"It Was a Real Eye-Opener": Supporting Adolescent Mental Health Literacy Through Contemporary Young Adult Literature

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The school environment can be challenging for young people experiencing mental health concerns to express their individuality and feel accepted. There has been an increased focus on wellbeing in school-aged children, with programs targeted to building resilience and promoting inclusion. However, peer stigmatization lowers personal wellbeing by limiting social belongingness in young people with mental health concerns and this is often exacerbated by poor mental health literacy. This paper is based on a doctoral study that used a grounded theory methodology to explore adolescent responses to a novel featuring mental health concerns as a class text. This research showed that students prefer contemporary young adult novels in the English classroom to support mental health literacy due to its contemporaneity and relatability. This paper links these benefits with the role of teacher librarians in recommending young adult literature featuring mental health concerns for use in the English curriculum.

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2021), 14% of adolescents aged between 10 and 19 years-old experience a mental health condition and are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and stigma. Further, research has found that self-esteem—a precursor to wellbeing—declines between the ages of 11 and 14 (Katsantonis et al., 2023). While Braun (2022) promotes public libraries as an important support for adolescent mental health through their everyday services, there is a groundswell of interest in school libraries fulfilling this role in promoting student wellbeing (Child, 2018; Merga, 2020).

According to Child (2018), student wellbeing is a significant factor in preventing a range of mental health concerns and antisocial behaviors in young people. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, an increased focus on wellbeing in schools has raised awareness of the importance of adolescent mental health with staff and students alike

(Court, 2020; Hughes et al., 2019). Currently, the focus in wellbeing programs and initiatives is often on building individual resilience and promoting inclusion, and resourcing teachers and teacher librarians in the support of this goal (Atherton, 2020; Merga, 2022).

However, in schools, it is often peer stigmatization—evidenced through bullying and exclusionary behaviors—that limits the social belongingness of adolescents with mental health concerns (Moses, 2010; O'Driscoll et al., 2015), lowering personal wellbeing. In social situations in schools, stigmatizing behaviors are still widely prevalent (Richmond, 2019), and occur where peers are not aware or are ill-informed about a mental health concern and how it can impact their classmate(s) (Gaziel et al., 2015).

An important step to increasing pro-social behaviors towards those with a mental health concern is building mental health literacy in their peers. Improving mental health literacy through increased understanding will support the development of empathy, which is vital to reducing stigmatization. While empathy for others can be instilled and strengthened through creating opportunities for contact and engagement with peers who have a mental health concern, the understanding of others' emotional state that underpins empathic responses can be developed through reading literature about young people dealing with a range of social issues including mental ill-health. In fact, such texts may be considered "a gentler teacher" than personal interactions, as reading can decrease the possibility of misunderstandings that can occur in real-life situations (Djikic et al., 2013, p. 44). Due to this "lack of obligation" to the fictional characters, reading fiction can provide a safe space in which the reader can practice their reactions and better process their emotions (Goldstein, 2009, p. 233). Reynolds (2010) also suggests there are "positive long-term social and emotional benefits" for readers of contemporary young adult novels that deal with social issues through the insights readers can gain into themselves and their peers (p. 89).

Regular reading has been shown to have many factors promoting positive mental health while empowering the reader to empathize with others (Atherton, 2020; Billington, 2019; Court, 2020; O'Brien, 2022). Through programs such as the 'Reading Well' Books on Prescription in the UK, there has been a strong call for the inclusion of contemporary young adult novels in school libraries as they can foster empathy in the reader (Atherton, 2020; Brenna, 2015; Claasz, 2014; Glaus, 2014). Promoting a Third Space model for school libraries, Raffaele (2021) argues that the only person to lead wellbeing initiatives in a school library is "the appropriately qualified teacher librarian" (p. 5), yet this view restricts aid to those schools that have a TL and to those students who engage in that space. Importantly, though, the school library is not the only place students can engage with contemporary young adult literature that will aid their emotional growth: The English classroom can offer this opportunity with greater scope for ongoing discussion around mental health that is so important to increasing mental health literacy.

