sense of purpose in life among participants, as well as improved outcomes in terms of wellbeing and sense of belonging for those who volunteer to deliver Shared Reading (3.3).

This study (3.3) also initiated the methods (video-recording of reading groups and interviews with participants and facilitators) which laid the foundation for CRILS' innovative training of reading practitioners. CRILS was awarded AHRC funding to co-produce with The Reader a suite of professional online training films, modelling close attention to literature and to group response, in order to enable the international reach of the proven mental health benefits of Shared Reading.

3. References to the research

- 3.1. Billington, J., Carroll, J., Davis, P., Healey, C., Kinderman, P., 'A Literature-Based Intervention for Older People Living with Dementia', *Perspectives in Public Health*, 133.3 (2013), 165-173. <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3042140/>
- 3.2. Billington J., Jones, A., Humphreys, A-L., McDonnell, K., 'A Literature-Based Intervention for People with Chronic Pain', *Arts and Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, 8.1 (2014), 13-31. <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3002438/>
- 3.3. Longden, E., Davis, P., Billington, J., Lampropoulou, S., Farrington, G., Magee, F., Walsh, E., Corcoran, R., 'Shared Reading: Assessing the Intrinsic Value of a Literature-Based Health Intervention', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 41.2 (2015), 113-20. (AHRC award, AH/L004674/1. Follow-on Funding for Impact, AH/P014356/1.) <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3002361/>
- 3.4. Billington, J., Longden, E., Robinson, J., 'A Literature-Based Intervention for Women Prisoners: Preliminary Findings', *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 12.4 (2016), 230-243. <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3002440/> (Based on the end-of-study report, March 2013.)
- 3.5. Longden, E., Davis, P., Carroll, J., Billington, J., 'An Evaluation of Shared Reading Groups for Adults Living with Dementia: Preliminary Findings', *Journal of Public Health*, 15.2 (2016), 75-82. <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3002305/>
- 3.6. Billington, J., Farrington, G., McDonnell, K., Lampropoulou, S., Lingwood, J., Jones, A., Ledson, J., Humphreys, A-L., Duirs, N., 'A Comparative Study of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Shared Reading for Chronic Pain', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 43.3 (2016), 155-165. (British Academy SG131956.) <https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3004966/>

Quality of research: All articles have undergone rigorous double-blinded peer-review.

4. Details of the impact

CRILS' research has demonstrated the value of shared literary reading to health and wellbeing with tangible impact in three distinct yet interrelated areas:

1. Organisational Development and Sustainability (The Reader)
2. Professional Development/Practitioner Training (The Reader)
3. Extension of the reach of Shared Reading to enlarged and to new populations of mental health patients/service-users.

1. Organisational Development and Sustainability (The Reader)

CRILS' collaboration with The Reader - a not for profit social enterprise as well as national charity – has contributed significantly to a massive expansion, nationally and internationally, for the organisation, which currently delivers approximately 600 Shared Reading groups in the UK, Europe and Australia.

Until 2016, delivery of Shared Reading was largely dependent (aside from charitable funding) on commissions from local government and the NHS. 'CRILS' research has been of particular value in establishing and sustaining these partnerships [33 Local Authority Library Services and 35 NHS Trusts, GPs and local organisations] (5.1, p.1). Research projects on dementia and chronic pain have provided 'vital quantitative and qualitative findings of the value of [The Reader's] model in relation to specific health conditions' (5.1, p.2) and have resulted in 'successful commissions across the UK, most notably, Shared Reading North West' (5.1, p.2), a collaborative regional project worth GBP750,000, including Knowsley Care Commissioning Group (CCG), North West Boroughs NHS Trust, Wirral Borough Council, Halton CCG (with additional funding awarded by Nesta and Department of Culture, Media and Sport). 'The rigour and quality assurance brought by CRILS' research played a key role in The Reader securing this grant' (5.1, p.2) (which extended dementia provision*), and 'directly influenced' (5.1, p.2) a GBP270,000 commission to deliver Shared Reading in Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPES)* and a GBP40,000 commission to deliver a chronic pain reading group.* (*For details see 4.3 below.)

The Reader attests that while 'the breadth, depth and rigour' of CRILS' interdisciplinary research has added 'robustness and a competitive edge to multiple successful tenders targeting diverse needs' (5.1, p.3), the research proved 'most valuable' (5.1, p.3) when The Reader took an organisational leap forward and replaced local project-funded delivery with a national volunteer-led model for growth, by securing a National Lottery Bid UK award of GBP850,000 for large-scale recruitment and for training volunteers to read with people experiencing social isolation, mental health issues and dementia. Three aspects of CRILS' research were 'key' (5.1, p.3) to the success of this bid: (i) the evidence it provided for the impact of Shared Reading in reducing dementia symptoms and benefitting quality of life (3.1, 3.5) (ii) the improvement it demonstrated in the wellbeing of volunteers delivering Shared Reading (3.3) (iii) the recognition of CRILS' research in the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Arts, Health and Wellbeing, 2017 (5.2, p.108). As UK Big Lottery Funding Director said, this research 'shows the difference Shared Reading can have for both volunteers and group members, which is why we are proud to be putting National Lottery funding behind the expansion of this project across the UK. It will give people the opportunity to improve their social skills and help them to lead happier lives' (5.1, p.4).

