
Textual Entanglements

Interactive Fiction in the Secondary School English Classroom

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Abstract

My research investigates a contradiction between my values and my practice as an English teacher; while I recognise the importance of students engaging actively and creatively with texts they are reading, I found myself teaching lessons that positioned my students as passengers rather than meaning-makers. In this thesis, I report upon how I used one form of writing to respond to this contradiction: Interactive Fiction (IF).

In this thesis, IF refers to a non-linear form of hypertext fiction that is read using an electronic device. Employing a post-humanist onto-epistemology and a material-dialogic conceptualisation of classroom reading, this study examines the possibilities for IF as a resource in the secondary school English classroom, exploring what the writing of IF can reveal about my positionality, how IF can be written for use in the English classroom, the affordances of IF as a classroom resource, and the influence of IF upon classroom talk. As such, it considers the ways that my students and I became, through our engagement with IF, part of an entangled set of relations emerging amongst ourselves, IF and a range of organic and inorganic factors.

In order to identify some of IF's affordances, I have incorporated into this action research study a variety of qualitative methods, such as lesson recording, interviews, autoethnography and the creative writing of IF. I show that IF can be used to conduct self-reconnaissance, using IF to produce an account of the ways in which my own privilege, values and memories, along with various policies and practices, shape my uneasy positionality as a teacher. I report upon how my approach to writing IF has developed and show that IF can be written in a way that enables students to discuss, make and comment upon language choices. I show that working with IF affected my teaching, finding that IF can make teaching and learning enjoyable, but also that it can help to make space for the voices of students during lessons. Finally, I show that IF can be used to help students practise inferential prediction, evaluation and argumentation, as well to support metalinguistic understanding and to facilitate metalinguistic forms of classroom talk.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Vignette: The English Corridor

Walking down a first-floor corridor of the secondary academy where I work, I glance repeatedly through glass walls and into the English classrooms on my right-hand side. In each room between twenty and thirty students sit in rows, facing forwards. A teacher stands at the front. Sometimes, I see students reading from books or from printed resources. However, in every classroom I pass, I notice that the teacher is projecting presentation slides onto the board at the front of the room. These slides feature prescribed lesson objectives, information, images, questions, tasks, model answers and success criteria. Often, identical presentation slides will be used simultaneously in multiple classrooms. All of the lessons I pass progress in linear and predictable ways. By the end of each lesson, I know that students will have engaged to varying degrees with the content and ideas that each teacher chose to share with their class prior to the lesson's commencement. The teachers are in control.

(9th September 2020)

1.2 Control

Until recently, I worked as an English teacher in a large inner-city secondary school that I here refer to as CentreTown Academy. In the above vignette, I describe the experience of walking down a corridor at this school and glancing into the lessons taking place. To me, the description remains a troubling one, for I have come to see highly controlled, linear English lessons as problematic. If all English lessons are structured in entirely predictable ways, the space for students to make and express their own choices about meaning can be limited. It can become easier for students to accept the manufactured interpretations their teachers offer them than to attempt making reasonable choices about meaning for themselves. In this context, a 'manufactured' interpretation refers to one that 'is imposed on a student' (Giovanelli and Mason, 2015, p.42). When students do not learn to make meaning from language, replicating instead the interpretations of their teachers, they do not necessarily practise or demonstrate reading skills that will benefit them beyond the classroom. By focusing all lessons on extracts, quotations, characters, questions, models and interpretations that are selected and designed exclusively by the teacher, we arguably provide students with few

opportunities to make meaning for themselves. Furthermore, in attempting to reduce the risk of students becoming distracted from prescribed and seemingly essential curricular content, we deprive our students of a voice. This approach to English teaching conceals the sociomaterial complexities of meaning-making; if students cannot experience meaning as it emerges from the entanglement of their own voice with the voices of the people, texts, ideas and things around them, they may not develop the literacy skills and practices that will be of most use to them.

1.3 Poem: February 2024

OK class, SLANT:

Sit up, Listen, Answer when I ask,
Nothing in your hands, Track the speaker – never glance
out of the window when we're working
in these glass-walled classrooms;

there's CCTV everywhere except the bathrooms
and silent corridors, so never speak unless you're asked to.
Your opinion is a doodle in the margin, and I must ask you
to rip that page out of your book.

Now, here's your mark: you
underperformed. Your target is a seven, but you hardly scored.
You didn't guess a single one of the answers I hoard
in my comfortable, corduroy, home county thoughts.

Didn't you use the online platform we bought?
Come on! It teaches you with memes – you ought
to enjoy that, right?

Right, shall we go on to the next assessment?
Yes, it says create, but your best investment
is to regurgitate
the answer I distributed to you last lesson.

Wait – before you start – just one second:

The paper says create a story: that I grant.
But please don't try to give it any personal *slant*.

(Holdstock, 2024e, redrafted for this thesis)

The above poem, which I wrote more recently than the vignette with which I opened this chapter, is also inspired by my experiences working at CentreTown Academy. It highlights my ongoing and developing concerns regarding the constraints imposed upon students' voices within the secondary school English classroom. It is a satirical monologue, exaggerating and interrogating the monologic teaching practices that concern me most. In the monologic classroom, the 'teacher informs the student of certain prescribed forms of knowledge' (Fisher, 2011, p.91) and, while they might pose questions, they 'only truly care about how closely the student's response aligns with some school-sanctioned or teacher-predetermined position' (Boyd and Markarian, 2011, p.517). With this in mind, my poem draws attention to the way that students' voices are often constrained by school policies, assessment regimes and pedagogical practices. It highlights the way that behaviourist strategies are implemented in schools, strategies that aim not to get students thinking, but which seek to condition students into acquiring new forms of behaviour (Prithcard, 2008, p.6).

Teachers at CentreTown Academy are asked to tell students to SLANT, SLANT being an acronym and accompanying teaching strategy that was advocated by Lemov in his book, *Teach Like a Champion* (2015); it is a strategy that helps teachers engineer 'classroom spaces where speech, writing and gestures are standardised and regulated in intricate detail' (Cushing, 2021, p.33). It is an acronym that demands students Sit up, Listen, Ask and answer questions, hold Nothing in their hands and Track the speaker. During professional development sessions at CentreTown Academy, *Teach Like a Champion* is referred to frequently, and there are SLANT posters in most classrooms. Moreover, in English lessons, writing is routinely framed as a formulaic act, with students being directed to use acronyms like PEEL (Point, Evidence, Explain, Link) to structure much of their written work. Although the SLANT strategy and its accompanying posters are employed variously and to different degrees by English teachers at CentreTown Academy, and although CentreTown teachers

use acronyms in a wide range of ways, I was inspired by my experiences at the school to write 'OK class, SLANT'. As a text, it both highlights and exaggerates the constraints placed upon student voices at CentreTown Academy, foregrounding my own concerns regarding said constraints. By constraining the voices of students, English teachers like me can relegate the process of meaning-making to a position of secondary importance, for if students' own voices are granted limited space, then the extent to which they are making meaning for themselves is also limited. In part, this perceived problem is the situation to which my PhD research seeks to respond.

1.4 A Living Contradiction

Before beginning my PhD, I completed an MA in creative writing and education at Goldsmiths, University of London. Therefore, as a writer-teacher, I recognise the value of creative expression and the individual voice. This is perhaps why I was initially drawn towards seeing reading as a transactional process (Rosenblatt 1978; 2005a; 2005b), recognising 'the reciprocal importance of both reader and text' (Rosenblatt, 2005, p.xxix). Although my understanding of reading has developed, incorporating post-humanist, sociomaterialist theories, I still hold that words do not transmit information, but are something to which people respond, drawing upon their own unique set of memories and experiences. As such, every word is at least 'a two-sided act' (Voloshinov, 1973, pp.86-87), with both readers and writers being personally involved in a linguistically mediated form of dialogue.

However, as a teacher, I came to realise that my classroom practice did not always reflect my beliefs. The pressures acting upon teachers can cause us to focus more on assessment outcomes than we do on the reading and writing capabilities of our pupils. Such a focus can position students as passive recipients of knowledge rather than engaged meaning-makers, transforming the classroom into a monologic environment. It results in teaching that subscribes to a banking model of education, a model in which 'the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat' (Freire, 1996, p.53). Such an approach to teaching denies students a voice, undermining the possibilities for English as a subject which enables 'personal growth' (Cox,

1989, p.60). For many English teachers like me, this is troubling (Goodwyn, 2016), as they see English as a means of 'developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives' (Cox, 1989, p.60). I became troubled by the misalignment of my teaching practice at CentreTown Academy with my values as an English teacher. I perceived the existence of a 'living contradiction': I was experiencing 'two mutually exclusive opposites, the experience of holding educational values and the experience of their negation' (Whitehead, 1989, p.44). I felt that the monologic approaches that I, along with my colleagues, was enacting were anti-democratic, as they were failing to nurture the independent reading and interpretation skills of my pupils. This living contradiction was compounded by the school's drive towards increased curricular standardisation, a drive which contradicted my belief in the role of teachers as professional and adaptive decision-makers.

However, at the beginning of my PhD, I suspected that there was a form of fiction which might help me to address this issue: Interactive Fiction (IF). I felt that IF, a digital form of fiction that requires readers to interact with texts by contributing input in the form of clicks or typed commands, could help me to direct more attention towards the social practice of reading, enabling students to practise and develop their own reading and interpretation skills. I therefore embarked upon an educational action research project that aimed to explore the possibilities that IF might afford me, an English teacher working in the secondary school English classroom. I set out to discover how teaching and learning might change, were I to swap existing resources and presentation slide decks for works of IF. By changing the 'digital artefacts' (Hennessy, 2011, p.463) that I projected onto the board of my classroom, what consequences would emerge? Specifically, how could works of IF transform classroom literacy practices such as the experiences of reading and writing? And what could I learn, as a teacher, a creative writer and as a researcher, through working with IF?

1.5 Interactive Fiction

I subscribe to an open definition of what IF can be: Adapting the words of Maher, I define IF as 'any form of storytelling which involves the reader or listener' as a digitally 'active participant' (Maher, 2011). I insert the word 'digitally' because I am focusing on works of IF that are read via an electronic

device and which are dependent upon digital forms of interaction, usually enacted using a computer mouse or keyboard. Such forms of digital interaction can foreground the active nature of meaning-making (Skains, 2019) because each physically enacted decision transforms the reading experience, changing the quality of the participant's engagement and highlighting the significance of choice. The financial accessibility of Twine (Klimas, 2023 – a free tool used to create hypertext or Choose-Your-Own-Adventure forms of IF) and its inviting ease-of-use (Kopas, 2015a) have caused me to focus my attention exclusively on works of IF created using this software.

Twine's ease-of-use is relevant, because my research straddles the practices of teaching and creative writing. As part of my research, I designed, wrote and developed works of IF for use in the English classroom, and the classroom data I collected relate to lessons in which I read and discussed these self-authored works of IF with my students. It is, in part, this fact that renders my research unique, for nobody else has conducted research using the stories I have written, and little research considers in detail the relationship between teacher-authored IF and the classroom experiences that such works might produce. Moreover, although some research has explored the beneficial experiences of teachers who write (Cremin et al., 2020), my research breaks new ground by exploring the situated experiences of an English teacher-writer who is working with the genre of IF.

To introduce one way in which IF can be used in the classroom, I shall now present a second vignette. In September 2020, towards the start of my PhD journey and not long after the first Coronavirus lockdown came to an end, I read a work of IF with a mixed ability class of year seven students (aged 11 to 12). Writing the following vignette, I attempted to portray the experience.

Before continuing, you may like to read the work of IF in question; the piece is entitled [The Doodle](#) (Holdstock, 2022c). I wrote it with a view to developing an understanding of IF from a writer's perspective. Other works of IF that I have developed during my research can also be found on [the itch.io page](#) that I created to host them (Holdstock, 2024d).

1.6 Vignette: A First Attempt

It is a cloudy, mid-September morning. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the need for year group bubbles to be kept separate from one another, I am teaching my year seven class in the library and not in a classroom. Students are sat behind disorderly rows of green-topped, rhomboid tables and I am stood at the front of the room, confined to an area that has been marked out with tape. Projected onto the whiteboard in front of the students is a work of IF: The Doodle.

I feel nervous and excited. Not only am I using a work of IF in the classroom, but I am using 'The Doodle' - a piece that I have written myself.

We read 'The Doodle' collectively, engaging in whole class discussion, passage by passage. After reading each passage, I use questions to elicit developed verbal responses from students and to encourage them to engage with each other's ideas. Moreover, during these exchanges we collectively decide upon the link we are going to select.

Students are eager to participate; many hands shoot up whenever I ask a question. In particular, when I ask them which link we should choose in order to proceed and why, students are eager to respond and to offer competing or contrasting opinions. The experience is joyous, and although I lead from the front, the students have a degree of control over the direction that the lesson takes. It is the class, as a collective, that makes the choices.

(17th September 2020)

1.7 Joyous Talk

A CentreTown Academy librarian (Ms Doig) witnessed the above-described lesson and remarked that there was 'Good Q&A interaction' during the lesson, that students were very 'expressive' in their answers and that students seemed to be 'thinking carefully' (written feedback, 17 September 2020).

A newly-qualified teacher who was observing the lesson (Ms Winn) commented that students gave 'insightful responses to not only what we were told in the story' but also in relation to what was 'yet to come' (written feedback, 17 September 2020). This suggests that Ms Winn observed what Alexander might term imaginative speculation (Alexander, 2020, p.144). The teacher also remarked

that students seemed to take ‘ownership’ of the story via their ‘decisions’ and ended up analysing language ‘without really knowing it’. Such comments suggest that I relinquished a degree of control of the students’ reading experience. Finally, the teacher also noted that my use of ‘class discussion with an emphasis on verbal responses allowed students to articulate thoughts and ideas which they may otherwise have struggled to communicate through written tasks’. These remarks indicate that *The Doodle* enabled me to scaffold student thought and talk in a noteworthy and potentially useful manner. I made space for the voices of my students. In fieldnotes taken after the lesson, I described the experience as ‘joyous’ and reflected on the ‘rich ideas’ that students had expressed. In particular, I noted that ‘the class talked about the protagonist’s jealousy’ towards another character (fieldnotes, 7 October 2020); I had not predicted that students would bring this up, and I was therefore pleased and surprised that this idea had arisen from our discussions. Moreover, I was happy to observe that such forms of classroom discussion were possible within the context of CentreTown Academy, and that their value was recognisable to my colleagues. Their feedback and my fieldnotes suggest that the reading experience was somewhat reciprocal, and not entirely monologic. However, I also noted that there were some aspects of the lesson that required further thought:

‘I need to reflect more about how long the passages are, visibility for students around the room and how to hold the attention of students that drift. Also [,] the story was way too long - we were nowhere near finished!’

(Fieldnotes, 17 September 2020)

1.8 My Research, in Context

Having provided a flavour of what working with IF looked like towards the start of my PhD research, I will now provide an overview of what my research involved, giving details about where and when it took place.

My research relates to my practice as a teacher working at CentreTown Academy. CentreTown Academy is a mixed and diverse, non-selective, inner-city secondary school. According to gov.uk data, over 40% of current students are eligible for free school meals (gov.uk, 2024). When I started

this research in 2019, the same source indicated that the number of students eligible for free school meals was above 60%. According to 2021 census data, within the borough where CentreTown Academy is located, just over half of the population recorded their ethnicity as White, while a quarter of residents identified as Black, Black British, Caribbean or African. Furthermore, 40% of homes in the area can be categorised as social housing (Office for National Statistics, 2024).

As a privately educated, white male from the southeast of England, and having worked at CentreTown Academy since 2016 as a teacher of English, I conducted my research from a position of privilege. I was (and continue to be) acutely aware of this privilege. I was also in a position of responsibility within the English department when I began my PhD. Working as the Key Stage 5 English Coordinator, I was responsible for overseeing our A Level English provision at CentreTown Academy. I have conducted my PhD on a part-time basis, meaning that it has been conducted over a six-year period. In that time, I have been promoted several times, working first as Second in Charge of the English department, then as a Director of Teaching and Learning, before finally being promoted to the role of Associate Assistant Principal. I left CentreTown Academy in May 2024 to pursue a career in teacher education at university level. CentreTown Academy supported me through my research by granting me permission to conduct it and by allowing me to move to a part-time contract so that I would have sufficient time to devote to the project. Moreover, during my time at CentreTown academy, I developed good working relationships with my colleagues, and I now recognise many of the teachers who participated in and supported this research project to be close friends of mine. However, I also adopt a critical stance towards some of the policies and strategies that were lauded and implemented during my time at CentreTown Academy. Consequently, I characterise my relationship with CentreTown Academy as warm yet nuanced. In this thesis, I endeavour to portray this nuanced relationship and its role in my research.

Over the six years that my educational action research project evolved, I conducted some initial reconnaissance (see Section 4.6.1), before engaging in classroom-based, collaborative action research that involved cycles of planning, action and reflection (see Section 4.6.3). In addition, I have

engaged in episodes of data analysis, reflection and reporting (see Sections 4.6.3 and 4.7). I have met with my PhD supervisors 46 times, and the research has become a significant part of my life. I have continuously reflected upon and evaluated my practice and values, and I have reported my research findings in various ways. For example, elsewhere I have written about the dialogic possibilities for IF (Holdstock, 2021b), the process of writing IF for the classroom (Holdstock, 2022b), using IF to engage students in metalinguistic talk (Holdstock, 2023) and using IF to explore positionality (Holdstock, 2024c). In this thesis I offer a more 'complete' research report, bringing together all of the work that I have done over the last six years into a single text.

1.9 My Aims and Research Questions

Embarking upon my PhD, I set out to explore the influence that IF can have upon teaching and learning in English. As a writer, I also wanted to explore the influence that the classroom and the genre of IF could have on the way I write, and what I could learn from the experience of working with an unfamiliar genre. In this thesis, I therefore respond to the following main research question:

- How might the introduction of IF into the secondary school English classroom influence the quality of textual entanglements being facilitated?

I respond to this broad research question by considering the following three sub-questions:

- What can producing a work of IF that is set in a secondary school classroom reveal about my position as a teacher, a writer and a creative practitioner?
- How can works of IF be produced for use in the secondary school English classroom?
- How can introducing works of IF into the secondary school English classroom affect the quality of my teaching practice?
- How can introducing works of IF into the secondary school English classroom affect the characteristics of the talk taking place during lessons?

1.10 Thesis Outline

I begin this thesis with a review of the relevant literature; in Chapter 2, I consider what has already been written and discovered about IF and its potential role within education, highlighting the gaps that my own research explores. I also explain how I have come to conceptualise the classroom

reading of IF and, in so doing, unpack the theory behind the term 'textual entanglement'. In Chapter 3, I turn to my sub-questions, reviewing the literature that I have drawn upon when considering IF as a creative tool and as a pedagogical resource. I do so to begin my exploration of the ways in which IF can disrupt problematic pedagogical practices that are at play within the context of CentreTown Academy and, more broadly, within the UK secondary education sector. As a good deal of my research focuses on the ways in which IF can influence the nature and quality of classroom talk, I conclude the chapter by introducing the literature and ideas that have informed how I theorise this relationship.

Having reviewed literature relevant to this study, in Chapter 4 I describe my methodology, research design, methods, and the ethical issues involved in my research. This enables me to share how my findings have been generated and to highlight the methodological contributions that my research makes.

In Chapters 5-9, I present a discussion of my findings, responding to each of my sub-research questions in turn. In Chapter 5, to consider the unresearched relationship between the creative writing of IF and the positionality of teacher-writer-researchers, I report on the ways in which IF has helped shape and unveil a nuanced account of my own positionality as a teacher-writer-researcher working at CentreTown Academy.

In Chapter 6, I present findings that relate to the ways in which IF can be written for use in the secondary school English classroom. In doing so, I provide those interested in the educational affordances of IF with insights into how such works might be designed for use in the classroom.

Chapter 7 details the ways in which IF can be said to have disrupted pedagogical models that exist at CentreTown Academy, before identifying the challenges that such disruptions engendered. This chapter explores how teaching with IF might contrast with existing teaching practices enacted in UK secondary schools, drawing attention to some of the potential advantages and disadvantages of IF as a teaching resource.

In Chapter 8, I examine the affective experiences, teaching strategies and forms of learning that working with IF made possible. As such, I present findings relating to the educational experiences that IF can enable, allowing other teachers and researchers to recognise its educational affordances.

In Chapter 9, I describe the influence that researching and working with IF has had on classroom talk at CentreTown Academy. I do so to offer teachers and researchers interested in how classroom talk can be facilitated with fresh insights into the role that IF can play in stimulating and scaffolding worthwhile forms of discussion and dialogue.

Overall, Chapters 5-9 follow an outward trajectory, moving from a focus on what IF can reveal about my personal positionality towards a description of IF's influence on the sociomaterial situations that emerged during English lessons at CentreTown Academy.

Finally, in my concluding chapter (Chapter 10), I draw together my findings and respond to my research questions, outlining how IF has affected the ways in which my students and I engage with written texts. I highlight the limitations, contributions and implications of my research in order to underline the significance of the work I have conducted and to draw attention to potential avenues for further exploration.

1.11 Useful Links

In this thesis, I frequently refer to works of IF that I have written during the course of my research. It is therefore advisable that readers read/play these texts before continuing. The works of IF in question, and links to the pages where they can be found, are listed below:

- [The Doodle](https://makingmeanings.itch.io/the-doodle): <https://makingmeanings.itch.io/the-doodle>
- [What Happens When You Close Your Eyes \(WHWYCYE\)](https://makingmeanings.itch.io/what-happens-when-you-close-your-eyes):
<https://makingmeanings.itch.io/what-happens-when-you-close-your-eyes>
- [Aboard the SS Mendi](https://makingmeanings.itch.io/aboard-the-ss-mendi): <https://makingmeanings.itch.io/aboard-the-ss-mendi>
- [A Great Gatsby \(AGG\)](https://makingmeanings.itch.io/a-great-gatsby): <https://makingmeanings.itch.io/a-great-gatsby>
- [A Party at Gatsby's](https://makingmeanings.itch.io/a-party-at-gatsbys): <https://makingmeanings.itch.io/a-party-at-gatsbys>

- [Gretel, Redesigned](https://makingmeanings.itch.io/gretel-redesigned): <https://makingmeanings.itch.io/gretel-redesigned>

Finally, all of the works of IF I have created were produced using Twine. [Twine](https://twinery.org/) (<https://twinery.org/>) enabled me to write non-linear, interactive stories. It is free, easy and enjoyable to use, and I highly recommend readers try writing with Twine prior to reading this thesis, as doing so will make the content of this thesis more readily comprehensible.

2 Literature Review – Part 1

2.1 Vignette: An Empty Library

At half past seven in the morning on 31st July 2023, the university library is virtually deserted. As I arrive and make my way up to the computer rooms on the first floor, I pass only the security guard at the building's entrance and one other person, who appears to be asleep. The plastic carrier bag of half-eaten snacks that sits beside their head yawns at me as I pass, and I realise that I should, perhaps, have had a slightly more substantial breakfast.

I'm here early because I am uneasy; the summer is getting away from me. This holiday was supposed to be the period during which I redrafted the literature review for my thesis, but I am two weeks into the summer break, and I am yet to begin.

I take my seat before a computer on the first floor, at a desk situated beside a wall of huge, floor-to-ceiling windows. They remind me of the glass walls of the classrooms in which I often teach. It is bright outside, but the sky is mortuary grey. Persistent, peristaltic traffic nudges by.

Where to begin? I've been nudging my way forward with this PhD project for four years now, so I've read a great many articles, books, blog posts and other texts. Which ones should I start with? How should I structure this chapter? And what, in the context of my work as an action researcher, should I set out to achieve when composing this literature review?

As I start reviewing the various papers, articles, presentations, and submissions that I've composed over the last few years, my hunger swells. However, when I open an article that I drafted last year, I happen upon a concept which I hope will get the ball rolling today: lineage of practice.

(31st July 2023)

2.2 Lineages of Practice

Action research positions me as an insider, a practitioner-researcher who, instead of claiming to observe and analyse phenomena from the outside, explores and develops forms of practice within a particular research context (Kemis, 2014). As a practitioner-researcher engaged in critical reflection and the development of my own practice, it is helpful to consider how this practice might

be located in relation to other lineages of practice (Nelson, 2013). For, if 'we wish to claim that our praxis manifests new knowledge or substantial new insights, the implication is that we know what the established knowledge or insights are' (p.31). For example, considering my main research question (How might the introduction of IF into secondary school English classrooms influence the quality of textual entanglements being facilitated?), we can begin to consider various existing forms of knowledge and practice upon which my research builds. Therefore, in this chapter, I will first establish how and to what effect other researchers and educators have conceptualised and used IF. Then, I shall outline what is meant by the term 'textual entanglement'. Alongside this, I shall identify the research gaps that my thesis seeks to plug and show how I relate to the research that I build upon.

By exploring my relationship with the lineages of practice upon which my research builds, I look to contextualise the insights that my research produces. However, it is worth noting at this stage that the phrase 'lineage of practice' is somewhat problematic, for I do not understand practice to be linear. In fact, I conceptualise practice rhizomatically; rather than building on existing lineages, it 'operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003, p.21). As a result, various lineages of practice have affected my practice, but I do not necessarily follow their trajectories. When Deleuze and Guattari refer to the rhizome they describe a 'chaotically distributed network' rather than a 'regular hierarchy of trunk and branches' (Moulthrop, 1994, p.301). My practice is socially situated – it is not an individual, linear or strictly chronological endeavour, and this makes the rhizome metaphor appropriate; experiences and individuals I encounter today alter the way I understand my past and future experiences, changing them, and an infinite range of factors that are beyond my control both within and without the classroom inform my actions as a teacher and as a researcher. As such, my practice has no convenient, linear or chronological 'beginning or end' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003, p.25), despite this thesis being necessarily organised into a structured report. For similar reasons, I feel able to begin this chapter with a vignette that connects the relatively recent redrafting of this chapter with the years of reading, writing, research and teaching that preceded it; my work as a teacher, writer and researcher is layered, iterative and rhizomatic, and it

would be dishonest of me to claim that this literature review was completed prior to the commencement of my study. Perhaps then, it is better to say that this chapter shall introduce some of the literature that has become part of my rhizome of practice during my research.

2.3 Vignette: A Basement in the British Library

After purchasing my ticket from the kiosk, I head downstairs to a basement exhibition space. I've been meaning to come to the British Library since someone at that conference in Exeter at the end of June mentioned the Digital Storytelling exhibition to me. As I descend, I am unsure what to expect. I am both excited and a touch anxious: What new insights into the world of IF will I glean? What new stories will I encounter? What worrying gaps in my knowledge will I unearth?

When I enter the windowless space, some of my inner tension dissipates, and a touch of disappointment breaks over me; the space is quite small, made up of a single room containing some video material, ten or so digital stories and some information boards.

However, as I start to circulate, my excitement and curiosity rebuild.

I revisit 80 days (Inkle Ltd, 2015), a game I have played previously on my phone, stepping once again into the shoes of the valet Passepartout and accompanying Phileas Fogg on a round-the-world adventure.

I dive into Windrush Tales (3-Fold Games, 2023), thinking about how my colleagues and I could share the story with students studying Sam Selvon's The Lonely Londoners and noting the interesting epistolary form that the creators have used along with the way they have effectively integrated pictures into the story.

I learn about the language of the 2011 uprising in Egypt as I explore A Dictionary of the Revolution (Hanafi, 2017), enjoying the way that an interactive, digital, dictionary-like format has been used to tell a powerful story.

Most compelling of all, I think back to the Manchester Arena terrorist attack of 2017 as I read C ya laterrr (Hett, 2017), an intensely personal and autobiographical work of hypertext IF exploring Dan Hett's memories and re-imaginings of the aftermath of an attack which killed his brother. In tears, I marvel sadly at the way Twine has enabled Hett to remember and revisit the choices that he made after that fateful event.

This space is rich with stories, variously and evocatively told. I am forcefully reminded of the fact that Interactive Fiction, as a form of digital storytelling, is a literary category with painful, porous and expanding borders.

(24th July 2023)

2.4 Interactive Fiction and its role in Education

2.4.1 Conceptualising Interactive Fiction

As the examples described in the above vignette suggest, IF is a form of digital storytelling that can come in many shapes and sizes. It can be read on various devices, be created using a range of different tools and can explore any number of different themes.

Broadly speaking, texts that produce ‘narrative during interaction’ (Montfort, 2011, p.26) and which are read using digital devices such as computers, tablets or smartphones can be defined as works of Interactive Fiction (IF). Such works of fiction are typically ‘nonlinear’, as the narrative produced varies depending upon the decisions and actions of the reader/player (Klimas, 2023); they require the reader/player to contribute input for a potential narrative to be realised, and a variety of potential narrative routes are available. Various types of IF exist, with new forms constantly emerging. However, The Interactive Fiction Competition suggests that three broad categories of IF exist: Parser IF, Choice-based IF (Choose Your Own Adventure, or CYOA) and Hypertext IF (Interactive Fiction Technology Foundation, 2011). Clark summarises how these types of IF differ from one another:

‘Parser-based works are sometimes referred to as ‘text adventures’. These involve typing commands in order to interact with the textual world and usually include puzzle solving. Choose Your Own Adventure (or CYOA) stories are more like the Fighting Fantasy game book series, or the recent Black Mirror episode ‘Bandersnatch’, providing readers with a series of choices which create a branching narrative. Hypertexts are linked passages of text much like a website, but the clickable links may provide choices or ways of exploring the world of the text. In these latter two types the reader’s role is less likely to involve solving puzzles and more likely to centre on exploration, interacting with characters or simply choosing how the story turns out.’

(Clark, 2019)

It is important to note that there is significant crossover between choice-based and hypertext IF, for when reading a work of hypertext IF, the links available present the reader/player with a choice. The crossover between choice-based and hypertext forms of IF perhaps explains why Porpentine put things more bluntly in 2012, stating that the ‘principle modes of interactive fiction are parser and hypertext. Parser is when you type to get shit done. Hypertext is when you click to get shit done’ (Porpentine, 2012). In choice-based and hypertext IF, choice plays a central role, and it is therefore a concept to which I will return. As a teacher working in a large inner-city secondary academy, I am concerned and frustrated by the lack of choice that my students and I experience during the school day. Almost all lessons are structured in a similarly linear fashion, allowing little space for ideas that students choose to express to be explored. In this respect, my school resembles an exam factory, within which significant emphasis is placed upon ‘uniformity of practice’ (Hutchings, 2015, p.23). Similarly, rules at CentreTown Academy (such as the one dictating students transition silently between lessons in different classrooms) limit the opportunities that students have for self-expression and can prevent students and teachers from having conversations on topics of their own choosing. Consequently, I am drawn to IF because it foregrounds choice in a way that contrasts dramatically with the educational context within which I work.

2.4.2 Producing Interactive Fiction

Works of IF can be produced using a wide variety of tools, the most popular of which is Twine (Rossi, 2020). Twine is an open-source tool for ‘telling interactive, nonlinear stories’ (Klimas, 2023). Its popularity can be explained by its ease of use. As Rossi explains, Twine enables writers to construct works of IF ‘without knowing how to code’ (Rossi, 2020). When creating passages within Twine, it is possible to create branching texts ‘simply by putting brackets around words’ (Robertson, 2021). Twine’s accessibility, popularity and ease of use led me to focus my attention on works of hypertext IF made with this software. I am more of a writer than a coder or programmer, and I found experimenting with Twine at the start of this project to be both intuitive and exciting.

IF has been used to tell stories in many ways. However, some trends and conventions are identifiable. For example, IF stories are traditionally written in the second person (Costanzo, 1986; Bell and Ensslin, 2011; Burn, 2014), engaging the reader/player in a form of role-play. As such, works of IF become game-like and, in works of hypertext IF, reader/players are obliged to act by making choices. Arguably, attention must be paid to the nature and quality of these choices; according to Salter, interactive stories must have 'clear purpose and goals for the user/reader's interactions' (Salter, 2016). This is because said interactive choices have consequences. As Joyce writes, 'our choices change the nature of what we read (Joyce, 1997, p.581)', and, as a result, hypertext 'implicates the reader in writing' (p.580). As a teacher, I want to implicate my students in the experiences of reading, writing and learning, rather than enabling them to progress passively along a prescribed and linear curriculum pathway. As such, IF appeals to me because it could encourage students, as reader/players, to become active and engaged choice-makers.

Structural trends or patterns can also be identified in the world of IF. In hypertexts, choices can take many forms and give rise to a variety of structural patterns (Bernstein, 1999; Ashwell, 2014; Ashwell, 2015). For example, passages and choices can form part of a cyclical structure which returns the reader/player to a previously-encountered passage (Bernstein, 1999). Choices can also be used to create a 'branch and bottleneck' structure – in this situation, a text 'branches, but the branches regularly rejoin, usually around events that are common to all versions of the story' (Ashwell, 2015). Where the choices themselves are concerned, a choice can be written as a 'tangle' – a situation which 'confronts the reader with a variety of links without providing sufficient clues to guide the reader's choice' (Bernstein, 1999). Alternatively, choices can take the form of 'focus choices', providing readers with options as to what they want to attend to (Ashwell, 2014). Choices can also offer reader/players the ability to 'grasp' the narrative, manipulating it in some way that accords with their own preferences and enables them to shape the narrative world (Ashwell, 2014). Interestingly, little research has considered the design and impact of choices when they are contained within works of hypertext IF that are encountered in the classroom by teachers and students.

As a form, IF has also been used as a means of telling a range of story-*types*, some of which are particularly noteworthy. Twine, for example, seems to have the capacity to facilitate the creation of subversive vignettes (Friedhoff, 2013), where a vignette is defined as a 'brief, indefinite, evocative description or account of a person or situation' (Bogost, 2011). Twine's subversive affordances are appealing, for I have identified the writing and utilisation of IF as a potential means of challenging common modes of instruction at CentreTown Academy. Moreover, as a creative writer, I have previously focused my attention on the writing of poetry, and it is perhaps therefore Twine's capacity to help writers produce brief and evocative vignettes that renders it so appealing to me. Friedhoff explains this affordance by highlighting that 'the amount of content needed for a long-form Twine game can easily make that genre unappealing to new developers' (2013). This, coupled with Twine's accessibility and ease of use, encourages 'new developers' to create short works of IF (2013). Such short vignettes have a tendency, according to Friedhoff, to engage in social commentary and critical exploration (2013). Parry et al. seem to support this notion, observing that 'many games created in Twine have civic purposes' and explore 'serious' issues (Parry et al., 2020, p.414). I feel this to be reflected in my own IF projects, as, during my research, I have explored topics such as the challenges facing young carers and the experiences of individuals whose narratives are often marginalised in the way we understand or remember the First World War in UK schools. Moreover, by writing works of IF for use in the classroom, I am conducting some potentially subversive, critical-creative exploration of what teaching can look like in the secondary school environment.

Friedhoff also observes that Twine has become 'a hotbed for games exploring personal experiences' (2013). I recognise this and am reminded of Hett's intensely personal exploration of the Manchester Arena terror attack and its aftermath (Hett, 2017). Keogh supports Friedhoff's claim and draws attention to the ways that queer game developers have used Twine as a revolutionary tool for the creation of games that move beyond the conventions and limitations of male-dominated game-development (Keogh, 2013). Similarly, Sarkar observes that 'Twine has gained a reputation for producing a genre known as "empathy games" — a phrase that references its capacity to put players into the mind of a game's creator and have them experience something personal' (Sarkar, 2015). In

my own research, I have written works of IF and played them in the classroom with my students. In so doing, I feel I have been giving of myself to my students, inviting them to experience some of my own ways of thinking as a writer of IF. When they read what I have written and select links, they arguably come to understand me better as they gradually work out the direction in which the links took my writing. As such, my research is intensely social and personal, and it is Twine that has enabled me to conduct such a project. I am drawn to the form of personal interaction that IF can facilitate, perhaps because of the impersonal way in which I felt encouraged to interact with students; as a schoolteacher, I feared that I might become an anonymous enforcer of rigid behaviour policies and a soulless curriculum-deliveryman. Researching the pedagogical possibilities of IF enabled me, in a small way, to resist this trajectory.

In the last fifteen years, much attention has been paid to the personal nature of games produced using Twine. For example, Salter concludes that Twine facilitates the development of 'personal narratives' and encourages the creator to dive into a 'personal landscape' (Salter, 2016). The 'Twine Revolution' (Porpentine, 2012; Ellison, 2013; Harvey, 2014; Salter, 2016; Short, 2016; Robertson, 2021) is said to have challenged the 'hegemonic context of digital game production' by queering the norms of game design (Harvey, 2014, p.95); through the production of 'personal games', creators can seemingly contribute to the 'democratization of game development' (Bernardi, 2013). However, most interesting for me is the fact that researchers have yet to explore the potential of Twine and IF as a tool for the exploration of the personal stories of teachers working in the secondary school environment. Given IF's capacity to help writers explore their personal landscapes, and given the many challenges that teachers face today – an understanding of which might help explain the current teacher retention crisis in the UK (Department for Education, 2023) – this gap in the research seems worthy of exploration.

2.4.3 IF's Educational Potential

Hypertexts and works of IF have been created and used for a variety of educational purposes and in a variety of educational settings. Such texts are said to have a good deal of educational potential;

Gee (2005) highlights the different ways in which video games can effectively empower learners, outlining thirteen principles that Kozdras et al. use to highlight the educational benefits of IF (Kozdras et al., 2006). For example, they suggest that IF can help position students as active and engaged participants in exploratory forms of learning. However, attempting to position students in such a way requires a de-centring of the teacher (Civello, 1999) and a movement away from 'linear' models of learning (Kozdras et al., 2006, p.529). For me, IF represents a potentially exciting movement away from classroom-based reading experiences that are rigidly linear. Instead of reading a text that was chosen for them and then attempting prescribed tasks that are sequenced and presented in a slideshow, as is the norm at CentreTown Academy, student-readers of IF can be encouraged to engage in an unpredictable, non-linear form of classroom reading. Interactive, digital narratives can thus provide a sense of agency (Hovious et al., 2018) that might otherwise be absent in the classroom, even when one acknowledges that this agency is somewhat 'bounded' by the fact that the choices contained within said works are designed by the author in question (Tanenbaum, 2011, p.55).

Although research into the educational affordances of IF and (more broadly) interactive digital narratives does exist, it must be noted that in 1996, Dewitt remarked that research into the use of hypertext in the writing classroom focused predominantly on its *potential*, rather than on its practical impact (Dewitt, 1996). I believe something similar can still be said of IF, for while researchers and teachers have considered and experimented with its various educational affordances (Short, 2007), there is still a lack of published research offering evidence relating to the experience of writing and using IF for and in the secondary school classroom. For example, researchers and practitioners have explored university student responses to digital narratives (Evans and Po, 2007), described how works of IF were designed in subject-specific contexts (Lester, 2018), evaluated the extent to which a literary game can be designed to align gameplay with specific learning goals (Shelton and Scoresby, 2011), and argued that IF provides teachers with 'special opportunities for direct teaching' (Desilets, 1999, paragraph 27). However, researchers have not fully considered what the process of writing IF might reveal to and for a teacher working in a secondary academy in the UK. They have

not considered the specific ways in which IF might disrupt existing pedagogical practices within this context. They have not examined the quality and characteristics of IF-based classroom talk taking place inside the English classroom, and they have not explored what range of skills might be developed through such specific forms of IF-based talk. In this thesis, to explore these research gaps, I provide an account of my experiences working with IF as an English teacher in the UK, using fieldnotes, interview data and transcripts of classroom talk to support my account.

2.4.4 IF as a Creative Tool

A good deal of research into IF's educational potential explores the ways in which resources like Twine can be used as creative tools within educational contexts. Much of this work focuses on the possible benefits of enabling students to create their own texts using such tools. Relatively little research focuses on the creativity of the educators and teachers involved. For example, consider the following projects:

- Parry and others have explored the affordances of Twine when used by young digital authors or media producers in educational third spaces (Parry et al., 2020; Parry et al., 2021; Parry and Taylor, 2021).
- Similarly, Fiftinova and Hamblai explain how Twine helped them to foster the creativity of university-level students of English as a foreign language (Fiftinova et al., 2023). Hahn also outlines the benefits of using Twine to facilitate collaborative creative writing in the L2 classroom (2016).
- Kee, Vaughan and Graham present a case study that involved nine- and 10-year-old students creating and playing a work of IF, a process which appeared to support the development of students' literacy skills (Kee et al., 2010).
- Teachers in New Jersey have argued that playing and creating IF can grab the attention of students, helping to motivate them (Allen, 2015).

- Sellers has used IF with 10th grade English students (15–16-year-olds), attempting to use the writing of IF as an engaging way to develop students' descriptive writing skills (Barack, 2013).
- Skains explores the benefits of incorporating Playable Fiction into creative writing courses at undergraduate level (2019).
- Golson explores some of the challenges that university level essay writers have encountered when constructing works of hypertext (1995).
- Terry and Dusenberry explain how graduate and undergraduate students have been able to hone their writing skills through writing IF with Twine (2018).

None of these researchers consider in any depth the creativity of the educators involved; little research explores the relationship between IF and the identities of teachers who are writers and creators of educational content. Before starting my PhD, I completed an MA in Creative Writing and Education, and I consider myself a creative writer; I write daily and enjoy thinking about my creative practice. Moreover, the creative act of lesson planning is one of the aspects of teaching that brings me the most joy. As such, I find it disheartening when I walk down a corridor and see numerous teachers using the same centralised lesson slides, or when I am so short on time that I am obliged to do the same. Researching IF was an exciting creative opportunity for me, an opportunity to create works of IF for use in the classroom, and I am well positioned to consider this creative experience in ways that other researchers have not. Moreover, many of the studies listed above focus on higher education, rather than upon the secondary school experience. As such, I aim to produce new insights into the roles that IF can play in the secondary school English classroom.

However, I must note that some research has considered ways in which educational works of IF can be designed. Bao and Drevitch describe the iterative design process they employed when creating an educational work of IF that aimed to highlight the problems posed by social media and which was tested on undergraduate and graduate students (Drevitch and Bao, 2023). Similarly, Lester offers up 'a thick description of how an instructor conceived and developed two IF games' (Lester, 2018,

p.260) for use in the higher education sector but has yet to present findings on their implementation. Shelton and Scoresby (2011) explore the way that a work of IF can be designed for use in the English classroom. However, they focus their attention on the principle of alignment, considering the extent to which learning through gameplay aligned with a set of intended learning outcomes. This outcome-oriented approach arguably prevents them from considering IF in other ways. In fact, none of these researchers provide classroom data that offer detailed insights into how works of IF are experienced by teachers and students in the classroom, or the impact that they have on, for example, classroom talk. I see both teaching and classroom reading as social practices, and I am concerned by the way that schools position reading as an autonomous skill that can be developed and assessed on an individual basis, following a linear trajectory (Street, 2003). Part of what excites me about researching IF, therefore, is that I hope to develop an understanding of how nonlinear works of IF might inform the social reading practices which occur in English lessons, and how these might differ from established forms of reading practice that occur in my own lessons and those of my colleagues. My interest in the social, interactive affordances of IF is therefore indicative of a commitment to 'literary sociability' and the notion that 'knowledge about texts emerges through social exchanges' (Mello et al., 2019, p.185). These exchanges involve people actively participating in the 'reading and enjoyment of literary works' (Doecke, 2019, p.343). In conducting this research, I explore the qualities of IF-based social exchanges. Consequently, my work builds upon a long history of thought within the subject of English. Doecke explores this history through his close reading of *The Teaching of English in England* (Departmental Committee, Board of Education, 1921), *The Education of the Poetic Spirit* (Hourd, 1949), and *Growth Through English* (Dixon, 1967). He argues that these texts 'articulate a vision of the English classroom as a social space where teachers and their pupils might enjoy each other's company and learn from their communications with one another. This is in contrast to the enormous pressures to treat students as competitive individuals, when the emphasis falls predominantly on measuring each student's performance under test conditions' (Doecke, 2019, p.352). My research explores the extent to which IF might support such a vision of the English classroom, a vision that exists in contrast with more individualistic and performative visions of school-based education.