Statement of the Research Problem

With adolescent mental health an increasing concern in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting a broader understanding of mental ill-health in adolescents has become essential in schools. While research has shown the benefits of young adult literature and its potential to further social justice in the education environment (Heath et al., 2017; Hill, 2014; Malo-Juvera & Greathouse, 2020), there is little focus on improving behaviors towards peers with mental ill-health. Research on the school's role in mental wellness in adolescents has also tended to focus on bibliotherapeutic practices, where the texts are focused towards increased understanding in the adolescent with the concern, rather than in their peers – one of the greatest influencers of poor mental health (Bergh et al., 2011; Fildes et al., 2014).

This research sought to raise awareness of mental health through typical classroom activity that addresses curriculum outcomes. Using a grounded theory methodology and a constructivist approach, the research question asked, 'How do adolescents respond to representations of mental health in contemporary young adult literature encountered in the classroom?' Findings suggest that, through 'mirroring' and relatability, adolescents can express understanding of mental health concerns when reading a contemporary young adult novel in their English classroom. Importantly, this research presents the adolescent voice that has been lacking in prior research (Conradi et al., 2014; Hayn et al., 2011).

Review of Literature

Oliver and Sapey's (1999) social model of disability is fundamental to the view that mental ill-health, due to its socially restrictive nature, should be viewed as a social problem that can be ameliorated through education, attitudinal change, and social adjustment (Mertens et al., 2011). Changes in attitude come with awareness and understanding. However, a willingness to disclose one's mental health concerns can be hampered by the attitudes of those around them. Further, Richmond (2014) suggests that having a disinclination to share information about one's mental illness can foster stigma in peers, as they may be indifferent, fearful, or ill-informed about mental ill-health.

Awareness of narrative fiction's power to influence a person's attitudes and empathic tendency in the real world has gained greater attention in the disciplines of psychology and education. Empirical studies show behavioral change after reading fictional literature including increased empathy and pro-social behaviors as well as improved social cognitive skills (Deshpande, 2012; Guarisco et al., 2017; Johnson, 2012). According to Chance (2014), narratives that are well-written, complex stories and that reflect the lives of today's adolescents provide readers with an authentic reflection of the world they inhabit. This allows for perspective taking that can improve attitudes and behaviors towards others (Bandt-Law, 2015).

One way in which young people have been encouraged to engage with fiction or non-fiction texts to improve wellbeing has been through bibliotherapy. Using fictional material, bibliotherapy supports the reader to relate to and vicariously experience the protagonist's situation and problem before considering solutions and alternate behaviors they could apply to their own situation, thereby gaining greater understanding of themselves and improving their own mental health (Gavigan & Kurtts, 2011). Bibliotherapy in schools has been used by classroom teachers, teacher librarians and school counsellors (Camp, 2015).

It has been suggested that bibliotherapy is important in a mental health first aid tool kit to help young people make sense of the often-adverse environment in which they are living and that ultimately affects their engagement at school and with their peers (Dajevskis et al., 2016; Heath et al., 2017). The varied situations and diverse characters described in contemporary realistic fiction offer adolescents opportunities for connection and relatability (Temple et al., 2019). It has also been suggested that books covering eating disorders, substance abuse, depression, and self-harm should be included for those aged 13 to 18 (Walworth, 2018, p. 154). While Merga (2020) advocates for bibliotherapy in the school library to promote wellbeing, others suggest its expansion into the classroom as a regular part of classroom activity (Stainbrook, 2011; Sullivan & Strang, 2002; Zepeda, 2020).

