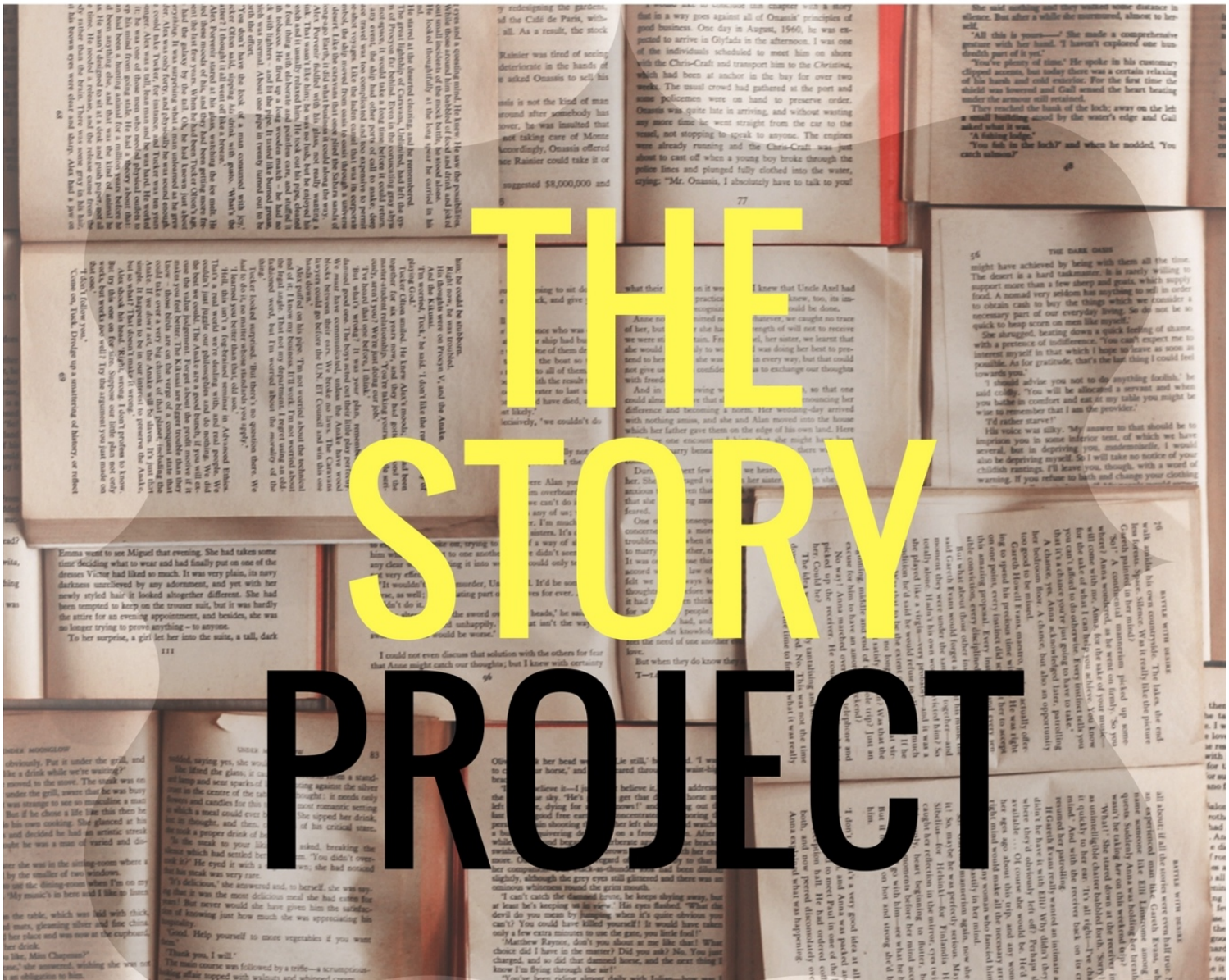
Using reading and writing to support young people's mental health and academic attainment in literacy



THE STORY PROJECT

A research project conducted by Olivia Richards
With the support of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
and the Mental Health Foundation

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Abstract

This report details the findings of my 2016 Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship to the U.S. and Canada. Also, supported by The Mental Health Foundation, this report details how reading and writing can be used to teach young people social and emotional skills, as well as to help them fulfil academic objectives.

During my Fellowship, I travelled from New York to Seattle visiting 12 different programmes and experts working in the field. The organisations and individuals were: The Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, Youth Communication, The Moth Education Program, StoryCorpsU, Dr. Dale Elizabeth Pehrsson at the Bibliotherapy in Education Program, RULER, Self-Authoring/ iVie, Changing Lives Through Literature, Dr. James Pennebaker, The Freedom Writer's Foundation, Center for the Collaborative Classroom and Pongo Teen Writing.

The research involved observations and interviews at each location. Over the course of the Fellowship, I took part in workshops, received countless reading materials, observed best practice and held interviews with experts, CEOs, teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders.

This report provides an overview of my Fellowship journey and details how the programmes I visited have managed to successfully provide emotional and academic support to young people through reading and writing.

The report findings have been organised into three categories:

1. How do the programmes visited use reading and writing to integrate Social and Emotional Learning into the classroom?
2. How do the programmes visited choose appropriate reading material that will address both SEL and academic objectives?
3. What type of writing activities do the programmes visited choose to use to address SEL and academic objectives?

Based on my research, this report will make a number of recommendations for the UK regarding how we can use reading and writing to provide young people with emotional and academic support.

Background

About the author

Olivia Richards

I am an English teacher and the co-founder of a literacy and well-being social enterprise called 'The Story Project'. My preparation for this report first started when I was a young child, as this is when I developed my lifelong love of stories. My relationship to stories has been similar to that of one of my favourite children's book characters: Matilda, one of Roald Dahl's creations. She survives on stories:

> "So Matilda's strong young mind continued to grow, nurtured by the voices of all those authors who had sent their books out into the world like ships on the sea. These books gave Matilda a hopeful and comforting message: You are not alone."
> — Roald Dahl, *Matilda*[1]

Stories also played an important role in my childhood. I read and was read to avidly. As a child, I was always a worrier, but books were my escape and comfort; they helped me see that I, like Matilda, was never alone and that my worries were normal.

> 'The books transported her into new worlds and introduced her to amazing Joseph Conrad. She went to Africa with Ernest Hemingway and to India with Rudyard Kipling. She travelled all over the world while sitting in her little room in an English village.'
> — Roald Dahl, *Matilda*

Like Matilda, books also opened my eyes to things I had never experienced and helped me develop a greater understanding of the world. Not in terms of facts and figures, but in terms of empathy and feelings; I learnt how to think beyond my own experience and care about other people.

My other great pleasure was writing my own stories, and writing gave me an outlet for my feelings. I knew that I always had a pen and paper that I could rely on to listen to my thoughts.

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[1] Dahl, Roald. (1988) *Matilda*. New York, N.Y.: Viking Kestrel

> “Matilda said, "Never do anything by halves if you want to get away with it. Be outrageous. Go the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it's unbelievable...”
> — Roald Dahl, *Matilda*

This affinity for stories is something that has stayed with me into adulthood, as I still read avidly and I write in a diary nearly every day. It is also why I have taken Matilda's advice and decided to 'Go the whole hog' and make a career out of my passion: I became an English teacher because I wanted to instil a love of stories into the next generation.

Engagement with stories

Over the years, as I taught in a variety of different educational environments, including the UK and overseas, in primary and secondary schools and even for some time in a pirate ship for the literacy charity, Hackney Pirates, I became increasingly concerned that my students were not connecting with stories in the same way that I had.

Research is accumulating that suggests that a growing number of children do not read for pleasure (Clark and Rumbold, 2006[2]). This is extremely concerning when considered in light of young people’s academic progress, as reading for pleasure and progress in English is intricately linked. This is explained in the government paper *Reading the Next Steps*:

‘Children who love reading will read more and, over time, choose literature which is more demanding and suitably stretching. It creates a virtuous circle: as the amount a child reads increases, their reading attainment improves, which in turn encourages them to read more. All reading makes a difference, but evidence suggests that reading for pleasure makes the most.’[3]

In addition, the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey found a difference in reading performance equivalent to just over a year’s schooling, between 15 year olds who said they never read for enjoyment and those who read for up to 30 minutes per day.[4]

Reading for pleasure is not only important because it improves performance in reading tests; it also has a much wider significance for children’s education. Research shows that it brings benefits that

[2] Clark, C and Rumbold, K. (2006). *Reading for Pleasure: a research overview.* The National Literacy Trust.
[3] Gibb, Nick. (2015) *Reading: the next steps: supporting higher standards in schools.* Department for Education (DFE).
[4] OECD (2010), *PISA 2009 Results: Learning to Learn: Student Engagement, Strategies and Practices* (Volume III)

help pupils achieve across the whole curriculum. These include a broad vocabulary, text comprehension, grammar and general knowledge.[5]

Reading for pleasure has also been found to be linked to greater progress in spelling and mathematics skills. Recent longitudinal research found that the impact of reading for pleasure on progress in vocabulary, arithmetic and spelling for students between the ages of 10 and 16 was four times greater than the impact of having a parent with a degree.[6]

It is not just reading for pleasure that is decreasing, but also writing for pleasure. The National Literacy Trust found that fewer children and young people enjoyed writing in 2015 compared with the previous year, with enjoyment levels dropping from 49.3% in 2014 to 44.8% in 2015.

The NLT also found that this has an effect on young people's performance in literacy, as children and young people who enjoy writing very much are seven times more likely to write above the level expected for their age compared with children and young people who do not enjoy writing at all (50.3% vs. 7.2%). Similarly, children and young people who write outside school daily are five times more likely to be writing above the expected level for their age compared with young people who never write outside school (30.9% vs. 5.8%).[7]

As well as a reduction in the number of young people who are reading and writing for pleasure, there is a general decline in the literacy skills of people in the UK as recent PISA polling found that 'in England, adults aged 55-65 perform better than 16-24 year-olds in both literacy and numeracy. In fact, England is the only country where the oldest age group has higher proficiency in both literacy and numeracy than the youngest age group, after other factors, such as gender, socio-economic backgrounds and type of occupations, are taken into account.'

Poor literacy has a big cost impact on the UK too. In 2006, KPMG released a paper entitled *The long term costs of literacy difficulties*. This research estimated the annual cost of poor literacy as £1.73bn; this figure took into account costs including crime, health, special needs support, behavioural issues, and unemployment. KPMG states that this estimate is conservative, and there are a number of intangible benefits of literacy that are not included in the survey.[8]

Therefore as an English teacher there is a large amount of pressure to improve students' literacy and their interest in reading and writing for pleasure.

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[5] Clark, C and Rumbold, K. (2006). *Reading for Pleasure: a research overview.* The National Literacy Trust.
[6] Sullivan, A. and Brown, M. (2013) *Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: the role of reading,* CLS working Paper 2013/10
[7] Clark, Christina. 2016). *Children's and Young People's Writing in 2015. Findings from the National Literacy Trust's annual literacy survey.* The National Literacy Trust.
[8] KPMG (2006). *The long term costs of literacy difficulties.* London: KPMG Foundation.

Emotional climate

This reduction in reading and writing for pleasure also means that young people are not getting the same opportunities to reap the emotional benefits from reading and writing that I did when I was a child. This is concerning in a time when young people's well-being is becoming a growing concern for the UK, with around 10% of young people in the UK experiencing a mental health problem[9] and a further 15% at risk of a mental health problem[10].