2.4.5 IF and The Subject of English

My understanding of the relationship between IF and the subject of English is informed by existing research into the usage of IF, but also by researchers and practitioners who have explored comparable ways of nurturing literary sociability in their classrooms. For example, other teachers have employed a computer programme called Devtray to foreground and facilitate student meaning-making and participation. Devtray asks students to collaboratively construct a text that they are studying 'as a class by guessing the missing words from a radically incomplete version of the original' (Stevens et al., 2006, p.103). According to Yandell, this can give pupils 'the freedom to make meanings' (Yandell, 1997, p.109). My research explores how IF might be used to provide a similar space for the collaborative making of meaning.

IF has been used in a variety of subject domains. For example, McCall has explored the ways that IF can be used to teach History at secondary level (McCall, 2011), and Fee has considered how IF can be used at undergraduate level when teaching Old English (Fee, 2014). Further afield, Marín-Paz et al. have used IF to develop the clinical decision-making skills of nurses (2020). Where English is concerned, educators like Pereira have explored how IF can be used when teaching English as a foreign language in the L2 classroom (2014). However, as a secondary school English teacher working in the UK, the role that IF might play within the L1 English classroom is the topic that intrigues me most.

The affordances of IF are noteworthy for teachers of English like me. For example, in an article exploring the possibilities of hypertext fiction in the English classroom, Snyder notes the way that IF blurs the boundaries between reading and writing, stating that that IF 'seems to help integrate an enriched experience of literature with the practice of writing as a social activity, and enables students to become not merely more perceptive interpreters of fiction, but also creators of it' (Snyder, 1997,

p.30). Snyder's remarks are significant when one recognises that teaching strategies balancing reading with writing have been shown to support students to develop their reading and writing skills (Graham et al., 2017). Texts which facilitate 'writingandreading' (Oatley, 2003), therefore, are arguably of particular value. Moreover, as IF is broken down into passages, requiring readers to stop and make choices, Desilets notes that IF's 'unique structure of narrative pauses' offers 'special opportunities for direct teaching' and 'an evaluative dimension of considerable instructional power, an element that operates even when the teacher isn't around' (Desilets, 1999, paragraph 27). This suggests that IF could help English teachers structure and punctuate episodes of classroom reading. Also, if it is capable of engaging students in evaluative thought, even when the teacher is absent, IF has the potential to facilitate a form of 'vicarious presence' (Warwick et al., 2010, p.350), enabling the teacher to remotely support pupils without the need for verbal intervention. Desilets is highlighting some of the unique and potentially beneficial affordances that IF can offer English teachers who are reading a work of IF with their class. However, he does so without grounding his claims through references to transcripts of classroom talk, and there is space for research that explores these ideas in greater detail.

Also working within the context of English, Shelton and Scoresby explore how a work of IF can be iteratively designed for use in the English classroom as a supplementary text, sitting alongside an existing curricular poetry anthology (Shelton and Scoresby, 2011). However, they focus on the extent to which students' gameplay and resultant learning successfully aligned with prescribed learning goals, without analysing the ways in which IF altered the social practice of classroom reading. Working in a school that I perceive to be very outcomes oriented, I feel less drawn towards researching the relationship between IF and a set of prescribed learning goals, and more interested in considering the ways that IF can influence the social exchanges and practices that are occurring in lessons. In fact, I am drawn to a more dialogically open approach to education. As I shall explore later (Section 3.4.2), I have become interested in the relationship between IF and dialogic forms of pedagogy, and as Wegerif writes, 'there is an unbounded openness at the heart of dialogue' (Wegerif, 2013, p.14), meaning that the dialogic teacher must be open to engaging with diverse

voices and perspectives. They must be 'response-able' (Boyd, 2016, p.226), in the sense that they must be able to adapt and respond to the ideas and voices of their students. Pre-defined targets and objectives have the potential to close off divergent avenues of investigation, and in conducting this research I sought to remain open to the possible affordances of IF in the English classroom, rather than testing IF's ability to support the accomplishment of specific curricular learning objectives. Considering IF's role in the English classroom from this, more dialogically open perspective, differentiates my approach from that of Shelton and Scoresby.

Other researchers have examined the affordances of interactive, digital narratives by working with (rather than designing) specific digital texts. For example, *Inanimate Alice* is a multimodal, digital 'interactive tale' that has been researched in a variety of ways (Harper et al., 2024). Notably, Fleming finds it to be an immersive and motivational resource (Fleming, 2013), and Zandstra describes her experiences working with *Inanimate Alice* in an Australian school context, highlighting the ways that such a text can be linked to an existing English curriculum (Zandstra, 2013). However, while such research is useful, it is focused upon the affordances of an existing text, and does not explore the ways a teacher might design, use and consequently theorise about IF in the context of their teaching practice.

In another relevant study, Ostenson describes the ways in which he used parser-based works of IF to engage his class in reading activities, helping them to learn about the 'power and potential of storytelling' by engaging them in the developing medium of IF (Ostenson, 2013, p.78). However, although he references the discussions that IF engendered, he offers limited classroom data in support of his claims. Similarly, Batchelor et al. explore the potential benefits, possibilities and limitations of IF in the English classroom, briefly referencing one middle-school teacher's classroom experiences and encouraging other educators to experiment with IF (Batchelor et al., 2021). However, again, little classroom data is provided to give readers insight into what teaching with IF can look or feel like in practice. Similarly, while Strasma does explore the ways that interactive works of digital, non-linear fiction can alter classroom dynamics, obliging groups to 'collectively negotiate

the meaning of the text through [their] different perspectives' (2001, p.372), he does so through reference to a small number of student-readers in a college-level environment. Overall, there is a lack of research that provides English teachers and researchers interested in the role that IF can play in the classroom with a data-rich depiction and theorisation of how students and teachers experience and respond to works of IF in the classroom. In reporting upon my research, I offer teachers and researchers insights into what creating and using works of IF for and in the English classroom can look, sound and feel like.

Also of interest to teachers of English is IF's apparent ability to engage reluctant readers, promote intertextual forms of thinking and allow for the forging of semantic connections. For example, Lancy and Hayes argue that IF has the potential to help motivate reluctant readers (Lancy and Hayes, 1988), while Taylor and Carpenter write of the ways in which hypertexts can be used to facilitate 'intertextual thinking' in the art classroom (Taylor and Carpenter, 2002, p.7). Other teachers have also considered the ways that hypertext can be used to 'explore semantic connections' (Cox et al., 2017). Writing about hypertexts theoretically, Bell considers this idea:

'[In] a hypertext fiction, the linked term or icon does not necessarily directly indicate what will be found at the destination lexia. While readers might surmise where the link will lead, they often must decipher figural connections between link and lexia content after the link has been followed'

(Bell, 2011, p.65).

For this reason, Ryan claims that hypertexts promote a 'meta-fictional stance' (Ryan, 2006, p.109); the reader is faced with choices that oblige them to pause their narrative immersion and consider the possibilities available to them as a reader. From an English teaching perspective, such meta-fictional engagement is desirable, for it is part of our job to enable students to write and talk *about* texts, as well as to experience them. As an action researcher, I am interested in unearthing what such meta-fictional forms of reading and thinking can look and feel like, allowing other teachers and researchers to gain a better understanding of what using IF in the classroom can practically involve. Also, the explorative nature of the IF reading

experience – with reader/players choosing to follow links and forge narrative pathways – appeals to me because it contrasts with the exam-focused pedagogies that are rife in secondary school exam factories such as the one in which I work. As Hutchings notes, such schools place increased focus on the tests that students are to take (Hutchings, 2015), meaning that – in the English classroom – the test (taken individually) can be foregrounded, while the rich, social experience of reading is relegated to a position of secondary importance.

Considering the relationship between IF and the teaching of reading, it is worth noting that some research explores or relates to the potential for IF when used with younger student-audiences. Lefever-Davis and Pearman have considered the ways that CD-ROM storybooks can both support and distract early readers (Lefever-Davis and Pearman, 2005). Also, Aliagas and Margalo’s research shows us that ‘interactive elements’ of storybook apps can increase a ‘child’s autonomy’ (Aliagas and Margallo, 2017, p.44), supporting the notion that the use of interactive texts can assist in the development of independent reading skills. Somewhat similarly, Johnston suggests that engagement with interactive storybook software can help improve the verbal abilities of children in kindergarten (nursery) (Johnston, 1997).

As IF is a digital form of literature, many examples of which can be accessed for free online, teachers of English and researchers working within the field of English teaching might well ask how IF should be considered in light of the recent explosion of machine learning and chatbots like ChatGPT. ChatGPT was launched after my research had begun, and as a result, it did not feature in my research-assemblage (see Section 4.3 for an exploration of this term). In the future, writers and teachers could employ machine learning tools to swiftly produce works of hypertext IF. A free tool like StoryMate, for example, could enable writers to produce IF very quickly (StoryMate, 2024). However, I explore the role that works of IF which I have written for my students can play. In so doing, I am considering the relationships between IF, my own writing and the interactions which occur in my classroom. Using a tool like StoryMate or ChatGPT to produce works of IF would have altered and constrained these creative and interpersonal dimensions of my research. Moreover,

even if works of IF can be swiftly created using machine learning tools, understanding the pedagogical affordances and limitations of IF and its structural components warrants investigation, for if we understand what IF can do, we can ensure that future works of IF, however they are produced, are designed with these affordances and limitations in mind. As a result, in this thesis I explore how such things as non-linearity, choice and the pauses that occur when one comes to the end of an individual passage within a work of IF might affect the quality of secondary school English lessons.

Choice is a structural feature of IF that is particularly noteworthy. Works of hypertext IF require readers to make choices between different links, but choice also plays an important role in all communication. Halliday writes that ‘all human activity involves choice: doing this rather than doing that. Semiotic activity involves semiotic choice: meaning this rather than meaning that’ (Halliday, 2013, p.15). This would suggest that literacy is dependent upon an individual’s capacity to make appropriate choices about meaning and expression. Working from this perspective, Myhill builds upon the work of Halliday and others to advocate for a choice-oriented approach to the teaching of grammar (Myhill, 2021). Such an understanding of choice implies that English teachers should regularly attend to the quality of their students’ semiotic choices. Looking at language from this perspective, an effective communicator might be described as an effective ‘choice architect’ (Thaler et al., 2013, p.428) – one who uses language to ‘nudge’ others towards making certain choices about meaning (Thaler and Sunstein, 2009). I use the term ‘nudge’ here to mean ‘initiatives that steer people in particular directions but that also allow them to go their own way’ (Sunstein, 2017, p.61). A critically literate reader will, from this perspective, be able to recognise, respect, reject and interrogate the semiotic nudges they encounter. In the context of creative writing, choice also plays a significant role. As Rubin writes, ‘[e]very piece of art consists of a series of choices’ (Rubin, 2023, p.305). ‘At each fork, we can go in any number of directions, and our choice will alter the final result’ (p.305). As communication skills, grammar and creative writing form a significant part of what is involved in English teaching, it seems important that teachers think about the role that choice plays

in their lessons. Therefore, while researching the educational affordances of IF in the English classroom, it is necessary and appropriate for me to explore the pedagogical affordances of choice.

2.4.6 IF, games and Classroom Talk

Works of IF are often described as text-based games, and as such, it is worth considering the ways in which games have been researched and used within education. Works of interactive fiction have also been described as 'ludonarratives' – playable stories – and they therefore occupy a liminal space, being part game and part story (Sell et al., 2023, p.28). There is insufficient space here to provide an extensive review of the existing research into games and learning, so I shall focus my attention on one particularly relevant educational affordance of games: their apparent ability to help create dialogic space within the classroom. Boyd, citing Wegerif and Yang, defines dialogic space as follows:

'Dialogic space is that elusive "shared space of possibilities" (Wegerif, 2015) that exists among participants "as different ideas are held together in the creative tension of a dialogue" (Wegerif and Yang, 2011, p.312). In dialogic space, participants commit to engaging in a manner such that new knowledge can be created, presented, engaged, questioned, and developed as interpretations of our realities are in conversation with those of others. We agree to be open, yet remain in dialogue, and to welcome different and even conflicting ideas and perspectives. In this liminal state of in-between certainties, we may even give way to new perspectives and identities.'

(Boyd and Sherry, 2024, p.115)

My own research relates to the concept of dialogic space by considering the way that reading a work of IF, as opposed to another form of text, can change the way that individuals verbally interact within the classroom, altering the metaphorical and social space that they occupy (see Section 3.4.2 for further exploration of the possible links between IF, dialogue and classroom talk). This is significant, as there is little existing research exploring the relationship between IF and the characteristics of classroom talk. However, some research does explore the relationship between games and talk; Arnseth, Hanghøj and Silseth argue that games can work as tools for dialogic teaching (2018). They state that, while using games in the classroom can disrupt existing pedagogies, it can also render

the classroom a more multi-voiced, dialogic space. The potential relationship between IF and classroom dialogue is under-researched, but Arnseth, Hanghøj and Silseth's argument is suggestive of one potentially noteworthy affordance of IF. As a teacher, I am often concerned by the apparent passivity and voicelessness of my students. When faced with a text that I know can be exciting and engaging, I feel frustrated and concerned if my students are unable or unwilling to express thoughts and feelings in response to it. As such, I find myself drawn to the idea that a ludonarrative could help my students to express themselves in response to a reading experience, rendering the classroom a more multi-voiced and reciprocal environment. For me, Arnseth, Hanghøj and Silseth's work inspired hope and excitement regarding the possibilities for IF in the English classroom and the ways in which it might disrupt problematic pedagogical practices.

2.5 Vignette: Reading Face

This year, for the first time, I am leading a reading group. At CentreTown Academy, all Key Stage Three students participate in a reading programme now; at the start of the year, they are tested and grouped according to their 'reading ages', and then each group of students is given an 'age-appropriate' novel to read together for half an hour each day. With my group, I am reading Face, by Benjamin Zephaniah (Zephaniah, 1999). However, this week has reminded me that classroom reading is far from a straightforward transaction!

On Monday, for example, our protagonists got into some trouble – after accepting a ride from an acquaintance in what transpired to be a stolen car, one of them ended up in hospital, and another got taken into police custody. In the classroom, some students were rapt, others sleepy. Some volunteered to read, others read aloud quietly and rather reluctantly.

During such sessions, it is my job to ensure that all students are following along, that they are sat up and paying attention. As we read, I am expected to take the register, intervene to ensure students are all behaving attentively and appropriately, pause, pose questions and explain the meaning of potentially challenging words. Simultaneously, I have to follow along and keep up with the plot myself.

I remember seeing one student leaning forward, their eyes close to the page of the book that lay on the desk before them. Another student slouched with his chin resting in his

palm. A third, directly in front of me, gazed absentmindedly at a space just over my right shoulder until I waved at her and pointed down at her book in an attempt to refocus her attention. I think I'm supposed to give a detention to anyone who isn't ready to read when I ask them to, but I have yet to do this. It feels a tad harsh!

On Monday, as I tried to decide whether or not to award a detention to the inattentive student before me, and as we read about a character being arrested, I was reminded of an intensely uncomfortable occurrence that had occurred the previous Friday. The school was holding a sports day that had originally been scheduled to take place in July but which had been postponed due to the teacher strikes that took place last academic year. During the day, an extremely unpleasant event unfolded, as a Black student who had previously been permanently excluded from the school but who had turned up for sports day was restrained by eight white police officers in front of almost the entire school. I was stood very close to where it took place, and felt extremely uncomfortable, especially as the young person in question posed no immediate physical threat. I picture him now, his face and body pressed against the concrete at the edge of the athletics track by a group of armour-clad adults, while I attempted to keep other students away from the heavy-handed restraint that was unfolding just behind me.

On Monday, as we read a description of a seemingly innocent young person being taken into custody, I was reminded of sports day, and I half expected my students to bring up the event. I was simultaneously disappointed and relieved that they did not; I was disappointed because I hoped that students might seize the opportunity to express some strong opinions in response to a text, but I was relieved that I would not be put in a position whereby I might have to defend or explain the police's behaviour. As our head teacher reminded us, we are a school, not an activist group, and we need to work with the police not against them. Sometimes, this can be tricky.

In that single half-hour of reading, a great many factors were at play: the text, the room, the desks in the room, the moods, dispositions and levels of fatigue of my students, memories, and (perhaps most significantly for me) public discourses regarding the relationship between the police and citizens of colour.

*Next week I shall be reading chapter two of Steinbeck's *Of Mice And Men* (Steinbeck, 2000) with my year nine class, and we shall have to discuss how and why Steinbeck uses racially derogatory language that, by today's standards, is totally unacceptable. Again, there will be much more at play than a reader, a book and the turning of pages...*

(20th September 2023)

2.6 Textual entanglements

2.6.1 Conceptualising Classroom Reading

What is classroom reading? I include the above vignette to demonstrate that a great many factors become embroiled in classroom reading, and as a result, I hold that it must be considered as a materially-situated literacy practice, a social activity in which a great many human and non-human factors are involved. It is not necessarily a linear or chronological process, for as we read, we might turn back a few pages to check something or cast our mind back a few days to a memory that the text brings to mind. Similarly, we might think forward in time, using our imaginations to picture future narrative or real-world events. In this sense, reading, like the writing of this thesis, is rhizomatic and non-linear. Reading can create unexpected and complex connections between different times and spaces in the same way that my writing here connects disparate ideas, times and places. The rhizomatic and materially situated nature of classroom reading is particularly noteworthy, for the classroom is a physical space full of people and objects and in which reading is routinely punctuated by episodes of questioning, discussion and occasional instances of teacher-initiated behaviour management. Classroom reading is more than a simple transaction between reader and text.

2.6.2 The Limitations of a Transactional Theory of Reading

My main research question was originally worded as follows: How might the introduction of IF into secondary school English classrooms influence the quality of textual *transactions* being facilitated? As I have since replaced the word 'transactions' with 'entanglements', I must consider the theory that underpinned my original question: Rosenblatt's *transactional* theory of reading. Moreover, I must explain what the term 'entanglements' here denotes and examine how it relates to existing conceptualisations of reading.

Rosenblatt built upon Dewey's pragmatic epistemology when developing a transactional theory of reading; as Connell writes, 'Rosenblatt's emphasis on the transactional relationship between reader and text draws upon Dewey's epistemological position that both knower and known constitute, and

are constituted by, the process of inquiry' (Connell, 1996, p.396). Although she used the word transactional as a means of differentiating her conceptualisation of reading from others, she also selected it to stress the 'reciprocal importance of both reader and text' (Rosenblatt, 2005, p.xxix). This was in part because Rosenblatt was writing in response to the New Critics, writers who focused on the text at the expense of the reader and who left the reader 'in shadow' (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.1), playing the role of the 'invisible eavesdropper' (p.2). However, as my research focuses not on reading as an abstract concept, but rather upon reading that takes place in classroom situations, I am obliged to look beyond *the* reader and *the* text. Classrooms contain many readers; works of IF contain many possible textual iterations; classroom reading is constituted by a multitude of human and non-human factors. A transactional model of reading does not suffice. As the above vignette suggests, an array of entities constitutes the reading experience. Therefore, it is worth looking beyond readers and texts and taking into account a wide range of factors that can become implicated in classroom reading.

2.6.3 Material-Dialogic Entanglements

Bakhtin posits that any individual utterance becomes 'an active participant in social dialogue' (Bakhtin, 2008, location 3909); language must always be recognised as 'somebody talking to somebody else' (location 129). From this perspective, the text and the reader must be given equal attention; they both participate in a dialogue. Every 'word is a two-sided act' (Voloshinov, 1973, pp.86-87); every 'word wants to be heard, understood, responded to, and again to respond to the response, and so forth ad infinitum. It enters into a dialogue that does not have a semantic end' (Bakhtin, 2010, location 2014). From this perspective, words mean different things to different people, and reading involves a never-ending negotiation of meaning.

However, the word 'dialogue' is potentially limiting, for it focuses our attention on words and the humans who use them. Teachers can fall into this same trap; material conditions shape classroom experiences, but not all teachers 'explicitly consider the relationship between the material resources they deploy and the dialogic learning taking place' (Hetherington and Wegerif, 2018, p.27). They do

not, for example, always recognise the 'socio-material structure of classroom talk' and the 'objects, machines, and materials' that shape it (Schwarz et al., 2024). The materials that feature in my lessons 'are not passive objects that are used unproblematically [...] to achieve fixed ends' (Waterhouse, 2020, p.148). For example, 'computer applications' used in the classroom can 'present "the world"' in particular ways, including and excluding content, thus shaping 'curriculum knowledge' (Jewitt, 2006, p.19). As a consequence, I have come to consider reading through a 'material-dialogic' lens (Hetherington and Wegerif, 2018, p.27), focusing my attention on the dialogue that reading can engender, but attempting to be mindful of the role that resources and material circumstances can play in this dialogue. I adopt an 'extended understanding' of dialogue (Hetherington and Wegerif, 2018, p.28), acknowledging that there are 'voices in everything and dialogic relations among them' (Bakhtin, 2010, location 2591).

For example, if I am reading a text with a class and that text is projected onto the whiteboard at the front of the room using my laptop, then a range of non-linguistic factors will form part of the social dialogue taking place: the positioning of desks and students in the room, the cleanliness of the whiteboard, the lighting, the moods, the memories and body positions of my students, the temperature of the room, the time of day, the educational and behavioural culture of the school and the fact that many classrooms have glass walls that teachers and students can see in and out of. All of these factors, along with the text and the readers involved, influence the reading experience. As a result, the reading event is not transactional, it is a complex material-dialogic entanglement that is constantly evolving. This material-dialogic perspective is similar to the sociomaterial perspective adopted by other literacy researchers, a perspective that positions 'literacy as an affective encounter generated through an ongoing reassembling of the human and the more-than-human' (Burnett and Merchant, 2020, p.46) and which acknowledges the ways that 'imagined worlds entangle with bodily relations and with the stuff in the classroom' (Burnett et al., 2020, p.116). However, I opt to use the term 'material-dialogic' because of the way that it acknowledges the significance of non-human matter whilst simultaneously gesturing towards a particular pedagogical approach that has

influenced my practice – Dialogic Teaching (Alexander, 2020). The term therefore reinforces the inextricable entanglement of my emergent theories with my pedagogical practice.

Barad's term 'entanglement' is not completely dissimilar to the term transaction. Importantly, both words do encompass a sense of emergence. Rosenblatt states that the idea of a reading transaction 'stresses the possibility that printed marks on a page will *become* different linguistic symbols by virtue of transactions with different readers' (1969, p.45, my emphasis). Somewhat similarly, Barad writes that 'to be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals *emerge* through and as parts of their entangled intra-relating' (Barad, 2007, p.ix, my emphasis). However, to conceptualise reading as entanglement rather than as transaction, we must embrace multiplicity: an instance of classroom reading is a phenomenon, an event that is 'produced through complex agential intra-actions of multiple material-discursive practices or apparatuses' (p.74); in other words, a great many entities are involved. As a result, to consider reading as a material-dialogic entanglement is to examine the way that people, texts, meanings, ideas, and objects emerge in intra-relation to one another, during specific reading events. While I am by no means the first researcher to consider teaching through the use of such new materialist terms, identifying classroom pedagogies and practices as 'entanglement[s]' (Hickey-Moody and Page, 2016, p.11), I have found no research that considers the entanglements involved in the classroom reading of IF. As such, my research builds upon existing research by looking at the classroom reading of IF through a material-dialogic lens.

It is worth noting at this point that there is some crossover between a material-dialogic approach to classroom reading (and, therefore, learning) and what can be termed a triological approach (Paavola and Hakkarainen, 2014). A triological approach focuses attention on the way that people interact through and with shared objects of inquiry, rather than with one another. As such, it places some emphasis upon non-human matter. However, a triologic approach does not 'break down the binary distinction between human and non-human' (Hetherington and Wegerif, 2018, p.29), instead

positioning materials and objects as things that are used by humans to make meaning. In the dialogic classroom, students and teachers develop knowledge-laden artefacts together' (Paavola and Hakkarainen, 2014). The participants are building the artefacts, and as such, have more agency than the objects in question. Contrastingly, a material-dialogic approach ascribes no more agency to humans than it does to matter, instead recognising that all human and non-human matter exists in dialogic relation to other matter and is constituted by the nature of these relations. By considering the classroom reading of IF from a material-dialogic perspective, I consider the entanglement of relations between teachers, students, the school environment and works of IF, instead of focusing exclusively on how teachers and students *use* IF to build meaning and understanding.

It is also important to note that, in adopting a material-dialogic perspective, I embrace a corresponding theory of knowledge, an onto-epistemology that acknowledges the entangled inseparability of subjects and objects, of the knower and the known. It is a new materialist onto-epistemology (Toohey, 2019) that draws upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari by positioning all entities – material and immaterial – as existing only in fluid relation to other matter (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003). It is a theory that, inspired by Karen Barad, recognises no fixed reality. Reality exists only in events and intra-actions between inseparably entangled entities. It is a reality that is constantly emerging, constantly happening (Barad, 2007). Entities intra-act, rather than interact, because they exist not separately, but as part of the same emergent web of relations. As is explored in my methodologies chapter (Chapter 4), this onto-epistemology aligns well with my chosen methodology of action research, as both foreground the inseparability of the knower from the known. Moreover, in placing emphasis on the non-existence of permanently fixed truths or meanings, this onto-epistemology aligns well with a material-dialogic conceptualisation of language and reading.

To consider reading as a material-dialogic entanglement feels particularly appropriate when considering the classroom reading of IF, for not only do classrooms contain a multitude of factors that can shape the reading experience, but works of IF also offer a variety of different reading pathways. When reading IF, the text takes shape as you read, and your reading experience depends

upon the specific choices you make. There is a higher level of unpredictability for the readers of such non-linear texts because there is no single line to follow. The sequence of passages you encounter depends upon your choices. As such, IF foregrounds the specificity of textual entanglements. Every reading entanglement can be different, and IF makes the reader more acutely aware of this by offering readers choices. As an English teacher, the idea of entangling myself and my students with works of IF is appealing precisely because of this sense of specificity and unpredictability. I find that CentreTown Academy is a school which, like other academies, values 'uniformity of practice' (Hutchings, 2015, p.23). However, where reading is concerned, uniformity is enormously problematic, as reading entanglements are specific to reading events. By introducing IF into the classroom, I set out to embrace the singularity of classroom reading, to push back against uniformity and to practice in the emerging and unpredictable present.

2.6.4 Reading, IF and the Rhizome

When considering textual entanglements, I have found the concept of the rhizome to be a useful tool, particularly where IF is concerned. Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, as Moulthrop explains, is a 'chaotically distributed network [...] rather than a regular hierarchy of trunk and branches' (Moulthrop, 1994, p.301). On a textual level, when I compare a non-linear work of IF to a PowerPoint presentation, I am struck by its seemingly rhizomatic qualities: the choices contained within it make it feel more like a rhizome than a tree, for, if we stretch Deleuze and Guattari's tree metaphor, the choices present within IF stress the fact that not every reader, student or class will be climbing the same trunk (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003). In contrast, a slideshow typically progresses along a single, linear trajectory. Moreover, in the secondary school, PowerPoint presentations are typically used with the aim of achieving a prescribed and precise lesson objective. In contrast, a rhizome 'operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003, p.21). To spend lesson time reading IF with a group of students is a potentially rhizomatic experience because it requires one to be sensitive to such offshoots: what choices will the class make? Why will they make such choices? Where will such choices lead us, both in textual terms and in broader, experiential terms? Encountering these questions, a teacher might need to display some 'contingent

responsiveness' or 'adaptive expertise' (Cao et al., 2023, p.954). Moreover, such questions cannot be answered in advance, meaning that the lesson will not necessarily develop in a predictable, linear fashion. I am not here asserting that IF texts *are* rhizomatic, rather that the classroom experience of reading IF might make them *feel* rhizomatic. I note this because, considering the potentially rhizomatic nature of hypertext, Moulthrop reminds us that 'hypertext may not be quite the smooth or rhizomatic structure some have made it out to be' (Moulthrop, 1994, p.308). Although hypertexts might give the impression of 'variability', they are subject to 'constraint' (p.308). If, when writing a work of hypertext IF, for example, you do not provide yourself with some sense of constraint or structure, the work will never reach a state of completion, for the story will continue to branch, and branch, and branch...

However, the rhizome does remain a helpful metaphor to use when considering the nature of textual entanglements. A rhizomatic understanding of reading positions texts as networks of relations, encouraging us to examine the 'intertextual linkages not only between different texts but also between texts and the socio-cultural and political "stems" that adhere to the creation and reading of the text' (Gardner, 2014, p.232). Viewing reading rhizomatically encourages us to consider it not as a transaction, but rather as a more complex entanglement that can encompass a whole range of human and non-human intra-actions. I believe that, with this conceptualisation of reading in mind, the rhizomatic *feel* of IF can foreground the rhizomatic nature of textual entanglements. As my research explores the classroom reading of IF in a particular school environment, such a rhizomatic approach to reading is useful. It allows space for me to consider the various ways in which, for example, factors relating to teacher identity and school culture can shape the complex experience that is the classroom reading of IF. Rhizomatically researching the creation and classroom usage of IF marks another way in which my research breaks new ground.

2.7 Vignette: A Senior Leadership Meeting

It's a Monday evening, and at 5pm I am sat in a first-floor classroom with a dozen or so other teachers. We are poring over a double-sided A4 document that the Principal has handed out. The font is small, and the sheet is crowded with letters, numbers, initials,

acronyms and bullet points. This text outlines the range of strategies that the school will employ to improve the exam results that our students achieve at A level and GCSE at the end of this academic year and which the Principal will be sharing with the multi-academy trust next week. It is a document we will be returning to regularly throughout the year, apparently. And apparently, this year's results are vital. More vital even than last year's, somehow.

As my eyes scan over the sheet and I review the proposed plans for strategic after-school interventions and methods for raising our attendance statistics, I am struck by the fact that all of us here are attempting to think ourselves into the future, to imagine what life will be like in a few months' time and to predict how effective all of these strategies will be. Moreover, we are thinking through and with data; there are no student names on this sheet, and there are no mentions of strategies we might use to inspire students to enjoy the school experience. It's all about results, and as the meeting ebbs by, I am filled by a sense of futility, for when it comes down to it, this is what is deemed to matter: the data. It feels like we're missing the point.

Perhaps this swell of futility is a response to circumstances. This term I have been attending a mindfulness course on Wednesday evenings. In stark contrast to the SLT meetings that I now attend on Monday evenings, at the mindfulness sessions we attempt to live in the present, to bring our attention to the body and the senses, to experience the world first-hand, rather than through the medium of thoughts, ideas and statistics. Every week I come away refreshed, inspired, motivated.

(25th September 2023)

2.8 Chapter Conclusions

The Principal who led the above-described meeting is the same person who granted me permission to conduct my research at CentreTown Academy. Moreover, some teachers who were present at the meeting supported and participated in this study. However, although members of the school community supported this research, I have sustained a critical stance towards the future-oriented, data-driven and results-focused culture that was maintained at CentreTown Academy during my time there. I include the above vignette here because my awareness of the profundity of this performative culture has only increased since I began my research in 2019. The concerns voiced in

earlier dated vignettes voice anxieties that have been sustained and developed over several years. These developing concerns are part of my rhizomatic practice as a teacher and a researcher. Moreover, the above vignette also foregrounds my critical attitude towards this culture. In so doing, it helps to situate my research; in writing this chapter, I have woven together various lineages of practice that others have established before me and sought to expand upon them by bringing them into relation with this specific context.

To conclude this first section of my literature review, and having unpicked some of the key concepts contained within my main research question, I shall briefly attempt to summarise some of the ways in which my research adds to the insights that other researchers and practitioners have already produced.

Various types and categories of IF have been identified previously. In writing works of IF for use in the secondary school English classroom, I am able to explore how works that are written for such a purpose can relate to existing categories and the extent to which this creative and pedagogical process might facilitate the identification or formulation of previously un-named or unidentified forms of IF.

Taking hypertext works of IF that I have designed into the secondary school English classroom also enables me to consider choice, a concept central to the form, from a perspective that could be of interest to other writers and teachers of English. The process allows me to interrogate and consider, for example, the ways in which choices contained within works of IF might inform classroom-based literacy practices. Furthermore, by considering the role of choice, and by providing readers of this thesis with data from the classrooms in which I have worked, I hope to offer teachers and researchers useful insights into what the introduction and utilisation of IF in the classroom can look and feel like.

As part of this research project, I have produced new works of IF, and in reflecting upon this process, I am able to critically examine the possibilities for IF when it is looked at as a potentially valuable pedagogical resource. In this sense, my research builds upon existing literature that identifies works

of IF made with Twine as critically explorative and subversive texts. Working within a results-driven school culture, my research examines how the creation and utilisation of IF can both highlight and disrupt problematic teaching practices.

Moreover, although Twine has been used previously as a tool for the exploration and sharing of personal experiences, writers and researchers have yet to explore how IF can shed light upon the personal attitudes and experiences of teachers working in today's educational climate. Sections of my thesis seek to do just this (see Chapter 5). Similarly, while some research has considered the extent to which games can shape the ways that students and teachers interact in the classroom, there has been little close examination of the ways that creating and using IF as a teacher in the secondary school classroom can affect interpersonal relations and verbal interactions that occur within the classroom. Again, sections of my thesis build upon existing research in exactly this way (see Chapter 9).

This thesis also builds upon research that highlights the educational potential of IF. It does so by considering the ways in which using IF in place of other, more widely used classroom resources, can reshape classroom practice (see Chapters 7 and 8). For example, having used non-linear works of IF instead of linear PowerPoint presentations in my lessons, I can identify some of the affordances of IF. While the educational potential of IF has been explored previously, there is little research that provides readers with data-rich accounts of the experience of working with IF as a secondary school English teacher, a gap which this thesis attempts to fill. Specifically, this thesis can provide insights into what it can feel like to work with IF within a very performance-oriented and results-driven school environment.

Considering IF and Twine as creative tools, I find that there is little research which focuses on the creativity of the teachers who use them. While some have explored the ways in which IF can be designed, and others have considered what it can be like to teach with IF, I have found no research that explores the relationship between IF and the creative practices of secondary school English

teachers. By exploring how IF can be written by me (a teacher) for use in the classroom, I seek to do just that (see Chapter 6).

While some existing literature does indicate the potential advantages of using IF in the classroom, there is little literature that can provide teachers and researchers with data-rich accounts of the ways in which IF can qualitatively influence classroom reading practices and the dialogic space that such practices help form. By considering and identifying the characteristics of such experiences through a material-dialogic lens, I offer readers of this thesis a novel perspective on the relationship between IF, teacher creativity and the secondary school English classroom. Moreover, by considering these relationships rhizomatically, I am able to explore how a broad range of personal and cultural factors can shape the complex experience that is the classroom reading of IF. In so doing, I hope to provide readers with a rich account of the possibilities for IF in the English classroom in a manner that has not previously been achieved.

3 Literature Review – Part 2

In this chapter, I return to literature I have read and papers I have written over the course of my PhD, drawing upon them to articulate the ways in which IF can theoretically be positioned as a disruptive resource in relation to the context of CentreTown Academy. In exploring IF's disruptive potential, I shall introduce concepts that will later help me respond more fully to the sub-questions of my thesis. The sub-questions that I respond to in this thesis are the following:

- What can producing works of IF reveal about my situation as a teacher, a writer and a creative practitioner?
- How can works of IF be produced for use in the secondary school English classroom?
- How can introducing works of IF into the secondary school English classroom affect the quality of my teaching practice?
- How can introducing works of IF into the secondary school English classroom affect the characteristics of the classroom talk taking place during lessons?

In considering these sub-questions, I here focus on the following topics, highlighting the way that my own research into the disruptive potential of IF draws upon the work of others:

- IF and the Foregrounding of Teacher Creativity
- The Possibilities for IF as a Disruptor of Teaching Practices
- The Possible Relationship Between IF and Classroom Talk

Much of my research explores the ways in which, through working with IF, my practice as a teacher and as a writer of IF developed over time. Therefore, to provide insights into this development, I shall also use this chapter to highlight models, ideas and practices that I recognise to be commonplace within CentreTown Academy, and to introduce concepts that I will later use when exploring the extent to which I found IF to be disruptive of such practices.

3.1 IF and the Foregrounding of Teacher Creativity

3.1.1 To What Extent is Creativity an Essential Part of What It Means to be an English Teacher?

In the context of this action research project, creativity and teaching cannot be separated, for in posing questions that refer to the production of IF, teaching and the secondary school English classroom, I position the creative production of IF as a central part of my practice. The way in which I research IF foregrounds creativity, so it is therefore important that I here consider the relationship between creativity, teaching, CentreTown Academy and the English classroom.

In foregrounding creativity within my practice as a teacher, I become part of a counternarrative, positioning myself as a teacher who, instead of seeking to emulate evidence-based practice that is deemed by other experts to 'work', creates new ways of working, producing new texts and using them in novel ways. Like Yandell (2019) and Biesta (2007; 2010), I am disrupting the 'what works' discourse that is so prevalent in the UK education sector, a discourse that is limiting our ability to develop nuanced understandings of 'the meanings and manifestations of literacy in different forms and sites' (Yandell, 2019, p.432). Rather than conducting experimental research that establishes scientific truths regarding how a given intervention can affect test results, I seek to explore what literacy can look like when students encounter works of IF in the classroom.

The 'what works' discourse is at play in a variety of publications that influence teaching practice at CentreTown Academy. In *The Science of Learning*, for example, a text cited in guidance shared with all CentreTown Academy teachers, Deans for Impact 'summarize the existing research from cognitive science related to how students learn, and connect this research to its practical implications for teaching and learning' (2015, p.1). This publication seeks to translate findings from the field of cognitive science into teaching strategies that 'work'. For me, however, applying this guidance is not straightforward. As Willingham notes, cognitive science ignores sociocultural perspectives, and using cognitive science to consider reading requires one to focus on 'the mind of the reading individual' rather than the role of 'the social environment in reading' (Willingham, 2017, p.9). From a material-dialogic perspective, this is untenable, as the act of classroom reading is an unavoidably

social entanglement. By advocating for the implementation of 'effective' approaches that arise from the field of cognitive science, CentreTown Academy constrains teaching practices that derive from other relevant fields. By creating novel, interactive texts for use in the classroom and using an under-researched form of text as part of my teaching practice, I did not set out to emulate practices that derive from cognitive science, but rather looked to create new texts and to interrogate correspondingly novel forms of teaching. As such, I foregrounded my role as a creatively disruptive practitioner.

I am far from the first person to consider the vital relationship between creativity and the teaching of English. Reviewing literature in this area, Smith shows that 'critics understand creativity to be a principal ingredient of a good English Education' (Smith, 2023, p.25). Looking at the development of the subject of English through the first half of the twentieth century, she goes on to show that 'creativity was valued and promoted in English from its inception as a school subject' (Smith, 2023, p.46). Moreover, one role of English in the curriculum, as identified in the Cox Report, is to use literature as a means of developing 'children's imaginative and aesthetic lives' (Cox, 1989, pp.2:21), the word imaginative highlighting the central role of creativity within the subject. In such a context, the creativity of English teachers seems vital, for it is arguable that 'teachers cannot develop the creative abilities of their pupils if their own creative abilities are suppressed' (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999, p.103). As Smith writes, 'the creative, agentive teacher produces the creative, agentive child' (Smith, 2023, p.124).

However, in English secondary schools, it is noted that 'creativity is no longer afforded a significant profile' (Cremin, 2015, p.3), and for teachers like me who value creativity, this is problematic; 'the tension between the drive for measurable standards on the one hand and the development of creativity on the other' (Cremin, 2015, p.4), leaves us troubled. My research explores the troubles and struggles involved in incorporating creativity into teaching whilst working in a performative and impersonal educational environment. A performative school environment is one which 'requires individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations.

To set aside personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation' (Ball, 2003, p.215). At CentreTown Academy, teachers must organise their practice in response to target grades, examination results, Ofsted inspection criteria and specified models of what is said to 'work' in the field of teaching and learning. Consequently, at CentreTown Academy, a school in which 'value replaces values' (p.217), the creative teacher is on unstable ground.

3.1.2 What Does it Mean to be a Creative English Teacher?

One might consider being a creative English teacher to involve creative forms of teaching, a desire to facilitate creative forms of learning (Jeffrey and Craft, 2004), or the habitual invitation of learners to engage with content imaginatively (Cremin, 2015). One might also identify a creative teacher as one who invests time and energy in their own creative practice, whether that be within the classroom or beyond it. Where creative writing is concerned, researchers have explored the relationship between teaching and creative writing, arguing that teachers who themselves write experience significant benefits; writing can help them to develop subject knowledge, improve their teaching practice (Cremin and Myhill, 2019; Grainger, 2005; Yoo, 2018) and to improve student outcomes (Whyte et al., 2007). However, it is also found that being a creative teacher-writer comes with challenges. Cremin and Baker have explored the ways that teachers can be positioned on a 'teacher-writer, writer-teacher identity continuum' (2014, p.30; 2010, p.20), conceptualising the writing classroom as a 'site of struggle' for teachers who seek to practise teaching and writing in the same space (2010, p.8). When writing in the classroom, teachers have to manage the professional expectations and pressures acting upon them, whilst also attempting to perform the role of an authentic writer, imaginatively composing and developing texts for their students. The imagination is not always predictable, and by positioning themselves as imaginative writers in the classroom, more akin to artists than technicians, teachers working within results-oriented contexts become potentially 'disruptive' professionals and must therefore be prepared to 'embrace uncertainty and discomfort' (Thomas, 2019, p.57). My own research seeks to explore the struggles, uncertainty and discomfort involved in being a creative teacher-writer, building upon the existing research in this area by exploring how such struggles can manifest and unfold when working with IF.

Much of the research into the benefits and struggles of being a teacher who writes is conducted from an outsider's perspective, rather than by the teachers themselves. Complicating the teacher-writer model by positioning myself as a teacher-writer-researcher who is reporting from within the context of my own classroom-based study offers me a perspective that few researchers adopt. Gilbert (2018) does adopt a similar perspective, exploring the benefits of sharing autobiographical writings with students within the writing classroom. As a teacher-educator, he has also examined the benefits of developing works of fiction for, and in collaboration with, school students and teachers (2022). However, his work does not focus on the writing of IF or on the quality of readings that occur in individual lessons which feature texts created by the teachers involved. My research's focus on the relationship between teaching, creative writing and IF therefore makes it somewhat unique.