McCulliss and Chamberlain (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of bibliotherapy studies included in a health database. They found several strategies and approaches were used by educators to address a range or issues including aggression and bullying, depression, family problems, self-esteem, and overcoming traumatic events like natural disasters and death. Gavigan and Kurtts (2011) note the first step is choosing one or a set of appropriate books. Then, depending on the age group, educators and students engaged in self-directed or guided reading together or on their own. After reading whole class, small group, or one-on-one discussions—like literature circles or a book club format—followed, with targeted questions related to the issue at hand and how they were tackled in the book(s) (McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013).

Bibliotherapy in schools has been seen as effective when run by welfare teams such as school librarians, welfare coordinators and school nurses (Harvey, 2010). However, there are some barriers to success, including level of literacy and emotional readiness (McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013); time constraints on students to read texts other than school materials (Harvey, 2010); or fear of negative responses from parents, colleagues, and administrators (Camp, 2015). Researchers therefore continue to explore ways in which adolescent mental health and wellbeing can be improved in the school environment in school libraries (Kirkland, 2022; Raffaele, 2021; Wallace, 2020) and in the classroom (Hendrickson, 2018; McPherson-Leitz, 2018; Zepeda, 2020).

Since the start of the 21ˢᵗ Century, there has been an increase in young adult literature focusing on mental health (Webb, 2016). This increase corresponds with global concerns and policy aimed at addressing the prevalence of these issues in our youth. Contemporary young adult novels whose protagonist is dealing with a serious mental health concern increasingly seek to inform and promote understanding in adolescents (Webb, 2016). The contemporary young adult novel gives adolescents a fresh view of peer relationships and their effects, through its ability to shift the emphasis from the problem to the results and consequences of character action and interaction. Further, Short (2018) observes that authenticity and accuracy in recently published novels has increased. This is often reflected in the research practices of the author evident either within the text itself or in an author's notes. There has also been an increase in texts dealing with mental health concerns for younger children, like *Meh* by Deborah Malcolm (2015) and Mel Tregonning's wordless picture book *Small Things* (2016). These books enable the reader to experience the world through the eyes of a small child with severe and little-understood mental health concerns, that is, anxiety and depression. These publications are considered children's books with their poignant illustrations and minimal or no text, however, they cross over into adolescent reading through their content.

To date, much research is on the texts themselves (Malo-Juvera & Greathouse, 2020; Richmond, 2019), or promoting adolescent wellbeing (Merga, 2021, 2022; NSW Department of Education, 2021; State Library of Victoria, 2022; Walworth, 2018). Often the views of teachers and teacher librarians are presented, without seeking to understand ways in which adolescents engage with discussions of mental health (Hayn et al., 2011; Hill, 2014). The current research aids in bridging the gap between these views and adolescent readers' own views of literature as a vehicle to raise awareness of mental health among peers.

This research, therefore, moves on from bibliotherapy, its benefits and barriers, to look at an integrated means to increase adolescent mental health literacy in the school classroom that can be more broadly applied. Importantly, this research builds on psychological research around literature as an agent of change by using a contemporary young adult novel to raise awareness of mental health in adolescents, thereby encouraging pro-social behaviors among the peer group. It presupposes and depends on a strong link between teacher librarians and English teachers that will be further explored in future research.

Methodology

An exploratory mixed method design using a constructivist grounded theory method was chosen due to its real-world focus and flexibility. This allowed the exploration of multi-dimensional and complex phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014) while valuing individual interpretations and meanings (Creswell, 2014). Seeking to ensure an authentic response to

the text, the researcher took an unobtrusive stance in relation to the 'instrument' used, the contemporary young adult novel *One Step* (Daddo, 2016).

Once university and school ethics approvals were obtained, a combination of purposive and criterion-based sampling (Maxwell, 1992) and snowball sampling (Berg & Lune, 2012) were used across three levels to recruit the sample: Initial purposive sampling to identify a proximate regional area with high schools in both government and non-government education systems; population selection through discussions with the principal and the Heads of English at each school; and finally to recruit the individual participants in each site, or class group. Students from three classes across two schools from a large regional city in New South Wales were involved in the study. Both schools are co-educational and non-exclusive and reflect the region's large multicultural community, transient families such as those in the Defense Forces, Australian First Nations families, and rural and remote students who board in the city. One was in the government system and the second in the non-government system. The English syllabus at the schools was based on the Australian Curriculum v.8 (2016) and the NSW Board of Studies Guide (2013). Both participating schools had a school counsellor on staff.

