

Shared literary reading for chronic pain

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In two pilot studies since 2014, the Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society has demonstrated alleviation of physical and psychological symptoms in chronic pain sufferers resulting from a literary reading intervention developed and delivered by award winning UK national charity, The Reader. The shared reading model is based on small groups coming together weekly, to read fiction and poetry together aloud, pausing to reflect on how the reading relates to their lives. The reading material ranges across genres, period and is chosen for its intrinsic interest, not pre-selected with a particular condition in mind. Quantitative evidence indicated improvements in mood/pain for up to two days following the reading group while qualitative analysis showed a far greater range in emotional experience and expression compared with the control intervention (cognitive behavioural therapy) as well as the power of the literary material to find (non-threateningly) buried emotional pain (Billington et al, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 43:3, 155-65, 2016). This research has resulted in the commissioning of a reading group at the pain clinic of Royal Liverpool University Teaching Hospital, UK, over several years.

This presentation will demonstrate the intervention in practice via video footage collected as part of the research in order to give firsthand experience of some of the processes which led to our findings. In addition, the presentation will indicate how qualitative data from our research studies is proving critical to a follow up neuro scientific research study on how literary reading affects the chronic pain brain.

Biography

Josie Billington is Reader and Deputy Director of the Centre for Research into Reading, Literature and Society (CRILS), University of Liverpool. She has led several multi-disciplinary research studies on the value of literary reading in relation to depression, dementia, chronic pain and prisoner health and has published extensively on the power of literary reading to influence mental health and wellbeing, most recently "*Is Literature Healthy?*" She is a Member of the Research Council UK Peer Review College and a National Teaching Fellow. Her edited volume, "Reading and Mental Health", will be published by Palgrave in 2020.

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