3.1.3 As a Teacher Engaged in Creating Works of IF, What Does the Act of Creation Involve?

Considering this question, I find it helpful to think of creativity in re-creative terms, where 're-creativity' refers to the 'self-conscious manipulation of source material to bring something new into being' (McCallum, 2012, p.54). As Koestler writes, the creative act 'uncovers, selects, re-shuffles, combines, synthesizes already existing facts, ideas, faculties, skills' (Koestler, 1964, p.120). Arguably, teachers are regularly engaged in re-creativity, for the planning of lessons requires them to transform curriculum documents or literary texts into lesson plans, questions, worksheets, activities, or performances. Similarly, I have found the creation of works of IF to be a re-creative endeavour, for much of the writing process has involved the location and transformation of relevant source material.

If we see creation in such re-creative terms, we must also interrogate what we mean by the transformation of source materials. My thinking in this area is influenced by the fact that IF was a form of writing that was unfamiliar to me at the outset of this project. Having never written non-linear works of prose before, and having never used Twine as a writing tool, I found Barnard's framework for conceptualising creative practice (Barnard, 2019), with its focus on remediation and multimodality, to be a useful reflective tool (Holdstock, 2022b). I consider myself to be a multimodal

writer in whose work with IF various 'different media and modes contribute to the production of meaning" (Barnard, 2019, p.6). Barnard conceptualises creation by considering the act of writing in a contemporary context, recognising that writers today need to feel 'at home in a shifting mix of words, images and sounds' and to 'work with different technologies and genres' (2019, p.1). In such contexts, writers remediate their creative practice by 'transferring existing skills into new digital multimedia and networked environments' (p.74). As a result, she describes written creativity by suggesting that writing is informed by the following factors: Writerly Resources (external and internal resources that shape writerly decisions), Writerly Personas (aspects or versions of our writerly selves), Expert Intuition (intuitive convictions about how to proceed), the Inner Auteur (our subconscious ability to marshal disparate influential factors and resources) and Creative Projects (previous creative acts and experiences) (Barnard, 2019).

Barnard considers creativity by considering the resources that writers draw upon. From a similar perspective, creativity might helpfully be considered in post-humanist terms, creative events being seen as emergences within rhizomatic assemblages. Through such a lens, to examine creativity is to examine assemblages of relations between human and non-human materials, relations that constitute a creative phenomenon (Fox and Alldred, 2021). This is important as, in this thesis, I do not focus on the multimodality of my writing but the material-dialogic relations that both constitute it and emerge from it. Creating a text, for example, can be explored by considering the relations between the writer, the concepts and ideas at play, and the various resources involved in the text's production. I therefore adapt Barnard's framework, employing a post-humanist perspective: a text can be considered in terms of the relations emerging between the writerly resources, writerly personas and creative projects that inform its emergence, with the Inner Auteur and Expert Intuition manifesting through said relations.

Some creative assemblages can become constrained, fixed and stable. To use a new materialist term, they can be territorialised (Fox and Alldred, 2021). For example, the creative act of planning at CentreTown Academy can be said to have become a somewhat territorialised practice, because all

lessons are expected to be similarly structured. CentreTown Academy's teaching and learning policies instruct teachers to plan lessons that begin with silent retrieval quizzes. These quizzes are then to be followed by some teacher input, a hinge (or whole-class assessment) task, some independent practice and a learning check. Such a lesson structure makes lessons predictable and linear, whereas a creative teacher might seek to be more open to unknown and unpredictable lesson trajectories. By positioning the classroom as a space for and within which the imagination is employed creatively, the creative teacher resists fixity and predictability. By introducing IF into the planning process, I seek to disrupt or deterritorialise lesson planning with a view to investigating what such unpredictable possibilities emerge. Deterritorialisation here refers to the opening up of new possibilities, as opposed to territorialisation, which refers to a 'process of specification' (Fox and Alldred, 2021, p.628). Deterritorialising my planning process by incorporating the creative writing of IF renders my research disruptive; it opens up new, unpredictable and potentially risky possibilities for what might happen before, during and after a lesson. This is countercultural, because in a performative school that exerts pressure on teachers to improve student outcomes, teachers 'generally aim to maximize examination outcomes through adopting a low-risk approach to curriculum change' (Harris, 2021, p.659).

3.1.4 What Relationships Can Exist Between Written Texts, the English Classroom and Creativity?

As my research involved not only the creation of IF but also its introduction and usage in the classroom, and as this can be seen as a novel and creative approach to teaching, it is useful to consider existing research that explores the ways in which creativity and written texts can intersect within the subject of English. When creative teachers read texts with their students, how might they use said texts, and what activities do they enable their students to engage with?

Two responses to this question are of particular relevance to this thesis. Firstly, teachers can encourage students to create responses to, and interpretations of, the texts that they read, rather than presenting a text to students as if it were 'a representation of meaning that is already decided' (Wells, 1990, p.373). Taking the former, more creative approach to reading is, according to Wells,

particularly empowering for the students involved. It is an approach which aligns with the notion that, in English, ‘knowledge is made by all the people in the classroom together as they develop their own “ideas and emotions” and do not simply recall things deposited or drilled into them’ (Eagleton, 2020, p.12). However, it is not an approach that is advocated for by the Department for Education, or (consequently) by leaders within CentreTown Academy. As Yandell observes, teachers in England are instead often encouraged to see learning as ‘an incremental, largely linear process’ and ‘as something which is done to the learners: students’ interests or agency do not figure in this account at all’ (Yandell et al., 2022, p.445). For example, the DfE suggests that teachers should learn to break ‘complex material into smaller steps’ and to ‘sequence lessons so that pupils secure foundational knowledge before encountering more complex content’ (2019, p.11). Similarly, at CentreTown Academy, guidance to teachers advocates for the use of direct instruction, citing Kirschner et al. (2010), who argue that direct instruction is more effective and efficient than other approaches. These direct and linear approaches to teaching and learning do not allow sufficient space for the ideas, emotions and responses that student-readers can create for themselves. They align more with a banking model of education, a model that sees teachers make ‘deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat’ (Freire, 1996, p.53). The creative teacher, valuing the voices and creativity of their students, seeks to resist such approaches.

Secondly, beyond positioning interpretation as a creative act, teachers can also position written texts as stimuli, encouraging students to engage with texts re-creatively. Students can be asked to ‘work actively upon and transform specific material’ into something new (McCallum, 2012, p.54). This in turn can encourage ‘a direct comparison between an original and what it inspires’ (p. 54). However, in a performative school where targets and outcomes hold centre stage, it can be problematic, for when ‘a student responds to a text by creating one of his or her own, notions of right and wrong tend to lose their relevance’ (p. 52). What becomes important in the re-creative classroom is not the extent to which students can produce a correct response or interpretation that will help them meet a prescribed objective, but rather the dialogue that emerges between student and text. Such an approach to the teaching of English and the study of literature can be termed ‘critical-creative’ (Pope,

2012, p.136). Interestingly, others have begun to identify connections between IF and critical or creative skills; Desilets, focusing principally on parser-based forms of IF rather than the hypertext forms of IF made using Twine that my own research concentrates upon, writes that IF promotes learning by demanding ‘critical and creative thinking’ of its readers (Desilets, 2015, p.3). A critical-creative approach to texts is a notably playful approach, for it is an approach that suggests that the ‘best way to understand how a text works [...] is to change it: to play around with it, to intervene in it in some way (large or small), and then try to account for the exact effect of what you have done’ (Pope, 1995, p.1). It is also an approach which acknowledges that the processes of reading and writing ‘are complementary and continuous, not opposite and mutually exclusive’ (Pope, 2012, p.136). For me, this is a noteworthy observation, for IF can also be said to blur the lines between reading and writing by demanding its readers make choices that affect how the text develops. They are thus not only readers, but they are also implicated in the production of a narrative. As Batchelor et al. suggest, where IF is concerned, there exists a ‘blurred line between the author and the reader’ (Batchelor et al., 2021, p.95). I point this out here, as my thesis will explore and identify ways in which IF can become a pedagogical resource in the critical-creative classroom, blurring the boundaries between reading and writing.

3.2 The Possibilities for IF as a Disruptor of Teaching Practices

3.2.1 The Learning Flow

‘I want the potential for surprise and joy to be ever-present, otherwise I get demoralised.’

(Fieldnotes, 19th January 2022)

Many teachers who began their career at the same time as me have since quit the profession. For some, this was because mechanisms of accountability demoralised them, depriving them of the variety and creativity that they sought (Perryman and Calvert, 2019). Creative freedom is, at CentreTown Academy, constrained by a variety of factors, including a mandated lesson structure that sees all teachers practise in a particular manner. Lessons are uniformly expected to respect ‘a version of cognitive science which recommends all lessons should follow a set structure’ (Smith,

2023, p.23). At CentreTown Academy, this lesson structure is referred to as 'The Learning Flow', and from it emerges what Hall et al. might term a 'default pedagogy' (2012, p.7). The conceptualisation of education that this approach represents can be described as a mechanistic one, for it provides teachers with 'direct guidelines about exactly what to do' in a 'prescriptive' manner (Harris, 2010, p.2). CentreTown Academy's learning flow directs teachers to plan lessons that begin with silent retrieval quizzes. These quizzes are to be followed by teacher input, a hinge (or whole-class assessment) task, some independent practice and a learning check. During my time at CentreTown Academy, the learning flow was introduced by senior leaders within the school including the Principal and the Assistant Principal for Teaching and Learning (Mr Faulks). It was used to support a drive towards curricular standardisation. Heads of department, middle leaders and senior leaders were directed to incorporate the learning flow into the planning of shared subject curricula, schemes of work and lesson resources. Consequently, as is the case in many schools where standardised curricula are used, some teachers experienced an accompanying reduction in autonomy (Traianou et al., 2025). The learning flow was also used as a framework to support the delivery of observation feedback. Therefore, in my roles as Second in Charge of English, Director of Teaching and Learning and Associate Assistant Principal, I referred to the learning flow (along with the research underpinning it) when developing components of the English curriculum, when providing observation feedback to teachers, and when facilitating professional development sessions. However, as an English teacher, aspects of the learning flow troubled me, and I frequently discussed my concerns with colleagues both within the English department and beyond. For example, I had several discussions with Mr Faulks about elements of the learning flow that I found concerning from my perspective as an English teacher. My concerns were listened to, but the learning flow remains central to teaching and learning at CentreTown Academy.

CentreTown Academy encourages the enactment of the learning flow via the guidance and professional development that it provides to teachers. The literature from which said guidance draws can reveal a good deal about the way teaching and learning is framed at the school. For example,

CentreTown Academy's professional development resources draw from the following texts, among others:

- Lemov, D. (2015) *Teach Like a Champion 2.0: 62 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Deans for Impact (2015) *The Science of Learning*. Austin, TX: Deans for Impact.
- Fletcher-wood, H. et al. (2019) *The Learning Curriculum 2.0*. Ambition Institute.
- Rosenshine, B. (2012) 'Principles of Instruction: Research-Based Strategies That All Teachers Should Know', *American Educator*, Spring, pp.12-19.

I reference these four texts not only because they are used at CentreTown Academy but also because they are popular and influential texts that influence teaching and learning in a range of schools. Moreover, they can help me to clarify what I mean by a *mechanistic* conceptualisation of learning. The word *mechanistic* is here distinct from the word *machine*, which is a new materialist term I use later in this thesis to describe aspects of my research-assemblage (see Sections 3.2.2 and 4.3).

Firstly, Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion* offers teachers a range of techniques and tools that can be used in the classroom (Lemov, 2015). While these techniques can be useful, they also position teachers as technicians using tools to aid the *mechanistic* process of learning, rather than humans working in a complex educational ecosystem that requires them to adapt to the situation before them. Secondly, the Deans for Impact publication presents evidence from the field of cognitive science in order to support teachers (2015). However, *The Science of Learning* presents teachers with a number of decontextualised evidence-based cognitive principles. Such decontextualised principles position learning as a *mechanistic* and predictable process, rather than a messy, social and entangled experience. Thirdly, *The Learning Curriculum* places great emphasis on helping teachers to develop an understanding of Willingham's memory model (Fletcher-wood et al., 2019; Willingham, 2009). This emphasis on memory foregrounds the role of memorisation in learning, marginalising more social and emotional aspects of the learning experience. As such, *The Learning Curriculum* encourages teachers to view students as memorisation machines rather than humans with a

capacity to feel. Finally, Rosenshine's *Principles of Instruction* offer another set of principles that can serve as a recipe for successful lesson planning and instructional design (Rosenshine, 2012). However, the principles do not encourage teachers to consider what it would *feel* like to sit through such an episode of instruction. As such, Rosenshine also positions students as learning machines rather than living, feeling people. These texts contribute to the mechanistic model of teaching and learning that exists at CentreTown Academy, a model that restricts the extent to which teachers feel able to design lessons that deviate from the CentreTown Academy Learning Flow.

To ensure that the Learning Flow model is respected, teachers are held to account via lesson observations and the regular scrutiny of data relating to student performance. These conditions, I assert, stifle creativity, limiting the potential for teachers and students to express novel ideas, and it is in part the stifling of creativity and self-expression that gave rise to this research project. As the above fieldnote explains, the 'potential for surprise and joy' is something that, as a teacher, means a great deal to me. However, it is something that a mandated and uniform approach to teaching and learning frustrates, and this frustration in part explains why I undertook this research; I wanted to be more frequently surprised by the ideas that my students expressed in lessons, and I saw IF as a potential means of achieving such a goal.

Therefore, in the following paragraphs, I shall further examine the ways in which I feel student and teacher creativity is stifled at secondary schools like CentreTown Academy, through reference to existing research. I shall then consider some of the potential ways in which I imagined, when starting my research, IF could function as a disruptor, facilitating more critical-creative and epistemic modes of textual engagement. I use the word mode here in a similar way to Wells, who argues that the epistemic mode of textual engagement (viewing texts and their meanings as 'tentative, provisional, and open to alternative interpretations and to revision'), gives rise to the most empowering forms of literacy (Wells, 1990, p.369). In this context, a mode is therefore a stance or an approach that shapes our relationship with the texts we are reading.

3.2.2 The Stifling of Creativity at CentreTown Academy

CentreTown Academy's prioritisation of evidence-based practice over pedagogies that are more 'attentive to local circumstance' (Yandell, 2019, p.434) stifles creative practice. By emphasising the role of evidence, schools encourage teachers to replicate decisions which have worked for others in the past (Biesta, 2007). It is a strategy that orients teaching towards replication rather than towards transformation or re-creation. It leaves less space for students to transform the trajectory of lessons by sharing their own personal responses to texts. As such, it stifles what Rosenblatt terms 'aesthetic' approaches to reading, approaches that 'focus attention on what is being lived through in relation to the text during the reading event', including the 'tensions, sensations, feelings and associations' that come to mind (Rosenblatt, 1986, p.124). For example, CentreTown Academy encourages teachers to respect Rosenshine's evidence-informed principles of instruction (Rosenshine, 2012). However, these principles help teachers instruct; they do not help students explore or interact aesthetically with texts or with one another. They are focused on helping students to acquire knowledge, rather than create, explore, transform or intra-act. As such, they can be said to promote more of an 'efferent' reading stance, a stance that focuses attention upon the information that is to be retained or carried away after reading (Rosenblatt, 1986, p.124). With such a focus on instruction, students can find that their personal 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al., 1992, p.132; Thompson and Hall, 2008) are excluded and that they are only able to draw upon a limited range of past experiences during lessons. If students' personal responses to texts are not aligned with the knowledge that it is deemed necessary to acquire, then they are disregarded. This narrows the range of expressive opportunities available to students; they become unable to explain their interpretations in terms of their own experiences. This stifling of epistemic engagement and focus upon instruction rather than dialogue can manifest in discriminatory ways. For example, Kulz observes that 'middle-class cultural capital is privileged' in one inner-city academy environment (Kulz, 2017, p.6) and that academic success is associated with 'acting white' (98). If instruction is based upon racialised notions of what success looks like, then some student voices will be marginalised; their personal responses to texts will never become part of the way that the students around them learn. I note here that this contrasts

dramatically the reputation of IF, Twine and the Twine Revolution, all factors that have been associated with 'the democratization of game design' (Harvey, 2014, p.95) and the foregrounding of 'a plurality of perspectives' (p.100).

'Deliverology' (Ball et al., 2012) and 'performativity' (Ball, 2003) also serve to stifle creativity; pressure to deliver results and to organise one's practice in response to various 'targets, indicators and evaluations' (Ball, 2003, p.215) shape classroom practice (Berry, 2012; Biesta, 2015; Hall and McGinty, 2015). For example, as Kulz explores, in academy environments, teaching can become 'equated with enabling information reproduction for exams' (Kulz, 2017, p.53). Here again, we see a focus on replication rather than critical-creative transformation or aesthetic engagement. For example, in English lessons at CentreTown academy, most students are routinely instructed to rely upon safe, 'formulaic frameworks' (Bleiman, 2020, 31) when speaking or writing in the classroom. They are instructed to rely upon acronyms as a means of structuring most of the writing that they do, and these acronyms enable them to mimic the structure of texts that the teacher has modelled. In this regard, they are not alone; Gibbons notes that an increased use of analytical acronyms such as 'PEE' or 'PEEL' within English classrooms serves to marginalise 'student choice, voice and personal response' (Gibbons, 219, p.36). In a pressurised educational environment, the use of such approaches to writing is unsurprising, for a formulaic approach is often seen as a prompt way of raising students' test scores (Wiley, 2000).

Similarly, at CentreTown Academy, the 'datafication' of teaching (Stevenson, 2017, p.537) stifles creativity in the English classroom by rendering data-driven courses of action more salient. An emphasis on numerical data encourages teachers to adopt 'data-driven' logic (Lewis and Holloway, 2019, p.48), influencing the choices they make about how to explore texts with their students. If a teacher knows that a prescribed interpretation will help a student achieve a certain grade or objective, they may focus on ensuring that their students can reproduce said interpretation. As such, CentreTown teachers can be said to adopt an efferent pedagogical stance, focusing on what prescribed interpretations they hope their students will carry away with them. Consequently, more

critical-creative, aesthetic, or epistemic modes of engaging with texts, modes that are open to unpredictable forms of teaching and learning, are disregarded. Instead, machines that enable the production of desirable data assemble. At CentreTown Academy the principles of direct instruction and the ubiquitous use of linear PowerPoint presentations form part of a machine that can produce desirable data by enabling students to reproduce specific ways of knowing and responding to texts. Here, the term 'machine' is borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari, and it refers to a collection of materials and relations that are affectively linked together to produce something (Fox and Alldred, 2015; Deleuze and Guattari, 2003). CentreTown Academy's data-driven machines can alter the ways that students make meaning; Xerri has explored how 'examination pressure' can encourage a 'mechanistic' approach to poetry (Xerri, 2013, p.134) that sees students attempt to guess 'what the teacher already knows is hidden in the text' instead of engaging personally as readers (136). The mechanistic approach to teaching and learning that is taken at CentreTown Academy is influenced by performative examination pressures in a similar way.

Overall, schools can facilitate the development of 'performance-oriented' rather than 'learning-oriented' classrooms (Watkins, 2010, p.5). Performance-oriented subjects are more concerned with proving their competence than they are with improving and developing their abilities or ideas. In the context of English, a performance orientation can result in the reproduction of prescribed interpretations and the limiting of opportunities for students to contribute to the making of meaning. This can, I believe, reduce the amount of critical-creative, aesthetic and epistemic engagement that occurs in the classroom, for it positions the English classroom as a reproductive machine rather than a transformative one. Moreover, as 'a performance-oriented school culture is linked with poorer motivation and greater disengagement predicting lower attainment' (p.5), such a situation is undesirable. An environment that imposes fewer performance-oriented influences upon student and teacher choice could help students develop valuable literacy skills. When I began this research project, it was my hope that IF would enable me to develop a less results-driven and performative orientation; CentreTown Academy is a school in which teachers are encouraged to plan backwards, using a prescribed lesson aim or a written model as a starting point and then devising activities that

can enable students to achieve said aim or replicate said model. Such an approach positions lessons as journeys with fixed and prescribed destinations or 'goals' rather than adventures towards expansive 'horizons' (Marshall, 2004, p.101), adventures that are open to novel and joyous forms of self-expression. In English, because students 'are not taught to make right-or-wrong calculations but *persuasive judgements*' (Eaglestone, 2020, p.17), 'it may be better to understand progression as heading towards a horizon rather than a clearly defined goal' (Marshall, 2004, p.101). It was my hope that I could use IF as a means of re-introducing an exciting sense of adventure and unpredictability into my teaching, whilst simultaneously respecting the non-linear nature of learning and progression within the subject.

3.2.3 IF as a Disruptor of the Learning Flow

Compared to other resources and text types, IF might impose different influences upon the choices that teachers and students make, changing the nature of the machines they help constitute and potentially altering the modes of textual engagement experienced. As works of IF can be fictional but unconventional (in the sense that they do not necessarily fall neatly into the literary categories of poetry, prose or drama), projected onto a board but used differently to presentation slides, and classified as stories but also classified as games, they occupy and establish a liminal space that could affect classroom behaviour in a variety of ways.

IF could enable both teachers and students to enact a critical-creative mode of engagement with texts, an approach that sees readers play around with texts and transform them. I make this assertion because IF demands readers take an active role in producing and transforming the text that they are reading by making choices. An IF text represents 'a potential narrative, that is, a system that produces narrative during interaction' (Montfort, 2011, p.26). As a result, it encourages a transformative mode of textual engagement, as readers alter the narrative trajectory as they go. They play with a text, making alterations as they read and considering the impact. Previous research into both IF and critical-creative modes of textual engagement have not explored the ways in which

the two fields are connected, and by exploring this connection I therefore make a novel and noteworthy academic contribution.

It is also possible that IF could encourage students to broaden the pool of past experiences from which they draw when engaging with a text. For example, as works of IF are very often written in the second person (Costanzo, 1986) and depend upon active and deliberate choices to a greater extent than traditional texts, students may feel more personally involved in a work of IF than they might in another type of text. They might therefore be more likely to draw upon 'funds of knowledge' that are otherwise marginalised (Moll et al., 1992; Thompson and Hall, 2008). This could broaden the range of interpretations that a class are able to offer, increasing the likelihood of epistemic textual engagement, a mode of engagement that sees students acknowledge the fluid and tentative nature of meaning. Similarly, the nature of IF might alter the contributions that teachers are able to voice and produce. Instead of being preoccupied with imitating other people's interventions, as can happen when adopting an evidence-based approach (Gilbert, 2018), IF might cause the teacher to adapt to the class's choices and to be contingently responsive to the meaning-making happening around them. Here, contingent responsiveness is used to denote 'a teacher's adaptive expertise in responding to the dynamic flow of student talk in the moment, with the goal to improve the collective dialogue' (Cao et al., 2023, p.954).

Building on this notion of contingent responsiveness, it seems likely that IF's non-linear structure could encourage teachers to think on their feet and to embrace the open and rhizomatic nature of classroom reading activities. It could help them adapt to the unpredictable nature of lessons by altering the tasks, questions and instruction that they enact, rather than thinking exclusively about how best to perform in an evidence-based, objective-led and data-driven manner. As such, the IF form could help teachers attend to the unpredictable and to engage in 'responsive teaching' rather than test-focused, 'formative assessment' (Booth, 2017). For example, an IF passage that contains a choice of links poses a problem to which there is not necessarily a correct answer: which link shall we select? Such a 'contestable' (Reznitskaya and Wilkinson, 2017, p.59) dilemma might direct

teachers away from providing students with judgmental, objective-led forms of verbal feedback and towards making 'talk moves' (Michaels and O'Connor, 2015, p.334) that expose and expand students' thinking. The term 'contestable' here refers to a question or problem that 'invites multiple interpretations and elicits reasoning' (Reznitskaya and Wilkinson, 2017, p.59). Using such contestable dilemmas to make space for unpredictable talk might, it must be noted, also pose challenges. For example, Bouton et al note that 'tension between curricular coverage and dialogue's unpredictability' can emerge when engaging in talk-rich, dialogic pedagogies (Bouton et al., 2024, p.182). Pressure to cover curricular content can preclude a flexible and responsive approach to teaching. Bouton et al. also remark that the flexibility involved in such approaches can be challenging for teachers to enact (p.195).

The way that IF foregrounds choice could potentially alter students' attitudes towards reading. As IF depends upon the choices of involved readers, it could help students engage personally with reading. For example, Pope argues IF can produce enjoyable reading experiences, especially when appropriately designed (Pope, 2010). Moreover, research into facilitating reading for pleasure highlights the connection between choice and enjoyment, suggesting that students who can choose what they read tend to be more able to read for pleasure (Clark and Rumbold, 2006; Education Standards Research Team, 2012; Cremin and Scholes, 2024). By using choice to evoke pleasure, IF might help students to adopt a positive and more playful attitude to reading, an attitude that complements a playful, critical-creative mode of engagement. The extent to which IF-based choice might thus have a positive effect upon student experiences in the secondary English classroom has not been considered in sufficient detail, and my research therefore examines the experiences of students who read IF during English lessons.

As well as potentially helping students to enjoy reading, it is possible that the salience of choice inherent in IF's form could help students engage in the creative process of choice-making. As Myhill writes, 'the act of writing is always about making choices. Whether we are novice or expert writers, we have to choose words, phrases, images, and layouts for our text production as we seek to match

our written text with our rhetorical goals' (Myhill, 2011, p.246). By encouraging readers to make choices to produce narrative, IF might help students engage creatively with texts that they are reading, a form of critical-creative engagement with literature that other forms might not afford, and which has not yet been properly considered.

Finally, IF could change the relationship between students, teachers, and the future, counteracting discourses of deliverology and performativity. Whereas students and teachers might usually think about present-tense activity in relation to future test performance, the instant feedback that works of IF offer in the form of new passages when a link has been selected could channel student attention towards the impact of their decisions upon the text and away from their own future performance in a test. IF's structure provides it with 'an evaluative dimension of considerable instructional power' (Desilets, 1999, paragraph 27); it demands that readers 'decipher figural connections' (Bell, 2011, p.65) that exist between passages, rather than focusing their attention on how they can win marks via a formulaic process of replication. Again, this shift in focus could result in a shift towards more epistemic modes engagement, and a less performance-oriented stance.

Overall, it appears possible that IF could help shift performance-oriented classrooms towards becoming more learning-oriented by facilitating enjoyable, epistemic and critical-creative modes of textual engagement. This perspective might smack of 'easy optimism' (Buckingham, 2003, p.314). Teachers working with rigid curricula, for example, may struggle to align the reading of IF with the learning objectives they feel obliged to respect, and this is certainly a challenge with which researchers of educational games have grappled (Shelton and Scoresby, 2011; Whitton, 2014). Despite this, I feel that the potential benefits render the use of IF in the English classroom worthy of further investigation.

3.3 Vignette: The Red Dots

CentreTown Academy is riddled with little red dots.

In the corner of almost every slide, projected on the board at the front of almost every classroom, you will see a dot. If that dot is red, it means students should be engaging in silent, independent work.

Today is my PhD day, so right now I am sat at home, facing the glow of my laptop screen, but without even being present in the school building, I can state with a high degree of confidence that a large number of CentreTown students are currently completing a red dot task.

Red dot tasks are normalised; every lesson starts with a silent quiz, and every lesson features some form of silent independent practice. There are at least six periods in the CentreTown school day, so students will likely come face to face with a red dot at least 12 times today.

Other dots are available. The amber dot, for example, denotes a task that allows for discussion or collaboration with a partner. However, it often feels to me that the red dots are taking over!

This year, there are even red dots stuck to the floors on the corridors outside the classrooms. These dots denote locations where teachers should stand during lesson transitions to ensure that the silent corridors rule is respected by all students as they move between lessons.

At CentreTown Academy, the silence of little red dots is a cherished commodity.

(8th November 2023)

3.4 The Possible Relationship Between IF and Classroom Talk

3.4.1 IF and Classroom Talk

The above vignette demonstrates that silent, independent practice remains highly valued at CentreTown Academy. Whilst the red dots take on slightly different meanings in classrooms around the school due to variability in the way teachers use and refer to them, their presence still implies that silent written work forms a significant part of everyday life at the school. Because learning is seen in predominantly individual and linear terms at the school, students are allocated plenty of time to work silently, as individuals. A culture of silence proliferates, despite Ofsted's most recent

inspection of CentreTown Academy highlighting that '[t]eachers do not typically encourage pupils to academically discuss the subject matter being taught' and that '[l]eaders should ensure that teachers encourage pupils to discuss academic content with purpose' (Ofsted, 2021).

Having done a good deal of reading and research into classroom talk, I was asked to lead some teacher training at CentreTown Academy that was focused on classroom discussions. This was part of the school's response to Ofsted's report. However, this interest in classroom talk appears to have been short-lived, for now – some years after Ofsted's inspection – little attention is being paid to the quality of classroom discussions. In fact, teachers are again being instructed to ensure that sufficient time within lessons is devoted to silent, independent practice. While the training I provided had some impact on individual teachers and some positive feedback, the cult of the red dot persists.

My research project emerges from this context, a situation that positions sustained discussions as less valuable than silent independent work. As a consequence, much of my research into the role that IF might play in the secondary school English classroom focuses on talk, the extent to which IF can disrupt existing talk patterns and how IF might influence the characteristics of the classroom talk that takes place in lessons. In particular, my research focuses on the relationship between IF and whole-class discussion – episodes of talk that see me and a variety of students contribute to a single conversation in response to a text. I shall here introduce some of the literature that has helped me make sense of these discussions.

A key argument that this thesis explores is this: IF might help facilitate *dialogic* and *metalinguistic* forms of classroom talk, forms that diverge from the patterns of talk that are more typical at CentreTown Academy. Later in this chapter, I explain what is meant by this statement, exploring the literature that informs my argument so that it can be examined more fully and with reference to classroom data in later chapters.

However, before commencing, it is worth noting that classroom talk is a very rich field of research, and various other forms or types of talk have been identified and conceptualised. Therefore, before

proceeding onto an exploration of two specific forms of talk, and to provide you with a flavour of the range of other work that has influenced my research into the relationship between IF and classroom talk, I present Table 1. This table contains a list of key talk concepts, all of which have helped me to think about classroom talk and how it can be made more educationally productive or valuable.

Table 1: Some influential concepts from the field of classroom talk

Concept	Description
Monologic talk	Monologic talk is dominated by one voice – that of the teacher. Although other individuals might speak, the teacher is positioned as the expert and the arbiter of truth, giving their voice authority over others. As a result, monologic talk typically involves a teacher informing their students of certain prescribed truths or facts, seeking to transmit information to them. Monologic talk also tends to position students as disconnected individual learners rather than members of a collaborative class (Fisher, 2011; Bakhtin, 1984; Lyle, 2008; Watkins, 2005).
The I-R-F	Identified by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), the IRF is a much-cited concept in the field of classroom talk. It stands for Initiation, Response, Feedback, and it is a very common pattern of talk that is characteristic of the monologic classroom. In an IRF exchange, a teacher will pose a question, a student will respond, and the teacher will provide immediate and individualised feedback. It is a pattern of talk that sees the teacher maintain control over the direction of conversational travel (Cao et al., 2023).
The third turn	Classroom talk often starts with a teacher question (the first turn) that is responded to by a student (the second turn). The next speaker takes the third turn in the conversational sequence. Much research explores the ways that utterances made at the third turn can influence the educational quality of classroom talk. For example, if a teacher asks a student to elaborate rather than providing immediate feedback, this can be beneficial to student learning and can help nurture dialogue (Alexander, 2020; Howe et al., 2019).
Talk moves	Michaels and O'Connor suggest that there are conversational contributions that teachers can make which can aid students to learn through talk. Often these talk moves are made at the third turn, and they can help students to do a variety of things, for example, thinking more deeply or engaging with the ideas of others (2015; 2012).
Authentic questions	Nystrand defines an authentic question as a question that does not have a pre-specified answer, one that is asked as a means of revealing information about how a student is thinking rather than testing them on what they remember. By posing such questions, a teacher can show an interest in the thinking and perspectives of their students (Nystrand, 2019; Nystrand, 1997). Authentic questions are a form of open question that 'encourage reasoning, speculation and more active cognitive and indeed social

	engagement' (Alexander, 2018, p.583). As such they can be contrasted with closed 'what' questions which look for a pre-ordained answer.
Dialogic teaching	Robin Alexander advocates for a pedagogy that he entitles dialogic teaching, a pedagogy that harnesses the power of spoken dialogue to enhance learning. From his perspective, dialogue is talk that is collective, supportive, reciprocal deliberative, cumulative and purposeful (Alexander, 2020).
Dialogic space	A conversational form of 'space' that forms when participants share ideas and perspectives, remaining open to ideas that differ from their own, and open to the possibility of new ideas and understandings emerging from the dialogue itself (Wegerif and Yang, 2011; Wegerif, 2015; Boyd and Sherry, 2024).
Exploratory talk	Mercer advocates classroom talk that respects a set of ground rules and which sees participants share their reasoning, discuss alternative ideas and attempt to arrive at an agreement. He refers to this form of talk as exploratory talk (Mercer, 2008; Mercer and Littleton, 2007).
Disputational talk	Mercer defines disputational talk as talk that is characterised by disagreement and competition (Mercer, 2008).
Cumulative talk	Mercer defines cumulative talk as talk in which various ideas are shared, but in a non-critical manner (Mercer, 2008). Contrastingly, Alexander's conceptualisation of cumulative talk refers to conversations in which 'participants build on their own and each other's contributions' (Alexander, 2020, p.131).
Accountable talk	Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick advocate for a productive form of classroom talk that they term 'accountable talk'. Accountable talk requires students to listen to one another; to build contributions in response to those of others; to use logic and reason; and to base contributions upon recognisable and accessible information (Michaels et al., 2007).
Inquiry dialogue	Inquiry dialogue is another productive form of classroom talk. It is defined as talk that allows students some control over conversational traffic; that sees students connect their ideas to those of others; that involves a range of student ideas and perspectives; that is understood on a meta-level by the students involved; and that involves students collaboratively inquiring into a given topic (Reznitskaya and Wilkinson, 2017).

3.4.2 IF as a Dialogic Teaching Resource

I believe IF makes 'active choice' an essential part of the reading experience (Keller et al., 2011, p.377), and that it might therefore provide encouraging opportunities for students to make and discuss choices, stimulating worthwhile forms of classroom dialogue. This claim aligns with Cook et al.'s argument, which states that 'a wide range of digital technologies, many not originally designed for dialogue, may potentially be implicated in the opening of dialogic space' (Cook et al., 2019). From such a perspective, a work of IF projected onto a whiteboard might become a 'digital artefact' that

helps create 'dialogic space' in the classroom (Hennessy, 2011, p.463). However, providing space for students to make and discuss choices requires 'teachers to yield the floor to students' (Murphy et al., 2009, p.761) and to make 'space for multiple voices', thus moving away from 'monologic practices' (Lyle, 2008, p.225). Monologic teachers can be described as follows:

'A monologic teacher is largely concerned with the transmission of knowledge to pupils and remains firmly in control of the goals of talk. Monologic discourse is an instrumental approach to communication geared towards achieving the teacher's goals.'

(Lyle, 2008, p.225)

Monologic teaching is pre-occupied with the prescribed goals of the teacher, rather than dialogic communication and the opinions of students. However, more open, unpredictable and 'dialogue-intensive pedagogies can produce sizable gains in students' literal and inferential comprehension' (Wilkinson et al., 2015, p.35), explaining why trials 'focusing on cognitively challenging classroom talk' are producing promisingly positive results (Education Endowment Foundation, 2022) and why approaches like reciprocal reading are also thought to be beneficial, particularly for disadvantaged children (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019). I suggest that IF, by foregrounding choice, can promote more dialogic, reciprocal practice by inviting students to make choices, enabling teachers to forsake some of their control over classroom talk and lesson trajectory.

IF has previously been used to stimulate collaboration in the classroom, and might therefore also be capable of scaffolding worthwhile forms of classroom dialogue. Desilets, focusing on parser-based IF, asserts that IF 'grows well in the one-computer classroom' (Desilets, 1986, p.75). He notes the following:

'With one student at the computer, typing what a class wants to try and reading the results aloud, and the rest of the class actively engaged in mapping, keeping track of problems, and generating suggestions, interactive fiction can become an engaging experience for groups of almost any size, an experience that involves students in the essential kind of thinking that we call reading.'

(Desilets, 1986, p.77)

Comparably, digital resources and classroom technologies such as ‘micro-blogging’ tools (Major and Warwick, 2019, p.395) and the Interactive White Board (IWB) (Mercer et al., 2010) have also been used to scaffold dialogue. The IWB, for example, ‘offers the facility for teachers and students to share and discuss ideas on texts in a whole-class setting’ (p.203). A work of IF, projected onto a board, could allow for similar discussions to take place. More specifically, an IWB’s “cover/reveal” facility’ can ‘focus students’ close attention’ onto part of a text, ‘thus scaffolding their learning about it by reducing the complexity of the task’ (p. 204). Similarly, the fact that works of IF are chunked into passages could position IF as an intrinsically scaffolded form, for IF has ‘narrative pauses’ built in (Desilets, 1999, paragraph 27). Furthermore, links could intensify this scaffolding effect by focusing student attention on particular keywords or phrases – choices that the writer has made. While this may cause students to filter or skim texts, focusing their attention exclusively on links rather than the whole passage (Sosnoski, 1999), it also has the potential to be a scaffolding tool that supports text-based discussion. The choices that classes must make between links could also elicit the sharing of different perspectives, as different students might want to select different links for different reasons. This could help teachers create a space for dialogue in the classroom.

I am arguing that IF might helpfully be understood as a resource for the scaffolding of dialogic talk. However, note that it could also be conceptualised as a tool for the scaffolding of *triological* learning. This pedagogical approach sees ‘learning as a process of knowledge creation which concentrates on mediated processes where common objects of activity are developed collaboratively’ (Paavola and Hakkarainen, 2005, p.535). By collaboratively making and discussing choices and thus producing a narrative as they read a work of IF, teachers and students can engage in triological learning. However, having formulated a material-dialogic conceptualisation of reading and adopted a corresponding theory of knowledge, I recognise that (as I have already explored in Section 2.6.3), a triological approach focuses on what human subjects can do to or make of material objects. I, contrastingly, recognise the voice and the agency of both the humans and the materials involved, noting that IF can transform us even as we transform it.

Positioning IF as a resource for scaffolding dialogue enables me to use Alexander’s dialogic teaching framework (Alexander, 2020) to explore how a work of IF could be used to scaffold learning in the classroom. For example, Alexander suggests that dialogic talk can be identified by a range of indicators, including the following (Alexander, 2020, p.164):

- ‘Interactions which encourage students to think and to think in different ways.
- ‘Questions which invite more than simple recall and are posed by students as well as teachers.’
- ‘Answers which are justified, followed up and built upon rather than merely received.’
- ‘Feedback which takes thinking forward and is offered by students as well as teachers.’
- ‘Extending moves which probe and collaboratively expand student contributions.’
- ‘Exchanges which chain together into coherent and deepening lines of enquiry.’
- ‘Discussion in which ideas are freely shared heard and explored.’
- ‘Argumentation which tests and builds evidence in cases.’

Furthermore, Table 2 outlines the ways that questions or tasks relating to a single IF passage could be used to stimulate ‘Learning Talk’ amongst students (Alexander, 2018, p.564). By encouraging students to evaluate, discuss and justify the significance and validity of the choices they are making as they read, for example, a teacher could use IF as a stimulus for purposeful dialogue. They could also encourage students to engage with the work cumulatively and epistemically by using the variety of choices available to the class as a way of encouraging the discussion of contrasting choices about meaning.

Table 2: Examples of how IF could be used to stimulate ‘Learning Talk’ in the classroom

Learning Talk	Example Question or Task
Narration	‘Describe what has happened so far in our interactive adventure.’
Explanation	‘Explain how we (the character) have ended up in this situation.’
Analysis	‘How is this new setting presented to us in this passage?’
Speculation	‘What do you think will happen to us if we select LINK A?’

Imagination	'What do you imagine our (this character's) home to look like?'
Exploration	'Why do you think this situation might have arisen? What might have happened before our interactive adventure began?'
Evaluation	'Which link (or pathway) would you prefer us to select? Why?'
Discussion	'Do you agree or disagree with this link selection? Why? Can you give an alternative opinion?'
Argument	'Explain why you want to select a different link to student A.'
Justification	'Can you justify your choice of link?'
Interrogation	'What questions do we have at this stage?'

Table 3 outlines the ways that IF could help teachers respect Alexander's dialogic teaching principles (2020, p.131). For example, the fact that a single work of IF can be re-used across multiple lessons due to the variety of narrative pathways it contains means that conversations and lines of thought can accumulate and be carried across multiple lessons in an intratextual, cumulative dialogue. Also, by helping teachers to foreground the meaning-making choices of their students, IF could help teachers to achieve reciprocity in their approach to meaning-making during lessons. Such assertions, however, require considerable further investigation, and in this thesis, I seek to explore the extent to which classroom evidence might support this line of argument.

Table 3: The potential relationship between Dialogic Teaching Principles (Alexander, 2020, p.131) and the use of IF in the classroom

Dialogic teaching principles	IF in the classroom
Collective (the classroom is a site of joint learning and enquiry)	The work of IF can be read / played collectively, with one individual (teacher or student) using the mouse to select the collectively agreed links.
Reciprocal (participants listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints)	Decisions are made based upon class discussion and interaction. Over time, the teacher can relinquish more control of the classroom discussion and thus the reading experience.

<p>Supportive</p> <p>(participants feel able to express ideas freely, without risk of embarrassment over ‘wrong’ answers, and they help each other to reach common understandings)</p>	<p>The work of IF is a fiction to be collectively enjoyed and experienced, rather than a written reading test; there are no intrinsically wrong links to select, making the work of IF more supportive than, say, a comprehension test.</p>
<p>Deliberative</p> <p>(participants discuss and seek to resolve different points of view. They work towards reasoned positions and outcomes.)</p>	<p>Choices are made based upon class discussions. Students exchange ideas about which link to select and the decision is taken after different students’ arguments have been considered and evaluated.</p>
<p>Cumulative</p> <p>(participants build on their own and each other’s contributions and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and understanding)</p>	<p>During discussions, individuals must actively listen and respond to the ideas of other students in order to construct <i>more</i> compelling arguments as to why the group should select their chosen link. Furthermore, the fact that a work of IF can be experienced in a variety of ways means that it can be reused, encouraging students to form intratextual lines of thought that transcend an individual lesson.</p>
<p>Purposeful</p> <p>(classroom talk, though open and dialogic, is structured with specific learning goals in view)</p>	<p>An appropriately designed work of IF will stimulate relevant discussions. For example, as part of a Dystopian Fiction unit of work, a work of IF could be designed in order to stimulate discussions relating to the conventions of Dystopian fiction.</p>

3.4.3 IF, Choice and Metalinguistic Talk

In this thesis, I also explore the possible connections between IF, choice and metalinguistic talk, thus building upon existing research that explores the connections between choice, metalinguistic understanding and classroom talk (see Section 9.1.4). I therefore here introduce some of the existing literature that has influenced my thinking in this area.