The novel was introduced as the class text for Year 10 English students (aged 15-16) in two Australian secondary schools, with permission from the principals and heads of English. Three teachers of the participating class groups taught one Unit of Study of the Australian Curriculum using this text. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in the form of written material produced by the students. Qualitative data included essays, short responses to reviews of the novel, and short answer responses to excerpts from the novel. A small amount of quantitative data was collected through a brief questionnaire that consisted of closed and open-ended questions on student reading and attitudes to the novel. All materials were changed to digital format and pseudonyms were given to each participant. Microsoft Excel was used to support analysis of the quantitative data. Qualitative data were coded with the aid of data management software, NVivo, following processes of Initial, Verbatim and Process Coding (Phase one), then Focused Coding (Phase two) as described by Saldaña (2016, pp. 239-240). Data were analyzed using a constructivist epistemology and described prioritizing the adolescent voice in the discussion.

This paper reports on part of a doctoral thesis (Shephard, 2022), and focuses on two of the four themes that developed from the adolescent responses. The findings presented in this paper are focused on how the participants felt the text was of value through 'mirroring' their own experience and in the 'emotional impact' the narrative had on them.

Findings and Discussion

In Australian English classrooms it is a rare occurrence for a young adult novel to be used as the set text where the entire class engages in reading a narrative that has been written expressly for them. This research did exactly that, providing an "eye opening" experience for students, according to one participant (Karli). Using Andrew Daddo's *One Step* (2016) as a set text increased classroom reading and supported engagement, with 100% of respondents stating they read the entire text (up from 77% for reading their usual class-set text). Notably, this shift comes from the ten students who labelled themselves as infrequent readers, many of whom indicate that the novel held greater interest for them. For example, Diana who suggested, "I read more of 'One Step' as it was more interesting and more appealing to my age group so I can relate" and Krystal, who commented, "this book actually interested me." The teachers suggested that the reading increase may have been facilitated in part by having access to the audiobook, an interesting area for further study. Participant responses to the narrative, regardless of reader type, were also positive, and 57% of participants indicated they would like more contemporary young adult fiction "like *One Step*" for class reading. This is supported by research from Gibbons et al. (2006), Glaus (2014), Jensen (2016), and Rybakova et al. (2013) that reluctant readers are motivated by and prefer contemporary narratives. Importantly, though, the text from the present study prompted both thinking about and discussing mental health in the classroom.

Through the data coding and analysis process showed that many responses to this text in the classroom coalesced around ideas of accuracy, truth, and relatability in the text's depiction of adolescent life and behaviors. Participants discussed the consequences of negative behaviors in the school environment and reflected on their own experiences. They noted how the novel had "a lasting impact" (Karen) and suggested that it "helps to raise further awareness and can teach students what others are going through" (Karli). These concepts were collected under two themes, 'Mirroring student experience' and 'The emotional impact of *One Step*'.

Mirroring Student Experience

One way of connecting a reader to a text is through the narrative's ability to mirror the individual or collective experience of a reader (Bishop, 1990). This connection is valuable in both engaging the reader and in eliciting an emotional response to the narrative. Published just one year prior to the study, *One Step* (Daddo, 2016) provides this contemporaneity as it focuses on everyday interactions in a suburban home and an Australian high school environment, representing a familiar setting for the participants. This resonates with participant Karen; "the book [is] relatable and modern, which instantly connects with the reader."