A number of indicators also suggest rates of mental ill-health among children and young people in England are increasing. In 2011, twice as many adolescents were estimated to have emotional or behavioural problems than in the 1970s (Layard 2011).[11] ChildLine also reported a 33-per-cent increase in the number of children and young people who contacted them and talked about suicidal thoughts between 2011 and 2013 (NSPCC 2013).[12] Finally, a 2016 survey of headteachers and deputy headteachers (ASCL and NCB 2016) reported that 90% of respondents had seen an increase in levels of anxiety and stress, 84% reported an increase in low mood and depression, 79% reported an increase in self-harm or suicidal thoughts. [13]

Research suggests a number of different explanations for this increase including technology[14][15], breakdown in family structure[16] and exam pressure. The latter has been found to be the most common worry among 10–16-year-olds, and as a result, many commentators believe that it has played a key part in the increasing incidence of mental ill-health among young people over the past 30 years (Chamberlain et al 2010).[17]

As well as the impact on the individual child and family, mental health problems in children and young people result in an increased cost to the public purse and to wider society. A study by Friedli and Parsonage estimated additional lifetime costs of around £150,000 per case – or around £5.3bn for a single cohort of children in the UK.[18]

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[9] Green et al. (2004) *Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain,* Office of National Statistics
[10] Brown et al. (2012) *Delivering effective parenting programmes to transform lives.* Elena Rosa Brown, Lorraine Khan & Michael Parsonage Centre for Mental Health
[11] Layard R (2011) *'Time for Action'*, New Scientist 210(2808)
[12] National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [NSPCC] (2013) *Can I tell you something? What's affecting children in 2013: ChildLine review of 2012/13*.
[13] Association of School and College Leaders [ASCL] and National Children's Bureau [NCB] (2016) *Keeping young people in mind: Findings from a survey of schools across England.*
[14] Public Health England [PHE] (2013) *How healthy behaviour supports children's wellbeing.* [online]. [Accessed on 16th Feb]. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/ attachment_data/ le/232978/Smart_Restart_280813_web.pdf
[15]National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children [NSPCC] (2012) *Children, young people and 'sexting': summary of a qualitative study.* [online]. [Accessed on 16th Feb]. Available from: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/sexting-research-summary.pdf
[16] Gardner F, Collishaw S, Maughan B, Scott J, Schepman K and Hagell A (2012) '*Trends in parenting: can they help explain time trends in problem behaviour?*', in Hagell A (ed) *Changing Adolescence: Social Trends and Mental Health,* Policy Press: 75–92
[17] Chamberlain T, George N, Golden S, Walker F and Bengon T (2010) *Tellus 4 National Report,* National Foundation for Educational Research, Department for Children, Schools and Families
[18] Friedli L, Parsonage M (2007). *Mental Health Promotion: Building an Economic Case.* Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health.

Social and Emotional Learning

To tackle this decrease in well-being, many schools are developing whole school approaches to promoting resilience and improving emotional well-being, as they strive to prevent mental health problems from arising and provide early support where they do. Evidence shows that interventions that take a whole school approach to well-being have a positive impact in relation to both physical health and mental well-being outcomes for individual students, for example, body mass index (BMI), tobacco use and reductions in incidences of bullying.[19]

The preventative approach to mental health that involves all students and helps teach the skills that children need to live mentally healthy and happy lives is often referred to as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) within the education sector. CASEL, the Centre for Academic and Social and Emotional Learning has defined SEL as the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. They class these skills under five core competencies:

Self-awareness

The ability to accurately recognise one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behaviour. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

- Identifying emotions
- Accurate self-perception
- Recognising strengths
- Self-confidence
- Self-efficacy

Self-management

The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- Impulse control
- Stress management
- Self-discipline

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[19] National Child and Maternal Health Intelligence Network. (2011) *TaMHS Final Evaluations*. [online]. [Accessed on 16th Feb]. Available from: http://www.chimat.org.uk/ camhs/tamhs/eval.

- Self-motivation
- Goal-setting
- Organisational skills

Social awareness

The ability to take the perspective of and empathise with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behaviour and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- Perspective-taking
- Empathy
- Appreciating diversity
- Respect for others

Relationship skills

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- Communication
- Social engagement
- Relationship-building
- Teamwork

Responsible decision-making

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

- Identifying problems
- Analyzing situations
- Solving problems
- Evaluating
- Reflecting

- Ethical responsibility[20]

There is a growing body of literature on the importance of these skills. Using recent data from the British Cohort Study 1970 (BCS70), the EIF found that having the social and emotional skills as described above at the age of 10 were predictors of life satisfaction and well-being, labour market success, and good health as adults at the age of 42.[21]

SEL has also been proven to increase young people's academic results by 11-17 percentile points[22]. Despite these proven increases in attainment, attainment targets are often cited as a reason why schools do not spend time on SEL. In research commissioned by the Early Intervention Foundation, the Cabinet Office and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, the importance of hitting attainment targets was described as being so great that it overrode other priorities: teachers and head teachers' jobs were at risk if they did not reach their targets and so their focus remained on attainment at the cost of other areas.[23]

During my time working as a teacher in a low socioeconomic parts of the UK, where students are three times more likely to be at risk of a mental health problem[24]. I have personally always considered Social and Emotional Learning as a priority, but I have also been under pressure to ensure that I prioritise academic attainment, so that students do well in their exams.

Emotional support through reading and writing

This is where I come back to my childhood interest in stories, because foremost as an English teacher I have to teach academic skills in English lessons, but from my own experience I also know that there is a lot of potential for emotional support in my subject.

Beyond my own experience, there is also evidence that reading and writing can support mental health. Dr. James Pennebaker has carried out extensive research into the health benefits of writing and found that those who write about traumatic experiences actually visit the doctor less than those

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[20] CASEL. 2017. *Core SEL Competencies*. [online]. [Accessed 16 February 2017]. Available from: http://www.casel.org/core-competencies/

[21] Goodman, A. Joshi, H. Nasim, B and Tyler, C. (2015). *Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life.* Early Intervention Foundation.

[22] Payton, J., Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., Schellinger, K. B., et al. (2008). *The positive impact of Social and Emotional Learning for kindergarten to eight-grade students: Findings from three scientific reviews.* Chicago, IL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

[23] Yeo, A and Graham, J. (2015) *A deep dive into Social and Emotional Learning. What do the views of those involved tell us about the challenges for policy-makers?* Early Intervention Foundation, the Cabinet Office and the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission.

[24] Green et al. (2004) *Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain,* Office of National Statistics

who don't in the two years following their writing experience.[25] The NHS has also recently started to prescribe books on prescription to encourage young people to read as part of their treatment.[26]

There has been a call to embed social and emotional skills into every aspect of schools as social and emotional skills only start to have a real impact on school environments and learning within the classroom when they are lived, breathed and reinforced in all interactions across the school.[27] This call has spurred me on to find out more about how I could best embed SEL into my subject, without detracting from the academic requirements of the subject.

The Story Project

As I began to develop my ideas in this area, I met Tazeen Ahmad, a Bafta-nominated TV reporter, writer and journalist, who has carried out extensive research into the relationship between writing and well-being and delivers a range of psychology and emotional intelligence lectures and workshops, including 'Writing as Therapy', at The School of Life. Using our shared passion and knowledge for the connection between emotional and academic growth and reading and writing, we co-founded The Story Project. This organisation has developed a method for integrating SEL into English/literacy lessons. Our method involves reading powerful stories which cover different SEL topics such as feelings and problem solving, followed by therapeutic writing activities that allow students to explore the characters and their own life experiences related to the SEL topics.

International research

While working on The Story Project, I heard about the opportunity for International Research offered through the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. There was still a lot for me to learn about supporting young people's mental health through reading and writing and I knew that having the opportunity to visit programmes and experts in this field would ensure that The Story Project was built on best practice. I also knew that the UK could benefit from more knowledge in this area.

I had already heard about a number of programmes that were making a real difference to young people's well-being through reading and writing in the U.S., so I decided to make an application to carry out my research there.

After being successful in my application, I narrowed all the programmes I had heard about in the U.S down to 10 of the most effective programmes and influential experts in the field to make an eight-

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[25]Pennebaker, James.(2004)Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma and Emotional Upheaval. Oakland, California: New Harbinger.
[26] The Reading Agency. (2016). *New national reading scheme to support young people's mental health.* [online]. [accessed Feb 16 2017] Available from: https://readingagency.org.uk/news/media/new-national-reading-scheme-to-support-young-peoples-mental-health.html
[27]Diekstra, R. (2008) *Effectiveness of school-based social and emotional education programmes worldwide.* In *Social and Emotional Education: An International Analysis*. Santander: Fundacion Marcelino Botin, pp. 255-284.

week itinerary for my research trip. I then learnt about an effective online writing programme based in Toronto, so I extended my trip to include Toronto. On top of this, I also learnt about The Moth Education Program, whilst in New York, so I visited 12 programmes in total during my research journey.

Programmes visited

The Morningside Center, New York

http://www.morningsidecenter.org

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility works with districts, schools and after-school programmes to build students' social and emotional skills and create caring, respectful classrooms and schools. Their programme, The 4Rs (Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution), for grades preK-8, develops the academic, social and emotional skills of students by integrating SEL into the language arts curriculum.

StoryCorpsU, New York

https://storycorps.org/storycorpsu/

StoryCorpsU (SCU) is a year-long, cross-disciplinary (language arts, media, history), youth development programme designed for 9th and 10th graders to help students develop: Self and social awareness; academic skills; and strengthened school relationships. To do this, SCU uses StoryCorps' tested interviewing techniques, combined with outstanding radio broadcasts and animated shorts, to support high school students in the development of identity and in drawing connections between their unique strengths and the college application process.

Youth Communication, New York

https://youthcomm.org/index.html

Youth Communication provides powerful, teen-written stories and professional development to help educators and youth workers engage struggling youth. Their literacy-rich training model helps teachers, after-school workers, juvenile justice officers, and other professionals to connect with the teens they serve and build their Social and Emotional Learning skills.

The Moth Education Program, New York

https://themoth.org/education

The Moth Education Program teaches students the skills needed to tell stories, so that they can perform their stories in front of their peers in a school story slam. Based on the very successful Moth

story slams, held for adults around the world, the education programme helps students to feel more connected to their peers and to develop their storytelling skills.

Bibliotherapy in Education Project, Pennsylvania

http://bibliotherapy.ehs.cmich.edu

The Bibliotherapy in Education project assists practitioners to utilize literature with competency in their work with clients and students. They connect individuals with reading material to promote personal and professional growth. The programme is online and based at Central Michigan University. One of the founders of the project, Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson, is currently based at Misericordia University in Pennsylvania as a 2016-2017 ACE Fellow, so I visited her there to learn more about the project and her extensive experiences of using storytelling in therapy.

Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, Connecticut

http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/

The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence uses the power of emotions to create a more effective and compassionate society. The Center conducts research and teaches people of all ages how to develop their emotional intelligence. RULER is the name for their programme for schools and stories are an integral part of it.

Self Authoring and iVie, Toronto

http://www.selfauthoring.com

The Self-Authoring Suite is a set of four online programmes, designed to help people write carefully and thoughtfully about their past, present and future. Step by step, participants are presented with specific, relevant questions, each addressing some key element of their past, present or future, each accompanied by the contextual information necessary to properly answer such questions. Writing in this way has provided numerous emotional, academic and physical benefits for the programmes participants and the programme is currently being adapted for use in schools through the iVie programme.