Firstly, choice occupies an important position within the subject of English. Myhill, drawing on Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), argues that ‘meaning-making is not simply about the lexical meaning of words, as explained in a dictionary, but about the way word choices and relationships, syntax and grammatical choices also shape meaning’ (Myhill, 2021, p.268). As a result, she has developed a ‘grammar as choice pedagogy’ (p.274) that has, over the course of this PhD, come to inform my approach to teaching and learning in the English classroom. As both Myhill’s pedagogy

and IF foreground the importance of choice, this is perhaps unsurprising. By placing choice-based IF passages before my students, I too have foregrounded choice.

Myhill argues that teaching practice should reflect a choice-based conceptualisation of grammar and meaning-making, advocating for 'functionally oriented grammar teaching' (p.274). Where writing is concerned, Myhill and her colleagues suggest that 'showing learners the possibilities of different grammatical choices can enable them to have more conscious control of how their writing communicates their intended message' (Myhill et al., 2020). Taking a 'contextualised' approach to the teaching of grammar and linking this approach with the 'teaching of writing' (Myhill et al., 2011, p.139) through 'activities which support students in making choices and being designers of writing' (p.148) has been shown to positively affect student writing attainment as well as levels of metalinguistic understanding. Myhill et al. have also begun to explore the role that classroom dialogue plays in 'developing [student] writers' metalinguistic understanding of how linguistic choices shape meaning in written texts' (Myhill et al., 2020, p.1). However, researchers have yet to explore the role that IF could play in the facilitation of classroom talk that supports or enables metalinguistic understanding.

Before proceeding, it is important at this stage to define what the term 'metalinguistic understanding' can denote. Metalinguistic understanding involves the conscious 'monitoring and manipulation of language' (Myhill, 2011, p.50); it 'involves both recognising how written text is crafted for meaning and effect, and consciously controlling one's own writing choices' (Newman and Watson, 2020, p.1). Developing metalinguistic understanding can help students learn 'how written texts are crafted and shaped' (Myhill et al., 2020, p.2). Myhill (2011), drawing upon Gombert (1992), explores secondary school students' ability to express different forms of metalinguistic understanding: metasemantic and metalexical understanding (the ability to recognise words and manipulating meanings); metasyntactic understanding (the ability to reason deliberately over the grammar and syntax of a sentence); metatextual understanding (understanding the ways in which a text coheres); and metapragmatic understanding (the ability to reflect upon the ways language is used in social

contexts). She further developed Gombert's framework by highlighting that, in lessons where language is considered in context, metapragmatic understanding is often very much intertwined with other forms of metalinguistic understanding. The concept of metalinguistic understanding might also usefully be extended when considering IF, for IF requires the reader to make choices as they simultaneously read and create a narrative. As such, metalinguistic understanding in the context of IF might involve the conscious control of both readerly and writerly choices, drawing connections between these choices and the effects they might have.

My research builds upon research into metalinguistic understanding and corresponding forms of discussion by considering the role that IF might play in facilitating talk that nurtures an understanding of the connections between choice and meaning (Holdstock, 2023). It also begins to consider the role that certain forms of IF could play in the teaching of writing. As such, my thesis breaks new ground by interrogating the degree to which a work of IF could be used as a means of stimulating and structuring what Myhill et al. call 'metalinguistic dialogic talk' (2020, p.5), and what I refer to as 'metalinguistic talk' (Holdstock, 2023). My research arises from the role that choice plays within the genre of hypertext IF; when faced with an appropriately designed choice, it seems possible that students will be enabled to talk about language in a valuable, metalinguistic way, considering the semantic implications of the choices they make, rather than attempting to guess what the teacher thinks about the text in question.

As a preamble to my later exploration of the relationship between IF and metalinguistic talk, and drawing upon research conducted by Myhill, Newman, Watson and others, Table 4 presents a list of four characteristics which clarify the way I have conceptualised metalinguistic talk (Holdstock, 2023). Alongside this, the table highlights some potential corresponding affordances of IF, affordances that I believe highlight the possibilities for IF as a useful resource in the scaffolding of metalinguistic talk. However, note that, although I here use this table to help articulate a conceptualisation of metalinguistic talk and its potential relationship with IF, I do not make extensive use of this framework as an overarching structure in my later analysis of the relationship between IF and classroom talk

(Chapter 9). This is because, in this thesis, I explore said relationship in a variety of ways, and an exclusive focus on metalinguistic talk could therefore be limiting.

Table 4: The characteristics of Metalinguistic Talk and some corresponding potential affordances of IF

Characteristics of Metalinguistic Talk	Affordances of IF
<p>Metalinguistic talk (MT) is functionally oriented; it explicitly considers language as a resource for the making of meaning (Myhill and Newman, 2016) and draws attention to the relationship between linguistic choice and meaning (Myhill et al., 2020).</p>	<p>IF foregrounds the links between choice and meaning-making. By positioning readers as decision makers whose choices shape the narrative, IF shows that choices impact the meaning of a text.</p>
<p>MT considers texts dialogically; it recognises that meaning is not static but exists in the intra-actions which take place between the author, text, reader and contexts in question (Jesson et al., 2016). Therefore, MT explores the interplay between authorial choice and reader response. In approaching texts dialogically, high quality MT also becomes dialogic by stimulating cognitive activity, engaging multiple perspectives and resulting in the inter-animation of ideas. This does not necessarily exclude teacherly, authoritative knowledge and input, which can form part of a dialogue, offering a perspective that can serve to develop the ideas being collaboratively formed (Myhill et al., 2020).</p>	<p>IF produces narrative through interaction. By depending on reader input, IF thus foregrounds the vital role of the reader in the material-dialogic process of reading.</p>
<p>MT gives voice to metalinguistic understanding; it provides students with opportunities to recognise, make, verbalise, explain, justify and discuss linguistic choices (Myhill et al., 2020; Myhill and Newman, 2016; Myhill et al., 2020). Therefore, MT <i>can</i> feature metalanguage. Metalanguage, the language used to talk about language, can help participants to be more precise about the features and effects under discussion. However, it <i>is</i> possible to express metalinguistic understanding without the use of metalinguistic terms (Myhill et al., 2020).</p>	<p>IF might effectively help make dialogic space. By presenting readers with contestable choices, IF could encourage students to voice and explore contrasting perspectives.</p>
<p>MT provides teachers with opportunities to assess, guide and model the expression of metalinguistic understanding (Watson et al., 2021).</p>	<p>By making space for talk that is not exclusively monologic, IF might help teachers attend to the way that students are thinking about language and choice.</p>

3.5 Chapter Conclusions

In this second part of my literature review, I have considered existing research that relates to my sub-questions. These sub-questions have brought the theme of creativity to the fore, and I have begun to examine the ways in which my research into the possibilities for IF in the English classroom might enable me to shed light on the challenges and struggles that are involved in attempting to be a creative teacher of English, especially when working in a results-oriented, performative educational culture.

I have examined a range of specific ways in which I feel, based upon my reading and my experiences in the field, IF might serve to positively disrupt territorialized teaching practices that are prevalent at CentreTown Academy. Thinking with IF has foregrounded the disruptive and rhizomatic nature of my practice as a teacher and a researcher.

More specifically, I have considered the potential ways in which IF could disrupt and shape teaching and learning, helping to produce more epistemic and critical-creative modes of textual engagement. In so doing, I suggest that IF might provide educational opportunities that CentreTown Academy's Learning Flow, a linear lesson structure derived from the field of cognitive science and corresponding principles of direct instruction, might be unable to offer.

Finally, I suggest that IF could also change the patterns of talk that occur in the English classroom, giving rise to forms of talk that diverge from the monologic talk that typically emerges at CentreTown Academy. Rooting my argument in existing research, I suggest that IF could enable teachers to facilitate dialogic and metalinguistic forms of talk, ideas that shall be further explored in Chapter 9. In interrogating and exploring the relationships that exist between IF, teacher creativity, performative school cultures and classroom talk, this thesis will therefore respond to questions that, to date, have not been sufficiently well explored.

4 Methodology, Methods and Ethics

4.1 Vignette: The Beginning

Where and when did this whole project begin? No individual moment springs to mind, but I do recall the frustration I felt in my first two or three years of teaching.

I remember my first year 11 class, for example, and their seeming reluctance to express an opinion in response to the texts we were reading. I'd plan my lessons and prepare my presentation slides, providing my students with what I thought were stimulating questions for us to explore together, but despite my best efforts, the whole experience felt laborious. It was like trying to drag an anvil through a freshly ploughed field, in the rain.

The afternoon lessons were particularly frustrating, to the extent that I'd leave the school at the end of the day feeling dejected. At night, as I slept, I'd grind my teeth and fret over how best to respond in my upcoming lessons. Some days I would question whether I was cut out for inner-city teaching at all.

My frustration was both diluted and exacerbated by the fact that I liked the individual students a great deal; they were witty and confident, capable of expressing themselves when they wanted to. But that was the problem: when it came to the literature we had to study, it felt like they didn't actually want to express themselves.

I'm sure most English teachers, particularly at the start of their careers, have felt a similar brand of frustration. I find that it is to be felt most keenly when questioning a somewhat uninterested class about a complex text. When the students are confused you end up simplifying your questions to such an extent that the whole thing feels painfully condescending, that is when the frustration I am referring to emerges.

The frustration is hot as tears, but carries with it a weight of sadness, for it suggests that we have failed to ignite any real understanding, interest or curiosity in the minds of our students.

(21st December 2023)

4.2 A Methodological Story

In this chapter, I tell the methodological story of my research, outlining how I became part of a research-assemblage that produced findings relating to the production and pedagogical application

of IF in an inner-city secondary school, here referred to as CentreTown Academy. I use the word *story* deliberately, acknowledging that writing itself functions diffractively; by writing about my research, I make a difference to it, transforming it in significant ways.

My research-assemblage included IF, a material-dialogic conceptualisation of reading, a correspondingly post-humanist onto-epistemology and the methodology of action research, as well as various other contributing 'research machines' (Fox and Alldred, 2021, p.102) such as autoethnography, creative writing, interviews and the audio recording of lessons. All of these components of my research-assemblage will be considered in more detail within this chapter. As no other researchers have considered the production and pedagogical application of IF in this way, this research-assemblage has produced novel and noteworthy academic contributions to the field of education.

IF is unlike texts that students might otherwise encounter in the classroom; the hypertext works of IF that became part of this research-assemblage are non-linear and require their readers to make choices. Their digital, non-linear and choice-rich form renders them materially different from linear works of literature or classroom resources such as PowerPoint presentations. Therefore, the inclusion of a post-humanist, material-dialogic onto-epistemology in my research-assemblage, a perspective which acknowledges that non-human entities can make 'agential cuts' of their own (Barad, 2007, p.178), changing the nature of the phenomena we experience, was essential. It is a perspective that allows me to consider the ways that IF and humans might intra-act. This is important, as to pose questions about how humans and IF might affect one another is to acknowledge the capacities of both the people involved and the texts they are reading.

Action research is a methodology that can be used by teacher-researchers to respond to problems emerging in their practice. In my case, action research was used to respond to teaching practice that I deemed to be problematically monologic, and which was occurring in my own classroom, but which was (and continues to be) commonplace in many CentreTown Academy classrooms. In response to

this problem, I conducted action research by attempting to use IF as a means of engaging students in talk-rich, epistemic and critical-creative text-based activities.

This thesis reports upon the findings that my research-assemblage produced regarding (1) the relationship between IF and my identity positioning; (2) the production of works of IF for use in the classroom; (3) the pedagogical effects of using IF as a classroom resource; and (4) the influence of IF on the characteristics of classroom talk.

This chapter is structured in the following manner: I begin by introducing the concept of the research-assemblage and how it applies to my own work. I then reflect on the overarching methodology that structured my work: action research. Subsequently, I describe and consider the various phases that my data collection and analysis involved, identifying the constituent research machines. Next, I consider the ways in which I have reported on my research, before identifying and describing the ethical considerations that I have taken into account. Finally, I discuss the significance of my positionality, highlighting the ways in which it is explored and reported upon in this thesis. Several vignettes which foreground the diffractive nature of writing as a process are also included in this chapter in order to highlight the role that writing played in reporting upon my research.

4.3 My Research-Assemblage

My research began in response to a ‘living contradiction’ (Whitehead, 1989; Whitehead and McNiff, 2006; Whitehead, 2014; Whitehead, 2019) between my values as an educator and my day-to-day teaching practice. I was frustrated that my students were forming very few personal responses to texts, and that they were frequently unenthused by the works to which I introduced them. While I believed that my role as a teacher was to nurture their meaning-making capacities, I felt that my teaching practices were often positioning students as passive recipients of prescribed interpretations. I was not enabling ‘literary sociability’ – ‘the exchanges in which people participate around the reading and enjoyment of literary works’ (Doecke, 2019, p.343). My lessons therefore felt somewhat monologic because they were not inclusive of a diverse range of voices and perspectives. Moreover, I also saw and valued myself as a competent professional capable of making pedagogical

decisions. However, I recognised that my decision making was being problematically constrained by, for example, CentreTown Academy’s learning flow and the school’s drive towards curricular standardisation. As I was seeking to respond to a problem that derived from my own educational values, and as action research is a methodology that places the practitioner’s values – their ‘living standards of judgement’ (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p.82) – at the heart of data analysis and interpretation, I felt that it was an appropriate methodological response to my problematic situation.

However, my chosen methodology is just one part of the wider research-assemblage that emerged from this living contradiction. The term ‘research-assemblage’ derives from a post-humanist, new materialist conceptualisation of what research is; from this perspective, research is not something that humans do, but rather an assemblage or gathering of things, ideas and processes that together produce knowledge (Fox and Aldred, 2014; Fox and Alldred, 2021). A simplified depiction of my research-assemblage can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5: A simplified representation of my Research-Assemblage

Stance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A material-dialogic conceptualisation of reading • A corresponding post-humanist onto-epistemology
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action research model
Methods of data gathering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative Writing • Creating lesson plans and resources • Audio recording lessons • Taking fieldnotes • Recording Interviews with colleagues • Collecting students' written work • Collecting feedback from colleagues and critical friends • Recording focus groups with students and colleagues
Methods of data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abductive theorizing • Rhizomatic, autoethnographic, playthrough analysis • Thematic analysis
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myself • Students • Colleagues • Other critical friends (e.g. my supervisors and my partner)

Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical classrooms • Virtual or Remote 'classrooms' • My home
Materials and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio recording device • Laptops • Email • Works of IF • Twine software • Presentation slides • Whiteboards and projectors • Paper and exercise books • Existing curricula

Table 5 places component parts of my research-assemblage alongside one other, but positioning action research alongside a post-humanist onto-epistemology is potentially problematic; the methodological term '*action* research' foregrounds the *actions* of the participant-researcher. From a post-humanist perspective, this is troubling, as it draws attention to the agency of the humans involved rather than focusing on 'assemblages' of animate and inanimate entities (Fox and Alldred, 2015, p.399) that produce the emergent world. It is important to note, therefore, that I identify my methodological model as just one component of a larger 'research-assemblage' (p.399) that has produced changes in my emergent practice and corresponding living theories. My actions and my action research cannot be considered independently of the assemblage from which they emerge. Within my research-assemblage, action research, as a methodological framework, has just as much agency as me, the action researcher. This is because, from a post-humanist perspective, agency is not limited to the action researcher, but exists instead in the intra-actions between elements of the entire assemblage. Considering action research from this perspective, I use Table 5 to demonstrate how my methodology sits alongside (and intra-acts with) other elements of my research-assemblage. However, note also that deeper theorisation of action research is conducted in Section 4.5.

It is also important to observe that it would be impossible for any depiction of my research-assemblage to include every human and non-human entity that forms part of my research. The writing of this thesis, for example, is not included in the table, but clearly intra-acts with all the other

elements of the assemblage, affecting the knowledge that emerges. Furthermore, components within Table 5 could be further broken down and explored. For example, the reference to 'myself' could be subdivided into categories such as personas, memories, goals and past experiences. Table 5 therefore provides only an introduction to my research-assemblage, not an exhaustive representation.

The notion of representation is in fact rather problematic, for it suggests that I might be able to represent the truths of my research in writing. Instead, I note that every part of my research-assemblage, including the act of writing about it, makes a difference to the research itself, rendering representation an impossibility. I think diffractively, noting that 'diffraction is a mapping of interference, not of replication, reflection or reproduction' (Haraway, 1992, p.300); elements of the assemblage summarised in Table 5 intra-act with one another, resulting in a research report that seeks to account for the affects these intra-actions produced. To research diffractively, is to be 'responsive to our intra-active engagements with our subject matter, including attending to what gets excluded and how it matters' (Barad, 2011, p.452). This thesis explores how I have intra-acted with, among other things, action research, IF and CentreTown Academy, whilst also remaining cognisant of the fact that these intra-actions have prevented other intra-actions from occurring. I here refer frequently to intra-actions, because my Baradian, post-humanist onto-epistemology positions all matter as part of a constantly developing and emergent web of relations. Intra-actions occur as part of that web, and the prefix *intra* is used to foreground the notion that entities do not exist in isolation from one another (Barad, 2007).

A research machine can be defined as a component of a research-assemblage that has its own affective capacities (Fox and Alldred, 2021), and my research-assemblage includes a variety of intra-acting research machines. For example, in the context of this study, my students are considered in terms of their relations and intra-actions with myself, IF, the classroom, one another and various other research machines. Within my research-assemblage, each research machine has the capacity to affect and be affected by all the other elements of the assemblage (Fox and Alldred, 2021; Deleuze

and Guattari, 2003), meaning that it can intra-act with other elements in particular ways to produce specific material becomings (Barad, 2007). For example, action research is a methodology that has the capacity to function as a ‘framework which can include processes from other literatures and practices’ (Dick, 2007, p.162), enabling the incorporation of a variety of methods into my systematic attempt at responding to the living contradiction I faced. Similarly, IF enables me to use a form of playthrough analysis that would not be appropriate in other circumstances; we can play IF in a way that we cannot play other textual forms. In this way, the relations between different assemblage components shape the knowledge that emerges.

The relations and intra-actions that occur and have occurred between the various components of my research-assemblage render my research *rhizomatic*. My research is not a linear, chronological, unidirectional process. Instead, all the assemblage components intra-act with one another in the same way that ‘any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003, p.7). It is in and through these intra-actions that knowledge happens. Knowledge is not here framed as the product of a linear process. Rather, it emerges and remains inseparable from a specific assemblage.

I stress the rhizomatic nature of my research because it contrasts dramatically with the linear, unidirectional and individualised model of learning and development that I encountered daily at CentreTown Academy. As has been discussed in previous chapters, evidence from the field of cognitive science influences pedagogical practices at CentreTown Academy to a large extent. However, ‘[c]ognitive science has tended to focus on the individual and personal aspects of mind and paid only implicit attention to the social and interactive dimensions of human cognition’ (Stockwell, 2002, p.169). From the perspective of cognitive science, ‘good teaching promotes learning by providing a carefully sequenced and always-already mapped-out linear route through the specified content’ (Yandell and Noor, 2024, p.52). This pedagogical approach is supported by specific forms of research evidence, as Doecke (quoting Bakhtin) notes: the ‘language of “impact factors”, “meta-analyses” and “randomised control experiments” that dominates our current policy

landscape confronts English teachers as “an authoritative discourse” that demands their “unconditional allegiance” (Doecke, 2019, p.353; Bakhtin, 2008, location 4792). Moreover, at CentreTown Academy, the assumed goal of teaching is the improvement of outcomes, as represented by public examination results. It is assumed that ‘the ends of professional action are given, and that the only relevant (professional and research) questions to be asked are about the most effective and efficient ways of achieving those ends’ (Biesta, 2007, p.8). As such, the school encourages a ‘technological model of professional action’ (p.8) that is at odds with more social, post-humanist conceptualisations of literacy and learning. By contrast, I do not pledge an exclusive allegiance to such forms of evidence or pedagogy, and I see neither learning nor research as linear. Instead, I understand both learning and research to be unavoidably social and intra-active phenomena. It is for this reason that I stress the rhizomatic nature of my research; I recognise that both knowledge and learning can happen in less linear and more rhizomatic ways.

As shall be explored later in this chapter, action research offers researchers an iterative means of developing and theorising their practice. Its iterative nature means that my research-assemblage has constantly evolved and developed; as the vignette which follows this section illustrates, this made it difficult to decide when my data gathering was complete. Moreover, post-humanism and the concept of diffraction did not initially feature in my approach to this project. However, during the reporting phase of my research, the nature of my methodology enabled me to introduce such ideas as a means of making sense of the research I have conducted. Rowley explains this process:

‘Data analysis is in one sense integral to and ongoing throughout the action research process. Nevertheless, as the project draws to a close, there is a phase during which there is an enhanced focus on data analysis. In this phase, *the researcher seeks to take an overview, make sense and generate understanding and insights from the base of evidence and reflection that has emerged during the action research project, with a view to contributing to knowledge or theory.*’

(Rowley, 2014)

I italicise here to draw your attention to the fact that my material-dialogic, post-humanist stance has emerged during the phases of my research in which I seek to 'make sense' of the data and experiences I have gathered. This ongoing approach to data analysis and sense-making can be challenging; writing about my research today, I realise that it can render the writing and reporting process awkward because the ongoing data analysis process makes it hard to know which tense to use.

Looking at Table 5 again, you may notice that I do not include separate columns for my ontological and epistemological stances. As I am conducting action research into my own practice, I represent both a knower and a known. This renders the division between ontology and epistemology problematic; the theories that my research-assemblage produces are produced by my intra-actions with my surroundings (Nicholas and Hathcoat, 2014). Any knowledge claims I make must be seen in this light, and in this way, my utilisation of a post-humanist onto-epistemology marries appropriately with my methodological model, for both position me, the researcher, as part of (and not external to) the research being conducted. This is not to say that any claims I make are of limited value to other teachers, writers or researchers. Rather, the findings and theories of practice that emerge here can enter into future assemblages, informing future research projects and developments in practice.

4.4 Vignette: The End?

At the beginning of this academic year, I thought my data gathering was at an end. However, perusing a year nine 'Narrative Writing' scheme of work that I had created a year or two ago, I recalled that I had included within it a link to a work of IF which I had produced as part of my research: Gretel, Redesigned.

As a result, it transpired that some of my colleagues within the English department experimented with this text in their lessons this term. In so doing, they embraced and explored the ways in which IF might affect their own practice as teachers of English.

A little frustrated, I recognised that, perhaps, my data gathering was not as complete as I'd hoped, but how could I turn a blind eye? I was curious to talk to my colleagues about

their IF-based teaching experiences. How had they used the text? How had their students responded? And how did they feel about the resource, the likes of which do not typically appear in our schemes of work?

And so it was that, at the end of a long school day, I sat down with three colleagues in a classroom on the first floor at CentreTown Academy. We sat in those familiar, plastic classroom chairs and we talked for fifteen minutes or so.

It was exciting to see how my research cycles were now expanding to include classes and students that I myself might never teach. Simultaneously, it was frustrating to know that exciting avenues for further research remained open, even as I sought to 'complete' the writing of my thesis.

(20th December 2023)

4.5 Methodology: Action Research

Methodologically speaking, my research can best be described as an educational action research project (Noffke and Brennan, 2014); the practical knowledge I generate emerges via a process of iterative, pedagogically oriented action and continuous reflection. The project began as an attempt to understand and improve my own teaching practice (Hopkins, 1985) and features a 'small-scale intervention in the functioning of the "real" world and a systematic, close examination, monitoring and review of the effects of such an intervention' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.441). Drawing on the work of Whitehead, I see this intervention as a response to the experience of existing as a 'living contradiction', an experience which involves the 'holding [of] educational values and the experience of their negation' (Whitehead, 1989, p.44). My action research therefore responds to the question 'How do I improve what I am doing' (Whitehead, 2014, p.514)? It is very much grounded in my own 'values and practices', and therefore I do not shy away from interrogating my 'own subjectivities and how they affect the research process' (Given, 2008, p.6). The living theories that emerge from my enquiry are rooted in and inseparable from my practice, my school context, my educational values, and my experience of existing as a living contradiction. For me, they explain the 'educational influences' in my 'own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations

in which' I practise (Whitehead, 2014, p.514). However, they are relevant to any practitioner with whom my experiences, values and school context might resonate.

It is possible to argue that the iterative process of action research is part and parcel of being a reflective teacher; teachers routinely plan, act and reflect in an iterative fashion. There is a good deal of crossover between being a reflective practitioner (Finlay, 2008) and doing action research, and the above vignette highlights this point; if, in conducting action research, one interrogates one's own practice, drawing a line under the research becomes a frustrating and potentially artificial act, as one's reflective practice is likely to continue after the action research project has drawn to a close.

However, like Johnston (1994), I do hold that action research is a distinct and valuable methodology, for it requires the researcher to engage in 'systematic, collaborative and critical' (p.39) processes that are distinct from the ways in which teachers typically practice and collaborate. For example, while teachers might often exchange 'experiences of their classrooms in stories' (p.45), they do not typically observe one another as they deliberately enact and investigate a particular intervention. Likewise, they do not often interview colleagues who have observed them teach in order to explore, develop and refine said intervention, and they do not often write stylistically academic reports of their day-to-day practice.

Action research is a methodology that is subject to a good deal of debate. Zeichner summarises these debates in the following way:

'There has been a lot of debate in the literature about what is and is not real action research, about the specifics of the action research spiral, about whether action research must be collaborative or not, about whether it can or should involve outsiders as well as Insiders, and so on [...]. There are many different cultures of action research and it seems to me that an awful lot of time and energy is wasted in arguing over who are the 'real' action researchers and who are the Imposters.'

(Zeichner, 1993, pp.200-01)

In this chapter, acknowledging that action research is so contested, I articulate how I have conducted my study, identifying the components of my methodology that identify it as action research and describing the model of action research that I have developed.

Developing or initiating some form of intervention is central to conducting action research (Weiskopf and Laske, 1996; Koshy, 2010; Coghlan and Shani, 2021), and it is the initiation of such an intervention that distinguishes action research from other methodologies. For example, although both action research and autoethnography are focused on the researcher's situated self, these two research machines are distinct; action research's explicit attention to deliberate intervention differentiates it from autoethnography. My research's dependence upon a deliberate intervention, conducted in response to the living contradiction I have identified and using materials such as Twine and IF — materials that are not typically seen in English lessons at CentreTown Academy — distinguishes my methodological approach from autoethnography.

Although it is possible to conduct autoethnography as action research (Hughes and Pennington, 2017), I do not articulate my approach in this way. I include autoethnography in my research-assemblage because I understand action research to be a methodology that can accommodate a variety of methods. Action research is fluid and adaptable, embracing a range of methods in order to enable interpretation (Given, 2008). Autoethnography involves the production of a self-narrative, a written exploration of the self as a socially situated entity (Denzin, 2014); it connects the 'personal to the cultural' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.739), often seeking to portray personal experience in an imaginative and evocative fashion (Muncey, 2010). In my research, although I do explore the characteristics of my socially situated self, I do so as part of my exploration and interpretation of the IF-based interventions I have iteratively developed. Where I use autoethnography, I do so in order to develop a better understanding of the possibilities for IF within the context of my particular research-assemblage. As such, autoethnography is a method of writing that helps me to understand my practice and develop richer and more nuanced living theories of practice.

Like autoethnography, action research 'privileges the individual' (Muncey, 2010, p.2) and positions researchers as both 'observers and participants' (p.8). Interestingly, Rosenblatt actually suggests that an 'ethnographic approach' is an appropriate methodology to employ when conducting 'research based on the transactional theory' of reading (Rosenblatt, 2005, p.47). This is due to ethnography's focus on 'problems' that exist 'in the context of the ongoing life of individuals and groups in a particular cultural, social and educational environment' (p.34). It feels appropriate then that I incorporate autoethnographic methods into my study, reflexively exploring the relationships between my emergent theories and the social contexts in which these theories are developed. Like autoethnographers who 'portray an individual experience in a way that evokes the imagination of the reader' (Muncey, 2010, p.2), I use descriptive vignettes to engage my readers' imaginations and to help them better understand my research story and its context. For me this is a diffractive, new materialist approach, as I am attempting to 'make explicit' the various ways in which I am entangled with my research-assemblage and the difference that such entanglements might make to the research I conduct (Fox and Alldred, 2021, p.93). In the above vignette, for example, I descriptively portray how my research was informed by my social situation as a member of the English department at CentreTown Academy, a situation which changed the shape of my research as a whole.

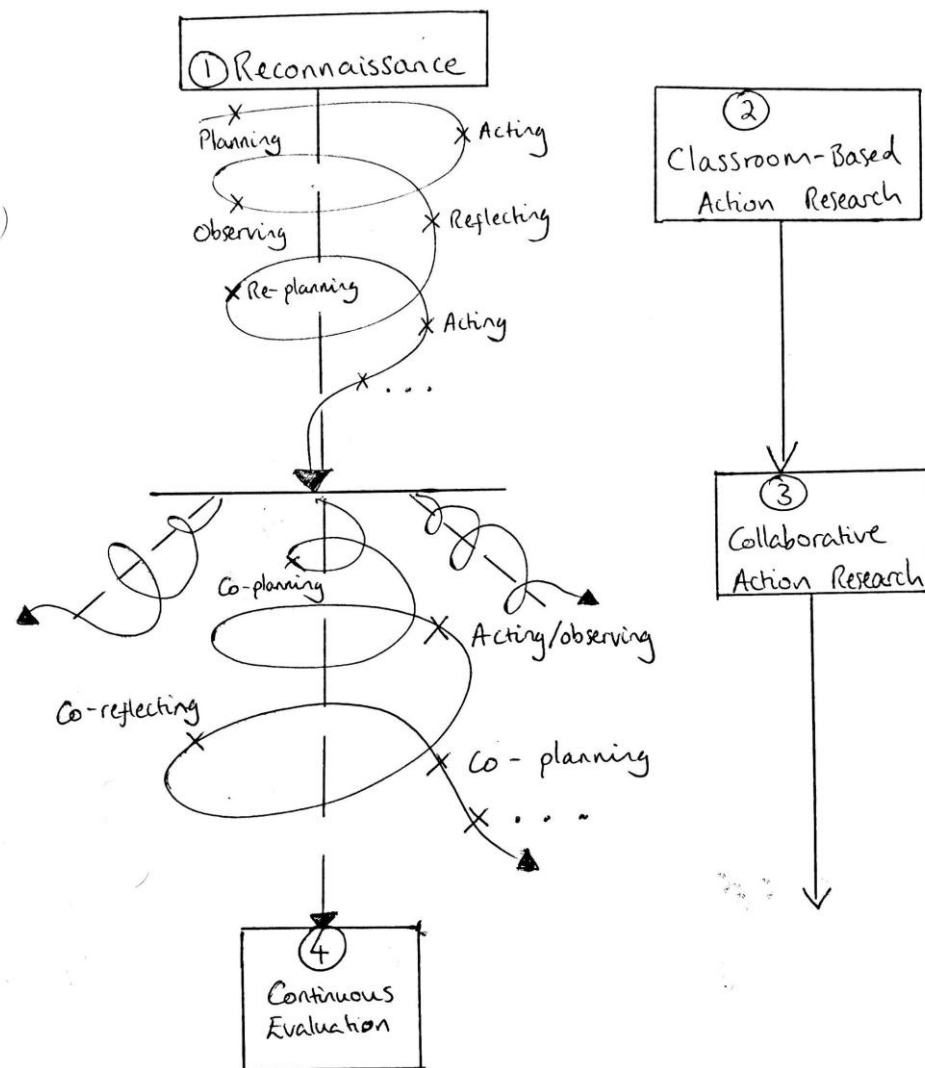
As I will explore later in this chapter, I do also use autoethnographic methods of data analysis, and I do so to develop a vibrant and nuanced understanding of IF and the living contradictions that I have experienced and responded to. My autoethnographic vignettes, along with the autoethnographic methods I have used, enable me to 'disclose the affect economies' of my research-assemblage (Fox and Alldred, 2021, p.100), to both shape and portray the affective flows that emerged from my intra-acting research machines; they help me to articulate the unexpected 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003, p.21) or 'path[s] of mutation' (Leander and Rowe, 2006, p.433) that arose from the introduction of IF into my practice and the formation of my research-assemblage. Such lines of flight - lines that transform practice by evoking 'new and unexpected arrangements and relationships' (Sherman et al., 2020, p.108) – deterritorialized my teaching practice in the sense that they altered it, changed its nature in various ways. My research involved regarding such lines and iteratively

reflecting upon the ways in which they intra-acted with my values, my living standards of judgement and my situation at CentreTown Academy. Autoethnographic methods became part of that process.

I am here using a range of new materialist terms (e.g. affective flow, deterritorialise and lines of flight) to articulate my research process. By introducing novel matter into my existing teaching and learning assemblage, I form a research-assemblage that is open to novel affective flows – changes of state and capacity that give rise to other unpredictable changes, forming flows. Such flows can territorialise (in the sense that they work to specify the capacities of something), or they can deterritorialise (in the sense that they can ‘open up new possibilities’ for something) (Fox and Alldred, 2021, p.628), becoming lines of flight. By forming a research-assemblage that features IF and secondary school English classrooms, I contribute to the emergence of affective flows, the novelty of which renders my research unique. The deterritorialising flows that emerge are of interest, as they represent noteworthy departures from forms of practice I understand to be commonplace and problematic. Moreover, the process of reporting on my research and attempting to specify what the affective capacities of IF might be when used in the English classroom is the start of a territorialising flow that is of interest to other teachers of English and researchers working in the field of literacy. The fact that some of my work on the affordances of IF has been published, is testament to this (Holdstock, 2021b; 2022b; 2023; 2024c).

To conduct my research, I entered into an action research spiral of 'planning, acting, observing, reflecting [and] re-planning' (McNiff, 1988, p.43). In fact, before entering into this spiral, and inspired by action research models such as those created by Elliot and O'Leary (Koshy, 2010, pp.6-7) and Kemmis and McTaggart (Hill, 2014), I proposed an action research model of my own (Figure 1).

Figure 1: My Proposed Action Research Model



In formulating this research model, I sought to render my intentions visible; I planned to begin by conducting a 'reconnaissance phase' (1) (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010, p.57), during which I aimed

to identify what writing a work of IF for the first time might reveal about myself and the situation within which I work. Then, as the model demonstrates, I planned to move through an iterative classroom-based action research spiral (2) (Convery, 2014) and onto a more collaborative form of action research spiral (3) (Townsend, 2014); I envisaged moving from an initial focus on my own practice through to a focus on sharing and interrogating the resources and 'living theory' (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p.12; Whitehead, 2014) that this process produced. Throughout these phases I also intended to enter into processes of triangulation and continuous evaluation (4) (Koshy, 2010; McNiff and Whitehead, 2010) in order to suggest a greater degree of credibility and validity. Triangulation in this context would involve gathering three different sets of data relating to individual lessons in which a work of IF featured. Each set of data would provide a distinct perspective on the lesson in question and enable me to interrogate my practice from a different angle. For each recorded lesson, one set of data would be a recording of the lesson, another data set would emerge from interviews with colleagues who had observed the lesson in question, and a third source of data would be my own fieldnotes and reflections. During the interviews with colleagues, I would seek evaluative feedback on my teaching practice and the living theories that my experiences had produced, engaging in a process of collaborative and ongoing evaluation. I also aimed to consult 'critical friends' (Koshy, 2010, p.37) such as my PhD supervisors as part of the process of continuous evaluation.

However, when I had completed the reconnaissance and classroom-based action research phases of my project, I realised that my proposed research model was overly ambitious. Firstly, the classroom-based action research spiral enabled me to gather such a quantity of data that reporting on subsequent collaborative action research spirals within my thesis became an unrealistic prospect. While a number of colleagues have experimented with using IF in the classroom, and although I have run a focus group to gather data relating to their experiences, my thesis does not focus to any great extent on co-planning or co-reflecting; this is one of the study's limitations.

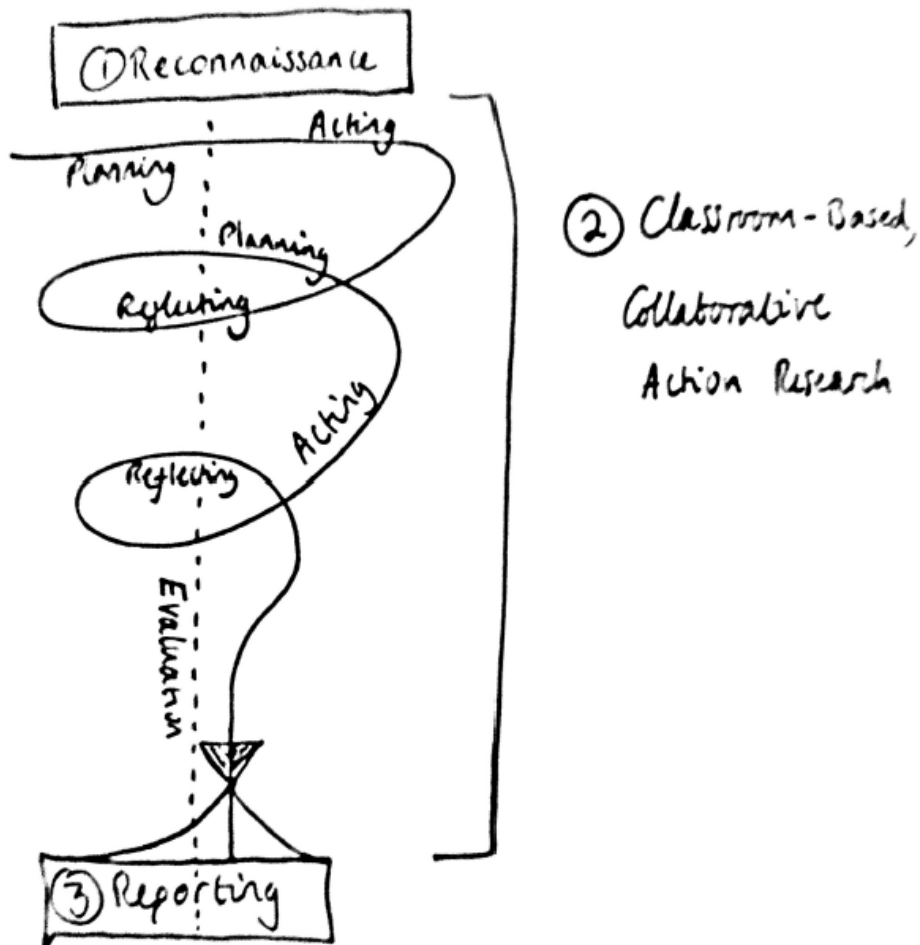
The multifarious ways in which my classroom-based action research spiral has influenced the manner in which I work and collaborate with other colleagues leads me to believe that reporting on

collaborative research spirals would become a valuable but infinite endeavour that would necessarily draw my attention away from my research questions. For example, having conducted a good deal of research on Dialogic Teaching as a part of this project, I was asked to lead a whole school, year-long, 6-session CPD programme at CentreTown Academy, focusing on dialogue in the classroom. My research informs this programme, but the programme does not focus on the role that IF could play in the classroom. I acknowledge that action research can produce unexpected questions and theories and does therefore require the practitioner-researcher to embrace mess (Cook, 2009; 1998). This is reflected in my original research model via the inclusion of ellipses (...), used to indicate further repetitions of action research cycles, and via the inclusion of multiple different spirals during the collaborative phase of my proposed research model. However, I am obliged to acknowledge that, when writing my thesis, I will not be able to continue reporting on my research ad infinitum and must therefore refrain from attempting to report on subsequent collaborative action research cycles or related professional activity to any great extent. I also note that, due to the ongoing evaluation that I was conducting during the classroom-based action research spiral, the divide between classroom-based action research and collaborative action research is indistinct. As my interviews with colleagues and feedback from critical friends informed my planning, the classroom-based research spiral can certainly be seen as collaborative, especially when one considers that, in observing and reflecting on a lesson, my colleagues and critical friends formed their own living theories in relation to IF and the English classroom, theories which interacted with my own during our discussions. As such, even before I began reporting on my action research project, I had already begun sharing and disseminating practical ideas in a collaborative fashion.

One further problem with my proposed research model is worth mentioning at this stage. Notice the way that each spiral is punctuated by labelled 'X' marks. These marks helped me to illustrate the activities that constitute the action research spiral. However, the use of 'X' marks also positions these activities as distinct from one another. This is unfortunate, for I have come to realise that it is worthwhile foregrounding the ways that these activities overlap and inform one another; they are far from discrete.

Eventually, I formed a revised research model that could be of use to future educational action researchers (Figure 2). My freehand use of pen and ink in Figure 2 reflects the emergent, living nature of this research model. Note the fact that this model did not predate my research but emerged from it as part of my research-assemblage. Note also that there is only one spiral contained in this model and that there are no ellipses included within it. Viewing my research model in material-dialogic terms, this reflects the fact that my thesis has agency and makes agential cuts (Barad, 2007): the thesis itself imposes boundaries, limiting the extent to which all of the theories, practices and ideas that have emerged from my action research can be reported upon. For example, theses are, on the whole, written to be read in a linear fashion. As such, a linear depiction of my research model, containing a single research spiral, might enable me to report upon my research in a coherent manner. However, as McNiff warns, there are risks involved in conceptualising action research as a neat, linear process (McNiff, 2000). In reality, events and processes overlap and research develops in unpredictable ways. It is the openness to mess and unpredictability that made action research feel appropriate, given my research context. As I perceive the dominant, technological model of professional practice that exists at CentreTown Academy to be problematic, I adopted a methodology that was, in fact, less linear and more flexible. It is apt therefore, that I moved from the above, messier model of action research, towards the below, more simplified and defined model; the second of these two models emerged from the research as it developed and does not represent a pre-defined linear research pathway.

Figure 2: A Revised Action Research Model



4.6 Data Collection and Analysis

In this section of my methodologies chapter, I will tell the story of *who* and *what* became included in my research-assemblage, and *how* research data was consequently collected and analysed. I write about data collection and analysis in the same section because they are not discrete components of my research-assemblage. While a good deal of data analysis came after my data gathering, a great deal of reflection and analysis was conducted as the data was being collected. The continuous evaluation of my practice, for example, was an ongoing form of reflection and analysis that was part and parcel of the research process.

I also here write about the 'phases' of my research. Again, it must be stressed that these phases are not as distinct as the diagram above or the description below might suggest. To portray my methods in writing, I have found it useful to introduce the concept of the phase. This is another example of intra-actions within my research-assemblage; reporting on my research, attempting to portray it on the page, changes it.

4.6.1 Phase 1 - Reconnaissance

To clarify, explore and describe the starting point of my research, I conducted reconnaissance (Dillon, 2008; Hill, 2008; Hill, 2014). As my research concerns myself as well as the context within which I work, my reconnaissance included both situational reconnaissance and self-reconnaissance (Dillon, 2008). Moreover, as the research emerged from my existing practice as a teacher at CentreTown Academy, it is also important to note that, while much of my reconnaissance was conducted intentionally, some of it was also conducted unintentionally, prior to the commencement of my PhD; I had already begun unintentional work on making sense of my research context by working at CentreTown Academy for three years before I began my research. For the sake of the coherence of this thesis, I refer to reconnaissance as a 'phase' of my research, but reconnaissance is an indiscrete process that is entangled within my research-assemblage, for, as Hill writes, it 'is not restricted to a place in time but continues in a haphazard way throughout the duration of an action research process' (Hill, 2008, p.29). Reconnaissance cannot be said to neatly precede subsequent research phases, but the act of reporting on reconnaissance might suggest otherwise. Similarly, my situational reconnaissance and self-reconnaissance are very much intertwined, and this fact is reflected in the methods of data gathering and analysis I have used.