The first-person adolescent narrator builds a rapport with the reader. This narrative style authorizes the character to be a proxy for the intended reader through its characterizations, behaviors, dialogue, and interactions and this creates an instant alignment for readers. For example, "I liked how it was easy to understand considering the main character is the same age as me" (Cara). Craig adds that personal understanding in the reader is increased through the character's inner monologue that reveals how the character sees himself and others, a response shared by Kevin: "[the] first person [narrative] gives the reader access to the character's perspective … sharing their opinions and observations." In their responses, participants acknowledge the similarity of their own teenage experiences, seeing reflections of themselves and their peers through the narrative. For example, Cara's response, "my favorite thing about the book was the language and how it connected with audience." This awareness is illustrated in Cathie's comment that the novel is "pretty precise about teen minds and what we go through."

Participants indicate that this novel induces a vicarious experience of the incidents impacting Dylan's behaviors through its linguistic features and accessible writing style, such as its use of the Australian vernacular, which places the reader central to the action. Cody notes that *One Step's* accurate reflection of an adolescent's life has an effect on the reader, describing some events as "hard-hitting" and "cruel" and this is experienced viscerally by Cara: "The way Daddo always makes us relate to Dylan's situations makes me feel a little sick because this can actually happen in real life and it does."

One Step explores the negative impacts on an adolescent's mental health through the cumulative effect of actions of both peers and family members on the central character, Dylan. Through their reading, participants articulate the behaviors depicted as bullying, which Cara describes as a "a pretty traumatic experience," and relate this to the impact it has on the character's mental health. For example, Kellie labelled the representations of bullying in *One Step* as "powerful," describing the protagonist's mental health in the context of his bullying, which makes him feel "humiliated," "sad," and "ashamed." Further, they express their own awareness of the prevalence of these behaviors, for example, "Some people, if not most people will be bullied in their lifetime" (Karli).

This theme showed that adolescents respond to representations of mental health in contemporary young adult literature encountered in the classroom by reflecting on their own experiences considering characterizations in the narrative they see as "accurate," "true" and "relatable." Participants' concept of accuracy in the narrative is related to the overall impression of veracity. For example, Craig's response asserts that "fictional texts can demonstrate 'truth'." Further, with exposure to this novel over time—each class studied the novel for eight to ten weeks—students became increasingly engaged with the protagonist and the problems he was facing. For example, Krystal's personal alignment with Dylan's experiences moved from detached in her earliest response where she reflects on the action around the character in the third person ("he [Dylan] is still learning about the consequences

of his actions"), towards a more insightful tone in later responses where she noted that her own experience was mirrored in the text, "it was about problems I can relate to."

In addition to the mirroring effect this novel had for readers, the personal connections to the narrative participants described were collected under a code of 'empathy,' which is outlined in the second theme, 'The emotional impact of *One Step*'.

The Emotional Impact of One Step

Fiction has been described as "a powerful and ancient virtual reality technology" that can simulate the real experiences and dramas of social interactions and human life more broadly (Gottschall, 2012, p. 67). Fiction can therefore provoke an emotional response to the text through its power to promote both concrete images and emotional memories in the reader (Hogan, 2010). The sympathetic and empathetic response this engenders can be intensified with a text such as *One Step* (Daddo, 2016) that authentically reflects the adolescent reader's environment, allowing the reader to experience the narrative from the character's viewpoint through an age-correlated first-person focalization. As suggested by Danielle, the use of first-person narration from an adolescent viewpoint gives "[the] audience raw insight into the emotions and mind of his characters as the changes occur."