2. Professional Development/Practitioner Training (The Reader)

Well-trained reading practitioners are critical to the success of The Reader's initiative and never more so than when the organisation made its transition from a commission- to a volunteer-led enterprise. Significant impact was achieved during this period through the use of CRILS' primary research data (extensive video-recordings of reading groups, 3.3) as powerful training materials. The training videos were first used at The Reader National Conference (British Library, 2014) and in bespoke training workshops in Liverpool, London and Exeter between 2014 and 2015, reaching 210 arts/health professionals in the UK. Since the materials were formally translated (via AHRC funding, see 2 above) into educative films for volunteer Reader leaders, they have provided vital training to reading practitioners worldwide. In May 2019, the films were formally incorporated into The Reader's 'Read-to-Lead' training programme and have been delivered to 332 Reader volunteers in London, NW, SW, Midlands, East Anglia, Wales, N. Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, US and Australia. The films are also providing online support to hundreds of

trained Reader volunteers globally (900 views from August 2018 to date). One benefit of the resource is that 'practitioners can return to these "live" instances as often as they wish for help and guidance' (5.1, p.5). As one reader said: 'It is a chance to slow it all down and consider the fine detail [in a session] that I don't always register or that I take for granted' (5.1, p.5). Volunteers consistently report that watching the films is a key aspect of their learning experience: 'one of the most useful parts of the course'; 'useful role model'; 'a reminder of techniques'; 'I see the power and value of [The Reader's] initiative' (5.1, p.6).

3.Extension of the reach of Shared Reading to enlarged and to new populations

(i)Extension to enlarged populations.

Dementia: The Reader used CRILS' research findings (3.1, 3.5) in successful tenders to North West NHS providers (see 4.1* above) to run Shared Reading groups for people living with dementia in residential care. The groups reached at least 100 people in care in addition to their carers. Key outcomes from The Reader's evaluation 'show 91% of reading group members agreed with the statement "I generally feel better after attending the group"; 90% agreed with the statement "I look forward to the group as an important event in my week" and 98% agreed with the statement "I feel relaxed (calmer) when I am in the group"'. The Reader's evaluation figures also show that '91% of people attending the groups within a dementia or care home setting had improved moods according to staff in their sessions, whilst 85% of carers reported that members concentrate better in the group' (5.1, p.2).

The findings from 3.3 and 3.4 were the inspiration for an initiative in New Zealand, led by a senior psychogeriatrician (Capital and Coast District Health Board, Porirua, Wellington), in partnership with an author, and with Bupa. In close consultation with CRILS between 2015 and 2017 (including two UK visits to meet with Billington and Davis), the NZ team adapted and developed the Shared Reading model, designing and producing abbreviated dementia-friendly versions of classic fictional texts (imprint Dovetale Press) and, between 2018 and 2020, trained 40 Bupa care staff to deliver the adapted model in 20 Bupa Aged Care Centres in New Zealand and Australia, reaching approximately 200 people living with dementia (5.3, p.2). The programme 'strongly follows on from CRILS' pilot research studies ... on the impact of reading in small groups for people living with dementia' (5.3, p.1). A pilot evaluation conducted in Otago found that, 'for all outcomes - quality of life, thriving, theory of mind, cognitive function, mood and behaviour - the book group participants had improved scores over participants engaged in "usual activity"' (5.3, p.2).

Secure Contexts: On the strength of CRILS' pilot study of reading in prisons (funded by the Ministry of Justice, 3.4), The Reader was commissioned to deliver Shared Reading in all eighteen of the UK Psychologically Informed Planned Environments (PIPES, see 4.1* above) developed by the National Personality Disorder Team (NPDT, a collaboration of Ministry of Justice and Dept of Health) (5.1, p.2). A Reader evaluation of Shared Reading in seven PIPES in 2015 - based on the delivery of 890 Shared Reading groups, 4,743 inmate attendances (341 attendees), and 111 staff attendances - reported that 48% of group members showed improved understanding of their own behaviour (including risk factors and effective management strategies), a greater openness to non-offending, and enhanced aspiration (5.4, p.5).