Changing Lives Through Literature, Massachusetts

http://cltl.umassd.edu/home-flash.cfm

Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL) is a bibliotherapy programme that offers alternative probation sentences to offenders. The programme has been proven to help reduce the recidivism rate among certain segments of the prison population. Former offenders credit the programme for giving them a second chance and it saves the U.S. Government thousands of dollars by avoiding

incarceration. There are also juvenile versions of the programme running in Juvenile Detention Centres.

University of Austin, Texas

http://liberalarts.utexas.edu/psychology/faculty/pennebak

Dr. James Pennebaker is a leading academic in researching the relationship between writing and health as well as the analysis of natural language and personality. He has written books on this area such as, Opening up by Writing it Down, and The Secret Life of Pronouns: What our Words Say about Us.

Freedom Writers Foundation, Los Angeles

http://www.freedomwritersfoundation.org

The Freedom Writers Foundation trains educators to teach every student, develops interesting and substantive curricula, awards first-generation high school graduates scholarships, and brings hope by sharing their stories of overcoming adversity through education.

Center for the Collaborative Classroom, Alameda

https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org

The Center for the Collaborative Classroom provides a number of programmes that empower teachers to create classrooms of learning and respect. All of their programmes, intentionally combine academics with Social and Emotional Learning to create an environment in which students learn to collaborate, agree and disagree respectfully, and take responsibility for their own learning. An example of one of their programmes is, Making Meaning, in which carefully selected nonfiction and fiction read-aloud trade books provide a rich, rewarding experience as students encounter increasingly complex texts and build their vocabulary.

Pongo Teen Writing, Seattle

http://www.pongoteenwriting.org

The Pongo Poetry Project runs writing programmes for youth and adults inside detention centers, homeless shelters, psychiatric hospitals, and other sites. Pongo's mission is to facilitate personal poetry as a healing response to devastating trauma – to help their authors understand their difficult feelings, find their strong voices, and address their life challenges and best hopes. At the heart of Pongo's work is a carefully developed and successful therapeutic methodology that Pongo teaches nationally and internationally.

Objectives

The main aim of my research was to get to the root of exactly how the organisations and individuals I was visiting, were using reading and/or writing to support young people's emotional health and academic development. Alongside this, I also wanted to fully understand how these organisations functioned and thrived. Therefore, I provided each organisation with a list of questions before each visit (refer to Appendix 1).

On top of this I have included some details regarding the functionality of different organisations that I have included. I could not include everything I learnt about in this report, however, this additional research will be used to inform the work of The Story Project.

I have organised my findings to answer the following three questions and this will provide the structure for my report:

1. How do the programmes visited integrate Social and Emotional Learning into the classroom through reading and writing?
2. How do the programmes visited choose appropriate reading material that will address SEL and academic objectives?
3. What type of writing activities do the programmes visited choose to address SEL and academic objectives?

In each section you will be able to read about the relevant information I discovered and will see my recommendations for the U.K. based on this topic.

1. How do the programmes visited integrate Social and Emotional Learning into the classroom through reading and writing?

As mentioned in the introduction, as an English teacher one of my key objectives was to see how SEL skills and academic reading and writing skills can be taught together in the classroom. Therefore, I chose to visit a number of the programmes that had created methods to do this, including Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence, the Center for the Collaborative Classroom and The Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility. This first section will examine and compare the different ways they have done this and suggest recommendations for how this can be transferred to a UK context.

Social and Emotional Learning through stories

— Learning from the RULER programme developed by Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence. RULER provides training and resources to support SEL in schools.

When I visited Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence, I learnt about how they had implemented RULER, their SEL programme, into the pre-school environment. Over the course of my trip I visited programmes that worked with a variety of ages, from pre-school to university students. SEL has been proven to work better the younger it is implemented[28], so I will start with how Yale is integrating this into pre-school lessons.

What is RULER?

Firstly, I should explain that RULER is an acronym that stands for Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing and Regulating emotions. At Yale they have identified these key steps as being important to developing emotional skills and they provide training for teachers to support their students in going through these key steps.

Dr. Craig Bailey, the Director of the Pre-School RULER programme explained to me why stories are essential to RULER's way of developing SEL:

> ***'Literacy and stories are important to RULER, and by extension, SEL, for three reasons. First, storybooks are ubiquitous in early childhood, and teachers often use storybooks in their teaching. Second, storybooks are a tool to show children what emotions look and sound like in others, how emotions impact peoples lives, and how emotions can be used to solve problems, which are all core components of social and emotional skills. Third, we encourage teachers to use best practices when reading stories***

[28] Tennant, R., Goens, C., Barlow, J., Day, C., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2007). *A systematic review of reviews of interventions to promote mental health and prevent mental health problems in children and young people.* Journal of Public Mental Health, 6(1), 25-32.

to children, which include connecting the stories to their own personal lives and to the lives of the children. This technique promotes engagement, facilitates knowledge integration, and most importantly to children's SEL, normalizes emotional experiences and talking about feelings. With a supportive emotional climate, sharing emotionally-laden stories is validating and begins the process of empathy.'

RULER in practice

I observed the RULER programme in practice at The Friends Center Pre-School, one of RULER's flagship schools. During the lesson I observed the teacher read a book about Mrs McNosh and the Great Big Squash, by Sarah Weeks.[29]

The teachers asked relevant questions as they read: 'How do you think the cat felt, when he was squashed by that giant squash?' When the children weren't sure, they were encouraged to look at the cat's facial expression and think how they would feel. This is the recognising emotions stage of the RULER process as the students are being given previews of different emotions in the stories, so they are better able to recognise them when they see them in real life.

I then saw this process being applied to a real life situation when one of the children tipped a basket of plastic fruit on the floor. Another child became very distressed by this and started crying inconsolably. When the teacher came over to rectify the situation, she asked the child who had tipped out the fruit to look at the face of the child who was crying and to tell her how she thought her friend was feeling because the fruit was tipped out. The child was able to see that she had upset her friend and decided that she should pick up the fruit.

As part of the RULER programme, children are also encouraged to ask their teachers, parents or a trusted person at home to share their experiences regarding the emotions that have been discussed in stories. For example, if students have learnt about sadness then they may speak to their family about a time they have felt sad. Then the studied emotions are integrated into other areas of the school day, maybe through drama or play time. This consistent repetition and application gives the children the opportunities to understand, label and express these emotions.

Once they fully understand an emotion, they then need to know how to regulate their emotions. One example of how the RULER programme helps children and their teachers to regulate their emotions is through the meta-moment. The meta-moment teaches children to take a small opportunity to assess their emotions before reacting to an event. This is not taught when the children are experiencing the emotion, instead this is done by discussing when story-book characters might need a meta-moment too.

[29] Weeks, Sarah. (2000). *Mrs Nosh and the Great Big Squash.* London: Harper Collins

Impact of RULER

Through observing RULER in practice, I could see that through a structured approach to questioning and the use of appropriate training, stories are being used effectively to develop emotional skills, without taking away from the students' academic time. The beauty of this programme, as Dr. Craig Bailey said, is that teachers use stories all the time anyway, so it is a natural way to integrate SEL.

RULER has also been evaluated consistently and classrooms in RULER schools were rated as having higher degrees of warmth and connectedness between teachers and students, more autonomy and leadership among students, and teachers who focused more on students' interests and motivations. These findings suggest that RULER enhances classrooms in ways that can promote positive youth development.

A curriculum built on stories

— Learning from the 4R's programme, developed by the Morningside Center for Social Responsibility in New York. The 4R's provides curriculums and training for teachers to use literature to provide SEL.

What is the 4R's programme?

The 4R's programme, created by Morningside Center for Social Responsibility, also understands the importance of stories, as they have crafted curriculums that use literature as a way to develop SEL.

The 4Rs has been designed to work with each grade, from pre-k to 8th, and for each grade there are teaching guides, books and age-appropriate activities. There is a clear structure to the curriculum that centres around a relevant piece of literature that is based on a particular SEL topic (these topics are detailed below).

The Morningside Center defines SEL as 'the process by which we develop our capacity to manage our feelings, relate well to others, deal with conflict and other life challenges, make good decisions, and take responsibility for improving our communities-from the classroom to the world.'

To develop these skills, they have split their guides into seven units that are based on the competencies outlined by CASEL in the introduction to this report:

> *Unit 1, Community Building* helps students build a sense of caring and connection in their classrooms.
>
> *Unit 2, Feelings* heightens students' awareness of their own emotions, and those of others, while providing strategies for managing strong emotions like anger.
>
> *Unit 3, Listening* fosters skills that enable students to understand where others are coming from, learn from them and empathise with them.

Unit 4, Assertiveness is about being strong but not mean in expressing one's needs and in standing up for what one thinks is right.

Unit 5, Problem Solving shows how to resolve issues and handle conflicts in ways that meet the priority needs of both parties.

Unit 6, Diversity cultivates a sense of one's own identity, respect for differences, and commitment to standing up for bullying.

Unit 7, Making a difference looks how others have brought about change, with the goal of creating positive change in the classroom, school, local community and beyond.[30]

The books that go with these themes are sent to schools alongside the teaching guides, so that teachers are able to start implementing the classes easily. Once the suggested book has been read, the teachers follow the activities that are suggested to solidify the book's themes.

The 4R in Practice

When I visited The Lorraine Hanbury School in the Bronx, where students take part in a number of programmes offered by The Morningside Center, the students were having a very frank and open conversations about anger. These students were clearly comfortable discussing these difficult emotions and one student came over to me and asked: 'What riles you miss?' I was impressed by how easily these students talked about emotions and that they could identify and share their own triggers, but were also interested in other people's triggers, a skill that has been honed by attending a school where discussing social and emotional issues is as important as learning their ABC's.

The impact of the 4R's

The 4R's programme has taken part in a gold-standard, control-group study by researchers from New York University, Fordham University, and Columbia University. They found that compared to a control group of schools who didn't offer the 4Rs programme, Children in the 4Rs schools were less aggressive, less hyperactive, and saw their social world as less hostile than their peers in non-4Rs schools. They were happier and more likely to resolve interpersonal problems competently.

The programme is not specifically aimed at at-risk groups of students, but research into the programme shows that at-risk students do particularly benefit. The students who were categorised by their teachers as being 'behaviourally at-risk' showed improved attendance, engagement and

[30] Roderick, T and Phillips, M. (2015) *The 4Rs Teaching Guide 3, Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution.* New York: Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility.

better standardised test results after taking part in the programme. When asked to reflect on this, Tom Roderick the Founder and Director at The Morningside Center suggested that it is easier to behave well in a 4Rs classroom, as there is something to which all students can relate.

The benefits are not only seen in the students' results, but they actually can save school districts and local governments money. A new study by the Center for Benefit-Cost Studies in Education found that The 4Rs and five other top SEL programmes are extremely cost-effective, delivering $11 of economic benefits for every $1 invested. This makes sense because if more students can be engaged within the classroom, then less money is needed to be spent on individual behaviour programmes outside of the classroom and on supporting people who are not able to access life's opportunities because of a lack of social and emotional skills and because they were not engaged within the classroom.

The 4R's Coaching

Despite the positive impact that is already being proven, the Morningside Center also recognises that the impact of their programme is limited if there is not enough professional development to support the teachers who are delivering it.

Therefore, the Center is currently implementing an in-depth coaching programme to support the teachers of the 4Rs programme. This means that as well as receiving all the 4Rs materials, these teachers are being supported in their delivery of the programme. This involves teachers videoing a selection of their lessons and using a coaching rubric to improve their class interactions and is having a transformative effect on teachers and their students.

