

Book Reviews

Reviews Editor: Dr. Paul Downes, Dublin City University, Ireland

The first reviewed book offers an intriguing account of poetry as a pathway to open young people into talking and healing. This invites questions about how much more poetry can be employed across the curriculum, and across age levels, to engage children and young people not only in meaning making and emotional expression but also in healing. In doing so, domains in school (though arguably not in class) for therapy, as distinct from mental health promotion and stress prevention, need to be developed so that at least some cathartic approaches find spaces in an education system designed for life, as a living system. This issue focuses attention on the need for stronger strategic approaches internationally to verbal and also nonverbal cathartic supports in schools and related health settings in and around schools. Such a strategy would clarify which kinds are appropriate for in classroom, in school and beyond school settings, to establish the boundaries for each. Issues of emotional supports and pathways to emotional communication in school are also relevant for the common theme of the other two books under review, namely bullying and violence in school. Both of these books offer an international focus and seek to offer comprehensive strategic approaches to address this issue.

Paul Downes
Reviews Editor

1. *Highly Using Poetry to Promote Talking and Healing*

Author: Pooky Knightsmith
Publisher: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London & Philadelphia
Year of Publication: 2016
ISBN: 978-1-78592-053-0

Pooky Knightsmith's book is a timely and practical guide to the practice of using poetry as a therapeutic tool to approach and explore issues surrounding mental health in a therapeutic, classroom or family setting. Poetry can be both moving and powerful. By connecting creatively through the medium of poetry young people can be reached out to. The book also can help those who are struggling to help those suffering. The author a specialist in child and adolescent mental health shows a deep understanding of pertinent issues surrounding mental health and emotional wellbeing. The traditional veil of silence surrounding mental health issues may in part be contributed to by a difficulty in naming feelings and complex emotions. The author shows a remarkable aptitude to recognise and acknowledge that deep rooted pain can be expressed and given a language through the medium of poetry. She does not shy away from the dark side of our emotions.

Part One 'Using Poetry as a Way In: Ideas, Strategies and Techniques' sets the scene for how poetry can be used as a 'way into' difficult conversations. The author provides a clear and succinct argument on the many ways poetry can be a tool for exploring emotions, reflecting on issues, connecting relationally and a means of emotional expression. Poetry as a safe means for addressing mental health issues is highlighted. Feelings can be spoken about less directly through the eyes of a character in a poem.

Part Two provides 'An Anthology of Poems for Discussion'. The author comprises an impressive selection of her own poetry. These are arranged into different categories from 'Anxiety and Panic' to 'Self-Harm'. Enormously user-friendly, the sections can be used to dip into to explore a particular mental health issue such as 'Eating Disorders and Body Image' or 'Depression'. The author sees the poems as a useful starting point and as such provide the initial impetus for a discussion. The author advises that poems be examined first before being introduced to assess suitability. After each poem questions are provided to explore the poem and start a discussion. Many of the questions are designed to create empathy with the protagonist in the poem. In so doing the poems have the potential to reach out to anyone experiencing isolation as they can know that they are not alone in their struggles. There are also ideas for extension activities after each poem.

A particular strength of the book is the ambitious breadth of mental health issues covered in the anthology and the amount of poems from different angles and points of view under each issue. The author does not rely on a 'one size fits all' approach and in so doing acknowledges the complicated and wide emotional realm of mental health issues.

The final section 'Part Three – Encouraging and Enabling Therapeutic Poetry Writing' recognises the therapeutic process in writing your own poetry and provides a wide range of poetic forms and prompts to aid writing. The creative process of writing can potentially act in a transforming capacity as it enables you a

voice. The author includes an impressive range of poetry prompts and examples to spur creativity. These prompts are wide-ranging from ‘A Poem to my Teenage Self’ to ‘Fragile Friendships’. The different contexts the book can be used in are noteworthy. From a therapeutic or familial one-to-one setting a road to recovery may be enabled. In a classroom context, once a safe environment is ensured the book provides the means to discuss issues potentially focusing on the importance of emotional well-being. The power of poetry transcends addressing anyone directly but still can connect on a visceral level promoting healing.

This is an inspiring book that explores a myriad of emotional states and mental health issues. In so doing Dr. Knightsmith gives a valuable resource to therapists, teachers and family members. Poetry, as demonstrated, acts as a profound means to enable empathy and through powerful imagery and metaphors personal healing can be promoted.

Chink of Light (p.189)

She listened and she held him,
On this dark and failing day.
And as he poured his heart out
He found his problems didn't weigh
Quite so heavy on his heart now
And he thought he saw a way,
That he could make it to the end
Of this dark and dismal day.

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2. School bullying: Teachers helping students cope. London: Routledge.

Author: Phillip T. Slee
Publisher: Routledge, London
Year of Publication: 2017
ISBN: 978-1-1389-1193-2

Educators' and parents' as well as policy makers' concerns about bullying of children have increased significantly. There is increasing awareness of its pervasiveness in schools and classrooms, particularly of the victimisation of marginalised students, as well as of its new form in cyberbullying. There is also higher awareness of the harmful effects of a lack of feeling of safety and social wellbeing on children's learning. On the other hand there is a growing understanding of how bullying can be effectively addressed (e.g. Downes and Cefai, 2016).