(ii)Extension to new populations

Chronic Pain: The first Shared Reading group delivered by The Reader to chronic pain patients in 2013 was a direct result of Billington's presenting on CRILS' research at a Personalised Medicine conference at the University of Liverpool, attended by consultants at the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospital Trust (RLBUHT). CRILS' findings were found to be 'highly relevant to the needs of our own patients, since there is a strong association between chronic pain and mental ill health' (5.5, p.1). Two subsequent CRILS' studies on reading for chronic pain have ensured the continuation of Shared Reading provision at RLBUHT Pain Clinic ever since. CRILS' first study (3.2) resulted in RLBUHT commissioning Shared Reading (initially funded for 12 months as part of the study) for a further 3 years. CRILS' second study (3.6) resulted in renewal of funding for Shared Reading for a further 5 years (to 2021). In total, CRILS' research resulted in 8 years consecutive funding of Reader-delivered Shared Reading for weekly attendees at the RLBUHT pain clinic (see also 4.1* above), benefitting a minimum of 10 and a

maximum of 20 patients per year (5.5, p.3). One pain medicine consultant, and Arts and Health co-ordinator for RLBUHT, attests that the research was 'crucial' in convincing commissioners of the value of a literary intervention in relation to a condition where 'treatment options for the patients we see week after week at the pain clinic are severely limited' (5.5, p. 2). The long-term commission, moreover, '**has altered provision at the clinic** such that we now have a pain-management programme for patients which extends far beyond 6-week CBT' (5.5, p.3), and which has produced **sustained change for patients** who continue to report a reduction in the isolation produced by chronic illness, and distraction from physical pain, through improved mental concentration and greater social connectedness (5.5, pp. 6-8).

Self-Harm: CRILS' research on Shared Reading's impact on the mental health needs of vulnerable adults in prison resulted in the implementation by Mersey Care NHS Trust of the first Reader-led Shared Reading groups for people who self-harm, at Ashworth Hospital. The 'inspiration and rationale' for this initiative, says the forensic psychiatrist leading the reading sessions, came from CRILS' research (3.2, 3.3, 3.4) on how absorption in reading promotes emotional expression (associated with mitigating self-harming behaviours) (5.6, p.1). An evaluation of this initiative (2017-2018) found that Shared Reading gave participants 'relief from emptiness' by providing 'stimulus', a 'sense of achievement', and a 'space' in which to 'reach out to others' (5.6, p.1). Former Mersey Care Medical Director, Dr David Fearnley, described CRILS' findings as 'unique in combining quantitative (pre/post intervention) data with qualitative evidence to demonstrate the value of reading in improving mental health and wellbeing' (5.6, p.6). Such research is 'essential in helping Mersey Care justify its Shared Reading programme' (5.6, p.6), currently (June 2020) reaching **70** service-users per week across the Trust.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)/War Veterans: CRILS' research findings on 'the capacity of Shared Reading to create an ethical space for the sharing of experience' (3.2, 3.4, 3.6), inspired the first Shared Reading groups both for people living with PTSD and for war veterans. The Centre for Contemplative Studies (Sturzebecker Health Science Centre, West Chester University, Pennsylvania) has taken 'active steps to import the evidence-based, contemplative practice of Shared Reading from the UK into clinical sites in the West Chester area' (5.7, p.1). The Centre's Director, a mindfulness practitioner, undertook The Reader's research-led training in Shared Reading (see 4.2, above), and has closely consulted with Billington (including two visits to CRILS), in order to develop an 8-week pilot Shared Reading programme for patients diagnosed with PTSD at the Veteran's Administration Medical Centre, Philadelphia, reaching **75** (mostly older black Vietnam war) veterans. Evaluation suggests a reduction in 'the tendency towards experiential avoidance' (in which subjects create habitual responses to escape unwanted internal experiences) and 'significant changes in patients' attitude towards and engagement in the other therapeutic programs offered' (5.7, p.2).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1. Testimonials, (former) Director of Communications (Oct 2018) and Head of Learning (Feb 2020), The Reader, confirming impact of CRILS' research on organisational growth/stability.

5.2. Report, 'Creative Health: The Arts for Health/Wellbeing', APPG (Jul 2017) showing parliamentary notice of CRILS' research.

5.3. Letter from psychogeriatrician, Otago, New Zealand (Jun 2018) confirming influence of CRILS' dementia research on initiative for training NZ Bupa staff and benefitting residents.

5.4. Reader evaluation of Shared Reading in Psychologically Informed Planned Environment, evidencing CRILS' impact on take-up of Shared Reading in PIPES (Feb 2015, pp.1-6).

5.5. Letter, Pain Consultant, Royal Liverpool/Broadgreen University Hospital Trust (RLBUHT) confirming value of CRILS' research in changing pain health provision (Oct 2018) and YouTube Video (transcribed) of RLBUHT patients confirming benefits of change (Mar 2019).

5.6. Letter, Forensic Psychiatrist, Ashworth Hospital, on inspiration of CRILS' qualitative research for reading intervention for self-harming patients (Feb 2020) and Letter, former Medical Director, Mersey Care NHS Trust on value of CRILS' quantitative research for changing health provision culture (Dec 2019).

5.7. Letter, Director, Contemplative Studies, Sturzebecker Health Science Centre, West Chester, Penn., on influence of CRILS' research re reading intervention for PTSD (Mar 2020).