While identification with a character is a core component of readers' empathy, identification does not necessarily rely on similarities in the character, but on the sense of understanding the experiences described (Keen, 2007). This is indicated by Cody's comment that familiarity with events can affect "readers who are going or have gone through similar situations." For example, Charles responds to a scene in which the main character, Dylan's, parents separate (Daddo, 2016) by stating that "the audience is able to connect Dylan's to their own experiences. This allows the audience to feel Dylan's discomfort." In this research, participants emphasized their identification with Dylan in a personal response to the narrative expressed through their language and punctuation. They expressed how the novel made them feel anger, sorrow, and sadness for the plight of the character, encouraging feelings of empathy that, in one case, leads to a desire for action; "Daddo evokes empathy in the responder, who feels the desperate urge to want to help Dylan in his struggles" (Kaleb). This novel stirred participants' emotions and their response to how Dylan is bullied and betrayed is to call attention to the injustice they see or feel. This personal connection is expressed through "I-statements" (Gee, 2000) such as "allowed me to see" (Karli) or "makes us relate" and "helps us connect" (Cara). In this, the students are expressing their opinions of how they treat others and would like to be treated by others, core components of empathy.

Relatability is also seen through the lens of the reader's experience, and this also induces an emotional response. As Kate notes, the level of sympathy a reader may have for Dylan will "depend on our own personal experiences." However, Kristopher describes

common experiences such as Dylan seeking greater social connectedness with peers as a way to elicit empathy in a reader; "In *One Step* Dylan is desperately trying to fit in with other friendship groups at school, and through his struggle and emotional journey the reader is able to evoke empathy for him." By building "a relationship between the reader and Dylan," Karen suggests, the author engages the reader in Dylan's narrative.

Importantly, the author's language, linguistic features, and tone also promote empathy in the reader. For both Kevin and Krystal, the emotive tone and language that Daddo uses "stirs up an emotional response from the reader" (Kevin) and "makes the audience feel the emotions" (Krystal). Krystal goes on to note that the rhetorical questions that stem from Dylan's inner monologue "make the audience think about [the narrative] more," and this improves both engagement and empathy. This is echoed in Diana's comment that by allowing the reader "to imagine what was said" through dialogic interruptions the reader is expected to understand and fill in the blanks by referencing their own teenaged experience.

Through reading fictional texts such as *One Step*, the reader is open to experiencing many emotions and provided the opportunity to contemplate the motivations and behaviors of individuals, peers, and families through the characters in the novel. In this, fiction can "improve empathy and social understanding" (Oatley, 2016, p. 625). However, the benefits can extend beyond this individual effect and this one encounter: Research has also shown that experiencing a personal connection with a text that builds empathy and understanding can result in long-term changes that can guide a person's real-life behaviors (Djikic & Oatley, 2014; Johnson, 2012; Oatley et al., 2018; Webber & Agiro, 2019). This is also expressed by Karen, who points to the "long-lasting" impact of stories that may "help to change your view on life, yourself or others."

This research, therefore, leans towards this greater outcome. For example, *One Step* is a novel that deals with bullying and its effect on adolescent mental health, however, associates this with the worst outcome of these factors: the possibility of suicide. In his responses to the novel, Craig signals an awareness of the cause and effect of peer behavior in relation to adolescent mental health. He notes that the protagonist's problems are "all too familiar" and that "everyone will get" the character and his actions, pointing to the fact that the novel provides readers insight into the problems that cause suicidal ideation and helps raise awareness of suicide prevention. This is echoed throughout the first theme, where the text is seen as 'mirroring' the readers' experiences. It is this raising of awareness and the novel's ability to add to the reader's mental health literacy that adds to the potential long-term value of this research.

One element to consider, however, is that the participants' ability to think deeply about and respond expansively to a novel such as *One Step* can be impacted by the assessment task they were given. For example, the essay tasks enabled the most beneficial

platform in which the participants could reflect on the text and consider the impact of the narrative on themselves and their thinking. It was also evident that reflecting on the whole text was more useful in promoting an empathetic reaction, in contrast to using only an excerpt from the novel. This individual effect can be further augmented by open discussion in the classroom using the fictional narrative as a springboard. It is the combination of this deep reading and opportunities for conversations among peers in a supported environment such as the classroom that can help to reduce stigma and self-stigma often associated with mental illness and opens pathways to help-seeking.