Kristin Valdes Stuart, who leads the coaching programme, explained that the aim is to create classrooms with more student initiated dialogue, more modal learning, more dialogue and questions between students, where teachers value students thinking over whether an answer is right or wrong and where there is freedom of movement for students. Right at the centre of these classrooms is the literature that it being read, as it can be used in displays and discussions to help create this atmosphere.

A curriculum that combines academic and SEL objectives on an equal basis

— Learning from The Center for the Collaborative Classroom (CCC) in Alameda. CCC provides a number of programmes that provide English instruction with SEL integrated.

The 4R's programme and RULER place their emphasis on SEL skills. Therefore their objectives are to develop the SEL skills, with literature as a means to achieve this. Although improvement in literacy is not a main aim, this structured focus on reading does mean that children are covering aspects of the literacy curriculum, such as analysing texts and identifying characters' emotions/ intent. However, academic improvement is not the main aim of the programme.

What is CCC?

Another programme that I visited, the Center for the Collaborative Classroom, has also created a curriculum that uses reading and writing to build social and emotional skills, but is different because it has academic outcomes as well as SEL outcomes. Teachers are provided with lesson plans, materials and the support of an educational consultant to ensure they get the most out of the programme.

An example of how SEL and academics are combined is seen in this extract from a CCC handbook: The handbook gives an example of what a teacher could say to model connecting the book 'Wizzil' by William Steig to their own life:

> ***'You might say:***
>
> ***"I want to write about how DeWitt's generosity reminds me of a time when someone has been generous to me. I'll write: In Wizzil by William Steig, DeWitt saves Wizzil even though she's a mean witch, and she responds to his kindness by becoming happy and loving. Notice that I include the name and author of the book in the first sentence.***
>
> ***Now I want to compare the book to my own life. I'll write: I too have been transformed by other people's kindness. Now I want to give an example. I'll write: For instance, last week I came home from work feeling tired and grouchy. I growled at my husband when he asked me how my day was. Instead of growling back, my husband offered to make dinner. He set the table and did the dishes too!***
>
> ***I want to include a final sentence that wraps up the piece. I'll write: My husband's kindness washed away my bad feelings just like DeWitt's kindness helped wash away Wizzil's witchiness."***[31]

In this excerpt the teacher is modelling their own SEL to teach kindness and empathy, whilst also modelling the academic objective of how to structure a paragraph. As a result, the students understand their teacher better, the writing process better and have the chance to understand themselves better.

Supporting the teacher at CCC

It is also clear from this excerpt just how detailed the instructions given to teachers are, so the curriculum is providing extensive examples of what can be done in the classroom. In the guides the instructions all have QR codes at the sides of the page that link to videos to demonstrate different

[31] Center for the Collaborative Classroom (2015) *Best Practices in Writing Instruction. 2015-16 Institute Handbook.* Center for the Collaborative Classroom

points in the lessons. This makes the programme very easy to use for teachers, which is very important, as SEL should not feel like an extra burden on teachers and teachers are more likely to follow a new curriculum or change their teaching if it is clear and easy to do so. In their continued efforts to improve their teacher training CCC has also partnered with Regional Educational Laboratory West at WestEd University to develop a more systematic approach to supporting teacher's professional learning.

A shared reading experience

— Learning from Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL). CLTL facilitate reading groups as an alternative to sentencing or as part of a reduced judicial sentence.

As well as learning lessons about integrating SEL into reading and writing within the classroom, I also had the opportunity during my research to learn about how this was being done within the justice system. This is an important area of my research as 95% of imprisoned young offenders have a mental health disorder and many of them are struggling with more than one disorder.[32]

Therefore, I visited Changing Lives Through Literature (CLTL), an organisation who facilitate reading groups as an alternative to sentencing or as part of a reduced judicial sentence. This visit taught me more about how reading and writing can be used to support young people within the justice system, but also gave me some ideas of how the success of this work could be replicated in the classroom.

The programme is run in adult and juvenile services and what is most remarkable about these reading groups is that the judge, probation officer and offenders all take part, as equals. The programme is very effective; research has shown that CLTL reduces recidivism rates by up to 50%, saving the U.S. Government thousands of dollars by avoiding reincarceration.

CLTL in practice

Jean Trounstine, the founder of the first women's CLTL session, invited me to join her reading group, which was made up of women covering the courts of Lowell and Lynn in Massachussets. Within this group, it was clear that each participant's level of education did not matter: everyone gave equally interesting points. When Kady, a member of the group made a comment about her lack of education, Lorie who was sat next to her, just whispered with genuine respect 'You seem really smart to me.'

And it was true. Everyone was smart – in ways that they didn't seem to perceive they would be. The conversation about the book brought people to life and Lorie summed up the feeling of the room by saying towards the end of the session. 'I actually like the book now, after we have talked about it, I'm

[32] Office for National Statistics (1997): *Psychiatric morbidity among young offenders in England and Wales.* London: Office for National Statistics.

finding it really interesting.' I was keen to ascertain what made reading through a CLTL session more effective than reading in a classroom. I discussed this with programmes' facilitators.

Firstly, these reading groups provide the opportunity for adults and young people to appreciate reading. This is done within a supportive environment where they have the space to ask and answer questions. But beyond this, what makes these groups so successful is the sense of respect and importance that everyone participating receives. Some of the ladies in the group I visited had been sentenced by the judge who took part, but that was not mentioned; instead, everyone in the group was treated as an equal.

Bob Schilling, one of the facilitators of the juvenile programme, raised the point that it would be interesting to have people in authority joining in with book groups at schools. Perhaps head teachers or leaders within the community could create a sense of importance to the group. Jean then expanded on this by suggesting perhaps parents could be involved too. This could be a situation where young people and people in authority could talk on equal terms.

Recommendations for the UK for integrating Social and Emotional Learning into the classroom through reading and writing

- People who read with young people including pre-school, primary, secondary teachers, teaching assistants and parents should be taught how to encourage young people to recognise emotions in stories, as well as how to read correctly.
- For younger students this means that they need to always be able to see expressions in illustrations when they are reading or being read to.
- Practitioners need to assign a clear set of SEL objectives to lessons and the curriculum, which are given as much importance as their academic objectives, so they know what they are trying to achieve when reading and writing for SEL. These objectives should be communicated to students too.
- Any materials or training that is created to support teachers to integrate SEL into the English classroom needs to be very easy to use and follow. Teachers themselves are under a lot of stress, as the NUT report that over 80% of teachers have experienced stress, anxiety and depression at work.[33] Therefore SEL interventions should not add to this; instead they should be easy to implement and help teachers by improving the emotional climate of the class.
- SEL is particularly important within the education of young offenders and should be implemented within their English curriculum.
- Vulnerable young people need opportunities to be on an equal level with people in authority through reading, whether this is a headteacher/probation officer etc.

[33] NUT (National Union of Teachers) (2013) *Tackling Teacher Stress.* [online]. [accessed feb 16th 2017] **http://www.teachers.org.uk/node/12562**.

2. How do the programmes visited choose appropriate reading material that will address SEL and academic objectives?

Within the curriculums mentioned above and within every classroom, if reading is going to be used to support young people's well-being, then the literature chosen needs to be considered carefully. This next section will look into how the organisations I visited select literature to read with young people.

Books selected for teachers

— Learning from the 4R's programme, developed by the Morningside Center for Social Responsibility in New York. The 4R's provides curriculums and training for teachers to use literature to provide SEL.

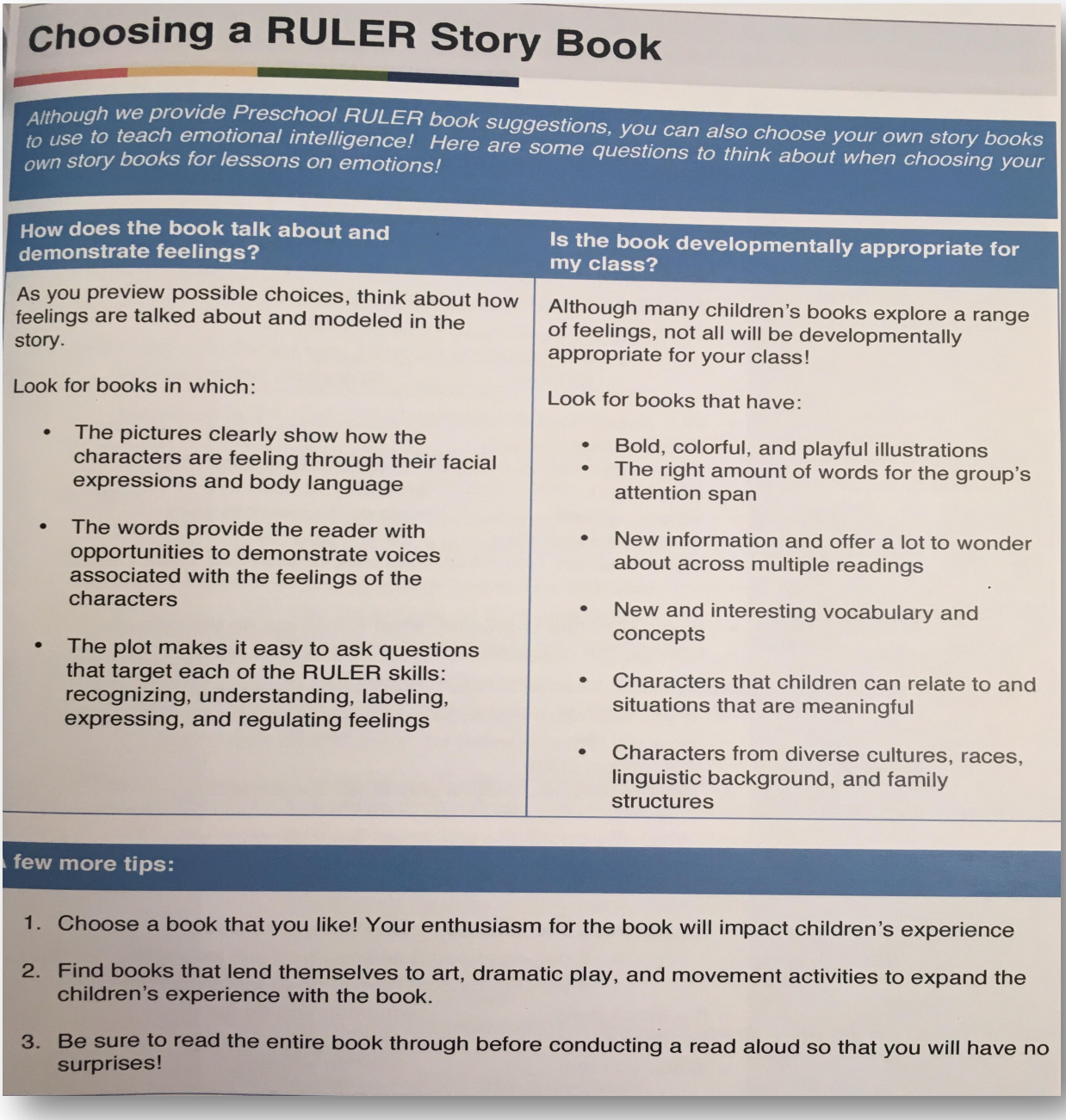
The programmes mentioned above all have recommended books that cover the emotions and social skills that need to be developed throughout the school year. The teams at each organisation work to ensure that the books they recommend are age appropriate, cover all aspects of SEL and that they represent their readers.