Situational reconnaissance involves exploring 'the research context, investigation approaches and the literature related to the management of knowledge', while self-reconnaissance is the exploration of one's own 'beliefs and behaviours' within the research context (Dillon, 2008, p.11). To explore my beliefs and behaviours and to better understand my research context, I engaged in the activities that

are listed below. However, these activities were later supplemented by further actions and are not independent from actions taken in other research phases.

1. Examining literature that explores the ways students are positioned in secondary school English lessons.
2. Examining literature that explores the role IF can play in educational contexts.
3. Examining literature that explores and explains the conventions of IF and the ways in which it can be produced.
4. Writing creatively to produce a work of IF of my own, a fictional narrative entitled [*The Doodle*](#) (Holdstock, 2022c) that is set in a secondary school.
5. Reading, discussing and seeking feedback on *The Doodle* from and with critical friends and colleagues.
6. Conducting rhizomatic, autoethnographic, playthrough analysis (Holdstock, 2024c) of *The Doodle*.
7. Reading *The Doodle* with a class of year seven English students at CentreTown Academy and writing fieldnotes describing the experience.
8. Gathering written feedback from two colleagues (Ms Doig and Ms Winn) who observed the abovementioned lesson.

The reconnaissance phase of my research cannot be separated from the classroom-based, collaborative action research phase, because actions taken in this later phase built upon my reconnaissance, and some were in fact taken while working with the same students who had participated in my year seven reconnaissance lesson. Methods 1, 2 and 3 in the above list represent methods that I employed to gather information about the situation I set out to explore. These methods enabled me to describe the broader context within which my work is situated. In choosing texts to read, I was led by my belief that I had identified a problem - the problematic positioning of students as individualised, passive learners on a prescribed and linear learning journey. I read in order to evaluate and clarify my own thinking through reference to other researchers. Likewise, when researching IF and the role it might play in the classroom, I was led by my belief that IF might be able to help me respond to the problem I was experiencing in my own lessons – the living contradiction that existed between my conceptualisation of literacy and the pedagogical practices that my colleagues and I were regularly enacting.

Contrastingly, method four in the above list represents a method of data *generation* that enabled me to explore my own identity in relation to the educational system and establishment within which I worked, whilst simultaneously enabling me to learn about IF and the ways it can be produced. The fact that this can be described as a method of data *generation* rather than data gathering reflects my role as a practitioner-researcher, one who is both researcher and research subject; these two roles are not easily seen in isolation from one another. *The Doodle* is a work of IF that is set in a secondary school inspired by CentreTown Academy. As a result, writing it enabled me to conduct situational and self-reconnaissance. I learned about IF by working out how to write fiction using Twine, and I began to learn more about my beliefs and educational values by considering the school environment from the perspective of a creative writer-teacher.

It must be noted that the extent to which the creative writing of fiction can be seen as a research method is contested (Kara, 2015). Writing is often seen as a means of presenting research findings, rather than a means of producing knowledge (Cook, 2013). Creative writing is also frequently positioned as a form of artistic or imaginative practice rather than a research method that can contribute to the production of knowledge (Cowan, 2021). The work of creative practitioners is not always 'understood' or 'valued' in academic contexts (Webb, 2012, p.9). However, imaginative forms of creative writing can be a valuable 'means of discovery' (Cook, 2013, p.204), drawing attention to things that the researcher in question might otherwise remain unaware. I adopt this stance, conceptualising research methods diffractively; my methods do not represent or replicate the world, but they do shape or interfere with the ways I perceive my experiences (Haraway, 1992). Creative methods can therefore help us respond to questions that traditional methods are unable to answer (Kara, 2015). From this perspective, creative writing can 'bring what is experienced as outside or beyond language into language' (p.206). Moreover, ethnographers sometimes imaginatively synthesise narratives, drawing upon data to produce writing which conjures a 'resonance of truth' – texts that strive not for accuracy of representation, but which instead use literary techniques to convey a more personal truth (Davis and Ellis, 2013). Clough argues that, within the world of education, there is an urgent moral need for researchers to share such personal truths, for in a sector

where the 'furniture of audit' works to marginalise the personal, researchers need to tell the truths that might otherwise never be heard (Clough, 2002, p.99). As such, my decision to position creative writing at the heart of my reconnaissance became part of my disruptive practice, a way of asserting that there are many ways of knowing and that one does not have to limit oneself to dominant forms of knowledge production. By using creative writing as a research method, I engage in a Creative Analytical Process (CAP) that uses various forms of writing, including creative writing, to unearth 'that which was unknowable and unimaginable using conventional analytic procedures' (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005, p.963). Using the creative writing of IF as a means of exploring the identities and experiences of practicing teachers like myself is also a worthwhile endeavour, for although IF is said to have the capacity to enable the production of 'games exploring personal experiences' (Friedhoff, 2013) and texts that can 'put players into the mind of a game's creator' (Sarkar, 2015), it has yet to be used by researchers to consider, for example, the identities of 'teachers as writers' (Cremin et al., 2020, p.49).

As *The Doodle* was the first work of IF I had created, I shared and discussed it with critical friends to develop a better understanding of how others might respond to it and how it functioned as a text from the perspective of a reader (reconnaissance method 5). Having created *The Doodle*, I then formulated what I felt to be an appropriate method of data analysis: method six in the above list (rhizomatic, autoethnographic, playthrough analysis). This analysis formed part of my reconnaissance, highlighting the fact that reconnaissance can involve more than fact-finding, and can feature a degree of action and analysis. I decided to produce an autoethnographic reading of my own work of IF. The fact that my research involves the creative writing and autoethnographic analysis of IF renders it novel, as such a combination of methods has not, to my knowledge, been employed by other researchers within the field of education; for this reason, some of my reconnaissance research has already been published (Holdstock, 2024c).

Autoethnography involves the production of a self-narrative, a written exploration of the self as a socially situated entity (Denzin, 2014); it connects the 'personal to the cultural' (Ellis and Bochner,

2000, p.739), often seeking to portray personal experience in an imaginative and evocative fashion (Muncey, 2010). To adopt such an evocative style is an academically unconventional choice and has resulted in some researchers struggling to find outlets for the dissemination of their research (Muncey, 2010). However, it must be stressed that autoethnographers are often committed to an 'analytic research agenda' (Anderson, 2006, p.375), and while Ellis and Bochner argue that autoethnography is not a vehicle for producing 'distanced theorising' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p.433), autoethnography does seek to critique the relationships between an individual and their social situation, often requiring the researcher to reveal their 'vulnerable self' (Muncey, 2010, p.30). Most importantly, conducting autoethnographic analysis enabled me to conduct nuanced self-reconnaissance, enabling me to explore, for example, my socio-economically rooted anxieties regarding power dynamics between myself and my students within lessons.

However, autoethnography does not necessarily reveal 'the self to the self' in the same way that creative writing does, as it does not engage with 'unconscious processes' in quite the same fashion (Cook, 2013, p.200). As a result, I combine creative writing and autoethnography to understand my own positionality in ways that individual methods would not allow. Both methods require the writer to use language in evocative and imaginative ways and cannot therefore be viewed as entirely distinct from one another. Gilbert and Macleroy have argued that researchers can use autoethnography to research creative writing (2020), and I extend this claim by arguing that autoethnographers might find the writing of fiction to be a useful research method to incorporate into their research practice. By writing creatively and then interrogating their own writing choices, autoethnographers can uncover findings they might otherwise not. As part of my reconnaissance and to explore my own positionality, I have attempted to conduct 'Good Autoethnography' (Adams and Herrmann, 2023, p.1) by producing a reflexive account of my own (auto-) experiences reading *The Doodle*. In so doing, I offer a unique perspective on the positioning of teachers and students within English secondary schools today (ethno-). Finally, I do so in an innovative and evocative fashion, engaging in a creative analytical writing process (-graphy).

Inspired by the IF playthroughs that appear in Kopas' *Videogames For Humans* (Kopas, 2015b), I decided to produce an autoethnographic *playthrough* of my own story, *The Doodle*. I was inspired by writers like Lana Polansky, who conducted a playthrough of 'Mangia' by Nina Freeman (a game exploring the writer's experience of chronic illness) (Freeman and Polansky, 2015). In Polansky's playthrough, she writes about how the story made her think and feel about her own past medical experiences. Inspired by such accounts, I wrote an autoethnographic account of one playthrough of *The Doodle*, writing about the ways in which *The Doodle* affected me. As action research focuses on 'personal enquiry', 'personal knowledge' (McNiff et al., 1992, p.4) and making improvements in 'practices and settings by the participants themselves' (Kemmis, 2014, p.4), this autoethnographic analysis of a self-produced work of IF felt apt. It involved using autoethnography to examine and reveal aspects of my relationship with the social situation I set out to explore. As my material-dialogic stance focuses my attention on the relations between different human and non-human entities, this method of analysis, with its focus on the relationships that exist between IF, the self and others, felt appropriate (Cohen et al., 2018). It enabled me to begin exploring the ways that my practice as both a teacher and a writer might intra-act with the genre of IF.

When producing my autoethnographic playthrough, I conducted rhizomatic, autoethnographic analysis. Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of a rhizome as an evolving and fluid network of relations (Deleuze and Guattari, 2003), the term 'rhizomatic analysis' positions texts as rhizomatic, and the process involves examining the 'intertextual linkages not only between different texts but also between texts and the socio-cultural and political 'stems' that adhere to the creation and reading of the text' (Gardner, 2014, p.232). Adopting such an approach facilitates an understanding of 'the connectivity of the self to the social world' (Gardner, 2014, p.244). To view texts rhizomatically is to suggest that language does not represent content, but rather interacts with it in a complex and fluid array of ways. No two rhizomatic journeys are the same, making all textual readings somewhat unique (Leander and Rowe, 2006). The rhizomatic singularity of a reading (or playthrough) reveals its personal nature and, as such, rhizomatic analysis feels like an appropriate method to employ given that I set out to explore my personal and evolving sense of unease with

dominant forms of practice at CentreTown Academy. Moreover, given the non-linear nature of IF, a rhizomatic approach that recognises the fluid and networked nature of a text feels apt; like a rhizome, a work of IF is not organised in a linear fashion on a printed page but can instead be navigated (and understood) in a variety of ways. Similarly, the playthrough itself, although structured in a chronological fashion, was in fact written iteratively – I returned to it during and after my data collection and analysis, highlighting again the fact that my reconnaissance was not a discrete phase but an ongoing process throughout my research.

As a final part of my reconnaissance, and to begin clarifying my thoughts on the role that IF could play in the classroom, I used methods 7 and 8 in the above list, using an English lesson to read *The Doodle* with a class of year seven students and seeking feedback from two colleagues. This lesson enabled me to refine my ideas about IF in the classroom and influenced the methods I chose to use in the other phases of my research.

4.6.2 Vignette: The PhD Legend

It is nearing the end of the Christmas holidays, and I'm sat in my parents' living room. Perched precariously at the top of a hill, their house is quite exposed, and Storm Henk is currently lashing at the glass doors to my right.

Sat at a wooden, circular table, I'm reworking my methodologies chapter. All this talk of 'phases' feels precariously neat and tidy; in reality, my PhD has also been a stormy experience. I did not step neatly from phase to phase, but rather muddled and zigzagged, buffeted about by a series of personal and professional challenges and opportunities.

It is now the start of 2024, and I started my PhD research back in 2019. In the intervening years, many significant events have shaped me and my research: The COVID-19 pandemic began; there were multiple lockdowns; my father was unwell and underwent serious medical treatment; I got engaged and then married; we acquired a dog; I shifted role and, more recently, got promoted at work... A lot has happened over the last five years!

When I began 'phase 2' of my research, I did not know all of this, and now, as I attempt to write a structured and coherent account of my research, I recognise that there is so much which has occurred but which I am not including.

It is as if I am writing the legend of my PhD, rather than portraying the chaotic and disrupted research itself.

I cannot help but write Storm Henk out of the picture.

(2nd January 2024)

4.6.3 Phase 2 - Classroom-Based, Collaborative Action Research

4.6.3.1 Planning

During the various planning stages of my phase 2 action research spiral, I generated data by writing and developing works of IF for use in the classroom, along with corresponding lesson plans and resources. When drafting the first of these works of IF (*What Happens When You Close Your Eyes*), I conducted interviews with Barney, an English teacher from another school with whom I had worked during my training year (25th November 2020), my colleague Ms Ellis (11th September 2020) and my head of department, Ms Morrison (1st December 2020). In these interviews we discussed drafts of *WHWYCYE* and the role that it could play in English lessons.

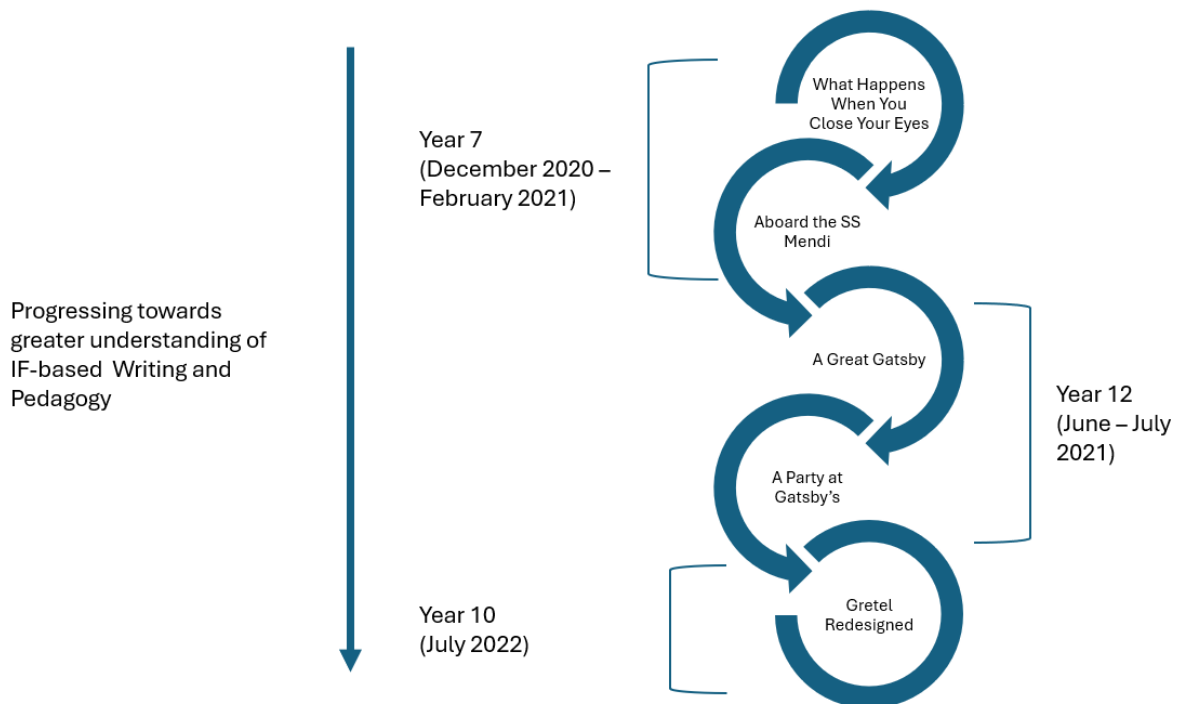
All the stories I wrote during phase 2 of my research are freely available via [an itch.io page](#) that I set up to host and share them (Holdstock, 2024d), itch.io being an open hosting platform and marketplace for independent digital creators. Interestingly, because itch is a gaming platform that plays host to games that could potentially be inappropriate for students, itch.io was blocked on CentreTown Academy devices, so one of the challenges I had to overcome involved working with the IT department to ensure that my itch page was made available to students and teachers using school devices. All the stories that I created were used with students at some point, but for some of them, I was unable to gather sufficient data sets. In this thesis, I therefore focus attention on the following works of IF. Corresponding data was gathered for all the lessons in which these stories were used, and all these stories were created as part of my 'phase 2' research spiral. Within action

research, the spiral model enables the researcher to 'progress towards a greater overall understanding' (Koshy et al., 2011), and with the writing and usage of each of these stories, my understanding of how IF might be written and used for pedagogical purposes developed (See Figure 3). In the list below, I also indicate the classes and groups with whom I used these stories:

1. *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes* (Holdstock, 2021c) – used with a Key Stage Three, year seven English class of students aged 11-12 years old. Data relating to six lessons in which this text was used were collected between December 2020 and February 2021.
2. *Aboard the SS Mendi* (Holdstock, 2021a) – used with the same year seven English class. Data relating to one lesson (11th February 2021) in which this text was used were collected.
3. *A Great Gatsby* (Holdstock, 2024a) – Used with a Key Stage 5, year 12 English Literature class of students aged 16-17 years old. Data relating to one lesson (29th June 2021) in which this text was used were collected.
4. *A Party at Gatsby's* (Holdstock, 2024b) – Used with the same year 12 English class. Data relating to one lesson (6th July 2021) in which this text was used were collected.
5. *Gretel, Redesigned* (Holdstock, 2022a) – Used with an after-school society (club) attended by a group of seven Key Stage Four, year 10 girls aged 14-15 years old. Data relating to one workshop (5th July 2022) in which this text was used were collected.

These works of IF were developed and created in different ways, but each new or redrafted story was a response to the previous one. For example, in response to my reflections and to feedback from colleagues who observed me use it, *WHWYCYE* was redrafted between lessons. Similarly, *AGG* and *A Party at Gatsby's* were developed in response to the theories I had formulated whilst working with *WHWYCYE* and *Aboard the SS Mendi*.

Figure 3: Developing IF-based Pedagogy using an Action Research Spiral



During the planning stages, and as part of my data gathering process, I took fieldnotes, documenting my thoughts and experiences. It is worth noting that the majority of my fieldnotes were recorded on a laptop; as much of my research took place at work, I felt that the most practical way for me to take fieldnotes was to send emails to myself. This would, I felt, prevent me from losing any valuable data along the way. It would also be convenient, as I usually had my email open during the school day. However, upon reflection and acknowledging the way that non-human matter can make ‘cuts’ that render certain courses of action possible and others impossible (Hetherington and Wegerif, 2018, p.38), I recognise that this approach to taking fieldnotes changed the nature of my research. For example, it is more difficult to draw diagrams in an email than in a notebook. Also, as I was using a CentreTown Academy device and email account, what I wrote in my fieldnotes was likely limited. I would not, for example, swear in any email sent from a school email account. The method I adopted for the taking of fieldnotes may have felt convenient but may also have channelled my attention towards my laptop and away from other materials within the classrooms where I was working, which could have shaped my practice in different ways. In this way, my methods functioned diffractively, making a difference to the research and my findings.

4.6.3.2 Acting & Reflecting

When gathering data in relation to the lessons in which I used the abovementioned works of IF, I triangulated (Seale, 2004) the data that I collected in order to develop more credible theories: I audio-recorded the lessons; I produced reflective fieldnotes after the lessons; and I conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews with colleagues who I had invited to observe each lesson. Some of these were joint interviews in which I discussed the lesson with two teachers who had both watched the lesson. In addition to these three methods of data gathering and generation, I also collected some written work that students produced during some of the lessons. Table 6 offers a summary of the IF-based lessons I taught during phase 2 of my research and the pseudonyms of the colleagues who participated through observation and interview.

Table 6: A Summary of the lesson and interview data collected during phase 2 of research

Lesson Date & Year Group	IF text involved	Observers/Interviewees
4 th December 2020 Year 7	<i>What Happens When You Close Your Eyes</i> (WHWYCYE)	Ms Sands (Experienced English teacher) <i>Interview conducted on 4th December 2020</i>
7 th January 2021 Year 7	WHWYCYE	Ms Sands (Experienced English teacher) Ms Winn (Early career English teacher) <i>Joint interview conducted on 4th December 2020</i>
8 th January 2021 Year 7	WHWYCYE	Ms Ellis (Experienced English teacher) Ms Morrison (Head of English department) <i>Joint interview conducted on 15th January 2021</i>
28 th January 2021 Year 7	WHWYCYE	Mr Faulks (Experienced History teacher and member of the senior leadership team) <i>Interview conducted on 9th February 2021</i>
29 th January 2021 Year 7	WHWYCYE	Mr Harris (Experienced English teacher and member of the senior leadership team) <i>Interview conducted on 8th February 2021</i>

4 th February 2021 Year 7	<i>WHWYCYE</i>	Mr Byatt (Experienced English teacher) <i>Interview conducted on 4th March 2021</i>
11 th February 2021 Year 7	<i>Aboard the SS Mendi</i>	Ms Ellis (Experienced English teacher) Ms Morrison (Head of English department) <i>Joint interview conducted on 26th February 2021</i>
29 th June 2021 Year 12	<i>A Great Gatsby</i>	Ms Ellis (Experienced English teacher) Mr Byatt (Experienced English teacher) <i>Individual interviews conducted on 29th June 2021</i>
6 th July 2021 Year 12	<i>A Party at Gatsby's</i>	Mr Byatt (Experienced English teacher) *Mr Byatt was unfortunately obliged to leave part-way through this lesson, before the IF-based activity commenced.
5 th July 2022 Year 10 (after school workshop)	<i>Gretel, Redesigned</i>	Ms Lee (Experienced English teacher) <i>Interview conducted on 7th July 2022</i>

My methods of data gathering emerged as part of my research-assemblage and functioned diffractively, changing the quality of my research overall. For example, it is interesting to note that, when I originally composed my PhD research proposal, I did not intend to collect recordings of the lessons in which I used my works of IF. However, during the reconnaissance phase of my research, I became interested in the role that talk could play in the classroom and the relationship that might exist between IF as a classroom resource and the forms of classroom talk that it might help me to facilitate. For this reason, I chose to audio-record the lessons and devoted much less attention to the quality of students' written work when reflecting upon and analysing data. I also recognise that by choosing to use an audio-recorder rather than a video recorder, I shaped the direction my research might take, drawing attention away from, for example, the role that gestures might play in the English classroom. Other factors also informed the way that data was collected. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered lockdowns and obliged me to engage in remote teaching; Some

of the lessons in which *WHWYCYE* was used were conducted via online video conferencing platforms, a situation which affected, among other things, the quality of student attention during lessons. School policy dictated that students were not allowed to have their cameras activated during these lessons, a fact which also influenced the way I interacted with my students and the audio data that was collected.

Where the unstructured and semi-structured interviews are concerned, I deemed these methods of data gathering to be fit for purpose (Cohen et al., 2007) for practical, methodological and ethical reasons. If I asked my busy colleagues to take time out of their working day to write up formal accounts of the lessons they observed, I felt I would risk engendering stress amongst my colleagues whilst simultaneously running another unnecessary risk – the writing of said accounts might fall to the bottom of a to-do list and the data might fail to materialise. The choice not to conduct more structured interviews also reflects the fact that the purpose of said interviews was to gain an alternative perspective on my own practice whilst simultaneously collaborating with colleagues to co-develop our own, constantly developing, living theories about teaching with IF. As such, a degree of openness seemed appropriate. Material circumstances also occasionally meant that an open and less structured approach to data gathering would be appropriate; interviews were conducted during or at the end of a busy working day, and the formality of structured interviews would have been slow and frustratingly impractical.

I invited a number of different teachers to observe me teach lessons in which works of IF featured. The teachers I invited to participate in this way were mostly English teachers, and they almost all had similar or greater levels of teaching experience and seniority when compared to myself. This was done so as to ensure that less experienced colleagues were not burdened with additional work, but also to ensure that positions of seniority and responsibility that I have held at CentreTown Academy during the course of my research did not significantly influence the responses offered by interviewees. I occupied various positions of responsibility during the course of my PhD research (Key Stage 5 English Coordinator, Second in Charge of English, Director of Teaching and Learning,

and Associate Assistant Principal for Teaching and Learning), and I did not want less experienced colleagues to feel that they needed to please me with their responses to my questions. That being said, I do have positive relationships with all of the colleagues I have collaborated with, but this has not prevented them from raising challenges and questions that have helped me develop my thinking about IF. The only non-English teaching colleague I invited to observe and be interviewed (Mr Faulks) was a History teacher and the school's Assistant Principal for Teaching and Learning at the time, so I felt that his perspective could be valuable. Of the colleagues with whom I collaborated during phase two of my research, three are White British men and five are women. Two of the women are also White British, while one of the women identifies as Black British African, one as Indian (Punjabi), and one as having a mixed ethnic background. I mention the sex and ethnicity of my colleagues to provide some insight into the potential privilege and power dynamics that were at play. This shall be further explored later in the chapter, but it is interesting to note here, for example, that the two senior leaders that I involved in the project are both White men. I invited these two colleagues to participate in the project as they were colleagues with whom I would regularly discuss issues of teaching and learning, but I realise that by inviting *them* to participate, rather than female members of the leadership team, I changed the way that CentreTown Academy and its leadership team are portrayed in my work.

As a final means of phase 2 data gathering and reflection, I orchestrated three focus groups. One of these focus groups involved colleagues who had used one of my works of IF in their own lessons (*Gretel, Redesigned*). on 30th November 2023, we discussed their experiences and opinions regarding the classroom usage of IF, and their spoken thoughts enabled me to further develop and refine my findings. The remaining two focus groups took place on 28th March 2023 and involved students who had previously participated in some of my IF-based lessons. I organised these focus groups because I came to realise, like Kitzinger (2011) – paraphrased in Liamputtong (2011, p.5) – that focus groups would enable me to reveal the 'experiences, points of view, beliefs, needs and concerns' of my students, and that this would enable me to develop a richer and more textured understanding of the role that IF could play within education.

In writing up this chapter, I have merged the Acting and Reflecting stages of the classroom-based action research spiral to reflect the fact that these two stages cannot be looked at discretely. By triangulating the data that I gathered in relation to the lessons I taught, I necessarily engaged in reflection; the fieldnotes I took were written soon *after* each lesson and featured retrospective thoughts on the teaching experience. Likewise, the interviews took place after each lesson and became opportunities for me and my colleagues to co-reflect, through discussion. Both my reconnaissance and these ongoing reflections were (and continue to be) elements of my rhizomatic practice as a researcher. For example, you will notice that in this section of my methodologies chapter, there is no discrete 'Data Analysis' subheading. This is because analysis was also an ongoing part of the reflective action research process, rather than a separate or later phase. As Rowley writes, in action research, 'it is difficult to divorce data collection from data analysis', for data analysis is 'integral to and ongoing throughout the action research process' (Rowley, 2014, p.239). As part of this ongoing analytical process, I engaged in 'abductive' theorizing, reflecting upon experiences I accumulated and data I collected to produce plausible hypotheses that served as the basis for subsequent cycles of research (2014, p.240). These hypotheses contributed to my living theories regarding the capacities of IF when used in English lessons at CentreTown Academy.

4.6.3.3 *Re-planning*

After reflecting on the experience of planning and teaching a lesson that featured a work of IF, I planned subsequent lessons in an ongoing, iterative fashion. This involved refining the works of IF I was using, developing new works of IF, and composing new lesson plans and resources for use in subsequent lessons. For example, I initially wrote a work of IF entitled *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes* (Holdstock, 2021c) and used it as a resource in my year seven English lessons. Later, I adapted this work for use in a specific lesson, producing a work entitled *Aboard the SS Mendi* (Holdstock, 2021a). Building upon the experience of using IF in the Key Stage 3 classroom, I then designed more works of IF for use in some year 12 English Literature lessons. These included *A Great Gatsby* (Holdstock, 2024a) and *A Party at Gatsby's* (Holdstock, 2024b). Finally, having received an invitation to contribute a chapter to a book that some fellow PhD researchers at

Goldsmiths were developing, I also developed a final piece of IF entitled *Grete!, Redesigned* for use in an after-school society with a group of year 10 students, all of whom were also in my year 10 English Literature class. To accompany all of these resources, I created plans and resources that I felt to be appropriate. The form that these resources took was somewhat shaped by the teaching and learning expectations that exist at CentreTown Academy. For example, it is expected that teachers begin lessons with some sort of 'Do Now' activity (Lemov, 2015, p.161), usually a short quiz that settles the class and engages students in silent work. Even though I was disrupting dominant teaching practices by introducing IF into lessons, elements of CentreTown's dominant teaching practices were retained, such as the Do Now quizzes.

4.7 Phase 3 – Data Analysis and 'Reporting'

Phase 3 of my action research project involved reporting upon my research. However, as with phases 1 and 2, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the reporting phase occurred after the gathering and analysis of data. In fact, I reported on my research constantly, submitting papers to my supervisors, preparing conference presentations, and composing academic articles for publication.

I found that, to report on the action research I conducted, a transition from abductive theorising to thematic analysis was, in some cases, required. This transition reflects a switch from continuous 'formative' data analysis to more 'summative' forms of data analysis (Rowley, 2014, p.239). In order to share 'insights from the base of evidence and reflection that has emerged during the action research project' (p.239), I used thematic analysis as a means of helping me to produce coherently structured and readable reports. This shift towards thematic analysis is reflected in the structure of this report. The thesis takes you on an outward journey, focusing first on the personal, and later on more social, classroom-based findings: In Chapter 5, I use rhizomatic, autoethnographic playthrough analysis to explore what producing IF can reveal about my positionality. In Chapter 6, I articulate how my approach to the writing of IF has developed over time by commenting on a chronological series of IF passages that I have created. In Chapter 7, I take a more thematic approach, exploring

first the disruptions and then the challenges that I encountered whilst teaching with IF. Similarly, in Chapter 8, I take a thematic approach to exploring the way that IF influenced the quality of teaching and learning that I enacted and facilitated. Finally, in Chapter 9, I articulate the living theory that I have formed regarding the relationship between IF and classroom talk, before unpacking the four major themes that constitute this theory. This approach to reporting upon my research allows me to offer insights into both the personal experience of working with IF over a long period, and the identifiable effects of this work upon the teaching, learning and talking in which my students, colleagues and I participated.

Conducting my thematic analysis involved reviewing the data I had collected so as to fully re-immense myself in it. It also involved the identification of key themes, and the coding of my data with a view to clustering related data chunks together (Bell, 2010; Rowley, 2014). However, when reviewing my data and coding it to identify key themes, I was of course influenced by my now more developed theories regarding the capacities of IF in the English classroom. Therefore, again, it must be stressed that abductive theorizing and thematic analysis are not discrete steps in a linear journey but connected elements within my research-assemblage. Also note that, due to the small scale of this project and the contrastingly large amount of data that I collected, I did not transcribe all of my recorded classroom or lesson data. Instead, as I reviewed said data, I took notes of key quotations and moments which related to the themes I identified and the living theories I had developed. I then coded these notes so that I could easily locate data excerpts that corresponded to each theme. It is only in written reports such as this thesis that transcripts of interviews or lessons appear. As such, I am unable to provide readers with full data sets to which they can easily refer, and this is arguably a limitation of my study. However, as this is an action research project exploring my relationship with IF as a practising teacher, my account of the research is of arguably greater importance than the full data set; in my account, I can provide readers with insights into the assemblage that produced said data, and from a post-humanist perspective, it would be inappropriate to do otherwise. As Zapata, Kuby and Thiel (paraphrasing Barad) remind us, 'knowing, being, becoming, and doing are co-

constituted' (2018, p.479). Therefore, to consider the data separately from the researcher who diffractively contributed to its production would be a potentially misleading process.

Reporting on my findings has involved the identification and transcription of data excerpts along with the articulation of living theories that I have developed during my action research. To establish the validity of my theories, I have sought to articulate the 'standards of judgement' that I use to evaluate the extent to which my practice corresponds to the values that underpin my theories (Whitehead and McNiff, 2006, p.12). My own standards of judgement can (at present) be articulated in the following way: Dialogic and reciprocal teaching practices are a vital and oft neglected part of what I deem good English teaching to involve. A commitment to such forms of practice requires teachers to remain somewhat open to allowing the ideas and responses of students to shape the trajectory of learning within lessons. The resources that teachers use within lessons have the capacity to alter the extent to which teachers can act in such a responsive manner.

4.8 Ethics

When writing of the ethical considerations involved in this project, it must first be stressed that action research is driven by values and is, as a result, a fundamentally ethically motivated endeavour (Coghlan and Shani, 2021). As Coghlan writes, 'choices about action flow from the deliberation of what is valuable and the judgement of value that an intended action is good or worthwhile' (Coghlan, 2016, p.98). The values and beliefs summarised above, for example, articulate ideas about teaching practice that I feel to be good and true; allowing for the ideas and voices of students to shape the trajectory of lessons is, in my opinion, a socially just form of practice that can encourage students to engage evaluatively with multiple viewpoints.

Turning to more procedural ethical considerations, I recall that, before I began this project, I was already a teacher at the school where my research is located. Therefore, when I began my research, I needed to gain access to the school and to its English department as a researcher, gaining permission from school leaders (Cohen et al., 2007, p.55). Having received ethical approval from Goldsmiths' Department of Educational Studies (see Appendix 1: Signed Ethical Approval Form), I

began by gaining the permission of the school's Principal. I acknowledge and remain very grateful that the school and its Principal permitted and enabled me to carry out this research.

In my letter to the Principal, I included a code of research practice that I have endeavoured to follow (Appendix 2: Code of Research Practice). In seeking to follow this code of conduct, certain challenges have arisen. For example, my code of conduct states that, 'where possible and appropriate, I will offer participants the opportunity to critique drafts of my research reports.' While I have been able to do this with my colleagues and critical friends, sharing drafts of my research reports with students who are involved in the study has been more challenging. Firstly, papers that I have written have been composed with an academic audience in mind, meaning that they are not necessarily accessible to all of my students. While I have had many open and honest conversations about my research and the living theories I have developed, I have therefore not felt able to share written reports with them. Moreover, some of my reports are not only inaccessible, but also somewhat critical of the culture of the school within which I worked. The oversharing of such critical reports or ideas could have had negative consequences for my students and their relationships with other staff members, and as such, it was in part an ethical decision not to discuss or share all of my research-generated ideas and reports with my students.

Before collecting data, having read BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) and respecting my university's standard ethical procedures, I gained appropriate informed consent from the teachers who participated, the students involved and the adults responsible for them (Cohen et al., 2007, pp.52-54). The willingness of my colleagues to actively participate in and support this study is of particular note, as I recognise that the research would not have borne the same fruit had they not consented to participate.

Where action research (AR) is concerned, informed consent is an ongoing and negotiated ethical process. This is because, after it is begun, 'the future direction an AR project might take is often unknown' (Gelling and Munn-Giddings, 2011, p.105). Throughout my research, I therefore kept all of the colleagues, students, parents, carers and participants that I was working with informed of what

I was doing. I stressed the fact that they were under no obligation to participate and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. For example, before interviews, lessons or focus groups from which I was collecting data, I reminded participants of what I was doing and invited them to withdraw their consent to participate if they so wished. I sent informative letters to parents and carers of all participating students, inviting them to contact me if they had any concerns about their child's participation in the study (See Appendix 3: Example of Letters Sent to Parents and Carers for an example of one such letter). None of the students, parents or teachers with whom I worked raised any concerns or opted to withdraw from the study. However, one student did choose not to submit the creative written work they had completed during the year 10 after school workshop. The student in question indicated that they consented to their verbal contributions to the workshop being recorded and used, but not their written work.

I have endeavoured to act reflexively throughout the research process, scrutinising my own social and institutional position and the diffractive effect it has had upon my research. For example, I acknowledge that my roles as second-in-charge of English, Director of Teaching and Learning and, most recently, Associate Assistant Principal, might have shaped the ways that colleagues spoke to me during interviews. It is partly for this reason that I sought feedback from a range of colleagues, including more senior members of staff within the school.

I have also paid close attention to the potential consequences of my research. For example, the impact that communicating and collaborating with critical friends and teaching colleagues may have upon their own wellbeing has been taken into consideration and has influenced my choice of research methods; the extent to which I have involved other teachers in the writing and using of IF as a classroom resource has been limited by the fact that I did not want to add to my colleagues' already heavy workloads. Having gained a bursary to support the completion of my PhD and having gone down to a part-time contract so as to allow one day a week for research, I had some time to devote to exploring the possibilities for IF, time that my colleagues had no access to. I have also considered my own well-being. Even as a part-time teacher, I had a limited amount of time available

to me, and it is partly for this reason that I chose to use email to collect fieldnotes and an audio-recorder for collecting classroom data. The convenience of these methods has enabled me to balance my responsibilities as a teacher and a researcher but has also shaped the quality of my research.

With regard to my students, the degree to which the interventions I have conducted may have negatively impacted the students that I or my colleagues teach has also been considered. I believe that my decision to have the lessons in which I used IF observed by colleagues helped me to ensure that my developing teaching practice did not negatively affect my students to any significant degree. Finally, as I report on my research, close attention is being paid to issues of anonymity and confidentiality (Cohen et al., 2007, pp.64-65). Wherever I use names, pseudonyms are employed in an attempt to conceal the identities of the individuals concerned. I managed all of the data I collected as part of this project with the strictest confidentiality, unless a safeguarding issue arose, in which case I respected CentreTown Academy's safeguarding policies.

4.9 Vignette: Staff Briefing

My work as a practicing teacher and a practicing researcher both occur inside of CentreTown Academy. Sometimes, this is uncomfortable.

This week, for example, I attended a whole staff briefing. I arrived late and, as a result, sat on one of the fold-up chairs in the front row of the assembly hall. These seats are hard and positioned far too close together, meaning that I ended up sitting rather awkwardly on the edge of the seat, trying my best to look at ease whilst not invading the personal space of the female colleague sat next to me....

During his presentation, the Principal drew our attention to some of the schools that he and other teachers (myself included) have visited. These 'outstanding' establishments have been used as models and reference points in the 'improvement' of our school.

One of the schools that the Principal mentioned – Mossbourne Community Academy – has elsewhere been compared to a factory for the 'efficient production of disciplined children' (Kulz, 2017), and as such, represents (for me) an extremely problematic establishment; in schools where discipline is put before reciprocity, and education is

likened to a linear production line, the dialogic values that I try to sustain in my practice are threatened.

So, seeing this school's logo on the board, my discomfort intensified.

For me, to be a practitioner-researcher working as an insider at CentreTown Academy involves such discomfort, feeling as if my values are under threat. It involves resisting that threat in a critical manner, whilst also preserving my own job security and well-being by acknowledging the need to conform to various organizational expectations. It is to live in a state of tension.

Sometimes, I feel that the only way to overcome that tension would be to leave. At other times, I feel that staying and arguing for the values I hold dear is the only work worth doing.

(24th January 2024)

4.10 Positionality

4.10.1 My Positionality as an Action Researcher

I am a qualitative researcher who was 'historically and locally, situated within the very processes being studied' (Denzin, 2017, p.12); For the majority of my research journey, I was a teacher, researching teaching. I identified as an insider researcher because I was a member of an organization inquiring 'into the working of their own organizational or community system in order to change something in it' (Coghlan, 2014, p.443). My desire for change arose from the same discomfort that is portrayed in the above vignette. Despite the fact that the Principal had allowed me to conduct my research at CentreTown Academy, our educational values and goals did not fully align, and a persistent degree of tension and discomfort therefore contributed to my research. This discomfort also derives from my standards of judgment and the living contradictions that I enacted and that I have already discussed. This desire is part of who I am, part of my positionality.

To speak of positionality is to speak of myself as a researcher who brings to the research-assemblage a 'gendered, historical self' (Denzin, 2017, p.12); I am a White, male, privately educated

English teacher, working in a state-funded comprehensive school. I did not grow up in an ethnically or socio-economically diverse city, but I teach in a diverse, inner-city school. My race, gender and educational background are of particular note; I attended a prestigious independent public school – a single-sex, fee-paying, selective, boarding school. This is significant, as it foregrounds the privilege that I carried into my research. Individuals occupying ‘the most prestigious, influential and well-paid roles’ (The Sutton Trust and the Social Mobility Commission, 2019, p.13) in the UK are ‘five times more likely than the general public to have gone to private school’ (The Sutton Trust, 2019). Moreover, although the teaching workforce is predominantly female, female teachers are less likely to be promoted into senior leadership positions (GOV.UK, 2024). Similarly, White British teachers like me are more likely to be promoted into middle or senior leadership positions than colleagues from ethnic minority backgrounds (Department for Education, 2022). These statistics reflect the privilege that I have experienced during my teaching career. For example, I have been promoted multiple times during the course of this PhD.

My privilege affected my relations with others. When I started work at CentreTown Academy in 2016, my then Head of Department had informed all of my English teaching colleagues of where I had attended school, and it changed the way they behaved towards me; some said nothing, but some made jokes, and one teacher told me that they assumed I would not continue working at the school for very long, believing me to have aspirations beyond the teaching profession. After a few years, some of my colleagues began jokingly referring to me as FHT – Future Head Teacher; they expected me to progress and to be promoted. Similarly, my privilege affected how my students related to me. I remember students asking me where I was from and why I was teaching in that particular inner-city area. Such expectations and questions had an influence upon my situation at CentreTown Academy and upon my research. Aware of my privilege and the notion that my research might therefore become or appear extractive, I consistently sought to collaborate with my colleagues and students in a reciprocal way that supported their development as well the development of my research.

Kulz's description of the authoritarian, military approach to discipline and behaviour management that is taken in one secondary academy (Kulz, 2017) is very comparable to behaviour policies that are enacted at CentreTown academy. Looking at my positionality in the light of this 'military' comparison, it is also possible to suggest that, at CentreTown Academy, I may have enjoyed a privilege that is akin to the privilege of the 'officer class' (Morrison, 2003) – socio-economically privileged individuals who rise smoothly to positions of power within the military. I mention this because, although in the data I gathered for my research it is not explicitly mentioned, my privilege is part of the context from which my research data emerges. It is therefore worthy of note; my privilege may, for example, have informed my colleagues' expectations of my work as a teacher and a researcher, and therefore influenced the way that they spoke with me during interviews. It can also, as I shall explore later, explain some of the discomfort that I derive from my professional life at CentreTown Academy.

This summary of my own identity positioning does not do my positionality justice, for if positionality is the 'stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study' (Rowe, 2014, p.627), then it must be noted that my positionality is emergent and rhizomatic; it is not fixed, but is constantly re-constituted in relation to the material surroundings within which I find myself. A desire to interrogate and change my positionality is arguably part of what it means to conduct action research; I started this project in response to a living contradiction, a contradiction I sought to alter by changing the ways that I intra-act with other human and non-human materials. As such, it seems inappropriate to reduce my positionality to a section at the end of my methods chapter. Fittingly, therefore, the following chapter draws upon the reconnaissance I conducted as part of my research, exploring my positionality in more depth and highlighting, for example, some of the socio-economic anxieties that I have brought to my research. A whole chapter is devoted to this because I deem an exploration of positionality to be central to the values-driven form of action research that I have conducted. It is important that I thoroughly explore the nuanced nature of my positionality as an individual who has experienced the contradiction of believing one thing but enacting another. It is partly for this reason that one of my research questions addresses positionality explicitly: What can

producing a work of IF that is set in a secondary school classroom reveal about my position as a teacher, a writer and a creative practitioner?