Those who are seeking up-to-date, evidence-based, clearly outlined and critically evaluated information on all the above issues about bullying should make use of Slee's (2017) book under review on School Bullying. Slee has been a frontrunner in researching bullying in Australian schools (Rigby and Slee, 1991). He has also been a long time practitioner in supporting schools to reduce bullying (Slee, 1996). In his new publication, he shares both his deeper and wider understanding of the nature, extent and impact of bullying as well as effective ways for addressing it. The book is full of descriptions of instruments used to investigate the nature, prevalence, and impact of bullying as well as of the relevant findings. These are complemented with descriptions of programmes for enabling schools to reduce bullying. The book's greatest value is that it gives a comprehensive account of school bullying, while still remaining grounded in the evidence and providing an opportunity to grasp the essential elements and practicalities of each issue.

Modelling one of the ways in which bullying should be addressed, Slee opens the book with a chapter on 'Promoting positive peer relations at school'. Here he describes the nature and healthy impact of pro-social behaviour and friendships as well as strategies for the development of prosocial skills including empathy and conflict resolution. This is complemented with another chapter on building friendships and social networks, including through the use of ICT.

The next three chapters present a detailed account of the nature and extent of both 'traditional' and cyberbullying, as well as how psychology has tried to explain its occurrence particularly in relation to the biopsychosocial development of aggression, anger and violence. An account is also given of developmental and gender aspects of bullying, including the impact of parental style on trajectories of bullying behaviour.

The author's systemic perspective is presented in Chapter 6 with an account of the importance of whole school and classroom climate and the nature and impact of teacher, school and community strategies for reduction of bullying. This is supported by another chapter on students who are more at risk of being victimised, including students with SEN, autism spectrum condition, or LGBTQ.

The final three chapters describe how bullying can be addressed. Firstly, a detailed account is given of how to assess the existence of bullying. This is followed by another detailed account of how students can be helped and supported to cope with bullying, including the importance of teacher intervention and whole school programmes, and the relevant issues that have been raised regarding the effectiveness of intervention programmes.

Each chapter is greatly enhanced by boxes containing 'Points for reflection', 'Trends and issues', 'Ideas for schools and classrooms', 'Guidelines for school practice', an 'Activity', as well as a set of questions to review 'What have you learnt?' and an exhaustive reference list.

This is a book that educators need to consult and will enjoy reading and using. It exceptionally combines the rigorousness of scholarly research and clear presentation with meaningful and practical accounts that enhance educators' awareness and understanding of bullying behaviour as well as provide them with evidence-based ideas and confidence for supporting children's wellbeing, learning and healthy development.

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References

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- Slee, P. T. (1996) The PEACE Pack: a programme for reducing bullying in our schools. *Australian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 2, 63–74.

3. How to Prevent and Tackle Bullying and School Violence: Evidence and Practices for Strategies for Inclusive and Safe Schools, NESET II report

Author:	Paul Downes & Carmel Cefai
Publisher:	Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg
Year of Publication:	2016
ISBN:	978-92-79-49062-0
DOI:	10.2766/0799

As the authors strongly and powerfully note with regard to school bullying “It is an affront to the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination. Its effects are serious and may be long-term. It is not only a problem for education policy to address. It is also a health and welfare issue relevant to child protection”. The stated purpose of the report is to engage and inform policy-makers and practitioners at EU, national, regional and local levels regarding strategies and practices for prevention of bullying and violence in schools across the EU.

What sets this report apart from the myriad of other texts and resources available on the topic is an identifiable focus with regard to developmental trends, ethnicity and migrants, disability, social inclusion, sexual orientations and gender. Moreover while the report is focused on the issue of bullying in the European Union its outreach is an international one. The breadth of scope of the report is reflected in its situating the issue of bullying in relation to key principles from a policy and legal perspective eg. The Paris Declaration on Promoting Citizenship. Importantly the review is based on evidence-based best practice with regard to bullying prevention.

The report is presented as 7 chapters with abstracts provided in French and German. Chapter one outlines the aims, method and scope of the report. Chapter Two provides a very comprehensive and informative breakdown of the prevalence of victimization and bullying behaviour. Very significant sections are provided examining issues associated with young people and special educations needs and disability

(SEND). The matter of homophobic bullying is considered in detail with critiques of EU countries which do not address this important issue. Racial and discriminatory bullying is also covered in some detail and as the authors note this is not a feature of the corpus of bullying research which has received a great deal of attention at all. Chapter Four consider the issue of health promotion and universal prevention strongly related to the school curriculum in a very integrated manner. Chapter five provides a further step forward in our understanding of prevention in considering bullying prevention in relation to macro community systems, community outreach and teacher and peer support roles. Chapter six examines prevention in relation to chronic needs with a focus on family support and school leaving. In Chapter seven the findings from the report are outlined including national gaps in bullying prevention and an important consideration of future research needs.

As the authors conclude “bullying is a serious concern in Europe, due to its sizeable prevalence in many countries and negative long-term impact. Some groups, such as learners from certain minorities, LGBTI background or those with special educational needs are more often bullied than others”. The report is richly sourced with data gathered for the report including presentations of prevalence data for victims and perpetrators of countries across the EU countries. I highly recommend this most informative and up to date text which shines a new light on a number of little understood areas of research related to the bullying of others eg racial bullying. Significantly the report while focused on EU countries has a much broader international outreach and as such is required reading for all those concerned with improving the well-being of some of the most vulnerable of our young people. To paraphrase the authors ‘Bullying is an affront to us all’.

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