To make life easier for the schools and teachers they work with, the Morningside Center actually provides the texts and the teaching guides. Therefore the teachers have everything they need to get started as soon as the package arrives. This also means the teachers/schools do not need to source the texts, so it saves them a lot of time.

Teachers choosing their own books

— Learning from the RULER programme developed by Yale's Center for Emotional Intelligence. RULER provides training and resources to support SEL in schools.

Having books pre-selected for you will be useful for teachers with little time, but RULER recognises that some teachers may still want to choose texts themselves. Therefore they have created some guidelines to insure teachers know what to look for when they are choosing books that will help develop their students' SEL.[34]



Choosing a RULER Story Book

Although we provide Preschool RULER book suggestions, you can also choose your own story books to use to teach emotional intelligence! Here are some questions to think about when choosing your own story books for lessons on emotions!

How does the book talk about and demonstrate feelings?

As you preview possible choices, think about how feelings are talked about and modeled in the story.

Look for books in which:

- The pictures clearly show how the characters are feeling through their facial expressions and body language
- The words provide the reader with opportunities to demonstrate voices associated with the feelings of the characters
- The plot makes it easy to ask questions that target each of the RULER skills: recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing, and regulating feelings

Is the book developmentally appropriate for my class?

Although many children's books explore a range of feelings, not all will be developmentally appropriate for your class!

Look for books that have:

- Bold, colorful, and playful illustrations
- The right amount of words for the group's attention span
- New information and offer a lot to wonder about across multiple readings
- New and interesting vocabulary and concepts
- Characters that children can relate to and situations that are meaningful
- Characters from diverse cultures, races, linguistic background, and family structures

few more tips:

1. Choose a book that you like! Your enthusiasm for the book will impact children's experience
2. Find books that lend themselves to art, dramatic play, and movement activities to expand the children's experience with the book.
3. Be sure to read the entire book through before conducting a read aloud so that you will have no surprises!

[34] Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence (2015) *Preschool RULER Early Childhood Educator Training Packet.* Yale University.

Considering blind spots when choosing books to read with the class

— Learning from The Center for the Collaborative Classroom (CCC) in Alameda. CCC provides a number of programmes that provide English instruction with SEL integrated.

However, if teachers are selecting their own books, Jennie MacDonald who is the Publisher Relations and Rights Director at CCC, suggests that they need to be aware of their blindspot. By this she means that the books the teacher selects need to be diverse and reflect the students they are teaching. It is very easy for a teacher to subconsciously choose books that reflect themselves and sometimes books with more diverse characters/storylines can be harder to source.

The subject of diversity in books came up at each organisation I visited on my trip. It was considered crucial that students see themselves, their peers and a wide range of communities in books. Jackie Jacobs at CCC explained that children need books that are 'mirrors and windows'; books that give students an insight into their own lives, but also a window into other lives, so they have a better understanding of the world.

At CCC Jennie explained that they have extended their understanding of what a 'diverse' range of books means to look beyond simply seeing diverse characters in books and to look at the roles of diverse characters in fiction and non-fiction books. For example, all the scientists in a book about dinosaurs may be white males or all the families in a set of fiction books may have mothers and fathers. This is not intentional and often reflects societies stereotypes, but showing these books in the classroom can perpetuate stereotypes and be damaging for students.

Tools from CCC to evaluate diversity

To evaluate diversity Jennie has helped to develop a tool that aims to assist teachers in measuring the diversity of their curriculum. The tool contains a number of carefully considered questions that need to be asked about each book, evaluating their settings, characters and plots. According to this tool, the books chosen by CCC were deemed to show a good range of diversity and Jennie has kindly agreed that I can share the tool, which can be found in the extra resources section of this report.

The tool is thorough and time consuming, but easy to use. By creating a quantifiable way of evaluating diversity, it means that every school can evaluate their book choices and teachers will be less likely to fall victim to their blindspots.

Choosing books related to different SEL topics

— Learning from the Bibliotherapy in Education Project in Pennsylvania. This project uses an online database to connect individuals with reading material to promote personal and professional growth.

Another system that I came across that is helping to evaluate books so that teachers can pick them more easily is the Bibliotherapy in Education Project. This is a database that has been collated at the

University of Michigan that evaluates books to discern their social and emotional value and who they are suitable for.

The Bibliotherapy in Education evaluative tool

This evaluative tool can be used by anyone to either enter a book into the system or find a book. For example, if you are a teacher who wants a book that tackles bullying, you can search for one that is suitable for the demographics of your class and the books will have been reviewed by other teachers. The books are reviewed regarding these 15 categories.

1. *General information*
2. *General format and structure*
3. *Subject matter*
4. *Reading level and suitability*
5. *Book length*
6. *Text and pictures*
7. *Developmental level*
8. *Diversity Factors*
9. *Usage*
10. *Context*
11. *Environment*
12. *Situation*
13. *Therapeutic use*
14. *Additional considerations*
15. *Overall Impression*

What are the benefits of Bibliotherapy?

While in Pennsylvania, I met with one of the founders of the Bibliotherapy in Education Project, Dr. Dale Elizabeth Pehrrson who has many years' experience of working with stories therapeutically. Dr. Dale explained the emotional benefits that can be achieved by using reading as a therapeutic tool:

- Relieving feelings of isolation by learning that others had shared their experience (universalization)
- Gaining comfort or reassurance
- Finding hope from hearing how others had dealt with similar situations in a positive fashion (an expectation for a good outcome)
- Being motivated to act differently
- Temporary escape from pressing problems
- Emotional release or relief (catharsis)

Advice from the Bibliotherapy in Education Project

Over years of implementing this work, she has seen many positive results, but she also has learnt some of the pitfalls that can occur when choosing a book to read with young people. Surprisingly, her main piece of advice is very simple: never choose or read a book with your class that you have not read yourself beforehand. You need to be familiar with every book you read and anticipate which points of discussion may come up. This advice, although simple, should be taken heed of by busy teachers.

Using animated stories

— Learning from StoryCorpsU in New York. StoryCorpsU is a year long youth development programme, that uses animations, interview techniques and oral story telling to provide SEL.

About StoryCorps

Another interesting interpretation of which stories should be read to young people came from StoryCorpsU. StoryCorps is renowned for providing people with the space and equipment to tell their stories, in their StoryCorps booths. These are static or travelling booths filled with recording equipment and manned by trained interview facilitators. People can book an appointment at the booths, alone or with friends/ family members, in order to tell their story. The stories are then recorded onto CDs, which are given to the storytellers to take home and a copy is kept for public records to create an invaluable archive for future generations. Some of the stories are also made into short animations, which can be seen on their website, and some of the stories have been published into books.

About StoryCorpsU

Melvin Reeve, the Director of Education at StoryCorpsU, explained that StoryCorpsU involves delivering the benefits of StoryCorps to students through training teachers to deliver a 29 lesson curriculum that involves watching carefully chosen StoryCorps' animations. The animations that are chosen are relevant to the students' lives and provoke interesting discussions in the same ways that books do. After the students discuss these animations, they have the opportunity to tell their own stories.

I have mentioned StoryCorpsU here as it is a valid point that stories do not only have to come from books, and short animations can be just as positive in covering SEL topics. What these animations do have in common with traditional written stories is that StoryCorpsU have worked hard to ensure that the animations being chosen are relevant and represent the students.

Using reading material that has been written by young people

— Learning from Youth Communication in New York. Youth Communication provides powerful, teen-written stories and professional development to help educators and youth workers engage struggling youth.

In the quest to find literature that is relevant and represents the young people who are reading it, one organisation has an innovative approach where they created a curriculum based upon the writing of the young people with whom they work.

This organisation is 'Youth Communication'. They support young people to write their own stories (and which are then published in magazines and anthologies) and they have created a SEL curriculum that is based around these stories, therefore ensuring that the reading material is directly linked with the real-life experiences of young people.

Youth Communication in practice

The following quotation, is an example of some writing by a Youth Communication participant: Anthony Turner is explaining from his perspective why reading is important:

> ***'I don't understand why they think reading is dumb. To me, being a reader means being open-minded, intellectual, and willing to learn new things. Reading has helped empower me and teach me important things that I might not have known about otherwise, like African history or world leaders. Also it's just fun to get into the story, especially if the writing is witty, and learn new vocabulary that I can use later in a conversation.***
>
> ***But black youth culture prizes guys who play ball, bag girls, dance, and rap. Simply reading a book is considered passive or introverted. Or it's considered a "white thing"—something black kids, especially black boys, shouldn't be caught doing if they want to be popular. Unfortunately, I think some kids hold themselves back academically for those reasons. I know I feel slightly wary around books after hearing my peers say that people who read have no lives.'***[35]

Through Anthony's writing, he is able to grapple with an issue. Keith Hefner, the founder and director of the organisation explains that all the stories chosen for the anthologies capture a transformation; they are designed to show the reader how the writer achieved that transformation. The pieces allow the reader to engage with and relate to a situation. They are not instructive but instead help the

[35] Turner, Anthony. YC Teen Magazine. (2016). *What's Wrong with Reading?* [online] [accessed on Feb 16th 2017] Available from: http://www.ycteenmag.org/issues/WEB/What's_Wrong_with_Reading_.html?story_id=WEB-2011-10-001&printable=1

reader to see that they are not alone in a situation. All the stories are written to fit in with the spectrum of Social and Emotional Learning as designed by CASEL and explained in the introduction to this report.

The anthologies are supported by curriculum guides that indicate which stories cover which SEL topic. They also give examples of the types of questions that can be asked while reading the texts. As well as engaging young people in the SEL topics, these texts are making reading and writing accessible to young people because they are able to see that people like them have written things that are worth being studied.

Youth Communication's impact

Youth Communication have tracked significant emotional benefits for young people who read their stories:

- 75% of teens reported that reading the stories helped them wrestle with moral dilemmas
- More than 50% of readers reported that the stories make them feel less alone and helped them understand people from backgrounds different from their own.
- Over one-third of teens reported that they felt more optimistic about their future and more confident after reading Youth Communication's stories.

Recommendations for the UK based on choosing the right type of literature to use with young people

- There should be packages available for teachers to buy pre-selected books that cover all SEL topics and which can be read in class.
- Teachers who are choosing their own books to read in class need access to a comprehensive database of appropriate books that cover a range of abilities and SEL topics.
- Teachers also need guidance on choosing their own books to read in class. Including tools to ensure they are choosing a diverse range of books.
- Teachers also need access to a variety of mediums that share stories related to different SEL themes, including short films/ animations.
- Students in the U.K. need opportunities to read stories by their peers, in the same way that they would read literary texts.
- Teachers need opportunities to help their students understand and access texts beyond just reading them, through visits or letters to authors etc.

3. What type of writing activities do the programmes visited choose to address SEL and academic objectives?

In the last section I mentioned a number of programmes that were based around reading stories written by other young people. It is helpful for students to read these stories, but writing the stories can also provide opportunities for SEL and will meet academic objectives too. This section is all about the types of writing that promote well-being.

Writing for an audience

— Learning from Youth Communication in New York. Youth Communication provides powerful, teen-written stories and professional development to help educators and youth workers engage struggling youth.

The writing aspect of Youth Communication

Youth Communication, who have previously been mentioned as creating a curriculum based around stories written by young people, also support the young people who are doing the writing. They have two projects that young people can write for, 'Represent' and 'YC Teen'. Both of these projects publish a magazine and some of the best stories from the magazines are used in the anthologies that go to schools.