In this research, the participants' responses demonstrate that students will readily enter a dialogue about mental health, causes for negative impacts on mental health and the consequences of the many smaller interactions an adolescent has with family and peers, given the right book and the opportunity. Using the English curriculum to study contemporary young adult literature that raises concerns of mental health in adolescence empowers students to voice their concerns and views about mental ill-health and how it impacts them and those around them. Importantly, this benefit to mental health literacy can be replicated broadly through the English curriculum in all schools and at different age levels, provided suitable texts are accessed. It is at this point of text selection and resourcing that the role of the teacher librarian is fundamental to success.

Limitations

While using a grounded theory method supported a thorough exploration of the data, there were a number of limitations to the study. For example, restrictions placed on the researcher and the research design by ethics processes, the Department of Education, and the Australian Curriculum meant there was no ability to return to the participants for additional information or qualification, for example through more in-depth questions at the end of the Unit that accessed students' attitudes and opinions in a more focused way. Further, the numbers of participants per class group were small (6 – 9) and a lack of demographic data restricted the ways in which the data could be explored. Nevertheless, the unobtrusive design of the research strongly contributed to a natural response from the students in their task responses.

Conclusions and Implications

Increased mental health literacy in adolescents is critical, as it can lead to greater empathy and result in less stigmatizing behavior (Mitchell, 2014; Perry et al., 2014). Schools are a prime site of influence and therefore integral to raising adolescent mental health awareness and promoting pro-social behaviors (Carlisle et al., 2018; Lawrence et al., 2015). In this research, participants advocate for contemporary young adult novels focused on mental

health to be included in their classrooms. This adds the adolescent voice to prior discussions about the value of including contemporary narratives in the classroom (Jackett, 2007; Newell, 2017; Roberts et al., 2013). Studying and discussing these texts provides a recognized avenue to enhancing mental health literacy, and the English curriculum offers a strong opportunity in which to make mental health part of the everyday discussion.

It is noted that the texts that a teacher selects for use in the classroom are influenced by many things, including personal preference, curricular requirements, student-based factors, as well as consideration of the external environment, such as community reactions (Watkins & Ostenson, 2015). In Australian schools—as with schools in other jurisdictions—texts can be repeated for many years due to a strong focus on curriculum requirements and maximizing student outcomes, lack of time and information, budgetary constraints, curriculum, or institutional restrictions (Davies, 2019; Healy, 2010; Jogie, 2015b, 2017). However, even when new texts are introduced, new writing and formats are rarely included (Jogie, 2015a, 2015b, 2017; Teese, 2013). If teachers have been designated as primarily responsible for text selection (Hateley, 2014), they need support from teacher-librarians to suggest and source well-written, contemporary young adult literature dealing with the issues around mental health as texts for the classroom.

This research showed that external factors such as the English teacher's attitude and task design, home environment, parental attitude and promotional material often influence responses to a narrative. However, the research also indicated that, if contemporary young adult novels were included in the English curriculum, adolescents and teachers will be accessing a valuable platform to learn how adolescents' behaviors do impact a person's mental health.

This doctoral research explored one aspect of this larger program of research. Future research plans to explore the resources and mechanisms needed to better incorporate young adult literature in the English syllabus by focusing on its role to "promote the development of emotional resilience and other factors that help prevent mental illness," (Mental Health Council of Australia, 2014, pp. 9-10), thereby showing its commitment to addressing the mental health crisis facing our young people. The next phase of the research is to collaborate with teacher-librarians, teachers, and students to assess preferences for and attitudes to these texts, and the barriers and facilitators of incorporating everyday discussions of mental health through including young adult literature on the English syllabus. Part of this program will be to identify relevant texts for English study across the stages of learning, and to discuss how these can be best integrated into the English curriculum with educators and teacher-librarians. This program will explore innovative ways to ensure availability of these texts across all schools and advocate for increased funding from government. It will also look at ways to resource teachers through training and materials, within the systems of support available in schools.

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