My positionality is an unavoidable part of my research-assemblage – it is the perspective from which I can see CentreTown Academy, and *seeing* is not a passive act. As Haraway writes, ‘all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building on translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life’ (Haraway, 1988, p.583). The knowing that emerges from my research-assemblage is situated; it is contingent upon the various ways of seeing and looking that I adopt and construct during the course of my research. The way that I see my research now, as I write this chapter, affects the way I write, and it is for this reason that I punctuate some chapters with vignettes. These vignettes offer some insight into how I am *seeing* (or have seen) my research and the factors that shape its portrayal. Similarly, later chapters will draw upon fieldnotes that were written earlier. This enables me to provide some insight into the ways in which my positionality can, has and continues to develop with this research project.

5 Using IF to Explore Positionality

5.1 Vignette: Keynote Speech

The conference that I am attending is well underway, and the air-conditioned auditorium is pleasingly cool in comparison to the sweltering afternoon outside. Slouched in a robustly upholstered, maroon-coloured chair, my notebook perched on the little fold-out table before me, I listen to the first keynote speaker as she describes the ‘rampant and joyful’ writing that occurred in the preschool environments in which she has worked (Rowe, 2023). She foregrounds the value of allowing children to explore their personal interests with pens in their hands.

It is joyous. It is thrilling. It is painful.

For even as my smile broadens, I feel my body sag. When did the personal and the playful fly from my practice? Students entering my lessons at CentreTown Academy read the curricular texts that have been selected for them and write in response to the tasks that I direct them towards. Moreover, I no longer feel that I have the time to run the creative writing club that I did in previous years. During my lessons, the words rampant and joyful do not spring to mind. The playful sense of pleasure that the speaker conjures when she plays us videos of children writing is, I feel, uncomfortably absent in my own classroom.

And I feel myself a traitor, for I personally recognise that instruction which allows space for students to pursue their own interests and curiosities can be both effective (promoting good academic outcomes) and affective (resulting in positive dispositions and feelings) (Young, 2019). However, this belief does not manifest in my practice, for I am part of an institution that values and enacts a curriculum that is rich in prescribed knowledge, but which allows little time and space for knowledge and experience generated via more personal forms of inquiry.

(23rd June 2023; also included in Holdstock, 2024c).

5.2 Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, writing in response to the question ‘what can producing a work of IF that is set in a secondary school classroom reveal about my position as a teacher, a writer and a creative practitioner?’, I seek to unpack the living contradiction to which I have already alluded. Beginning

this PhD, I recognised that my practice did not always reflect my educational values and beliefs, and as such I felt at odds with myself. I felt uneasy. Some of this unease is manifest in the above vignette. The conflict between my desire to attend to the affective experiences of students in my English lessons and the pressures I faced as a teacher working at CentreTown Academy, a school with a performative culture and which promoted a mechanistic conceptualisation of teaching and learning, is evident. As explained in previous chapters, CentreTown's mechanistic approach to teaching and learning positions teachers as technicians who use prescribed teaching strategies as tools to improve attainment outcomes, rather than humans working in a complex and unpredictable educational ecosystem. Whilst, in practice, individual teachers might respond, adapt and reject this approach to teaching in a range of ways, its influence over teaching and learning at the school is significant.

Conflicts like the ones portrayed in this vignette are important, for they are part of a personal story that subverts impersonal yet dominant discourses at play in the context of school-based education in England. As Wrigley points out, the nature of dominant 'evidence-based practice' and 'what works' discourses active in England can serve to limit the extent to which teachers draw upon their own professional judgment and experience when making pedagogical decisions (2016). However, as this chapter shall show, 'professional judgement cannot be reduced to technical calculations based, directly or indirectly, on comparative attainment scores' (p.250). Simple 'quantitative measurements' are not a sufficient way of evaluating teaching and learning (p.238). Teaching is a more complex practice than the 'what works' discourse might suggest. In fact, the question to which this chapter responds immediately highlights the complexity of my positionality and practice; as a teacher, I am also a writer and creative practitioner. I write and create both within and beyond the classroom, and my creative practice is inseparable from my professional practice whilst also extending beyond the professional sphere.

Recognising that 'qualitative methodologies provide an effective counterpoint to the quantitatively driven nature of the academies programme' (Kulz et al., 2022, p.13), I work to bring a personal

narrative to the fore, to grapple with my own nuanced and personal sense of unease. Working with IF to explore these issues enables me to explore them in a way that researchers have not previously done.

My unease is situationally rooted; in my literature review, I highlighted the problematic ways in which CentreTown Academy's impersonal, linear and mechanistic conceptualisation of education stifled creative, epistemic and aesthetic approaches to classroom reading practices. By marginalising aesthetic reading, the resultant pedagogies relegate affect and feeling, an unfortunate occurrence when one considers that reading for pleasure is associated with educational success (Clark and Douglas, 2011), and research into effective writing instruction highlights the interconnections that exist between effective teaching practices and affective teaching practices (Young, 2019). Whilst I acknowledge that it would be reductive to suggest that all English teachers at CentreTown Academy uniformly adopt impersonal practices that marginalise epistemic and aesthetic reading, I note that CentreTown Academy's Learning Flow, along with the literature that is used to support teacher development, encourages the linear and mechanistic conceptualisation of education I have described. My discomfort with this model is symptomatic of a tension that other practitioners have experienced between their belief in the value of literary sociability and the "the "unsociable" forms of sociability (cf. Schmidt 2016, 170) traditionally associated with schooling in capitalist societies' (Doecke, 2019, p.349; Schmidt, 2016)

To begin responding to this tension, and as a part of the reconnaissance phase of my research, I assembled a novel research machine that combined (amongst other things) the creative writing of IF with rhizomatic, autoethnographic, playthrough analysis (Holdstock, 2024c). This research machine felt appropriate; it used creative writing to respond to the stifling of creativity and attended to the personal feelings and experiences that were marginalised by both CentreTown's uniform and impersonal approach to education and the highly influential 'what works' discourse that is at play in education in England. For a full account of my reconnaissance research machine, readers can refer back to my methodologies chapter (Section 4.6.1).

In this chapter, I draw upon data that this reconnaissance machine produced; I shall first present to you a section of my rhizomatically analytical playthrough (I refrain from sharing the playthrough in its entirety as I do not want to spoil readers' experiences of *The Doodle*, but also because the entire playthrough would be too long to include in this chapter). I shall then respond to the titular question of this chapter by identifying from this playthrough the assemblage of factors that intra-act to produce my positionality as a teacher, writer and creative practitioner, acknowledging that this snapshot of my positionality-as-assemblage emerges from the specific research machine that I employ. Finally, I shall conclude by summarising the key findings and implications that emerge from the chapter as a whole.

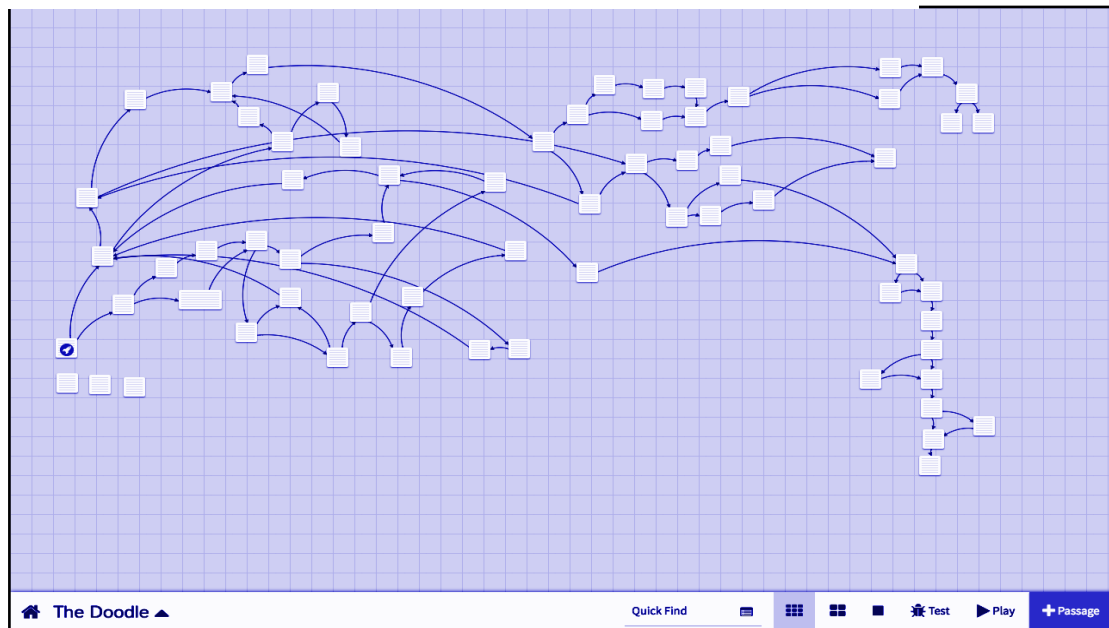
I shall present the account of my playthrough of *The Doodle* in the same way that such accounts are presented in *Videogames for Humans* (Kopas, 2015b). So that you can follow my account, whenever I select a link, I shall type the link that I choose in the following manner:

> link

However, note that my playthrough is a more autoethnographic playthrough than those found in Kopas' book, enabling me to rhizomatically reflect upon my own creative practice and positionality, rather than that of another writer. Note also that readers might benefit from reading *The Doodle* prior to continuing, or by reading *The Doodle* alongside my playthrough.

To summarise the story, *The Doodle* is a non-linear story that explores one young carer's experience of a school day. During the story, a doodle that she draws in the margin of her exercise book comes to life, resulting in a range of potential consequences. A story map of *The Doodle* can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4: The Story Map of *The Doodle* (Holdstock, 2022c)



5.3 A Section of the Playthrough

The story begins in a classroom setting. I do not state this explicitly, but the signs are there - one character is given the title of 'Ms Harper' rather than a first name, and you, the protagonist, are doodling in your 'exercise book'.

My own relationship with classroom spaces is based on a wealth of past experiences: as a child I was privately educated at two independent boys' boarding schools. At these establishments I spent a great deal of time in classrooms, studying, learning, reading and socialising. Moreover, as an undergraduate, master's student and now as a PhD candidate, I have entered many more classroom environments, each one different from the last. Finally, as a professional adult I have worked in secondary school classrooms as an English teacher, form tutor and employee. With this wealth of

classroom experience behind me, I feel comfortable entering a classroom space, as I understand broadly what is expected of me. This is partly because, as an able-bodied White man who is a proficient speaker and writer of standard English, I am on the privileged side of an entrenched linguistic divide; in the context of school-based education, linguistic proficiency is often understood using 'deficit and dichotomous framings' that position 'working-class, disabled, and racialised children as producing less legitimate language than their wealthier, able-bodied, and white peers' (Cushing, 2024, p.1). My classroom confidence, I believe, derives from my own race and class-based privilege, as my language usage has repeatedly been legitimised in the context of the school classroom.

However, I also associate the classroom space with a degree of stress and anxiety; as a schoolboy I was, on some occasions, made to feel insecure about my academic ability as well as my social role within the dynamic of class, and as a teacher I have seen multiple students react badly to the confines and expectations of the classroom.

I think back to French classrooms that I sat in as a schoolboy; I was in the top French set for several years at secondary school, but I felt somewhat inadequate within this space. My teacher set us weekly translation quizzes that tested us on the grammar and vocabulary we had encountered that week, and I remember performing poorly. There were native French speakers in the class, a fact that exacerbated my insecurities and reduced my classroom confidence. During the lessons, my teacher posed a large number of challenging questions, and I regularly felt worried that my inadequacy as a linguist would be exposed.

Moreover, older students from my boarding house were taught in the classroom opposite, and they would regularly be dismissed before us. As they passed our open door, they would call to me in a high-pitched trill: "Sammy!" Their mockery of my then high-pitched voice still makes my skin crawl, particularly when I recall the face of my French teacher. He did not support me by speaking to these older students or even by closing the door, choosing instead to join in with the laughter. Students in my own class, along with the teacher, started referring to me as Sammy, using an artificially high

pitch when doing so, highlighting something else that marked me out as different and seemingly inferior to other members of the all-male group. As a result, the classroom became a space within which I felt increasingly vulnerable and defensive. Part of me enjoyed the pressurized environment of that particular top French set, but part of me was always on edge, aware of my own vulnerability.

> thinking of home

The next passage provides me with some information about the protagonist's home life. We learn about her 'Mum', inferring from the fact that she was 'still in bed' when the protagonist left for school and from the fact that, on good days, she 'can still get about the house', that she is physically disabled.

This passage is somewhat reminiscent of my own childhood experiences; when I was ten years old, my mother suffered a severe brain haemorrhage. She was in hospital and intensive rehabilitation for months. She went through multiple life-threatening operations and was not able to return to work. She had to rediscover how to walk, relearn how to live. The event transformed her life, and the lives of our entire family. I still recall the day it happened; I was attending a one-to-one after school violin lesson when a school receptionist arrived to tell me that my father would be picking me up shortly because my mother was unwell. It was an unsettling and ambiguous interruption that left me confused and distracted. I was not aware of the severity of the situation, but I knew that some aspect of my home life had bubbled over into the school environment. I remember smiling and speaking in a confused but light-hearted way with my teacher, imagining why this interruption might have been necessary.

Somewhat similarly, the protagonist's home life here bubbles into her thoughts, entering into the classroom environment and seemingly transforming her experience of it; her attention is drawn away from Ms Harper and towards her mother. The boundary between home and school is thus portrayed as porous. It is possible that the option of using links to create non-linear narratives when writing

with twine enabled me to portray this porosity, to create a hyperlink that took the reader beyond the confines of the classroom and into the personal life of the protagonist.

Recognising the porosity of this boundary, I become uneasy, for I am aware of the unfortunate ways in which academies can construct and maintain rather impermeable boundaries between the school and the local community. Kulz highlights the ways in which 'Beaumont academy' is built upon an ethos that 'pathologizes the surrounding area while essentializing itself as an "oasis in the desert" liberating students through discipline' (Kulz, 2014, p.685). In so doing, it seeks to separate students from the perceived 'urban chaos' (p. 696) that exists outside of the school's walls. Somewhat similarly, Walker et al. suggest that multi-academy trusts (MATs) can govern and practice in ways that have a 'detrimental impact on people working within their schools and their connections with local communities' (Walker et al., 2023, p.12). Their practice also 'diminishes the scope for local communities to exercise democratic influence and engagement with schooling' (p. 12). Arguably, the classroom is a space in which the boundary between school and community is maintained, especially in schools that enact knowledge-rich curricula. In such schools, the focus is placed upon forms of knowledge that are distinct from the knowledge that is acquired through non-academic life experiences (Young and Lambert, 2014; Eaglestone, 2020). Moreover, in results-focused schools, 'school borders thicken so that more school space and time are devoted to one literacy practice: test preparation' (Sheehy, 2013, p.407). Consequently, as I read this passage, I become uneasy. The character's home life is clearly challenging, but her teacher and her school may prefer her to attend more closely to the knowledge they want her to acquire. There is a sense of foreboding as I imagine the ways in which the boundary between home life and school life, between school knowledge and personal knowledge, will be maintained. As an English teacher I am also uneasy, because such a distinction does not align with my conceptualisation of knowledge in English; like Eaglestone, I believe that what happens in the English classroom is very much entangled with what happens outside of the English classroom. He astutely writes that we 'all use the content of English every day when we tell stories or make jokes, and when we think about our own emotions and ourselves. We interpret texts and make value and aesthetic judgements all the time' (2020, p.11).

My own mother's illness disrupted our family norms; Mum went from being an active mother and diligent General Practitioner to being a retiree whose mobility and independence had been significantly reduced. She was still the same loving mother she had always been, but physically, things had changed. Furthermore, during Mum's illness, my father revealed an emotional vulnerability that neither myself nor my brothers had ever encountered before. The disruptive nature of this episode is distinct from, yet also comparable to the way that the childhood of any young carer is disrupted by the responsibilities that are thrust upon them. I myself was never a young carer, but my memories of this family trauma may have provided me with a way into writing about a fictional young carer and her home life.

Although I was not writing *The Doodle* with a view to sharing personal, autobiographical information with my students, I believe I hoped that the very writing of *The Doodle* could help me develop a more consistent and heightened awareness of the challenges that some students face outside of school. In this sense, I was attempting to imagine one particular fund of knowledge that might be relevant to some of my students. Therefore, the story can be seen as an imaginative attempt to attend to the emotional lives of students, lives that schools habitually exclude from the classroom by ensuring that 'students focus on what is to be learned and overcome competing demands on their attention' (Fletcher-wood et al., 2019, p.5).

> She used to cook the most wonderful things

The narrator now recollects a delicious fricasé that their mother used to make. It seems that she no longer makes such dishes, suggesting that something has changed in the mother daughter-relationship. Something has been lost.

The fricasé I imagined when writing this passage was originally made by the au pair that my parents employed to look after me while they were at work and before I started boarding school at the age of 11. Her name was Erika. Erika lived with my family for years, and we became very close. She collected me from school, cooked meals for me and my family and helped out a great deal around

the house. When my mother became ill, she stayed with us for another year, even though she had previously planned to resign and move into a new career at that time.

Upon reflection, the fricasé in *The Doodle* can be viewed as significant in various ways. Firstly, the IF form encouraged me to include divergent narrative pathways. On the path I have selected in this playthrough, I am given access to a sensorially rich memory that I might otherwise not have encountered or included in a work that is set in a school environment. Secondly, the fricasé is symbolic of my own socio-economic privileges; the dish upon which this fictional fricasé is based was prepared by the person that my parents employed as an au pair, highlighting the comfortable lifestyle that my parents' socio-economic status afforded us. The comfort I enjoyed and still benefit from as a privately educated White man, is perhaps a comfort that the protagonist does not have access to. From such a perspective the dish comes to represent the divisions that exist in elitist Britain, a place where 'the prospects of those educated at private schools remain significantly brighter than their peers' (The Sutton Trust and the Social Mobility Commission, 2019, p.5)

The tension is building as the passage goes on. I am still awaiting the moment when Ms Harper will seek to reconstruct the boundary between the school and the character's life outside of school. At the end of this passage, I am left with no choice – there is only one link to select; like the protagonist who has no choice but to be physically present in the classroom, the reader is dragged back to the school environment.

> **'What do you think Jenny?'**

The protagonist, Jenny, hasn't been listening. She doesn't know how best to answer. She is alone - neither the poster of Albus Dumbledore nor her neighbour Ronnie offer her any real assistance.

The reference I make to Albus Dumbledore, like the fricasé, feels significant in various ways. With regards to the classroom setting, I believe it adds a touch of realism; I have taught in English classrooms in which Harry Potter posters have been pinned to the walls in an effort to inspire students to read. Secondly, the quotation I include ('Help will always be given at Hogwarts to those

who ask for it') resonates with the overarching themes of connection and isolation that dominate the narrative (Rowling, 1998, p.195). Moreover, during my own childhood, I read and listened to Harry Potter books and audiobooks incessantly. At home and later at boarding school, I would listen to audio tapes of Harry Potter novels when I went to bed. I would listen to the same tapes over and over again; they helped me to get to sleep. I found comfort and joy in the process. Now, during an era in which 'young people's voluntary reading continues to decline' (Cremin and Scholes, 2024, p.537), and given that 'multiple cognitive benefits as well as social and emotional ones are seen to accumulate and are associated with choosing to read recreationally in childhood and beyond' (p.542), I recognise that finding pleasure in reading and listening to published, written texts as a child was a valuable experience, an experience that many children do not routinely encounter. In the UK, policy, curricula and the 'performativity and accountability agenda' have 'tended to sideline reading for pleasure' (p.544). Perhaps then, the reference to the Dumbledore poster that hangs on the wall reflects the fact that pleasure has been pushed to the edges of classroom life.

The fact that the Dumbledore quotation is a link at the end of this passage gives me a glimmer of hope though, potentially foreshadowing a later opportunity for Jenny to get some form of help and support, magical or otherwise.

> 'Help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it.'

Admitting that she wasn't listening to the teacher, Jenny receives a 'taut smile' and a 'first warning' before Ms Harper repeats her question. The glimmer of hope that brought me to this passage is, to some degree, extinguished; Jenny is punished for her honesty and remains isolated.

As I read, the words 'taut' and 'warning' exude tension, and the passage becomes infused with a sense of threat. Partly, this mood emerges from a recognition that adolescence can be a period during which children are particularly sensitive to the way they are perceived by others, especially their peers, making Jenny's potentially embarrassing inability to respond to the question more uncomfortable. I remember that as a child I was desperate to maintain a positive image, to be liked

by both teachers and peers alike. I remember the shame I felt when one teacher, as he issued me a sanction for messing about in the student common room when I was roughly ten years old, told me that I was too keen to appear 'squeaky clean'. I remember blushing, turning red, feeling the heat rise in my flesh; he had found me out, identified my desire to maintain a good reputation. I feel tense when re-reading this passage, then, because I am concerned that Jenny might feel some similar form of embarrassment.

The sense of threat also feels palpable because I recognise how the passage reflects the problematic way in which schools like CentreTown Academy combine knowledge-rich curricula and authoritarian approaches to behaviour management with frequently exclusionary consequences for some students. Like Kulz (Kulz, 2017), Reay notes the 'slide to authoritarianism' that has occurred in English schools, commenting on the way authoritarianism manifests itself in 'no-excuses behaviour policies adopted in many academies in working-class areas' (Reay, 2022, p.126). From Mrs Harper's perspective, there is no excuse for inattention, despite the fact that Jenny faces a challenging set of personal circumstances. She faces a sanction (the warning) because her attention is drifting from the pre-defined content that the curriculum mandates. It feels somewhat unjust. Reflecting on the relationship between exclusion and knowledge-based curricula, Wood notes that a knowledge-based 'curriculum may not cater well for children who do not fit the typical mould of an academic student' (Wood, 2021). The mould, in Jenny's case, does not appear to cater for young carers like her.

By allowing the reader's hope to be frustrated at this stage in the narrative, the passage highlights the way that the imposition of a no-excuses behaviour policy might frustrate students like Jenny. Student engagement and attention are desirable, but not always realistically possible, depending on the circumstances and needs of the student in question. At times, I feel uncomfortable at work when implementing the school's behaviour policy. While I recognise that clear boundaries can be enormously valuable for students, the differences that I recognise to exist between myself and my

students have the effect of making me feel that I am somehow dehumanising them by inflexibly implementing an unsympathetic behaviour management system.

> Can you think of any differences between the lives of the aristocracy and the working classes?

You, Jenny, now answer the question correctly, and are left in peace to continue doodling.

I note at this stage that the protagonist is a girl, and I reflect on the significance of this fact; I have no experience of what it would be like to be a girl attending a state-funded secondary school in England, having attended single-sex private schools myself. The first time I experienced a co-educational space was when I entered the lecture hall as an undergraduate. However, I do recognise that in English schools, girls' difficulties can be rendered invisible by the relatively large amount of attention that is paid to the problematic behaviour of boys (Osler et al., 2002). Moreover, their voices can frequently be silenced and marginalised (Clarke et al., 2011). This story, then, with its focus on a female character, seeks to voice the imagined experiences of a female young carer. Writing it became an attempt to understand through imagination the ways in which some girls might experience life in an English secondary academy; it became a partial attempt to fill a gap in my understanding of my students.

Jenny's marginalised status is emphasised by Ms Harper's behaviour. Instead of using questions to probe or extend Jenny's thinking, the teacher offers her some feedback and moves on. This pattern of classroom talk can be described as an Initiation-Response-Feedback sequence, a monologic sequence of talk that makes little space for reasoning, collaborative thinking or dialogue, testing instead an individual student's capacity to remember a bitesize chunk of information (Alexander, 2020). Since beginning my PhD project, I have come to see the excessive use of such monologic forms of questioning as problematic, and it appears that, even when I started this project, I believed that such monologic sequences do little to motivate or engage pupils in a meaningful way. This approach to questioning serves to limit the extent to which Jenny can voice her thoughts and

suggests that Ms Harper is not engaging with more dialogic forms of pedagogy. In the context of the lesson's content – Marxist class consciousness – this inattention to the voices and thoughts of students is particularly noteworthy. It suggests that students are being taught to memorise terms relating to class and power but are not necessarily being asked to explore their significance. In Ms Harper's lesson then, insufficient attention is being given to critical literacy skills, as 'diversity and difference in perspectives' appear seemingly undervalued (UKLA Viewpoints, 2020).

5.4 Positionality-as-Assemblage

In this section, I shall reflect upon the above playthrough extract, considering what it reveals about my positionality and the uneasy and nuanced living contradiction that I experienced at CentreTown Academy.

I conceptualise my positionality in post-humanist terms. As an individual, I am 'created through temporary assemblages that may involve connections between the organic and inorganic'; I 'come into being in a kind of chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways' (Potts, 2004, p.3). In this chapter, I have used the creative writing of IF and rhizomatic, autoethnographic, playthrough analysis to look at this assemblage, to capture a snapshot of my positionality-as-assemblage and thus to identify the factors and relations that can comprise it. In this context, the use of autoethnographic methods is appropriate, for 'when we consider the "body-as-assemblage" that is entangled with matter, meaning, and being, we recognise that all research is subjective and affective' (Landi, 2018, p.6); autoethnographic methods can be used to disrupt and subvert the oversimplified and seemingly objective approach to research that is promoted by the 'what works' discourse within education in England.

Table 7, below, draws together the factors that the above section of my playthrough identifies as forming part of my positionality-as-assemblage. Although it is only reflective of the playthrough section that I have included in this chapter, it highlights the nuance and complexity of my position as a teacher, a writer and a creative practitioner. Assemblages can be chaotic, and I have, therefore, organised the table into sections in order to make the findings of this chapter more readily accessible.

I have also used dotted lines to construct the table, highlighting the fact that the various elements of the assemblage intra-act with one another and also as a reminder that the table is an imperfect and incomplete snapshot of my positionality-as-assemblage.

Table 7: Factors comprising my positionality-as-assemblage, as identified by the unique research-machine employed in this chapter

People and characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secondary school students I have taught - Imagined school students and teachers - Teachers at the boarding schools I attended - Peers and older students at the boarding schools I attended - University lecturers - My violin teacher - My mother, father and brothers - My au pair - Albus Dumbledore
My identity positionings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An insecure French student - An able-bodied White male - An authoritarian teacher - A linguistically privileged individual - A socio-economically privileged individual - A student of the violin - A son - A PhD student - A creative writer and reader of IF
Memories and experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attendance at private, single-sex boarding schools - Memories of studying French at school - University attendance - Limited experiences of co-education - Experience of military-style interventions enacted in secondary schools - My mother's brain haemorrhage - Teenage feelings of shame and a desire to be liked and respected
Values and feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A distaste for impersonal pedagogies that focus on prescribed knowledge - A fear of becoming indifferent to the voices and experiences of students - A belief in the inseparability of school knowledge and personal knowledge - A desire to understand the challenges that students face outside school - The importance of reading for pleasure - Anxieties regarding the enactment of unjust behaviour policies and strategies - A desire to create more inclusive learning environments

<p>Concepts and discourses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - British elitism - Surveillance in schools - Authoritarianism - Zero-tolerance policies - White, middle-class norms - Dialogic pedagogies - Monologic pedagogies - Knowledge-rich curricula - Funds of knowledge (and their marginalisation) - Impermeable academy / community boundaries - Reading for pleasure - Recitation (I-R-F) - The invisibility of girls in English schools - Critical literacy
<p>Materials, spaces and other resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My French classroom at boarding school - A fricasé prepared by my au pair - IF and the non-linear narrative form - Books and audiotapes - Classroom posters

The range of identified factors that appear to comprise my positionality-as-assemblage underlines the entangled complexity of my role as a teacher, writer and creative practitioner. This contrasts sharply with more mechanistic conceptualisations of teaching and learning. Whereas the EEF might offer schools and teachers a toolkit of interventions that they can apply like technicians in order to improve performance and achieve better outcomes (Education Endowment Foundation, 2024), and Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion* might provide teachers with a menu of strategies that can do something similar (Lemov, 2015), my use of creative writing and rhizomatic, autoethnographic, playthrough analysis highlights that such strategies can only ever be seen as part of more complex, unique, and emerging assemblages. In my case, such strategies might sit alongside memories of a particular fricasé, characters I have imagined and written about, and my belief in the inseparability of school knowledge from personal knowledge. Moreover, whereas much of the most influential research in the UK is built upon 'technical-rationalist premises', focusing on the impact that interventions can have upon 'student attainment' (Yandell, 2019, p.432), an exploration of my own positionality-as-assemblage underlines the fact that such a conceptualisation of education research

conceals the fact that other elements, values and variables play a significant role in the positionality and practice of the individual teacher.

Some of the relations that form my positionality-as-assemblage are particularly noteworthy, for they help paint a more detailed picture of the unease from which this research project emerged. Firstly, the relationship between my own privilege and the challenges and disadvantages that students studying at schools like CentreTown Academy can face is repeatedly foregrounded by my playthrough and clearly plays a role in my unease; I am aware that some students do not enjoy the advantages and opportunities that have been made available to me, advantages that are not necessarily quantified by measurable attainment scores. My classroom confidence, for example, coupled with my experience of linguistic vulnerability in the French classroom as a school student, has helped me to recognise the vulnerability that students might feel in the classroom. Moreover, the symbolic fricasé that I described in *The Doodle* has helped me to identify the role that British elitism plays in the way I relate to school-based, state-funded education.

Secondly, my belief in the value of creative self-expression, coupled with my identification of practices enacted at schools like CentreTown Academy, practices which serve to regulate and stifle the space available for self-expression, appears to contribute to the complex living contradiction that I have experienced. As a creative writer, I resent the impersonal stifling of self-expression that my role requires of me. The relationship between impersonal enactments of knowledge-rich curricula and the marginalisation of students' own funds of knowledge appears to play a significant role in the production of the unease that I have experienced. The classroom marginalisation of students' personal knowledge and experiences is antithetical to my conceptualisation of English as a subject, and the resultant constraint and exclusion of student voices and perspectives is, to me, enormously problematic. It produces, I suggest, a teacher-student disconnect that undermines the joy of school-based education, whilst simultaneously preventing dialogic pedagogies (pedagogies that can enable the development of critical literacies) from being enacted. This teacher-student disconnect appears to be sustained by the maintenance of impermeable boundaries between academies and the

communities they serve. My memories of my mother's illness has helped me to imaginatively understand how such boundaries might impact upon students facing challenges in their lives outside of school.

Finally, the relationships between the character of Albus Dumbledore, my memories of reading and listening to works of fiction as a child, the concept of 'reading for pleasure' and school-based cultures of performativity have helped me recognise and reflect upon the marginalisation of pleasure and affect in the secondary school English classroom. My recognition that personal feelings, emotions and responses to texts are central to my conceptualisation of the subject of English underlies the unease that I feel when faced with authoritarian, zero-tolerance policies and overly attainment-focused pedagogies.

5.5 Chapter Conclusions

This chapter shows that IF can be incorporated into a reconnaissance research machine that is capable of producing a nuanced account of an individual's positionality-as-assemblage. Such accounts can help action researchers like me identify and articulate the factors and relations affecting the decisions they take as researchers and practitioners. By combining the creative writing of IF with rhizomatic, autoethnographic, playthrough analysis, I have managed to portray and share a snapshot of my positionality-as assemblage, helping others to better understand the values that underpin my research. In so doing, I have created an account that offers readers a unique insight into the pressures and complexities of teaching in English secondary schools today. Producing this account renders my research, and the research methods involved, remarkable, for in an education sector preoccupied with the discovery and implementation of strategies that seem capable of improving measurable outcomes, textured accounts of the experiences and feelings of teachers – things that are not easy to measure – become noteworthy and important counter-narratives.

I have also shown that my novel IF-based research machine can be used by action researchers to conduct self-reconnaissance: 'the exploration of the investigator's beliefs and behaviours within a particular investigation context' (Dillon, 2008, p.4). I have described how my experiences of living

contradiction and unease emerge from a complex positionality-as-assemblage comprised of privilege, values, policies, pedagogies, personal memories, and the relations and intra-actions that occur between such elements. Engaging in the creative writing of IF and rhizomatic, autoethnographic, playthrough analysis has helped me to recognise, as an English teacher, that my belief in the value of creative self-expression and the personal funds of knowledge that students bring to class explain the discomfort I experience when faced with modes of instruction that marginalise and silence the individual voices of students.

Focusing on IF, I have shown that IF enables a very particular research machine to be assembled; IF makes rhizomatic, autoethnographic, playthrough analysis possible via its non-linear, game-like form. Conducting playthroughs of works of IF reminds us that one's positionality-as-assemblage is emergent and constantly changing, something that is reflected in the fact that each playthrough can be slightly different from the last. Furthermore, using Twine to write works of IF encourages writers to create diverging, non-linear narrative works. I therefore suggest that IF enables writing and, by extension, self-reconnaissance, that is uniquely explorative; it encourages the creation and consideration of tangential lines of imagination and inquiry and can help writers and researchers explore positionality in a manner that would not otherwise be possible in quite the same way.

Certain implications and possibilities emerge from these findings. As my IF-based reconnaissance research machine offers a means of exploring and reflecting upon one's positionality-as-assemblage, it could be used by other researchers and teachers to consider their own positionality. It could, for example, be used in the professional development of teachers as a means of helping them to articulate their own attitudes, living theories and educational values, and the ways in which these might affect their practice. This is an important exercise to engage with, for as Biesta observes, education is about more than 'what works'; questions of values and educational desirability are central to education and teaching (Biesta, 2007). It is 'only in light of decisions about the aims and ends of educational practices that questions about evidence and effectiveness begin to have any meaning at all' (Biesta, 2010, p.501). Therefore, educators need to think hard about what they value

and what their educational aims might be. IF is a resource that can contribute to this process. At schools like CentreTown Academy, where a mechanistic conceptualisation of education directs little attention towards personal values and questions of educational desirability, and where the improvement of attainment scores is assumed to be an agreed upon and principal aim, engaging in such a process is of particular importance. Personally, through engaging with such a process, I have come to recognise that providing students with some space to voice themselves affectively at school is something that I deem more valuable and desirable than policies and practices at CentreTown Academy imply.

6 Producing IF for use in the secondary school English classroom

6.1 A Line of IF Flight

The assemblage of my creative and pedagogical practice altered with the introduction of Twine and Interactive Fiction; a line of flight (Colebrook, 2001; Deleuze and Guattari, 2003) emerged as my practice developed in novel and unpredictable ways. Lines of flight appear when assemblages are disrupted, bringing about new arrangements and new possibilities (Colebrook, 2001). Using IF and Twine released a line of flight from out the assemblage of my creative and professional practice by disrupting existing relations; sitting down to create a lesson resource using Twine changed the way I, a writer and a teacher, thought about my students, my teaching and my writing.

Therefore, in response to the question ‘How can works of IF be produced for use in the Secondary School English classroom?’, I here articulate how the deterritorialized assemblage of my creative practice, an assemblage that was deterritorialized in the sense that it opened up to an array of new possibilities, evolved over time; I trace the emergent ways in which I produced IF for use in my classroom. The approach to IF that is described here is a pedagogically oriented one, and I shall therefore often refer to works of *Pedagogical Interactive Fiction* (PIF) – non-linear stories written for educational purposes.

6.2 Telling the story

Storytelling plays an important role in action research; the stories that action researchers tell ‘comprise their descriptions and explanations of practice, which constitute their own living theories’ (McNiff, 2007, p.308). In this chapter, I attempt to tell the story of how my approach to producing works of PIF developed over the course of this project, whilst simultaneously articulating the living theories that emerged. I do this through reference to several PIFs that I have written during the course of my research. To trace the ways in which the assemblage of my practice developed over time, I shall refer to a number of passages, taken from the following works of IF (note that the order in which the IF texts appear in this list reflects the order in which they were written; the texts have

been updated and republished at various times when, for example, spelling errors have come to my attention, so the publication dates do not fully reflect this chronology):

- *The Doodle* (Holdstock, 2022c) – a story set in a secondary school about a young carer whose doodle becomes magically animated during one of her lessons.
- An early draft of *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes* – a story containing various vignettes, each portraying a fictionalised experience of someone who lived through the First World War, and whose story does not typically feature in English curricula constructed around the literature of the First World War.
- An up-to-date version of *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes* (Holdstock, 2021c)
- *A Great Gatsby* (Holdstock, 2024a) – a writing game that puts the reader/player into the shoes of F. Scott Fitzgerald, asking them to rewrite the opening of his famous novel, *The Great Gatsby*.

In this chapter, through reference to passages taken from the abovementioned PIFs, I explain the ways in which my practice developed over time. Other data gathered as part of phases 1 and 2 of my action research project are also used to enrich this research story. Additionally, in order to bring the story of my research to life, but also to provide some insight into my personal experience of writing PIF, I include autoethnographic reflections that help to contextualise each of the works in question. Finally, at the end of the chapter, I highlight the elements that my research story suggests helped constitute my PIF-production assemblage and offer some questions and recommendations for teachers and future PIF creators.

6.3 *The Doodle*

When writing The Doodle, I was excited to be working with a new form, a new genre, a new technical toolkit. I loved the ease with which a blank passage or a new link could be created with just the touch of a button or via the insertion of double square brackets. It opened up an interesting world of possibilities for me, and I enjoyed allowing myself to produce divergent creative ideas without having to worry about confining myself to a single page and a single, linear line of narrative thought.

It became clear though, after working on The Doodle for some time, that such creative possibility could frustrate – to conclude the story in any satisfactory way, I had to start

limiting the extent to which my narrative pathways could diverge from one another so that I could actually bring the various strands to some sort of conclusion.

I also found myself getting a little confused at times by the structure of my story – I didn't set out with a plan in mind, so my links jumped across the story map somewhat randomly. This made the story hard to re-engage with after a break.

I was also intrigued to find myself writing a sort of fantasy tale. I'd never written such a prose narrative before, but I enjoyed allowing my mind to explore this personally divergent avenue. Would this have happened to such a sustained extent had I not been using Twine? Maybe! Would it have happened if I had been writing independently, and not as part of a PhD project? I doubt it; the story would have remained unfinished.

I revelled in the sense of forward momentum that writing with Twine engendered. To develop a text, you are prompted to transform words into links, and by selecting words to transform in this way, you are obliged to generate ideas about how you should proceed, how you should take the next step into the unmapped story space that extends before you.

6.3.1 Structure

I wrote *The Doodle* during the 'reconnaissance' phase of my action research (Hill, 2014); I was an IF novice when I began writing it. Therefore, I devoted little thought to the way in which it was structured, and the potential impact of my structural choices. Instead, I saw hyperlinks as an exciting resource, and I enjoyed creating my first branching narrative. Others before me have identified the enjoyment that can be derived from writing interactive stories; Pope and Gyori, for example, comment on the enjoyment that their student participants found in the writing of interactive narratives (2021), and Tran also refers to the enjoyment that her student-writers derived from writing IF using Twine (2016). Although my own research does not focus on enabling students to write IF, in writing *The Doodle*, I experienced firsthand the enjoyment to which these researchers refer. In fact, I suggest that the ability to create a freely branching narrative rendered the writing experience pleasingly rhizomatic, for Deleuze and Guattari state that 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other' (2003, p.7), and I excitedly came to realise that, unlike more linear narratives, any passage within the text could become connected via hyperlink to any other passage.

Writers who use twine have structural oversight of their projects through reference to the project's story map. Said maps are not seen by the reader, but instead provide the writer with a way of visualising their non-linear project. My inattention to structure resulted in the story map for *The Doodle* (see Figure 4 in Section 5.2) becoming rather chaotic; it contains a disorganised crowd of white squares (each of which represents an individual passage) and a web of black lines (each representing a hyperlink). The passage marked with a small arrow icon on the left-hand side represents the story's starting point, and the story's four endings are located towards the right-hand side of the map. While the story does move from left to right, mirroring a traditional approach to page-based writing, the structure of *The Doodle* is haphazard, with passages not organised or grouped in any deliberate way. Before and during the writing of *The Doodle*, I paid little attention to structure, having not read, for example, Ashwell's 'Standard Patterns in Choice-based Games' (2015).

However, the story map's layout is evidence of the ways in which the text was produced. In the above autoethnographic reflections, I highlight that I experienced some initial excitement, but that I later needed to reduce the number of narrative branches I incorporated into the story in order to complete it. For example, the column of passages that is visible in the bottom right-hand corner of the story map all lead to one ending, and it is easy to see the way that I tried to limit my use of choice at this stage of the writing. After starting off with great exuberance, excited by the prospect of writing a branching narrative, I realised that I wanted to finish the story and that introducing more narrative branches would only delay that process, requiring me to write a greater number of passages. As such, a tension emerged between my enthusiasm for the creation of branching narratives and my desire to complete my first work of IF. With this conflict in mind, the column of passages on the right-hand side of the story map, all leading to a single ending and containing a limited number of narrative branches, reflects my eventual eagerness to finish writing the story.

6.3.2 The Beginning

The enjoyment I discovered in the writing of IF is evident in the way the story begins. The first passage that you encounter when reading *The Doodle* can be seen in Figure 5, below. There is no

title page – once you run the story, the story is underway. Likewise, I did not take the time to draft or plan the narrative, but instead dived straight in. This reflects the fact that, when I was writing *The Doodle*, I was focusing more on how Twine could be used to write a branching narrative than I was on producing a text that would be read by others. Moreover, I had yet to experiment with underlined, emboldened or centred text, having not discovered the code that would enable me to include such things in my stories. Therefore, at the start of *The Doodle*, the reader is immediately faced with a passage and a binary choice of links, rather than a title or a cover page.

The links in the opening passage offer some clues as to what might be contained in subsequent passages – information about the protagonist’s doodle, or information about the protagonist’s home. As such, the choice could be termed a ‘focus choice’; it enables the reader to select what they want to attend to (Ashwell, 2014). However, at the time, I was not thinking about choice in this way. Although, as Salter writes, an ‘interactive story needs clear purpose and goals for the user/reader’s interactions with the system’, I was not thinking in this way (Salter, 2018, p.467). Instead, I was thinking about where the creation of hyperlinks could take *me* – the excited writer.

Figure 5: The opening passage from The Doodle

Ms Harper drones on monotonously, her voice buzzing about your head like a weary bluebottle. Occasionally a word or phrase bashes heavily into you: 'Aristocracy,' 'Bourgeoisie,' 'Working Class.'

You **doodle** absentmindedly in the margin of your exercise book, **thinking of home**.

6.3.3 Blind Spot

Due to the exuberantly rhizomatic way in which I approached the writing of *The Doodle*, I included in the story what might be termed a blind spot. When reading *The Doodle*, it is possible to arrive at the passage that is visible below, in Figure 6, without having previously read anything about the magical animation of the doodle. In this passage, which appears towards the end of the story, the doodle ‘winks’, and the protagonist tries to ‘tell it to keep quiet’. As the story’s final passage does not invite the reader to restart, it is possible that a reader of this passage will finish the story having only had this one very limited encounter with the doodle. Readers of this passage are thus denied focus choice, for although they may be interested in the doodle, the story does not permit them to attend to it (Ashwell, 2014). This was not a deliberate decision on my part, but rather a symptom of the way in which I lost control of *The Doodle*’s branching structure.

Figure 6: A passage taken from The Doodle

Subtly, slowly, you open the zip to your backpack and slide out your History exercise book. You slip it under the textbook that you are working from just in time; Mr Tiller looks over at you suspiciously for a moment, before returning to his work.