The positive effect of this is explained by Otis, a young author for the magazine, in this extract from his story:

> ***'I read some Represent stories online. I saw that other writers were writing amazing stories and sharing personal experiences that I didn't think any foster kid would reveal. I thought "If they're brave enough, maybe it's time I come out of the dark." At first, I felt embarrassed and even fearful about telling people about things like my cerebral palsy or getting my ass kicked or my biological parents giving me up when I was 2. Growing up, my adoptive family liked to keep things private. But it was a relief to let things out. Plus, I enjoy getting feedback on my writing.'***[36]

A professional atmosphere

As soon as the budding authors arrive at the Youth Communication office, they are treated with professionalism. The office is a genuine publishing suite and they are given deadlines and high expectations. The young authors then start a process of writing that involves multiple editing

[36] Hampton, Otis. (2014) *Representing: Writing my stories freed me.* [online] [accessed on Feb 16th 2017] Available from: http://www.ycteenmag.org/issues/FCYU118/Representing.html?story_id=FCYU-2014-10-16&printable=1

opportunities. Every time they submit a draft of their story, their editor will return it with a mixture of positive and improvement comments. The high expectations and professional environment mean that the young people are being challenged academically, but the supportive and personal comments also mean the young people are being supported emotionally.

These young people are being given an outlet for their experiences through this writing and are having this validated through the editing process. The importance of writing is explained by a young writer from the programme called Terry-Ann:

> ***'Writing helped me when I was going through difficult times with my family- when they didn't or couldn't understand me, or when they didn't understand why I would cry for no reason. Writing helped me when I needed someone to talk to. Writing is like both my friend and my family, because it's always there for me whenever I need it.'*** [37]

A shift in perception

What Youth Communication is doing is not miles away from what a teacher does through marking and providing feedback on students' work, but that simple shift in perception -from having an editor look at your work rather than a teacher - has a transformative effect.
The young people are also engaged because the writing is personal to them and they have chosen to write about it. Furthermore, they know that their work has purpose, which gives the young people an incentive to stay motivated.

Processing lives through writing

— Learning from the Freedom Writer's Foundation in Los Angeles. The Freedom Writers Foundation trains educators and provides curricula based on a class' experience of sharing their stories.

What is the Freedom Writer's Foundation?

The Freedom Writer's Foundation also celebrates the writing of young people and was founded by a teacher who encouraged her students to read stories by other young people then to write and publish their own stories.

The teacher is Erin Gruwell; her first job was at Wilson High School in Long Beach, South Los Angeles. The area was volatile and dangerous due to gang violence, and the students that she was teaching were at risk of death every time they left the house.

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[37] Da Costa, Terry-Ann. (2000) *How Writing Helps Me.* In *'The Struggle to be Strong'.* Youth Communication (2000). New York: Free Spirit.

Ms. Gruwell and her class in Room. 203 have been made famous through their publication 'The Freedom Writer's Diary' and the Hollywood film that was made about it. 'The Freedom Writer's Diary' and film were based upon a collection of personal stories written in the students' journals. Due to the success of the diary, the Freedom Writer's Foundation has been created to train teachers to support and inspire students to also write their personal stories.

Freedom Writing in practice

Sue-Ellen Alpizar, who is a member of Ms. Gruwell's original class 203 and is an author in the Freedom Writer's Diary, explained to me why writing personal stories was important to her and her classmates.

She explained that her class were bringing a lot of baggage with them into the classroom. As a child who had grown up in a very difficult environment, she did not think of life beyond a two-week span and was far behind in her academic work. Living in her community, she did not have access to therapists, but writing gave her an opportunity to process her past and to begin imagining a different life for herself.

It was inspirational for me to hear how Sue-Ellen was able to process her past through writing. However, she also explained that this wasn't always easy and many of the diary entries that were read out to the class could trigger very difficult emotions for all the students. Sue-Ellen, explained that when a story was read out to the class about molestation, a number of students had to leave the room. It was at this point that Ms. Gruwell recruited the support of a volunteer counsellor to ensure that her students were able to access professional mental health support on top of the benefits they were receiving from the writing.

Using games to encourage writing

As writing and reading about themselves could be personal and uncomfortable to share, Ms. Gruwell had to find ways to form links between the students and make them comfortable together. To find common ground, she used the 'Line Game', where a line is drawn on the floor and students are asked to step onto the line if a statement applies to them.

Leading with a series of non-personal statements, Ms. Gruwell built up to such statements as 'Step forward if you have seen someone being shot'. When the students were able to visibly see how many of them had been through the same experiences, they were able to start building relationships with each other.

If other teachers want to use these activities, the Freedom Writer's Foundation has published a 'Teacher's Guide', that provides many examples of the relationship building and empowering games that helped enable Ms. Gruwell to create a classroom environment that was conducive to writing.

Academic improvement from The Freedom Writers

The Freedom Writers were never graded on their personal stories as it would be ethically wrong to grade someone's personal experience. However, because of the connection the students made to writing in the diary writing process, their writing skills did improve. Sue-Ellen explained that as she suffered from dyslexia, her experience as a Freedom Writer was the first time that she was able to see that she could still be a writer and this helped improve her grades as she had more of a belief in herself.

Being a writer

— Learning from The Center for the Collaborative Classroom (CCC) in Alameda. CCC provides a number of programmes that provide English instruction with SEL integrated.

Writing free from concern

The belief in your potential to be a writer is what guides the writing curriculum of The Center for The Collaborative Classroom. In their curriculum they explain that:

> ***'All growth and learning in the art and craft of writing depend on a solid foundation of abundant, uninhibited writing. To get enough sheer practice with the physical and mental act of writing during their elementary school years, students must tap into their intrinsic motivation to write. Unit 1 helps students develop this motivation by inspiring them to write freely and daily about things that interest them. Engaging read-clouds are used to stimulate creativity as examples to inspire writing. In this unit, it is more important for the students to write generously, free from concerns about making it right or good, than it is for them to write complete, correct pieces.***
>
> ***To support the students' writing practice in Unit 1, formal skills instruction is delayed until Unit 2. It continues in the 'Revision, Proofreading and Publishing' phase of the genre units. For the time being, relax your expectations about the students ' spelling and grammatical correctness, and encourage them to- just write freely, getting their ideas down on paper.'***[38]

While visiting CCC in California, I met some teachers who were at the Unit 1 stage of writing with their classes at Benito Juarez Elementary in Richmond, CA. The teachers were really excited by the

[38]Center for the Collaborative Classroom (2015) *Best Practices in Writing Instruction. 2015-16 Institute Handbook.* Center for the Collaborative Classroom

positive effect that free-writing had been having on their students. One teacher couldn't believe how much writing her students were producing compared to their previous writing lessons.

Jackie Jacobs, one of the programme managers at CCC, explained that this is a 'slow-to-fast' approach. The free-writing and emphasis on SEL skills can appear to be taking away time from academics to begin with, but in the long-run students will be able to learn writing concepts quicker and will be more engaged and ready to learn.

Silent writing time

To encourage this free-writing, the CCC curriculum has built in opportunities for 'silent writing time'. The teacher note that accompanies the silent writing time in the lesson plan explains that 'a period of silent writing, during which you also write without interacting with the students, may feel new to you. We strongly encourage you to establish this routine early in the year. Students adapt to it quickly after a few reminders, and they learn to focus inward on their own thoughts during this time. By knowing that they are not to interrupt you or others, they come to rely on their own thinking and decisions as they write. As the writing period gradually lengthens over the coming weeks, you will write quietly for 5-10 minutes and then begin conferring with students.'[39]

It is very important at CCC and at all of the programmes I visited that teachers and facilitators are seen by students to also benefit and learn from reading and writing exercises. Emily Cremidis, a consultant at CCC, highlighted how it would be hard for teachers to promote the CCC programme unless they had experienced its benefits themselves.

Expressive Writing for Happiness and Health

— Learning from Dr. James Pennebaker in Texas. Dr. Pennebaker is one of the world's leading experts on the physical and emotional health benefits of expressive writing.

Expressive writing in the research lab

Dr. James Pennebaker, who I mentioned in the introduction and who I met at The University of Austin in Texas, has carried out extensive research into the benefits of expressive writing. In his research he found that people who came to the research lab and wrote about their innermost feelings and traumatic experiences were healthier and saw their doctor less regularly in the following two years than a control group who came to the research lab and wrote about superficial topics. Talking therapies have been prescribed for various mental health issues for many years, but Dr. Pennebaker's research was able to show that writing about our problems could also be a viable source of support and healing in difficult times.

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[39]Center for the Collaborative Classroom (2015) *Best Practices in Writing Instruction. 2015-16 Institute Handbook.* Center for the Collaborative Classroom

Expressive writing in the classroom

Meeting Dr. Pennebaker gave me a chance to discuss whether the benefits seen in his expressive writing experiments could be reproduced within a classroom setting. The first interesting point of discussion was the point of confidentiality. Dr. Pennebaker is very passionate about the fact that for expressive writing to be therapeutically beneficial it needs to be confidential, as people will change their style of writing to censor controversial details or to please their reader if they think their writing will be read.

As therapeutic writing is private, Dr. Pennebaker was cautious about how this type of writing could support a young person academically as therapeutic writing does not need to be technically accurate or interesting. Sometimes what appears the least 'interesting' piece of writing could be the most therapeutic, because that person has never written it before, whereas a really 'interesting' piece of writing may not be as beneficial as it may be embellished or have been told to please the reader.

Although technical skill is not a requisite of therapeutic writing, Dr. Pennebaker was interested in our discussion of whether giving a young person the skills of good storytelling story could help them have a more therapeutic experience when writing. When he carried out his expressive writing experiment, it was evident that people who wrote about the same experience a number of times, started to shape the experience into a story.

The more the person wrote, the more concise the story became and a valid start, middle and end started to appear. As the traumatic experience became more of a story, the writer felt more relieved as they were able to cope more with the memory of the event. Therefore, a possible hypothesis would be that teaching young people how to construct stories would help them manage their own experiences as they could make sense of them by putting them into well-constructed stories. However, further research would need to be done to prove this.

Writing through metaphor

One idea that Dr Pennebaker and I discussed that would allow students to keep their stories confidential and develop academic skills while still expressing their feelings was the idea that students could write expressively but through an alias or metaphor.

Dr Pennebaker brought up Melanie Greenburgh's research that found that writing about someone else's trauma could have the same therapeutic benefits as writing about your own trauma.[40] Simply expressing the emotions that are related to trauma is what is beneficial; these emotions don't have to be directly about the author, as the author will integrate their own experiences naturally into the writing.

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[40] Lepore, Stephen J. (Ed); Greenberg, Melanie A.; Bruno, Michelle; Smyth, Joshua M. (Ed). (2002). *The writing cure: How expressive writing promotes health and emotional well-being* , (pp. 99-117). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association, xii, 313 pp.

This is an interesting idea. If young people were writing about their emotions, but in the context of a situation that was not directly related to them, this would mean fewer issues of confidentiality and self-censorship.

The Language Fantasy Approach

— Learning from Dr. Dale Pehrsson and Dr. Bob Pehrsson in Pennsylvania. Dr. Dale and Dr. Bob have carried out extensive research into how to use stories in therapeutic work.

Writing about feelings through somebody else's experience also came up during my visit to Dr. Dale. She and her husband Dr. Bob Pehrsson have created an approach to writing entitled 'The Language Fantasy Approach'.

> ***'A group process that empowers youngsters as they, guided by a therapist, create a mythological story, as a series of six to eight episodes. The therapist facilitates the group process as heroic characters work together to meet and overcome challenges. Each child in a group of three or four creates a character who behaves courageously and develops heroic qualities. As the story characters learn to co-operate in overcoming challenges so do their creators. Youngsters with peer relationship issues, learning challenges and related fears become increasingly more courageous and embrace their personal and collective experiences, while learning to negotiate, and to cooperate with peers.'***

Academic and emotional benefits

The programme was initially designed to improve literacy, but it became clear that there were many more benefits than simply academic. For example, the responses of the parents of children who had taken part in the programme indicated additional benefits:

'Although they were pleased with the results of the reading programme, they often noted that so much more than their child's reading had improved. Many stated that everything changed and that their child was more co-operative, less tense, less fearful, and much more confident. Overall, they noticed a positive change in the child's attitude, and improved interactions with peers and family members.'[41]

[41] Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson & R. S. Pehrsson (2007) *Language fantasy approach: A therapeutic intervention by creating myths with children*, Journal of Poetry Therapy, 20:1, 41-49

Boundaries

Through the characters that they create, the children can explore feelings and achieve a sense of liberation as their characters have unlimited boundaries. One of the few boundaries that the characters do have are that they are not allowed to kill themselves or each other and Dr. Dale and Dr. Bob have put a lot of thought into how the work that they do can be safe and beneficial. They discuss these boundaries with the children before they start co-writing the stories.

Goal writing

— Learning from iVie online writing programme in Toronto. iVie is an online programme designed to help students write carefully and thoughtfully about their past, present and future.

Another type of writing that I encountered during my trip was the iVie goal-focussed online writing programme.

iVie Theory

While in Toronto, I met with Dr. Jordan B Peterson, one of the founders of an adult version of the programme called 'Self Authoring'. This programme has had positive results with adults for many years and is designed to help people write carefully and thoughtfully about their past, present and future. Step by step, participants are presented with specific, relevant questions, each addressing some key element of their past, present or future, and accompanied by the contextual information necessary to properly answer such questions. Adults can go online and purchase access to the programme, then independently guide themselves through it.

iVie in Practice

For iVie, the programme has been adapted to suit a younger audience as instructions are given in video format and are a lot more focussed on the future aspect of the programme as it has been designed to help young people achieve their potential after finishing school. During the programme, they are supported to write down a vision of their perfect future and a future they don't want. Through this activity, students are able to spin off possible versions of themselves and writing about a future students don't want and taking risks in their writing means that students can think of bad situations – rather than living them.

Students are also encouraged to envision positive situations that they may not have previously considered possible and once they have seen this and written about this, it is easier to set goals to make this happen. To get to the point where students can write about their future, they are encouraged to write lots of things about themselves, such as who they admire and what they enjoy doing.

The writing for the programme is confidential, but teachers can be sent word counts and do have meetings with their students to discuss their goals and progress on the programme. The programme is not working specifically on academic literacy, but when the students are answering the questions, they are encouraged to start off by free-writing and then follow this up with some editing. They are also given guidelines on how to structure their goals into an essay format, so there is potential for the programme to fit into academic lessons.

A low-cost programme

The iVie programme was also interesting due to its potential for saving schools money and having a big impact on students. As the programme is completely online, it offers the potential to be self-sufficient and the cost is low enough to ensure that schools can afford to completely pay for the service. Additionally, having the programme online means there are no administration costs and it is easy for schools to sign up for and does not take up much class time. In fact, it only takes three days to complete the programme and it is recommended that the materials are worked through one day a week for three weeks.

Impact of iVie

Even though the programme appears a light-touch, the benefits to students have been significant. Students who take the programme have improved drop-out rates, better grades and feel better about themselves and their futures. A study following students two years later has also proven that these benefits are still apparent when compared to their peers who did not take the programme.

The interesting thing is that the benefits are seen in data and questionnaires, but the students themselves may not even remember that they took part in a three-day writing programme two years ago. Instead, the programme seems to have made an unconscious shift in their way of thinking that outlasts the actual memory of what they did.

Oral storytelling

— Learning from StoryCorpsU in New York. StoryCorpsU is a year long youth development programme, that uses animations, interview techniques and oral story telling to provide SEL.

As well as developing emotional and academic skills through writing, some of the programmes take a more traditional approach and support students to tell their stories orally.

Oral storytelling in practice

At StoryCorpsU, after students have watched and discussed the animations, they use recording equipment and gain opportunities to improve their own speaking and listening skills.

Melvin informed me that for many of the young participants, the StoryCorpsU programme is the first time they will have told their story and have been listened to within their community. This is an immense confidence boost for students and helps to foster understanding between teachers and students to create a better environment for learning. There are three areas within the curriculum for the young people to focus on: where they are from, who they are and where they are going.

The impact of oral storytelling

Through exploring and telling their stories related to these areas of their identity, the young people are given a new sense of pride, as they are encouraged to see more positively areas of their identity that they may have previously perceived as negative. They are encouraged to see the strength and beauty in areas of which they may have previously been made to feel ashamed.

The programme also helps to foster relationships between students and between them and teachers, because sharing stories helps to reveal commonalities. In fact, 91% of teachers reported a greater understanding of and stronger relationships with their students after completing the programme.

Sharing human experiences

— Learning from The Moth Education Program in New York. This programme teaches students the skills needed to tell stories, so that they can perform their stories in front of their peers in a school story slam.

Another programme that also supports students to tell their story orally is The Moth, a non-profit that hosts storytelling nights. The Moth's mission is to promote the art and craft of storytelling and to honour and celebrate the diversity and commonality of human experience.

The Moth Education Program in theory

The storytelling nights are usually held for adults and have been very successful worldwide, so they have adapted the programme to suit a younger audience through The Moth Education Program. During my trip, I met Catherine McCarthy, the Manager of The Moth Education Program and Micaela Blei, the Senior Manager of The Moth Education Program. They told me how they had set up storytelling events in high schools. Students sign up for eight week of after-school workshops to prepare them for telling their own story to their school peers at the end of the programme.

There are no specific guidelines for the types of stories the young people tell, instead they are taught skills in the art of storytelling. This is a high-level skill, as students are being taught how to captivate an audience and keep on track with a story. Students do not write down their stories, as they are encouraged to keep away from telling a scripted story. Instead they develop an idea and mainly free-style their story. Students are often surprised at how easily the words flow out once they get started and they are taught that it is ok to stop and add in extra information if they need to or that even telling their audience that they are nervous can be endearing.

Academic benefits

When I asked about the academic benefits of the programme, Micaela and Catherine were both wary of the ethical implications about making storytelling an academic pursuit. As also pointed out by a few other programmes, young people's grades should not be based on their willingness to share personal information. As a result, they do not collect data on academics and they do not give written correction to anyone's work.

However, as part of the storytelling process the young people tell a number of social drafts of their stories. This involves telling their peers in the after-school clubs their story ideas and practising their story and receiving feedback. The feedback focuses on a lot of academic literacy skills, such as story structure, using descriptive techniques and knowing when to take a pause. Therefore, without realising it, the young people are being guided academically and developing their literacy skills - but in a verbal way.

Storytelling in business

Micaela raised another interesting point: that the skill of storytelling is becoming more and more valued within the world of business. Within my own professional context, I am a member of a number of entrepreneurial networks and I am constantly receiving invites to 'Storytelling' or 'Master your Story' workshops. This is a skill that businesses are recognising is important as it enables them to capture customers' attention. As a concept that has become a buzzword in business, it won't be long until the education system also recognises the importance of this skill.

Using poetry with at-risk youth

— Learning from Pongo Teen Writing in Seattle. Pongo help people to use poetry to help them deal with terrible and traumatic experiences.

While in Seattle, I spent a week with Pongo Teen Writing, an organisation that is helping people to transform terrible and traumatic experiences into something beautiful: poetry. They work specifically with vulnerable populations such as young offenders or homeless people and have trained volunteers to facilitate one to one poetry writing workshops. The key point that they try to explain about writing poetry is that poetry can appear in many forms, for example as a story or even a list. They believe that there is no pressure to be experienced in writing; anyone can be a poet.

Pongo workshops

I joined the Pongo team on a visit to King County Juvenile Detention Center. At the start of their work together, the volunteers ask the young people questions such as 'How was your day?' or 'Is there anything you would like to write about?' They then write down what the young people say and this forms a poem. Witnessing this process was very inspiring as through the careful, non-intrusive, respectful and interested questions from the volunteers, the young people started to talk about

important topics, such as death, drugs, court and birth. (An example of this moving work can be seen in appendix 3.)

You could visibly see the young people relax as they had someone listening to them and a small smile of pride would creep over the young people's faces as they listened to the volunteer read back what they have written. They could hardly believe that the volunteers were reading what they had said, and were amazed that they had come up with something so interesting.

This worked wonderfully as an introduction to writing for vulnerable populations as there was no pressure for the young people to write themselves, instead they were able to see that their experiences were valuable on their own. Although there is no intended academic outcome to the Pongo Method, it does encourage a group of young people who have previously not seen writing as an accessible act to instead see themselves as writers.

Supporting volunteers

The volunteers at Pongo Teen Writing always start each volunteering session by sharing a poem that has inspired them during that week and to share another poem that they have written themselves that week. This helps set the mood for the volunteers and follows the belief that you can't support a young person in their poetry unless it is something you use to support yourself.

Pongo are very open about their methodology and are eager for it to be replicated around the world so they regularly provide training internationally and their founder Richard Gold has written a book on his methodology called '*Writing with At-Risk Youth*'.

Writing within the clinical setting

— Learning from Dr. Dale Pehrsson in Pennsylvania. Dr. Dale has carried out extensive research into how to use stories in therapeutic work.

Poetry and anorexia

As well as supporting educators to use bibliotherapy, Dr. Dale uses stories herself in her clinical work with her patients of many different ages and backgrounds, from toddlers to the elderly. She has also written on how the work can benefit young people suffering from specific mental health problems including grief and anorexia. In her work with Joy Robbins on anorexia and poetic and narrative therapies, she explains that:

> ***'... anecdotal evidence through clinical work supports that narrative and poetry therapies have helped women with AN (Anorexia Nervosa). The approach of distancing by giving AN a proper name and a voice offers women with AN a chance to relinquish self-blame and to avoid***

totalling descriptions of self. Further, narrative techniques such as poetry assist women in reclaiming their power and in finding encouragement. They can rewrite their living story and have an opportunity to exist more fully.'[42]

Although teachers should not be delivering clinical bibliotherapy or treating specific mental health problems, this work does show how powerful books and stories can be.

Recommendations for the UK based on choosing the right writing activities to use with young people

- Students need opportunities within the school day for 'free writing' and also need to see adults writing.
- The process of writing needs to be given as much significance as the technical skill of writing.
- Students need to see their writing as important and valuable. They need opportunities to share their best writing, either by it being published or in through reading aloud within the classroom.
- Marking should be reframed as providing the support of an editor, rather than as a classroom tool solely seeking to improve exam grades.
- More research should be conducted into whether writing about 'emotional situations' in a classroom setting can lead to improvements in well-being.
- Students need to understand the process of story writing as a way to structure their experiences and as a skill they will need for their careers.
- Students should have the opportunity to write about their futures as part of a process of visualizing what they hope to achieve in life.
- Students should have the opportunity to tell their stories orally.
- Poetry needs to be available as a source of emotional support for vulnerable young people.
- Training on how reading and writing can be used to support young people with complex mental health problems should be available to those working in this context.