You flip open your exercise book to the page where your doodle is. After a second or two, the inky Socks-like drawing winks at you. You raise your left index finger to your lips, trying to tell it to keep quiet. To your surprise it nods and sits down, shuts its eyes and seems to doze off.

For **the rest of the day**, whenever, Mr. Tiller isn't looking, you concentrate on filling in the background to your doodle: the swings in the park you and Dad used to walk in; the trees; the grass; the flowers.

6.3.4 ‘THE END’

Although I enjoyed the imaginative work involved in creating *The Doodle*, I was eager to finish it. Arguably, this eagerness is evident in the way the story concludes. Despite my initial excitement – triggered by the possibilities afforded me by a branching narrative – there are only four different

possible endings. After realising how difficult an unstructured work of IF can be to write, I sought to reduce the number of branches available so that I could complete the story in a timely and satisfactory manner. After all, '[w]hen you make a game full of choices, the story can branch out in a combinatorial explosion of possible lines and, theoretically, have a vast number of endings' (Adams, 2004). Such vast possibilities render the timely completion of an IF project challenging, and it was this challenge that obliged me to begin reducing the number of available branches and, consequently, endings. At this point, the writing experience was constrained, as I felt less open to the range of possible connections I could construct.

The passage below (Figure 7) contains one of the four possible endings to the story, and my eagerness to complete the story is evident in its length. Instead of writing one or two short paragraphs and inserting a choice of hyperlinks into it, I wrote a more extensive text, seeking to finish the story rather than introduce further complications. This reflects the fact that I approached writing *The Doodle* in a similar way to how I might approach the writing of a more traditional, linear story. I was not focusing on the ways in which my student-readers might interact with one another or with the story at its end point, but rather on how the story might be drawn to a conclusion.

Figure 7: A 'final' passage, taken from The Doodle

Why not? What's the worst that could happen? He saw the doodle wink as well, after all.

"Yeah, it sucks but I have to go home and, you know, wash up stuff and prepare dinner for Mum and for Benny really."

You wait, wondering how he will respond, nervous. After a moment, during which you both look pointedly down at the leaf-strewn pavement, he responds. "Oh yeah."

Another pause.

"Want some help?" he says finally.

You look over at him, shocked. Nobody else at school knows about Mum. Nobody has ever really asked, let alone offered to help. "Ummm... yeah, that'd be cool, if you really want to?"

"Sure!" He responds.

You walk on together towards home. You feel a stinging sensation creeping into your eyes. Silently, you smile down at the leaves on the wet pavement.

THE END.

6.4 *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes: An Early Draft*

After The Doodle, I progressed on to a writing project that felt more purposeful, in the sense that my aims as a writer were less open and exploratory and more dependent upon external factors; to research IF in schools I needed to identify a curricular window in which I could reasonably experiment. So... year seven (because there's less exam pressure) and the First World War (because the department's curriculum map showed that we would be studying World War One literature for quite some time, and there would be more lesson time available to devote to additional material).

Approaching writing in this way was a new challenge, for I have always enjoyed writing in a somewhat meditative way—the writing I have enjoyed most has enabled me to access my subconscious, my unspoken thoughts, my underself. Here though, was something new.

Fortunately, my partner introduced me to The Unremembered resources, which excited me; the stories were compelling, informative and important. Also, it was joyous to be able to engage with my partner in this way, making a bridge between my work and hers, for she worked with the company that produced the resources.

On the technological side, I was also excited by Twine and its features. When writing The Doodle, I had kept things very simple. I had paid little attention to the style sheet, to variables, to story structures as well as other macros or functions that Twine offered and which opened up new creative possibilities. For example, when writing What Happens When You Close Your Eyes, it was very satisfying to successfully create a bottleneck passage in my narrative, using variables and macros to ensure that readers would remain on the same narrative strand after reading this passage as the one they had been experiencing beforehand.

Moreover, playing with background colours and scoring systems was enjoyable, for they became problems for me to solve with the help of various online manuals and forums. For example, you may not have noticed, but if you read What Happens When You Close Your Eyes more than once in the same sitting, the question you are given at the end, changes. I achieved this by experimenting with scoring systems and changing the text that appears in the final passage according to how many 'points' the reader/player had accumulated.

In September 2020 I began to develop a work of IF for use in the year seven (11–12-year-olds) English classroom, as I believed that such a work could help my students become more actively and personally involved in the meaning-making process of reading (Holdstock, 2021b).

Noticing that my school's year seven curriculum featured two schemes of work focusing in different ways on literature written in response to the First World War, I decided to create a work of IF that I could use to help my students gain a richer understanding of the ways in which the conflict affected people's lives. I therefore produced a work of IF entitled *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes* (*WHWYCYE*). Between the months of October and February 2020-2021, as my research progressed, I continuously revised this work.

The inspiration for the work came from a set of resources that were created by Big Ideas© (Big Ideas Community Interest Company, 2018). These resources showcased the lives and stories of diverse individuals whose World War One (WW1) narratives frequently went untold, such as, for example, the members of the South African Native Labour Corps who died when the SS Mendi sank. I felt, particularly in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the ensuing protests against systemic racism in America and in Europe (BBC, 2020), that such underrepresented stories should take a more prominent role in our approach to teaching students about WW1.

6.4.1 Structure

In contrast to *The Doodle*, the story map that I created for an early draft of *WHWYCYE* is more structured and organised. This partially transformed the writing experience from an excitingly rhizomatic one, to more of a satisfying exercise in problem-solving; I wrestled with the problem of how best to structure my branching narrative so that I could contain within it diverse content whilst simultaneously ensuring that I did not lose control of the story map and fail to produce a 'complete' PIF. The story map, visible in Figure 8, is a symmetrical affair; passages are arranged so as to render the different levels of the story more distinguishable from one another, and every narrative strand comes back to one central and one concluding bottleneck passage, so that the overall map comes to resemble a butterfly. The design decisions taken with regard to the central and final bottleneck

'Would it be better to make it a loop so that the iterative process is more transparent? [...] could I link a cyclical, looping IF structure to loops in music as well as Bruner's spiral of learning?'

(Fieldnote, 2nd November 2020).

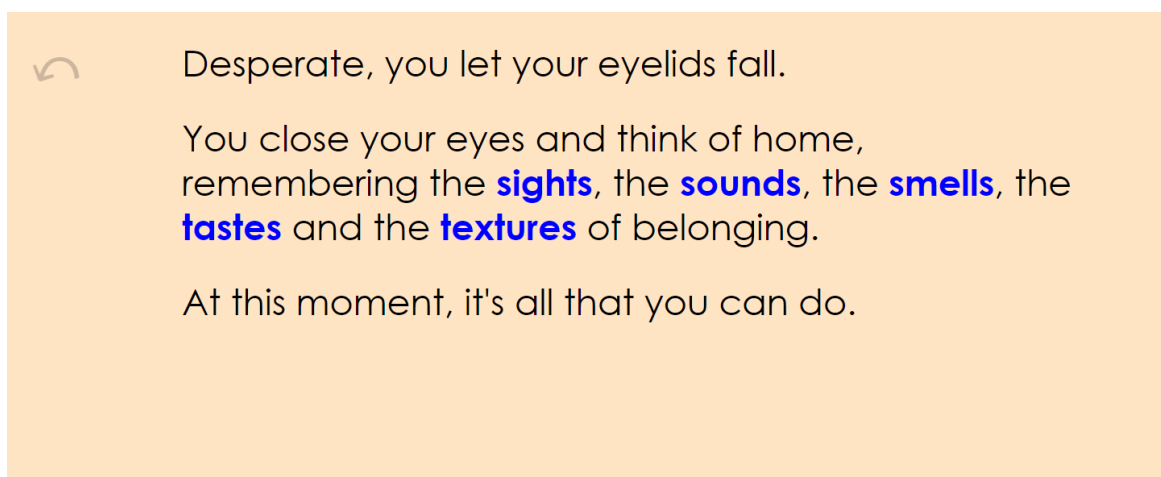
Introducing the work to colleagues, I subsequently wrote that 'The text encourages iterative reading. This could help students to accumulate thematic knowledge and to begin making intratextual comparative remarks' (email to colleagues, 4th November 2020). This comment suggests that I was beginning to consider my students' 'interactions with the system' that I was designing in a more deliberate fashion (Salter, 2018, p.467). Similarly, my reference to Bruner suggests an increased degree of attention to the relationship between IF and learning. Bruner asserts that learners should first acquire a 'fundamental understanding' (Bruner, 1966, p.31) before later revisiting a topic multiple times, building up a more nuanced understanding of the content in question. By referring to Bruner in my fieldnotes and connecting the notion of the spiral with *WHWYCYE*, I suggest that repeated readings could help students to develop a fuller understanding of WW1 and the negative impact that it had on a range of people's lives; each reading of the text can introduce the reader to a different character, so reading the text multiple times could enable readers to notice the similarities and differences between the experiences of each character, helping them to develop a richer understanding of the impact of WW1. The use of a cyclical structure is not uncommon in choice-based games and hypertexts; Ashwell describes the 'Loop and Grow' pattern that some writers use to retain 'narrative momentum' (Ashwell, 2015), and Bernstein describes 'the Cycle' and its ability to express and assert 'the presence of structure' (Bernstein, 1999). It was such a presence of structure that I felt could enable student readers to make intratextual comparative remarks, encouraging them to notice similar and dissimilar passages as they read and re-read the story, meeting a wider variety of characters in the process.

6.4.2 Tangled beginnings

Unlike in *The Doodle*, I began *WHWYCYE* with a designated title passage before presenting readers with the passage that can be seen in Figure 9. The inclusion of a title passage reflects my improved familiarity with Twine and the Twine user manual; I could more easily use code to create a centred, emboldened, underlined title. It is also suggestive of a more measured and purposeful approach to writing. Whereas I had approached *The Doodle* with unfettered excitement, I began writing *WHWYCYE* with a more specific intentions; I wanted to use the text in my lessons, and a title would help me to communicate what we were reading to my students.

The ambitious nature of *WHWYCYE* – a structured, branching narrative featuring multiple protagonists and narrative strands – is reflected in the choice contained within the passage below; readers are given five options to choose from rather than two, with few clues as to the narrative consequences their decision might produce.

Figure 9: The first passage after the title in an early draft of What Happens When You Close Your Eyes



Bernstein might describe this opening passage as a ‘tangle’ (Bernstein, 1999). Reflecting on structural patterns within hypertext, Bernstein describes a tangle in the following way:

‘The Tangle confronts the reader with a variety of links without providing sufficient clues to guide the reader's choice. Tangles can be used purely for their value as intellectual

amusement, but also appear in more serious roles. In particular, tangles can help intentionally disorient readers in order to make them more receptive to a new argument or an unexpected conclusion.'

(Bernstein, 1999)

In trying to create a more manageably structured text, I inadvertently rendered aspects of *WHWYCYE* disorienting for the reader by confronting them with a tangle. This reflects the fact that I was somewhat preoccupied by structure; I wanted to avoid the frustration that I had experienced when trying to bring *The Doodle* to a conclusion. While, in creating a looping structure, I had begun to think about how my students might interact with the text, I was still devoting insufficient attention to the ways that students might interact with the choices within the text. In one interview with colleagues, we discussed this particular passage, and I remarked that 'there's something about that first passage that feels quite random [...] It's not an easy one to make a reasoned decision about' (interview, 15th January 2021). Here, I reflect that the choice does not enable readers to make reasoned or purposeful decisions, and as – in my lessons – I was trying to use IF as a means of facilitating talk, this was problematic; Alexander asserts that the dialogic classroom is purposeful, and this choice arguably limits the space for purposeful dialogue (Alexander, 2020).

Comparing *WHWYCYE* with *The Doodle*, you might also note a difference in font and text size. This is because, having conducted an informal pilot lesson in which I read *The Doodle* with my year seven class, I made the following note:

'I need to reflect more about how long the passages are, visibility for students around the room and how to hold the attention of students that drift. Also [,] the story was way too long - we were nowhere near finished!'

(Fieldnote, 17th September 2020)

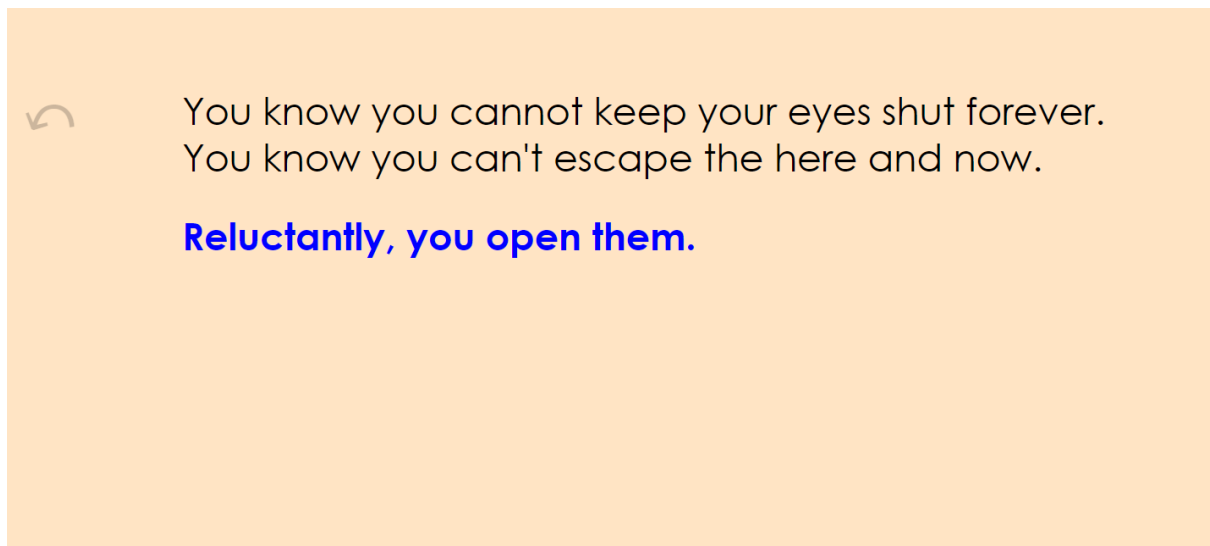
The lesson had drawn to my attention the need to make IF as accessible as possible in terms of visibility, hence my decision to enlarge the text size and to use century gothic – a font that my SENCO had informed me was appropriate for dyslexic students.

The choice that readers are asked to make in this early passage from *WHWYCYE* also reflects the fact that, in producing the story, I took a different approach to writing. Instead of writing one branching narrative, I created a network of comparable and interlinked vignettes, each vignette exposing the reader to the experiences of a different individual. The choice readers make when faced with this passage leads them towards one of five different narrative vignettes, each focused on a different but comparable protagonist. Interestingly, as Friedhoff notes, Twine seems to lend itself to the creation of such vignettes (Friedhoff, 2013). Coincidentally, a critical friend with whom I read *WHWYCYE* prior to using it in the classroom also remarked that the text felt 'like a little vignette of, you know, what World War One was like in this place' (interview, 25th November 2020). This suggests that Twine began to inform the type of fiction that I was writing; Twine lends itself to the construction of vignettes, and *WHWYCYE* reflects this.

6.4.3 The Bottleneck

Every iteration of *WHWYCYE* features the passage that is visible in Figure 10. This is because of the structural device that I used to control the story's branching form when I was writing it: the bottleneck. This is not an uncommon structural pattern in choice-based texts. As Ashwell describes, such texts branch, 'but the branches regularly rejoin, usually around events that are common to all versions of the story' (Ashwell, 2015). I used a bottleneck because, in writing *WHWYCYE*, I wanted to avoid the frustration that I had experienced when trying to finish *The Doodle*; I wanted to contain the structure of the story so that completing it could remain a manageable endeavour.

Figure 10: The bottleneck passage, taken from an early draft of *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes*



In this bottleneck passage, I did not give my readers a choice. However, this lack of choice is deceptive, for the link (Reluctantly, you open them) will take the reader to a passage that reveals more about the specific character they have already encountered, and it could therefore take the reader to a number of different passages, depending upon their prior decisions and the vignette to which they have already been exposed. As Ashwell notes, this structural approach requires the writer to ‘rely on heavy use of state-tracking’ (Ashwell, 2015), and I achieved this effect through the use of ‘macros’ and ‘variables’ (Arnott, 2022), programming the passage in the following way:

You know you cannot keep your eyes shut forever. You know you can't escape the here and now.

```
(if: $path is "A")[[[Reluctantly, you open them.->A2]]](if: $path is "B")[[[Reluctantly, you open them.->B2]]](if: $path is "C")[[[Reluctantly, you open them.->C2]]](if: $path is "D")[[[Reluctantly, you open them.->D2]]](if: $path is "E")[[[Reluctantly, you open them.->E2]]]
```

My use of a ‘\$path’ variable combined with ‘if.’ macros enabled me to maintain control over the story’s length and structure, but also required me to understand the grammar of variables and macros in a way that I had not when I was writing *The Doodle*. As such, writing *WHWYCYE* required

me to learn a new form of language, extending my knowledge of how language can be used in the digital sphere.

Using a bottleneck, macros and variables in this way was helpful; I wanted each narrative strand to contain the same number of passages, and the bottleneck helped me to ensure that every strand conformed to a similar structure. One of the reasons I did this was that, as I wrote, I was concerned about the length of my stories. *The Doodle* had felt too long. Consequently, I made the following remark regarding the approach I took to writing *WHWYCYE*:

‘I feel that a longer story might ultimately be dissatisfying as the class may never finish it in a lesson. Hence, I have taken the vignette approach’.

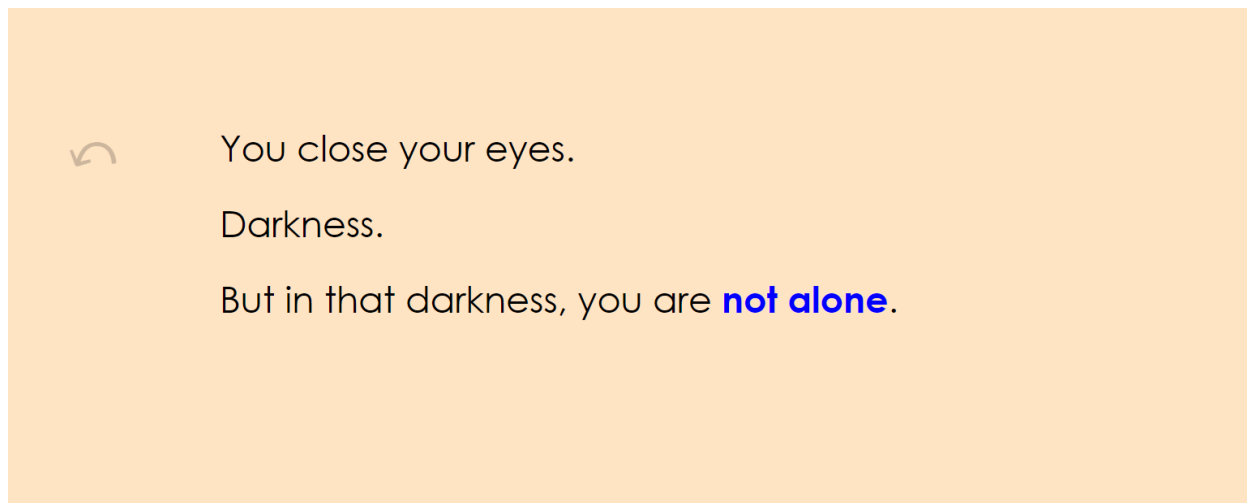
(Fieldnote, 11th November 2020)

My use of a bottleneck, macros and variables allowed me to manage the number of branches my story contained, helping me manage the length and structure of the story so that it would be more likely to be of an appropriate length for use in a single lesson. Here, we see an increased degree of focus upon the relationship between text design and the lesson-based interactions that the text was designed to facilitate.

6.4.4 The End?

Readers of *WHWYCYE* enter into a looping narrative. The passage visible in Figure 11 was the final passage of an early draft of the text, and when readers clicked on ‘not alone’, they were transported back to the start of the story. As a result, the reader had to choose to stop reading themselves, rather than being informed that the experience was over.

Figure 11: The 'final' passage, taken from an early draft of *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes*



In this final passage, we see the influence of my iterative action research model. Whereas *The Doodle* was written as an initial foray into the world of IF and a way of conducting some initial 'reconnaissance' (Hill, 2014), *WHWYCYE* was written with a cycle of planning, teaching and reflection in mind. I wrote it with a view to using it in multiple lessons, over time. I wanted to encourage and facilitate re-reading, giving myself the opportunity to edit the story between lessons as well as to refine the ways in which I used it within lessons. As such, I chose to use a looping, cyclical structure that mirrors the iterative cyclical structure of my action research model.

Notably, I included neither dialogue nor specific imagery in this final passage of *WHWYCYE*. Instead, more abstract forms of imagery are included (e.g. 'darkness'). Using abstract imagery in this way was a necessary consequence of using bottlenecks to structure my work. All the narrative vignettes led back to the same passages in the middle and at the end of the story, so the language contained in those passages needed to be applicable in all of the vignettes. For this same reason, each vignette follows the same trajectory: a character has a flashback, thinking of home, before opening their eyes to their own First World War experiences, and then closing their eyes again at the end.

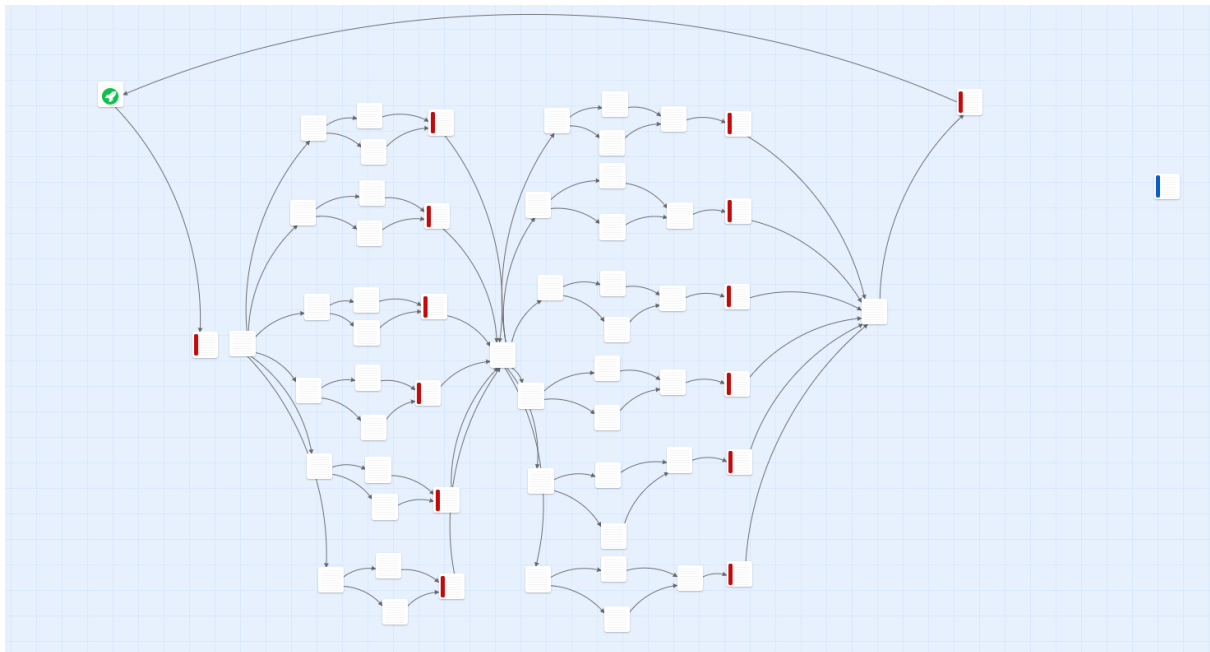
6.5 What Happens When You Close Your Eyes: Developing a ‘Frankentext’

Over time, I redrafted *WHWYCYE*, and the up-to-date version is available to read online (Holdstock, 2021c). In this section, I shall examine the ways my approach to writing PIF developed during this period.

6.5.1 Structure

The up-to-date story map of *WHWYCYE* is visible in Figure 12, and can be compared to the earlier story map which is visible in Figure 8. The up-to-date map features additional narrative layers – additional vignettes – and a number of additional, colour-coded passages.

Figure 12: The story map for the up-to-date version of *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes*



I added vignettes to the story in response to feedback I received from colleagues and critical friends with whom I shared the story prior to using it in the classroom. A colleague, Ms Sands, had noticed that each of the vignettes in my first draft explored the experiences of individuals on the allied side of the war, going on to pose the following question:

“What might pupils stand to learn by engaging in a story with someone from the Axis powers?”

(Feedback received via email, 9th November 2020)

Although the term 'Axis powers' is more commonly used in the context of the second world war, my colleague's remarks encouraged me to question the range of perspectives that I was including in and excluding from my work. In my fieldnotes, I reflected on her question:

"Firstly, she raises a good point about all of the characters being on the allied side. Should I (and if so how) include a character from the other side?"

(Fieldnote, 9th November 2020)

Partly in response to this feedback, I considered including a vignette based upon the experiences of someone who could have profited from the war: Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the Vickers machine gun. However, I felt uncomfortable placing the story of such a well-known and somewhat celebrated man alongside the underrepresented narratives I had already included. Therefore, the final version of *WHWYCYE* contains vignettes that are inspired by the lives, works and experiences of two individuals who were German citizens but whose stories are rarely encountered in the Key Stage 3 English classroom: Rosa Luxemburg and Erich Remarque. Both of these vignettes, like the other vignettes contained within the story, focus on the trauma and suffering that the war brought. As such, including them, I felt able to maintain some thematic coherence within the story.

The up-to-date story map also contains a number of red, colour-coded passages. These passages are colour-coded because they do not form part of the narrative. One of them is a meta-passage which contains information and choices that are *about* the narrative. Others are para-passages: passages which provide information and resources that are designed to stand *alongside* the narrative. These passages shall be considered in the following sections, but it is worth pausing to reflect upon their significance, for they represent a shift. It is the presence of these passages that caused me to refer to *WHWYCYE* as a 'frankentext' (fieldnote, 10th January 2021). Instead of remaining a non-linear, choice-based work of hypertext *fiction* in which each passage formed part of non-linear *narrative*, the work came to contain various forms of text within it. Perhaps this is no surprise; hypertext and Twine seem capable of helping writers to push boundaries; the 'Twine

Revolution' (Ellison, 2013) came about due to the ease with which Twine could be used to create personal, text-based, non-linear games and stories, pushing the boundaries of what it meant to be a game-designer. Works of hypertext fiction were not formerly recognised by members of the IF community as true works of IF, as Emily Short remarks:

[After the Twine Revolution] 'the number, quality, and interest value of the new Twine games was so great that it wound up shifting the self-definition of the community instead, to the frustration of some of its members.'

(Short, 2016)

My 'frankentext' therefore, should be seen in the context of Twine and its boundary-pushing affordances. Using Twine, I constructed a text that occupied a liminal space; I was no longer writing fiction but producing a hybrid form of PIF.

6.5.2 Meta-passages

One of the above-mentioned meta-passages is presented in Figure 13. I included in this passage a question that is aimed directly at the reader, using the second person in a manner that differs from the way the second person is used in the narrative passages and in the previous works of IF I had created. As such, it offers the reader what Ashwell might term a 'Meta' form of agency (Ashwell, 2014); it allows the reader to choose where the narrative they are about to encounter should be set.

Figure 13: A Meta-Passage taken from *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes*

Today you will step back in time, back into World War One. But whose shoes will you step into?

- Someone who lived in **Germany** before the war?
- Someone who went to the **battlefields** in France during the war?
- Someone who remained at a **distance** from the French battlefields?

My role as a teacher and researcher informed the decisions I took when developing this passage. During interviews with colleagues who observed me using early drafts of the story in my lessons, I remarked that without a meta-passage towards the start of the story, students might be obliged to make ‘random’ rather than ‘reasoned’ choices about which link they wanted to select at the beginning of the story (interview, 15th January 2021). I wanted my students to be able to make and discuss choices intentionally, identifying what Reznitskaya and Wilkinson would term the ‘most reasonable answer’ to the ‘contestable’ choice before them (2017, p.4). This explains the inclusion of the above meta-passage. Furthermore, I have come to recognise that metalinguistic and metanarrative understanding are vital parts of what students can learn in the English classroom, and the inclusion of this meta-passage reflects this recognition. In this context, I take the ‘meta-’ prefix to denote “moving to a different level of awareness or perspective” and, where language is concerned, developing an “explicit understanding of language structure and choice” (Myhill et al., 2020, p.8). The passage’s green background colour draws attention to this teacherly focus on meta-level engagement by differentiating the passage from the other narrative passages. Likewise, the way that the meta-passage uses the pronoun ‘you’ in order to directly address my player/readers, rather than to refer to the protagonist, encourages them to move from a narrative level of engagement to a meta-narrative level.

Contrastingly coloured meta- and para-passages contributed to the production of my frankentext. In a study edition of *Frankenstein* (McCallum, 2016), I read of the ways in which the prefix “franken-” has been used in a variety of neologisms to denote a degree of (often unnatural) modification, interference or synthesis. My use of the prefix ‘franken-’ in my fieldnotes, therefore, arguably indicates that I considered the synthesis of narrative and metanarrative passages to be both exciting and somewhat unnatural. Perhaps for this reason, transforming the narrative text of *WHWYCYE* into a multi-coloured frankentext did not happen overnight. Time, critical feedback and the experience of using the story in lessons eventually produced the following realisation in my fieldnotes:

‘I’ve been limiting myself, focusing on making a piece of historically literary hypertext fiction. But the text could be enriched - it could be more than this. It could be a story, more of a game, a scheme of work, a slide show, a work of fiction... why not? The boundaries don’t have to be so rigid’

(Fieldnote, 10th January 2021)

Furthermore, my experience of using presentation slides as lesson resources when teaching groups of secondary school students also influenced my developing approach. For example, the fact that the passage in Figure 13 is quite short and can be projected onto a whiteboard in its entirety without any need for scrolling (much like a presentation slide), rendered the passage more easily usable as a resource when projected onto a whiteboard. This desire to keep the passage short might also explain my decision to use metaphor in a somewhat clichéd manner. The metaphor of stepping back in time and into someone else’s shoes is not original, but it enabled me to explain a complex idea in relatively few words, keeping the passage short and manageable. Similarly, in my fieldnotes I documented the challenges of writing this passage in such a way as to enable me to transform the links into single words rather than longer phrases. My teacherly desire to use the story to support dialogic teaching may have produced this decision; I understood single words to be more easily embedded into a spoken utterance than an entire phrase, making the passage more conducive to interactive forms of talk. As such, the voices of my future students entered into dialogue with my

writerly and teacherly personas, producing specific decisions about how to format links in this passage.

6.5.3 Para-passages

As has already been noted, the up-to-date version of *WHWYCYE* includes some para-passages: passages that contain content designed to sit alongside the narrative, rather than forming a part of it. Consider, for example, the passage that is visible in Figure 14.

Figure 14: A para-passage, taken from the up-to-date version of What happens When You Close Your Eyes

The Chinese Labour Corps

War labourers were recruited by the Allies from China.

Many of them continued working long after the end of the war.

Take the [quiz](#) and then [continue](#)!



Para-passages like this one provide students with relevant contextual information, and they are the only passages in *WHWYCYE* that contain images. Initially, these passages and images were not included in the story, and in fact Ms Sands explicitly remarked upon the ‘absence of any images’ (Feedback received via email, 9th November 2020). At first, I resisted the inclusion of pictures in the text. In my fieldnotes, I reflect upon this resistance, beginning to embrace a more open approach to the designing of PIF:

'I have not wanted to make a Frankentext that is both a narrative and a game and a resource for facilitating learning. Why not? [...] Why not incorporate reflection points, informative passages and images? I could colour-code passages so the narrative was clearly differentiated from the other types of text?'

(Fieldnote, 10th January 2021)

Eventually, I did embrace a more multimodal approach, utilising colour and image deliberately, particularly in the para-passages that became part of the text. In doing so, we see the influence of my teacherly persona; it is recommended that teachers use images to support teaching and learning in the classroom (Caviglioli, 2019). In fact, during an interview with Ms Morrisson after she had seen me use *WHWYCYE* in a previous lesson, she asserted that pictures would help students 'understand what's going on' (interview, 15th January 2021).

Para-passages from *WHWYCYE*, such as the one in Figure 14, featured in two noteworthy lessons that were observed by two separate colleagues of mine (Mr Harris and Mr Faulks), both of whom made similar comments during interview. Commenting on the historical facts contained within the para-passages and the quizzes to which the passages are linked, Mr Faulks remarked that I seemed to be pursuing conflicting lesson aims. On the one hand, while reading the text I was encouraging students to practise making 'convincing arguments about which link to choose' (interview, 9th February 2021). On the other hand, I seemed to be teaching students 'about the context of World War One'. Similarly, Mr Harris remarked that the 'assessment' (the quiz to which there is a link in the para-passage) 'did not assess what the lesson had been attending to' (interview, 8th February 2021). He continued, noting the following:

'When there'd been a focus on language, then, then there was essentially kind of like a short info dump, and then an assessment on that information. [...] Why didn't you frame your assessment around the work that they'd been attending to for the previous sort of fifteen minutes?'

The conflict that my colleagues identified arguably renders the text a 'site of struggle' (Cremin and Baker, 2010). As a writer of fiction, I produced an interactive work of historical fiction, but as a

teacher, I inserted activities and para-passages into the text, focusing my attention on teaching students something about the First World War. Arguably, as a writer I was designing an aesthetic reading experience, but as a teacher I was becoming interested in efferent forms of reading and the information that students might glean from the reading experience (Rosenblatt, 1986). As such, comparing different drafts of *WHWYCYE* reveals one way in which I navigated the 'teacher-writer, writer-teacher continuum' (Cremin and Baker, 2010, p.20), highlighting the potentially problematic conflict that appeared between my aesthetic writerly intentions and my more efferent teacherly intentions.

Considering *WHWYCYE*, and hypertext IF more broadly, as a form of game, it is also possible to frame this tension as a problem of alignment: In *Digital Games and Learning*, Whitton observes that "Ideally, the game outcomes should be aligned with the learning outcomes so that engagement in the game supports learning" (Whitton, 2014, p.81). However, in *WHWYCYE*, the bulk of the play (the discussion of which link we should choose) appeared to be misaligned with the learning I sought to assess via the quizzes that are contained in the green para-passages.

One reason behind this issue of misalignment lies in the context surrounding the development of *WHWYCYE*. I began teaching with this text in the classroom, but the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of schools in England and the transfer to remote teaching. As I noted in one interview, the pandemic 'completely changed my approach to how I was using it' (interview, 12th January 2021). Instead of teaching in a classroom, I was teaching from home. When I attempted to read *WHWYCYE* with my class, it was easy for students to become distracted. As I remarked in my interview with Mr Faulks, the para-passages represented an attempt to 'prevent drift' by 'breaking up long moments of dialogue with interludes and quizzes' (interview, 9th February 2021). In my own way, I was trying to follow government guidance, which stated that 'it's harder for pupils to concentrate when being taught remotely', so it is 'often a good idea to divide content into smaller chunks' (Ofsted, 2021).

6.5.4 Learning, Playing and Misalignment

In the up-to-date version of *WHWYCYE*, I provide readers who finish a given vignette with a question before encouraging them to start again. This is evident in the passage that is visible in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Another para-passage, taken from the up-to-date version of What happens When You Close Your Eyes

You have just read a story that was inspired by the history of the Chinese Labour Corps.

At the end of the narrative you have just read, how is the protagonist feeling?

Click [here](#) to start again!

This passage highlights the way that my teacherly aims intra-acted with my initial writerly aims, producing a hybrid text. The passage above looks less like a passage from a work of IF, and more like a slide that a teacher might typically project onto a whiteboard during a lesson, highlighting the influence of my role as a teacher.

The passage also shows that, while writing this PIF, I was working on ‘activity-goal alignment’ (Shelton and Scoresby, 2011, p.114). By posing a question (‘At the end of the narrative you have just read, how is the protagonist feeling?’), I hoped to encourage my students to reflect on the reading experience and to think about what the First World War might have been like for the individual character they had just encountered. I wanted to use such questions to align the reading/playing experience with what I felt the learning goals could be. For, as Whitton notes, ‘it is crucial that computer games for learning should be considered in relation to the other activities and reflection that surround them and not simply as stand-alone activities’ (Whitton, 2014, p.42). This is so that the

teacher can use the game to 'enable transfer of learning from the context of the game into the real world' (p.42). I hoped that my students, through reading/playing this IF, would be able to consider and express the traumatic role that the First World War played in people's lives. However, the presence of this para-passage still highlights that there is a disconnect between the reading experience and the learning experience that *WHWYCYE* seeks to facilitate. This is because reading and learning are not positioned as wholly integrated activities. Instead, readers are encouraged to play to learn, rather than learn to play:

'Regarding playing to learn, the emphasis is on learning, which is to say that some content or skill should be the end result of game playing. As such, knowledge and skills are treated as effects or outcomes. In regard to learning to play, on the other hand, the emphasis is on the activity of playing. As such, learning might be regarded as an integrated part of mastering an activity, in this case, gameplay.'

(Arsneth, 2006)

Arsneth's differentiation between learning to play and playing to learn highlights the disjointed nature of the frankentext that is *WHWYCYE*. Whilst reading the story with a class, Mr Faulks observed that I asked students to 'make convincing arguments about which words to choose' (interview, 9th February 2021). However, at the end of the story, student-readers are asked to reflect upon what they had learned about an individual character's experience of World War One. These two activities are not clearly connected, and as I moved on to the creation of subsequent works of IF, I attempted to overcome these issues by better integrating learning with reading/playing.

6.6 *A Great Gatsby* (AGG)

All the World War One writing came to an end, but my research journey wasn't over. Working with IF had taught me a great deal, and I wanted to take this forward, to continue developing my writing practice in response to my learning. I was now less excited by the process of writing with Twine and more excited by the pedagogical purpose to which IF could be put.

When I use the phrase 'pedagogical purpose', I mean a more tangible and specific purpose; observing my lessons, my colleagues had asked me, 'what's the aim?' I wanted

to produce something that teachers could align with a lesson aim. While I enjoy the idea of an aim that is open, experiential and social, I recognise that some teachers are less comfortable with this idea. I wanted to create something that could bring some of IF's social excitement and pleasure-giving capacities into the classroom, but in a more widely palatable fashion.

I had started with a hunch, and now I was keen to home in on something more specific. What curricular learning aims could IF be used to achieve? My experiences had shown me that writing and reading IF could be pleasurable for me and my students, but I hadn't wholly established what skills or knowledge IF could be used to develop. I had ideas though...

At the time, I was also doing more reading into language, grammar, stylistics and Textual Intervention. I was re-discovering my inner grammar-geek, the geek who enjoyed wrestling with grammatical concepts and solving linguistic puzzles. I particularly liked the way that Textual Intervention engaged me on this grammatical level as well as on a playful, creative level. For example, when writing AGG, I enjoyed identifying and experimenting with linguistic alternatives to the opening line of Fitzgerald's celebrated novel. It felt fun, and a touch transgressive.

Writing AGG and the other Gatsby-based resources got me thinking about language and grammar in terms of choice. As I wrote, I became excited to hear how my students would respond, the extent to which they would successfully call upon their existing metalinguistic knowledge and the critical-creative responses they would form. It wasn't the writing of these works of IF that excited me quite so much as it was the prospect of using the texts in the classroom, with my students.

Contemplating which sentence from the novella with which I should choose to work, and then which element of the language to focus my students' attention upon via the creation of links and choices, was interesting. And as, with each layer of choice that I added to the text, I saw it blossom and spread across the story map, the potential range of responses my students could co-construct became exciting. Writing so many similar passages was not as creatively satisfying as writing The Doodle had been, but it was exciting in the sense that I became aware of all the different directions in which my students could take a single sentence.

It became more about them, and slightly less about me.

The wonders of language choice came to the fore—the plurality of potential forms of expression became very visible to me.

I ended up using AGG with an English Literature class, as part of an introductory lesson, and I was pleased to introduce a little creativity into the A level English Literature experience. These young readers were otherwise being given no opportunities to write creatively, for such writing was a distraction from the more essential critical work the exam specification required of them.

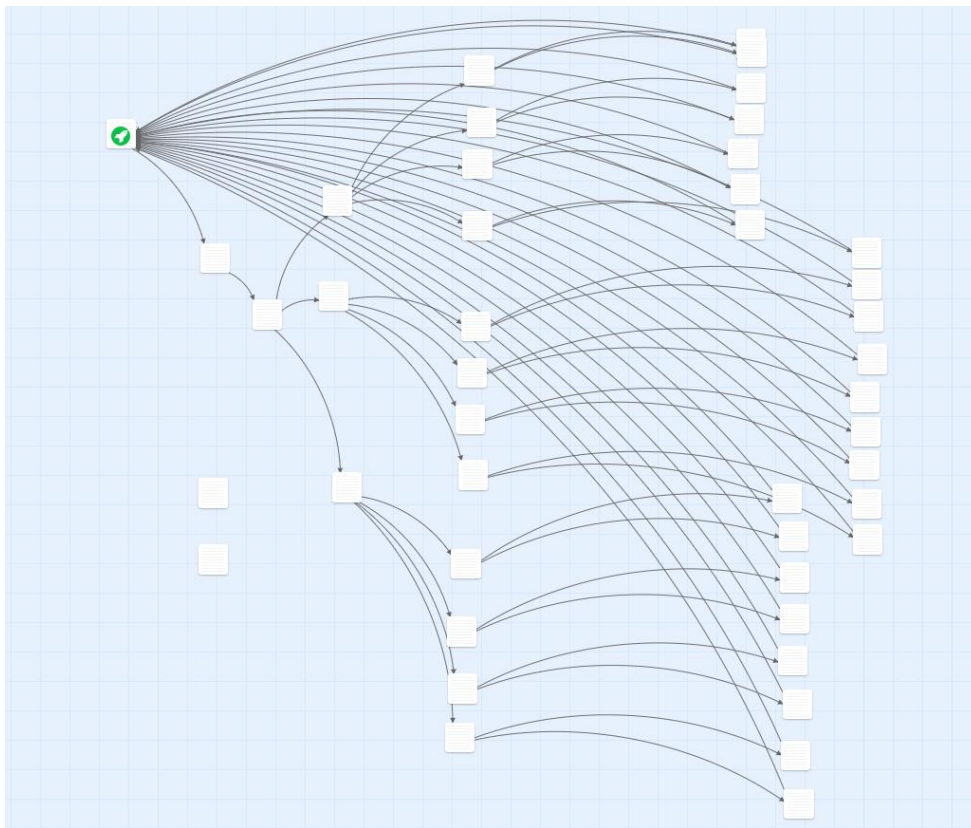
It was good to open up an imaginative window in their lives.

During the spring and summer terms of the 2020-2021 academic year, having learned a good deal about writing IF for the classroom, I began creating works of IF that could be used in a year 12 A-Level classroom with sixteen-to-seventeen-year-old students. At CentreTown Academy, students on the A Level English Literature course studied *The Great Gatsby* in the summer term of year 12 with a view to later producing a coursework essay in which they compare Fitzgerald's novel with another text of their choosing. AGG is a work of PIF that I produced for use in this context; it is a work which, as I shall here explore, aims to help students engage with Fitzgerald's language in critical-creative fashion.