[42] Joy M. Robbins & Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson (2009) *Anorexia Nervosa: A Synthesis of Poetic and Narrative Therapies in the Outpatient Treatment of Young Adult Women,* Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 4:1, 42-56

Conclusion

I started this research journey with a question: can reading and writing be used to support both the well-being of young people and their academic development? I believe that the projects I have visited and written about prove that the answer to that question is yes. Each project has achieved this in their own way, and not all projects have set out to deliberately support young people emotionally and academically, but collectively the research has shown that through specific curriculums, carefully chosen literature and innovative writing activities, it is possible to achieve both of these aims concurrently. They have also taught me that it is possible to do this in a way that is ethical, scalable and will be able to have an impact on the people who need it the most.

This report has touched upon the surface of everything I have learnt from my Winston Churchill Memorial Trust research project. Visiting and spending time with each organisation has taught me so much more than just researching them online ever could. This report outlines the fantastic work of each organisation and provides a framework for what can be transferred into a UK context. My next job is to use this learning to improve the work of The Story Project, particularly for training teachers. At The Story Project, we will use the recommendations that have come out of each section to build a teacher training programme that is built upon international best practice.

As I am finishing this report in February 2017, I am pleased to see that the crisis in young people's mental health treatment has finally been recognised by the U.K. Government, with Teresa May expressing that more will be done to solve the 'burning injustices' that currently exist in this area. I hope that this will include more preventative measures, such as through better SEL in schools. This report highlights a way that this can be done without taking away from schools' academic priorities.

For anyone who is reading this report, I hope that you will also have a new appreciation of the impact that reading and writing can have on well-being and an appreciation of the need for innovative solutions to supporting young people's well-being.

You may want to start integrating reading and writing into your own day, but more importantly please do find a way to share the important message of this work with a young person, or someone who works with young people, as every young person also deserves the opportunity and skills to tell their story, as, in the words of one of my favourite authors, Maya Angelou: 'There is no greater burden than an untold story.'

On top of being able to tell their story, every young person also deserves the opportunity to find a love of stories, stories which will help them navigate life's challenges, so that they can know that like myself and Matilda, they are also not alone. While they are discovering this and travelling on their literary adventures, research suggests that they will also be on the path to academic success too.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The Story Project research questions

This research, supported by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and The Mental Health Foundation, will aim to discover how reading and writing programmes can best improve young people's well-being as well as develop their skills academically.

This research will then be used to improve the work of The Story Project, an organisation I am developing in London, UK, that uses reading and writing to improve young people's well-being and academic literacy skills. The research will be conducted through visits, including observations and interviews, with interested organisations and educators in the UK. A blog will also be written to document the research journey in action. You can follow here: www.story-project.co.uk/blog

This is not academic research; instead it is an opportunity to learn from within my field and to share best practice internationally. As a result, each meeting will be individual and personalised. However, I have written the following research questions to help guide the research and which will be adapted depending on the context of the programme being visited and some of the answers I will be able to find online before my visit. The research also includes visits to some leading academics who are working in the field. As such, the questions will be adapted to suit the academics' areas of knowledge. It is up to you which questions you are able/ happy to discuss, but hopefully this template will provide you with a bit more context before my visit:

1. *In what ways does the programme use reading and writing to improve young people's well-being and develop their academic skills?*

- What are the vision and aims of the programme?
- What are the main activities of the programme?
- How was the programme developed?
- What research supports the programme?
- Does the programme aim to improve well-being and academics?
- Does the programme agree that both can be improved simultaneously?
- Do young people understand the aims of the programme?

2. *How does the programme create a safe environment where young people can develop their well-being and academic skills?*

- How are the programme aims communicated to the young people?
- How does the programme establish rules/ boundaries/ ethics?
- Does the programme use rewards/ consequences?
- Does the programme encourage young people to share their work?

- How does the programme handle disclosures?
- What qualifications do the facilitators of the programme have?
- Do young people feel safe in the environment? How does it differ from other classroom contexts?

3. *Does the programme benefit all young people or what groups of young people is the programme best able to support?*

- What is the target group of the programme?
- How was the target group chosen?
- Why do young people think they have been chosen for the programme?
- How does the programme create an inclusive environment?
- Do all participants complete the programme?
- Does the programme work with children with specific mental health problems?

4. *How do you know that young people's well-being and academic abilities are improving?*

- How does the programme measure its impact?
- Why is impact measured in this way?
- Does the programme measure well-being as well as academic improvement?
- What anecdotal evidence is there of improvement?
- How far into the future are improvements tracked?
- What improvement do facilitators and young people perceive the programme has?

5. *How has the programme scaled to reach as many young people as possible?*

- How many young people are currently benefitting from the programme?
- How many young people have benefitted from the programme since it began?
- Is the programme easily replicable?
- How has the programme scaled?
- What financial model does the programme have? For/ not for profit? Charity?
- How much does the programme cost? Per young person?
- How does the programme plan to grow/ sustain itself in the future?

Appendix 2: Suggestions for further reading

The Morningside Center, New York
http://www.morningsidecenter.org

A whole host of resources can be found here: *http://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment*

Roderick, T and Phillips, M. (2015) T*he 4Rs Teaching Guide 3, Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution.* New York: Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility.

Story Corps U, New York
https://storycorps.org/storycorpsu/

Example session plans can be found here: *https://storycorps.org/discover/storycorpsu/*

StoryCorps and Isay, D. (2008) *Listening Is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project.* New York: Penguin

Youth Communication, New York
https://youthcomm.org/index.html

Youth Communication (2000) '*The Struggle to be Strong*'. New York: Free Spirit.

Materials can be read and bought here: *https://youthcomm.org/resources/#curricula*

The Moth Education Program, New York
https://themoth.org/education

The Moth Writers and Burns, C. (2013) *The Moth.* London: Serpent's Tail.

Some example stories and tips from The Moth Education team:
https://themoth.org/education/resources

Bibliotherapy in Education Project, Pennsylvania
http://bibliotherapy.ehs.cmich.edu

You can find many different resources and links to Dr. Dale Elizabeth Pehrsson's published works here: *https://www.cmich.edu/colleges/ehs/bibliotherapy/Pages/Created-Works.aspx*

Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, Connecticut
http://ei.yale.edu/ruler/

There are lots of videos demonstrating the recommendations of Yale's Center for emotional intelligence here: *goo.gl/fmnfLd*

Self Authoring and iVie, Toronto
http://www.selfauthoring.com

You can experience self-authoring yourself by signing up for the programme here: *http://www.selfauthoring.com/purchase.html*

The version of the programme for schools can be found here: *http://ivieplan.com*

Changing Lives Through Literature, Massachusetts
http://cltl.umassd.edu/home-flash.cfm

Waxler, R. P., Trounstine, J.R. ed. (1999). *Changing Lives Through Literature*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.

Trounstine, J. R.; Waxler R. P. (2005). *Finding a Voice: The Practice of Changing Lives Through Literature*. University of Michigan Press.

There are a lot of resources on the CLTL website.

Dr. James Pennebaker, University of Austin, Texas
http://liberalarts.utexas.edu/psychology/faculty/pennebak

Pennebaker, James.*(*2004)*Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma and Emotional Upheaval*. Oakland, California: New Harbinger.

*Pennebaker, James. (*1997) *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*. New York: Guilford.

Freedom Writers Foundation, Los Angeles
http://www.freedomwritersfoundation.org

The Freedom Writers and Gruwell, E. (1999) *The Freedom Writer's Diary*. New York: Broadway Books.

The Freedom Writers Teachers and Gruwell, Erin (2009) *Teaching Hope.* New York: Broadway Books.

The Freedom Writers Foundation and Gruwell, Erin (2007) *The Freedom Writer's Diary Teacher's Guide.* New York: Broadway Books.

Center for the Collaborative Classroom, Alameda
https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org

The Center for the Collaborative Classroom's Diversity Book Review Form: *goo.gl/JSLsqj*

You can trial CCC resources here: *https://ccclearninghub.org*

Pongo Teen Writing, Seattle
http://www.pongoteenwriting.org

Gold, Richard. (2014) *Writing with At-Risk Youth. The Pongo Teen Writing Method.* Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield

Pongo Teen Writing from King County Juvenile Detention (2015) *Above the water of my sorrows.* Seattle: Pongo Publishing

Pongo Teen Writing from King County Juvenile Detention (2015) *There had to have been someone.* Seattle: Pongo Publishing.

There are many resources available on the Pongo Teen Writing website.

Appendix 3: Pongo Teen Writing poem

Dear Mom,

I just thought you should know what I'm doing now. I'm addicted to drugs and in juvie a lot. I am an unloved person who spends a lot of time doing drugs to feel better and not abandoned.

I just thought you should know how I'm feeling. I just hate you. I hate my dad, too. I hate you because you left me one night when I was 7 and never came back. The police broke down the door to take me to foster care. But even before that you brought home men who hurt me and did bad things to me. I hate you for pimping me out. I hate you for packing my nose full of white powder, which is why I have breathing problems now. I hate you for getting me into drugs. I hate you because I ended up in a gang. I hate you.

I just thought you should know what I have been through. Since the last time I saw you I've been in more foster homes than I can count, but 45-50% of them were abusive. I always ran, but the system found me, didn't believe me, and put me in another, and another. The time that I was going to be adopted was especially important. They came and picked me, and I lived in their house for a week before they found out my history and they sent me back.

I just thought you should know what I wish for the future. I hope that somehow I can yell at you without having to see you, to blame all this crap on you. Though it would do nothing for me, at least I wouldn't have to hold it inside any longer.

I just thought you should know what I don't miss about you… I don't miss you at all. I'm glad I don't have to worry about you leaving me again and not coming back.

I just thought you should know that there is nothing at all

that I miss about you.

I just thought you should know that no matter what,
you'll always be my mom, and I'll always love you.

_____

Dedicated to my mom

By Katelyn, Age 13
In above the water of my sorrows
A poetry anthology written during Pong Teen Writing sessions at King County Juvenile Hall

Special thanks

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Story Corps U, New York
Melvin Reeves and Katherine McCarthy

Youth Communication, New York
Keith Hefner, Jillian Luft, Holly St. Lifer and Virginia Vitzthum

The Moth Education Program, New York
Catherine McCarthy and Micaela Blei

Bibliotherapy in Education Project, Pennsylvania
Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson and Dr. Bob Pehrsson

Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, Connecticut
Dr. Craig Bailey and Therese Luetzgendorf

Self Authoring and iVie, Toronto
Dr. Jordan B Peterson and Christine Brophy

Changing Lives Through Literature, Massachusetts
Mary Stephenson, Bob Waxler, Jean Trounstine, Stella Ribiero, Bob Schilling, Jeremy Waxler, Judge Flatley, Jennifer, Maureen, Kady, Lorie, Jeanette and Angelica

University of Austin, Texas
Dr. James Pennebaker

Freedom Writers Foundation, Los Angeles
Sue-Ellen Alpizar and Grace McGlade

Center for the Collaborative Classroom, Alameda
Emily Cremidis, Peter Brunn, Jackie Jacobs, Jennie McDonald, Megan Green and Kim Austin

Pongo Teen Writing, Seattle
Richard Gold, Eli Hastings, Emily Caris, Amani Carithers, Becky Sherman, Natalie Singer-Velush, Vanessa Hooper, Jefferson Rose, Ellen Bloom, Lisette Austin, Rebecca Richards-Diop, Ann Teplick, Samantha Krecjik, Jaspar Lepak, Ashley Skartvedt

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