6.6.1 Structure

As can be seen in Figure 16, AGG's story map is markedly different from that of *The Doodle* and *WHWYCYE*. In comparison to *The Doodle*, it is more organised, with six identifiable levels, arranged visually from left to right. Like *WHWYCYE*, AGG is a looping text, inviting reader/players to start again once they reach the final passage. However, it features no bottlenecks and offers readers a total of 24 different end points, rather than one.

Figure 16: The Story Map for A Great Gatsby



The multitude of possible final passages in *AGG* are a reflection of the number of different choice options that are available to reader/players. This also reflects my recognition of choice as a valuable asset in the classroom. As one colleague (Mr Byatt) phrased it to me, reflecting on an IF-based lesson he had observed, “story + choice = engagement” (interview, 4th March 2021). Moreover, the prevalence of choice that my story map foregrounds mirrors the way that the concept of choice grew more central to my conceptualisation of expertise in the subject of English. In my interview with Mr Harris after he had observed one of my remote lessons, he remarked that an English teacher must ‘get students to understand that every word is a choice’ and to recognise that ‘the writer is constantly choosing these things’ (interview, 8th February 2021). Writing with Twine, using IF in the classroom and then reflecting upon the experience drew my attention to this fact. Moreover, in connecting language expertise with choice I am not alone: Halliday asserts that a ‘language is a resource for making meaning, and meaning resides in systemic patterns of choice’ (2004, p.23), going on to state

that when we analyse a text, 'we show what meaningful choices have been made, each one seen in the context of what might have been meant but was not' (p.24). Drawing upon Halliday, Myhill too foregrounds the value of a 'grammar as choice pedagogy' (2021, p.272).

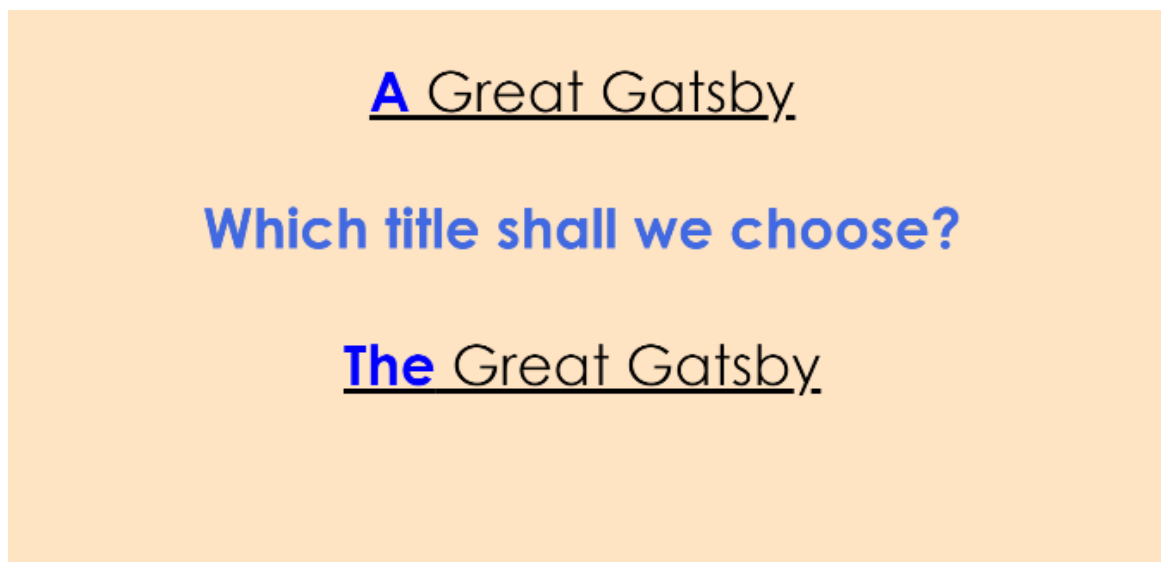
6.6.2 An Integrated Approach to Playing and Learning

The title passage from AGG contains more than just a single title. Instead, as can be seen in Figure 17, it contains a choice of titles and a hyperlinked question: 'Which title shall we choose?' Clicking on this question reveals a short, italicized paragraph that reads as follows:

'I think we should choose 'A Great Gatsby' because I feel that using the indefinite article rather than the definite article creates an interesting contrast - is he unique and 'Great', or is he one of many?'

The existence of this short paragraph highlights again the way that I used online manuals and the Twine software to design passages; the paragraph is revealed to the reader because of the way in which I use the 'click-replace:' macro, a technique I learned through reference to Twine's Harlowe manual (Arnott, 2022).

Figure 17: The title passage from A Great Gatsby



By beginning *AGG* in this way, I sought to align my intended learning outcomes with the reading/playing activity. My aim was for students to be able to make and comment upon language choices, and the text that appears when the reader clicks on the hyperlinked question seeks to model this process, giving students an example of how to read/play *AGG* and how to make and comment upon a language choice. The tension that I felt to exist between my intended learning outcomes and my IF-design in *WHWYCYE* helped me to produce a more aligned and integrated work of Pedagogical Interactive Fiction, as did the feedback that I received from colleagues who watched lessons in which I used *WHWYCYE*. Ms Sands had asked two similar questions after watching me teach: 'Did you have an aim for the lesson?' (interview, 4th December 2020) and 'What was your learning objective?' (interview, 12th January 2021). This focus on aims, goals and objectives focused my attention on what the most appropriate learning goal might be for an IF-based reading activity, and also made me ask myself how I could make my IF resources more 'school-friendly' (interview, 12th January 2021). Another of the ways I sought to make *AGG* more 'school-friendly' was by making its relationship with a curricular text more explicit. Although I read *WHWYCYE* with a class of year seven students during one scheme of work that was based upon *War Horse* (Morpurgo, 2017) and another that was focused on First World War poetry, there was no explicit link between my work of IF and the texts that were on the curriculum, as I observed in my fieldnotes:

'The story doesn't feel explicitly relevant to the texts that the scheme is planned around. As a contextual intro, it could work but if you only use it briefly in this way. Is it worth it? I guess you could see it as a parallel strand of the scheme, but that would eat up lesson time quite a lot.'

(Fieldnote, 11th January 2021)

Contrastingly, *AGG* is explicitly linked to Fitzgerald's novella, *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald, 2000), a text that students at CentreTown Academy study as part of their A Level English course.

6.6.3 Textual Intervention

AGG, unlike *The Doodle* and *WHWYCYE*, is not a narrative in the traditional sense. Instead, as a work of PIF, it is more of a writing game; reader/players are invited to 'experiment' by reconsidering

the language choices that Fitzgerald made in the opening sentence of his novella, *The Great Gatsby*. As such, creating AGG, as well as reading/playing it, became a form of 'Textual Intervention' (Pope, 1995); both processes involve making and considering alterations to the original work. Pope writes:

'The best way to understand how a text works, I argue, is to change it: to play around with it, to intervene in it in some way (large or small), and then try to account for the exact effect of what you have done.'

(Pope, 1995, p. 1)

With this in mind, consider the passage that is visible in Figure 18, which asks reader/players to choose between two versions of the same sentence, one which mirrors a particular metaphorical verb phrase of Fitzgerald's ('turning over') and one which does not ('pondering'). I intervened by placing an alternative option alongside Fitzgerald's original. In turn, I ask my reader/players to intervene, to 'play around' with a text in a pre-structured way, in the hope that, when reading/playing as a group, they verbally 'account for the exact effect' of the choice that they make.

Figure 18: A language choice passage taken from A Great Gatsby

In her youngest and most vulnerable years her father gave her some advice that she's been **turning over in her mind** ever since.

In her youngest and most vulnerable years her father gave her some advice that she's been **pondering** ever since.

It must be noted that my decision to use 'Textual Intervention' as a method for the creation of (and engagement with) PIF also emerged from the cultural context of CentreTown Academy. Consider, for example, the following fieldnote:

‘As a result of the culture within which I practise, some of the IF-based lessons I have led so far have highlighted the issue of alignment - other teachers have made me ask myself how I can make the IF-based activity more relevant to the prescribed learning goals outlined in the curriculum I am asked to enact. In another setting this wouldn't be such a problem, but at my school I feel like it is.

It seems to me that using IF as a tool for conducting textual interventions could help me respond to the demands of the conflicting influences that I am experiencing.’

(Fieldnote, 17th March 2021)

This note highlights the role that CentreTown Academy has played in the development of my approach to writing PIF. CentreTown Academy's mechanistic, linear, outcomes-oriented approach to teaching shaped the feedback my colleagues provided and the design choices I made. I became increasingly focused on learning aims and questions of curricular alignment, and my positioning of IF as a vehicle for textual intervention and re-creative writing was one way in which I was able to respond.

AGG was, therefore, designed in response to the feedback I received and the reflective cycles of action and reflection I had conducted. For example, in an interview with two colleagues (Ms Winn and Ms Sands), after a lesson that featured *WHWYCYE*, I reflected upon my desire to design a text in which, encountering a passage, readers engage in ‘making choices as writers’ (interview, 12th January 2021). In the passage above, reader/players are asked to do just that. Moreover, my fieldnotes demonstrate other ways in which *AGG* was designed in response to the cycles of action and reflection I had undertaken:

‘I wrote *WHWYCYE* as a writer. Should I have approached it as an English teacher, with a more fixed objective in mind?

If I had approached the writing as a teacher, I might have done something different. For example, I could have taken a stylistician's approach and made links reflective of a specific type of choice (e.g. verb type or pre / post modifying phrase).

This would do the alignment work for me.

Also, I approached it as a tool for developing reading skills. Is it better suited for a writing-based lesson objective? Also, has my focus on IF and my writer's identity limited me? Should I instead have created a de-centred, choice rich version of a text on the curriculum, using the choice that IF offers to illuminate students' understanding of existing texts?'

(Fieldnote, 10th March 2021)

Here we see a shift in the way I chose to write PIF, approaching the process from a pedagogical, teacherly perspective first and foremost. My position on the 'teacher-writer, writer-teacher continuum' had altered (Cremin and Baker, 2010, p.20). Moreover, we see the influence of my reading in the field of stylistics. Like other stylistics-informed practitioners, I wanted my students to consider *how* a text operates, rather than learn *what* it does (Giovanelli, 2010); I hoped to enable them to perform "slow-motion," phrase-by-phrase analysis' of how a text can shape a reader's understanding (Tyson, 2006, p.175); I wanted my students to formulate personal responses that are 'conditioned with an understanding of how language works' (Cushing, 2018, p.273). In this way, I also hoped that AGG could support the development of metalinguistic understanding amongst my students (see Sections 3.4.3 and 9.1.4 for further exploration of the connections between IF and metalinguistic understanding).

My fieldnotes also draw attention to a shift in focus away from reading and towards writing. Instead of designing a work of PIF that could facilitate a collaborative reading activity, I wrote AGG with a view to helping students think like writers who make choices as they craft a text. In a fieldnote, taken after I finished drafting AGG, I expressed this idea:

'Using this resource that I have made as a springboard for re-creative writing and analytical commentary might enable me to use IF in a way that positions my students as agents as well as students of an existing curricular text.'

(Fieldnote, 17th March 2021)

As this remark indicates, over time I have become drawn to the notion that IF can be used as a 'springboard' for analysis, and (re-)creative forms of writing and reflection. This development is

reflected in the nature of the choices made available to my readers. In the above passage, for example, the choice does not allow readers to select what they want to 'focus' on, but rather requires them to 'grasp' or manipulate a sentence, choosing how it should be written (Ashwell, 2014).

6.6.4 Critical-Creative Calls to Action

Coming to the end of one iteration of AGG, reader/players encounter a call to action. For example, the passage below (Figure 19) invites readers to '[Change](#)', '[Comment](#)', '[Create](#)' or '[Restart](#)'. Clicking on each of the first three of these links reveals the following questions, respectively:

- What further changes might we want to make?
- How is the narrator presented in this sentence?
- Can you continue this narrative?

Figure 19: A final call-to-action passage taken from A Great Gatsby

In her youngest and most vulnerable years her father gave her some advice that she's been turning over in her mind ever since.

- [Change](#)
- [Comment](#)
- [Create](#)
- [Restart](#)

As I here invite reader/players to both analyse the ways in which the narrator is now represented and continue the narrative that the new sentence begins, we can say that the passage seeks to engender a somewhat 'critical-creative' response to the first sentence of *The Great Gatsby* (Pope, 2003). It is therefore unsurprising that my approach triggered some resistance from one colleague, for Pope observes that there is 'widespread resistance' to this sort of 'critical-creative activity' (Pope, 2003, p.107). Mr Byatt, who observed a lesson in which the class read AGG, made the following remark:

‘And I felt that when we went into the Interactive Fiction, it became, we became slightly too absorbed in these hypotheticals. I think this was most true when you then got them to write their own beginnings of the novel.’

(Interview, 29th June 2021)

The idea that students may have become ‘too absorbed’ in hypothetical versions of Fitzgerald’s novel is worthy of consideration; if students pay more attention to their own adaptations of Fitzgerald’s novel than they do to the original, there is a risk that they will learn misconceptions about Fitzgerald’s novel. However, my colleague’s comments also suggest that, in the Literature classroom at CentreTown Academy, there is not space for this form of critical-creative ‘play’ (Pope, 2003) because it is deemed to be of questionable use. From my perspective, the focus on an activity’s *use*, rather than the linguistic and creative *thought* that it engenders, is problematic, as it suggests a narrow definition of what it means to study English and an exclusive focus on the examination board’s assessment demands. It also relegates critical-creative play, positioning it as a less valuable form of educational activity. Contrastingly, like Bomford, I hold that ‘so-called “creative” tasks can be a very effective way of generating critical insight’ (Bomford, 2022).

You will also notice I use a green background in this passage from the end of *AGG*, just like I had done previously in the meta-passages and para-passages that I inserted into *WHWYCYE*. However, in *AGG*, the content contained in the green-backed passages is more closely connected to the other passages, for they ask students to engage in activities that are closely aligned with the activities involved in reading/playing the rest of the text. As students read/play *AGG*, they are encouraged to make and consider language choices, and when they reach this final call to action, they are asked to continue doing so, but more independently. To make further changes to the language of the sentence, to produce a commentary in response to the sentence or to write creatively, continuing the narrative that *AGG* begins – these are all forms of critical-creative practice that encourage readers to continue making and considering language choices. As such, the passage above is not a meta-passage or a para-passage. It does not ask students to think about *AGG*, nor does it provide

additional information that might sit alongside it. Instead, it is a call to action, inviting readers to continue the critical-creative play/work they have already begun.

Finally, it is worth noting that the passage in Figure 19 contains the entirety of the interactively constructed narrative that one particular reading of *AGG* can produce. This is dissimilar to *The Doodle* or *WHWYCYE*, works of IF in which the reader is never given access to the entirety of the narrative they have created. I mention this because not having access to the entirety of the constructed text could prevent student-readers from engaging with independent tasks that are designed to get students thinking about their response to the text they have read. For example, during an interview, Ms Morrisson remarked that having access to the entire text that you have read would 'make you feel less lost' (interview, 15th January 2021). Ms Ellis also stated that she 'would probably want them [students] to be able to see the whole text at some point in the lesson' (interview, 15th January 2021). I recognised the validity of these comments, and the above passage represents my attempt to adapt my IF-design process accordingly. Moreover, it also demonstrates the way that I considered the reading/playing of *AGG* in relation to other activities within the lesson, rather than as a standalone work of fiction.

6.7 Chapter Conclusions

6.7.1 My PIF-production Assemblage

Having explored the ways in which my approach to writing IF for the classroom developed over a period of time, I have uncovered a significant portion of a creative assemblage that developed in response to the introduction of IF and Twine into my practice. Table 8 attempts to present the elements of this assemblage in a comprehensible form. However, note that it does not portray the relations between said elements, and it is these relations which, from a post-humanist perspective, produce my evolving practice as a teacher and writer.

Inspired by Barnard's framework for conceptualising creativity (Barnard, 2019), I organise the elements of this assemblage into three broad categories: Writerly resources, Writerly Personas and Creative Projects. Within two of these categories, I also organise elements further. Writerly resources

are categorised either as ‘people’, ‘concepts’, ‘documents / texts’, ‘technological tools’, ‘contextual factors’ or ‘other’. Where writerly personas are concerned, three different personas are identified (a writer, a teacher and a researcher), with each persona being accompanied by a set of characteristics.

The significant scale of this assemblage is important; teachers carry an already heavy workload, and it might be unreasonable therefore to hope that all English teachers would have the time to draw upon such a range of writerly resources in order to develop their own approaches to writing PIF. However, the works that I have created and the questions and recommendations that I offer at the end of this chapter could help others to engage with the pedagogical affordances of IF (or comparably choice-based, non-linear resources) in a more time-efficient manner.

Table 8: A summary of the elements within my creative assemblage that have been uncovered in this chapter

Writerly resources	<p>People:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Target audience of year 11-12-year-old English students; - My partner, who introduced me to inspirational resources; - Critical friends, principally colleagues at CentreTown Academy; - Historical figures like Rosa Luxemburg and Erich Remarque; - A contrasting target audience of 16-17-year-old A Level English students.
	<p>Concepts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Genre of IF, with its typically non-linear form; - Action Research, as an iterative form of research model; - Bruner’s constructivist conceptualisation of the spiral curriculum; - The bottleneck and the loop as structural patterns within the IF genre; - The concept of thematic coherence; - The concept of meta-level engagement, including metalinguistic and metanarrative engagement; - The conventional use of the second person in IF texts; - The concept of alignment between gameplay and learning outcomes; - The notion of the integration of playing with learning; - Textual Intervention as a critical-creative method; - Choice as a concept that can be seen as central to the subject of English; - Stylistics, an approach to literary criticism that foregrounds linguistic choice; - CentreTown Academy’s mechanistic and linear conceptualisation of teaching; - The notion of the meta-passage and the para-passage.

	<p>Documents and Texts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing CentreTown Academy English curricula documentation; - The Unremembered resource pack; - The Twine Harlowe story format manual, and various online forums; - Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and an accompanying study guide. <p>Technological Tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Twine; - Hyperlinkage; - The Twine story map feature; - Twine macros and variables; - Twine's affordances as a tool for the creation of boundary-pushing, vignette-based texts. <p>Contextual factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Black Lives Matter movement and the impact of George Floyd's murder; - My awareness of exam pressure; - The length of lessons at CentreTown Academy; - The COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdowns. <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time (the research project took place over an extended period); - Feedback and comments from critical friends; - Cycles of Action and Reflection, forming part of an Action Research project.
<p>Writerly Personas</p>	<p>A writer...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - with minimal experience of working with Twine and IF; - whose initial aim was to write interactive, narrative fiction; - who aimed to involve readers personally in the narrative before them; - with an interest in language and grammar. <p>A Teacher...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - who hoped to engage students in meaning-making; - who sought to promote dialogue in the classroom; - working in a specific school; - who is encouraged to think in terms of learning aims and objectives; - who values metanarrative and metalinguistic expertise; - who aimed to involve students in the deliberate act of choice-making; - who aimed to hold student attention in the remote classroom; - who initially aimed to use IF to develop reading skills; - who later saw IF as a potentially effective means of developing (critical-creative) writing skills.

	<p>A Researcher...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - whose aim is to complete a high-quality PhD research project; - who adopted an Action Research methodology; - who engaged in cycles of action and reflection.
Creative projects and Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Previous experiences of writing works of fiction; - Previous experiences of designing multimodal presentation slides for lessons; - The experience of writing my first work of IF, <i>The Doodle</i>; - The experience of writing and developing subsequent works of IF (e.g. <i>WHWYCYE</i> and <i>Aboard the SS Mendi</i>); - The experience of planning and teaching lessons that incorporate works of IF; - Previous experience of composing loop-based electronic music.

6.7.2 Questions and Recommendations for writers of Pedagogical Interactive Fiction

To conclude this chapter, I offer a list of questions and recommendations that could help other teacher-writers design works of PIF that are effective in their own contexts. These questions and recommendations arise from my own experiences of writing hypertext works of IF with Twine for use in the classroom and are based upon the discussion of my practice that has here been presented.

Firstly, the following list of questions might be of use to teachers looking to create works of pedagogical interactive fiction:

1. For whom are you writing your work of PIF?
2. How will your work of PIF relate to your curriculum?
3. What is your source material, and why have you selected it?
4. If you are working in collaboration with others, who are your critical friends, and how have you selected them?
5. How regularly will you use this work of PIF, and what opportunities for iterative refinement might be available?
6. As an educator, what are your goals, and how will the content of your work reflect these goals?
 - a. How will students read/play the text, and what will this involve?
 - b. To what extent will the activities involved in reading/playing the text complement and align with the learning outcomes you would like your students to achieve?
 - c. What tensions might exist between your creative identity as a writer of PIF and your identity as an educator?

7. How will you structure your work so as to ensure it remains manageable?
8. What central themes will your nonlinear work of IF explore?
9. What sort of choices do you want to include?
 - a. Do you want to design meta-level choices which allow readers/players some control over structural elements of the work?
 - b. Do you want to design focus choices that oblige the reader/player to choose which option they want to explore and which one they do not?
 - c. Or do you want to design choices that allow your reader/players to 'grasp' or manipulate things within the text?
10. What genre (e.g., historical fiction) and form of work (e.g. hypertext IF) are you designing?
 - a. What conventions of said genres and forms will you respect?
 - b. What conventions will you flout?
11. What technical support do you have access to (e.g., forums and manuals)?
12. What technical skills do you need to master (e.g., the use of variables and macros)?
13. Do you have sufficient time available to you for drafting, redrafting and editing?
14. What contextual factors might help or hinder your progress as you attempt to create a novel form of resource?
15. How might your previous creative endeavours, such as your prior experience of creating learning resources, inform your process?

The following recommendations are more specific, for they are aimed at teachers hoping to design works of PIF for use in the English classroom:

1. Consider the centrality of choice within the subject of English, and design works of PIF that offer students opportunities to think about language choices.

For example, a work of PIF that obliges students to compare contrasting word choices or grammatical constructions could help them to recognise and consider the significance of such writerly decisions. Similarly, metanarrative choices about setting and character could help students to think about the processes of characterisation and the portrayal of setting.

2. Consider using Textual Intervention as a method for the drafting of PIF.

This may require you to adopt Textual intervention as a critical-creative pedagogical method, one which involves inviting students to adapt and play with existing texts before accounting for the effects they have thus created.

3. Recognise and embrace the blurred boundary that exists between reading and writing, particularly where IF is concerned.

IF asks readers to read and to choose. In so doing, it blurs the line between critical and creative forms of textual engagement. Therefore, it might just as well lend itself to writing instruction as it does to collaborative reading activities.

7 Disruptions and Challenges

In this chapter and the next, I draw upon data gathered during phases 1 and 2 of this study (see Sections 4.6.1 and 4.6.3, respectively), as well as the thematic analysis that I have conducted, to respond to the following question: How can introducing works of IF into the secondary school English classroom affect the quality of my teaching practice? I respond to this question by examining the pedagogical affordances of IF, drawing upon the following data sources to support, explain and exemplify my living theories: Written feedback from colleagues and critical friends; interviews with colleagues and critical friends; fieldnotes; audio-recordings of lessons; and collected samples of students' written work. The subheadings used in this chapter and the next derive from my thematic analysis of this data.

In this chapter, I firstly explore the ways in which the introduction of IF disrupted CentreTown Academy's pedagogical models. Secondly, I identify the challenges that incorporating IF into my teaching practice engendered. I conclude the chapter by highlighting the significance of my findings and the tensions that my research draws to the fore.

7.1 A Disruptive Intervention

Action research is disruptive, for it is used to engender changes in practice. Such changes can be countercultural. To conduct my action research, I disrupted my practice by creating works of IF and using them in a number of my English lessons. I hoped that using IF in my planning and teaching would help me to facilitate a greater degree of reciprocity in my lessons. Through inviting students to influence a lesson's trajectory by making and explaining choices, I hoped to teach lessons that were contingent upon the active participation of students, and which, consequently, were less predictably linear. Given that dialogue, literary sociability and the exchange of ideas are central to my understanding of English as a subject, I also hoped that my work with IF would help me to teach in a more subject-appropriate manner.

7.1.1 The Learning Flow

Using IF in this way was a disruptive endeavour, for it challenged what Hall et al. might refer to as CentreTown Academy's 'default pedagogy' (2012, p.7). Writing over a decade ago, Hall et al. suggested that lessons in English schools typically feature periods of 'direct instruction' followed by 'individual or small group practice' (p. 12). Moreover, they assert that the default lesson is planned around a 'curriculum objective' and that 'exercises and tests' are designed to test the extent to which these objectives have been met (p. 12). Similarly, at CentreTown Academy, direct instruction is very much in favour. Prescriptive guidance given to teachers encourages backwards planning from a fixed lesson objective and stresses the importance of teacher explanations. The guidance draws upon the work of Coe et al., who state that if teachers want students 'to learn new ideas, knowledge or methods, they need to teach them directly' (2014, p.23). The guidance also references the work of Kirschner et al., who advocate direct instructional guidance, a teaching practice that involves 'providing information that fully explains the concepts and procedures that students are required to learn' (2010, p.75). Drawing upon such research, CentreTown Academy staff are encouraged to plan and deliver lessons in which they deliver explanations before later directing students to engage in 'independent practice' (Rosenshine, 2012, p.18). The work that students do independently should demonstrate the extent to which they have met the prescribed lesson objective, and the lesson as a whole should help students progress towards independently meeting that aim. This pedagogical approach and accompanying lesson structure is referred to as the CentreTown Academy 'learning flow'. The use of PowerPoint presentation slides at CentreTown Academy entrenches this linear, teacher-led and objective-driven approach to planning and teaching by encouraging teachers to visualise their lessons in relation to a vertically arranged set (or line) of presentation slides. CentreTown Academy's default pedagogy therefore foregrounds students' progress towards future achievement (objectives that the class are going to meet) more than it does their present tense experience (what the class are actually doing and feeling during the lesson itself) (Hall et al., 2012). In the subject of English, the learning flow is problematic, for if knowledge is made 'by all the people in the classroom together' (Eagleton, 2020, p.12), then it is not possible for a teacher to fully

explain the 'concepts and procedures that students are required to learn' (Kirschner et al., 2010, p.75). For this reason, English teachers at CentreTown Academy deploy and adapt the learning flow in various ways and to differing degrees. However, the influence of the learning flow and the research that is used to support teacher development at the school significantly influences the way that English teachers are expected to practise, reducing the space for dialogue and literary sociability that is available during lessons.

7.1.2 Disrupting the Learning Flow

Incorporating IF into my lessons disrupted the learning flow for two principle reasons. Firstly, unlike PowerPoint presentations, works of IF are non-linear. As a result, they require an approach to planning and teaching that is open to a wider variety of potential outcomes and lesson trajectories. Secondly, I did not initially conduct and develop IF-based interventions in order to help students master any prescribed academic 'ideas, knowledge or methods' (Coe et al., 2014, p.23). Looking back, I recognise that my initial aims were more explorative and socially motivated. For example, before reading *What Happens When You Close Your Eyes (WHWYCYE)* (Holdstock, 2021c) with a class of year seven students, I interviewed and sought feedback from critical friends who I had asked to read the story. Introducing it to them, I explained what I felt the affordances of this work of IF might be. I felt that it might encourage students to make 'predictions', to 'reflect upon the meanings of different words and phrases', to 'attend more closely to the choices they make as readers and as writers' and to engage in 'text-related classroom talk' (email to critical friends, 4th November 2020). Writing this, I was beginning to explore where IF might take me. My reference to 'valuable forms of text-related classroom talk' highlights that I was interested in exploring the ways that IF could change the quality of communication in lessons. Similarly, my reference to IF's potential ability to help students make 'their own predictions and choices about meaning' is indicative of a subject-appropriate and dialogic desire to invite more of my students' voices and opinions into my lessons. In the same message, I mentioned a desire to help students gain a 'richer understanding of WW1'; this too suggests an inclusive approach, for the text itself features diverse narratives relating to the

experiences of individuals whose stories would otherwise not have been mentioned in any lessons relating to the literature of the First World War.

7.1.3 Dialogic Space

In subsequent interviews with other critical friends, the focus on the social and talk-based affordances of IF were further emphasised, and my relationship with lesson aims was considered. For example, while reading through *WHWYCYE* with one critical friend, I remarked that I was viewing IF as ‘a way of scaffolding or structuring classroom talk’ and ‘a tool for stimulating good quality classroom talk’ (25th November 2020). Arguably, my interest in classroom talk and the inclusion of diverse voices reflects my emergent interest in what Wegerif describes as ‘dialogic space’ (Wegerif, 2013) – ‘a space of new possibilities for learning that opens up in the surface of things when there is a tension between different perspectives’ (Wegerif, 2024, p.239). Like Wegerif has done, I consider the affordances of technology (in my case, IF), examining the extent to which it may facilitate and expand dialogic space in my lessons (Wegerif and Major, 2019). Moreover, my interest in talk is indicative of a particular approach to knowledge. For me, in the context of English literature, ‘knowledge is never something that a teacher simply transmits to students’, but rather, it ‘emerges through social exchanges’ (Mello et al., 2019, p.185). Such an approach to knowledge can be understood as a commitment to ‘literary sociability’ (Mello et al., 2019, p.184; Kirkpatrick and Dixon, 2012) – the coming together of individuals to share and develop interpretations of a literary work. It also aligns with the material-dialogic, post-humanist stance I have come to adopt, a stance which stresses that knowing occurs in material-dialogic intra-actions, rather than in the mind of any one individual.

Exploring how IF could be used to develop dialogic space was disruptive, triggering tensions. This is unsurprising, for as Bouton et al. observe, the opening of dialogic space can pose a number of challenges for teachers, including the creation of ‘tension between curricular coverage and dialogue’s unpredictability’ and the ‘threat of losing control’ (Bouton et al., 2024, p.182). In an environment in which teachers feel pressure to cover a prescribed body of content in a specific time

period, the inherent unpredictability of dialogue can be problematic, for it increases the likelihood of valuable time being spent on non-curricular content. Moreover, to support dialogic space, teachers must step away from an 'authoritative role' and join the discussion 'as a fallible participant' (p.184), a move which requires teachers to reconsider their default identity positioning within the classroom.

7.1.4 Aims and Objectives

In interviews with colleagues who had observed lessons in which I used *WHWYCYE*, these tensions came to the fore. For example, after the very first lesson, Ms Sands remarked that my approach 'just completely ripped up the learning flow that we have at this school' (interview, 4th December 2020). Moreover, in interviews, I was repeatedly asked questions about my lesson aims, such as 'Did you have an aim for the lesson?' (4th December 2020), 'What was your learning objective?' (12th January 2021), 'What exactly are we trying to get out of this?' (15th January 2021), and 'What was the objective? Like what was the point of the lesson?' (9th February 2021). These questions suggest that my colleagues were preoccupied by the alignment of lessons with prescribed objectives.

Reflecting upon my approach to aims and objectives during interviews, I made a variety of remarks that rendered my disruptive resistance to prescribed objectives evident:

- 'There wasn't a specific thing I wanted them all to know' (7th January 2021).
- 'I intentionally resisted having a clear aim or rationale because I wanted to be led by student choice and student interpretation' (15th January 2021).
- 'A part of me recognises that there is a value to, not every single lesson having like a really concrete, defined destination point' (9th February 2021).
- 'I'm definitely reluctant to, kind of, having a very very fixed objective' (8th February 2021).

The questions posed by my colleagues highlight their default, objective-driven approach to lesson planning and their corresponding desire to prescribe the trajectory of lessons. My disruptive resistance to this default approach is evident in the above comments. Moreover, my expressed desire to 'be led by student choice and student interpretation' is suggestive of a desire to create and widen the dialogic space that emerges in my lessons by inviting students to express their ideas. As such, my use of IF in the classroom can be understood as an attempt to alter the quality of dialogic

space within my lessons, an attempt that, in taking an approach to lessons that was consequently more open to an unpredictable array of outcomes, challenged CentreTown Academy's default learning flow.

Over time, I became more able to articulate the value that I placed upon unpredictability in lessons. Reflecting upon a conversation I had had with two colleagues I made the following note:

'I spoke of my desire to be surprised, to witness a student form an idea or create a piece of work that I did not and could not have foreseen. A school that makes this sort of event unlikely is not a school I want to work in. I want the potential for surprise and joy to be ever-present, otherwise I get demoralised.'

(Fieldnote, 19th January 2022)

The value I place upon surprise, unpredictability and the contributions of students is indicative of my resistance to CentreTown Academy's default pedagogy, an approach that is direct, linear and predictable. From Marshall's perspective, and in the context of English, my resistance might be deemed appropriate. English is a subject within which 'it may be better to understand progression as heading towards a horizon rather than a clearly defined goal' (Marshall, 2004, p.101). Myhill here argues that studying English is not a linear, goal-oriented endeavour. My resistance to direct, linear and predictable lessons also reflects a commitment to teaching as a social practice. In English lessons where student contributions play a more central role, the subject of English itself is 'continually remade in the classroom, and differently in different classrooms' (Yandell, 2023, p.89). Such an approach to English is at odds with systems that value uniformity of practice and default pedagogies.

7.1.5 Serving Two Masters

The disruptive nature of my IF-based intervention gave rise to further tensions. For example, after reading an article by Lucinda McKnight (2021) in which she, referencing Terry Locke, described writing teachers who are 'serving two masters' (Locke, 2015, p.208), I made the following note:

‘On the one hand I want to allow students’ funds of knowledge to enter the room and allow the meaning of a text to be negotiated in a truly unpredictable way.

On the other hand, I want to be seen as effective in the eyes of the school. This involves curricular alignment, deliberate practice and a focus on prescribed knowledge.’

(Fieldnote, 16th February 2021)

As this note suggests, my research into IF shed light upon the conflict between my commitment to English as a social subject, and CentreTown Academy’s insistence upon direct instruction and prescribed knowledge. The note also highlights the effects of surveillance upon my practice as a teacher, for it demonstrates the way that ‘the eyes of the school’ influenced my thinking (Page, 2017). This tension was sustained: In a later fieldnote, in which I reflected upon the usage of shared lesson resources and PowerPoint slides, I commented on the inhumanity that accompanies uniformity:

‘If you have to follow a pre-planned sequence of slides and activities, there is less space for your own thinking and input. If we all do the same thing, the school becomes mechanical, automatic, inhumane. We are here to interact not deliver.’

(Fieldnote, 9th September 2022)

My commitment to human interactions is reflective of a disruptive commitment to classrooms in which ‘students are taken seriously as human beings’ (Yandell, 2020b, p.12). Such classrooms exist in contrast to neoliberal classrooms in which ‘systems and processes operate to deny difference, individuality, [and] agency’ (p. 9).

Other colleagues recognised this contrast. Two members of the senior leadership team who I interviewed after they observed lessons in which I had used *WHWYCYE* made comments that suggest such an awareness. One asked ‘Do you want feedback as though it was a normal lesson, or do you want feedback, like specifically about the interactive, um, reading?’ (interview with Mr Faulks, 9th February 2021). The other said ‘if I was doing this, you know, in the context of QA for the school, I would be asking, like, what is the intention of the lesson?’ (interview with Mr Harris, 8th February 2021). These two remarks are telling. The first one – a question – references a ‘normal

lesson', indicating an awareness that my research into IF-based approaches to teaching was somewhat disruptive of such norms. The second, which references the school's use of lesson observations as a means of quality assuring teaching, uses the conjunction 'if' to indicate that my research into IF sits somehow apart from other, more typical, lessons. Both remarks suggest a degree of contrast between my teaching, and the default pedagogies that teachers are expected to enact. However, the remarks also highlight how participating in research might change the way that teachers think about lessons.

The contrast between my approach to teaching and that of the school was also noted by students. In a focus group I conducted with students two academic years after they had read *WHWYCYE*, one student – Amir – commented on the affordances of IF:

'When you add the element of being able to make your own choices, it makes it feel even more like an experience, 'cos you're sort of, um, doing what you want and seeing what you want, rather than just, um, having, like, a certain topic shoved in your face and certain questions shoved in your face that you might not, like, want to learn about.'

(Focus group, 28th March 2023)

Amir's use of the phrase 'shoved in your face' suggests a symbolic violence enacted by CentreTown Academy's default pedagogy. As Freire writes, any 'situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence', and 'to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects' (Freire, 1996, p.66). Amir seems aware of this violence. His comment also highlights the fact that IF allowed students to influence the trajectory of lessons in a way that is at odds with the school's default learning flow.

7.1.6 Remote Teaching

The tension between my emerging dialogic approach to pedagogy and CentreTown Academy's learning flow was arguably intensified by the Covid-19 lockdowns and the initiation of remote teaching. In his analysis of one lesson taken from the Oak National Academy website, Yandell observes that, during lockdown, some English lessons became increasingly monologic due to the

way that they were delivered, narrowing the range of voices and perspectives that were included down to one – that of the teacher. In such lessons, the ‘monologic voice of the teacher, the voice of direct instruction, is the only voice we hear’ (2020a, p.266). My own data partially supports this claim. Consider, for example, the following transcript of part of an interview I conducted with Mr. Harris, who had observed one my IF-based lessons:

Mr Harris: [...] ‘That that kind of Spielman-type, knowledge-rich curriculum. Um, I’ve probably gone more extremely in that direction, where my lessons are characterised in two ways. One is me lecturing and info-dumping, and ess- essentially saying ‘take notes’ and doing lots of um, er, extensive assessment in the chat [...]. And then, um, other lessons are me going ‘here’s a document’ – that is basically an empty page – “write something”, er, and, and being quite open in responses, and then giving more individual feedback on what’s written, er, and, and not much in between! So, I think I’ve been driven to extremes.’

(8th February 2021)

In this interview, my colleague and I wrestled with the challenges of teaching during lockdown. During the interview, he suggested that, unlike other teachers he had observed, I was attempting to make talk a central part of my lessons. Contrastingly, as the above transcript suggests, he had been driven to extremes, planning lessons that either involved ‘lecturing’ or independent written work. Mr Harris’ references to other staff members suggest that he may not have been alone in adopting such an approach, an approach which placed little emphasis on talk and in which the teacher’s voice played a central role. It suggests that, at a time when students were spending a great deal of time isolated from one another, teachers’ reliance on direct instruction and remote iterations of CentreTown Academy’s default pedagogy did little to provide them with opportunities for verbal interaction with one another or with their teachers. The more social aims that I took into my work with IF therefore drew attention to, and partially disrupted, the way that CentreTown Academy’s default pedagogy manifested itself during lockdown. That being said, it must also be noted that the comparative work being done during this interview indicates that CentreTown academy was an institution in which teachers could discuss, compare and explore pedagogical approaches. Whilst students may have

had limited opportunities to converse during lockdown lessons, my research enabled my colleagues and I to explore and compare our practice.

7.1.7 Knowledge

Mr Harris' reference to a 'knowledge-rich curriculum' is also telling, for it suggests a commitment to prespecified forms of knowledge; in a knowledge-rich curriculum, students 'amass a body of specific declarative and procedural knowledge' in a manner that is 'not ad hoc but planned' (Sherrington, 2018). Mr Harris' reference thus further highlights the disruptive and countercultural nature of my research; in adopting a more unpredictable and explorative, IF-based approach to teaching, I sought to frame knowledge as something that emerges through dialogue and collaboration. Mr Faulks found this approach problematic, saying that 'if you have a, a canon of knowledge that you need the students to know, then the options and the different branches... Does that mean that some students don't get the requisite knowledge they need?' (interview, 9th February 2021). His reference to requisite knowledge reflects the school's emphasis upon the direct instruction of prescribed, propositional knowledge, as opposed to a commitment to socially emergent and entangled forms of knowing that many would consider appropriate within the context of English as a subject.

7.1.8 Curricular and Pedagogical Alignment

However, I must note that CentreTown Academy's default pedagogy influenced my relationship with IF. In a fieldnote taken on 11th January 2021, I made the following comment:

'Note also the problem of curriculum alignment - the story doesn't feel explicitly relevant to the texts that the scheme is planned around. As a contextual intro, it could work [,] but if you only use it briefly in this way. Is it worth it? I guess you could see it as a parallel strand of the scheme, but that would eat up lesson time quite a lot.'

This note suggests that my usage of IF initiated a tension between the pressures of 'curricular coverage' and the unpredictability of IF and the classroom discussions it initiates (Bouton et al., 2024, p.182). This tension gave rise to what I began referring to as a 'frankentext' (fieldnotes, 10th January 2021), for I eventually added para-passages to *WHWYCYE* that provided some explicit

information to readers about the individuals whose lives and work had inspired the narrative vignettes contained within the story. In addition, I added links to online quizzes that tested students on their memory of this historical information. In so doing, I sought to create a resource that could function as a relevant 'contextual intro' to the First World War. I hold that this adaptation of *WHWYCYE* rendered it a 'site of struggle' between my teacherly and writerly selves (Cremin and Baker, 2010, p.8); Cremin and Baker have argued that the writing classroom can become a site of struggle between the teacherly and writerly intentions of a teacher-writer or writer-teacher, and I here argue that a work of IF itself can become a similar site of tension, a tension that I have also explored in Section 6.5.3. My teacherly desire to align my practice more closely with the school's curriculum was at odds with my initial writerly intention of producing a work of historical fiction that I could read and discuss with my students.

The influence of CentreTown Academy's default pedagogy was also evident in a lesson that featured a work of IF entitled *Aboard the SS Mendi* (Holdstock, 2021a), a text which is an edited fragment of *WHWYCE*. Using a fragment of the original text enabled me to conduct a lesson that felt, in the words of Ms Ellis, who observed the lesson, more akin to CentreTown Academy's 'standardised lesson format' (interview 26th February 2021). My objective was more clearly defined; I wanted students to form arguments, incorporating word-level analysis, and my colleague noted that, during the lesson, students 'knew a lot more what you [I] wanted of them'. This felt somewhat positive. However, in the interview, I expressed concerns. We discussed student comments that might be deemed 'irrelevant', and I worried that I had been 'shutting down the space for that irrelevancy'. My colleague then remarked that, '[i]t boils down to what your overall aim is, because if you, if you want a space where they're, kind of, really engaged and you're encouraging them to speak, there probably does need to be time for, kind of, what we're deeming irrelevant chat.' In this lesson, the tighter focus on a specific lesson objective aligned the lesson more closely with the CentreTown learning flow, but in the process, it rendered certain student comments 'irrelevant', constricting the dialogic space available. My colleague's comments therefore highlight the constrictive influence of focused lesson aims upon dialogic learning. However, their comments also highlight the fact that CentreTown

Academy was a school in which explorative conversations regarding the purpose of English teaching were sustained.

7.1.9 Disruptive Choice

Overall, IF disrupted, but did not entirely escape, the influence of CentreTown Academy's default pedagogy, and to conclude this section, I shall consider the qualities of IF that rendered it disruptive. Specifically, I shall focus on *choice*, for, as one of my colleague's remarked, 'there's something massive in choice, in majoring on choice' (interview with Mr Byatt, 29th June 2021).

Choice is a central feature of non-linear, hypertext works of IF. Moreover, it is choice that renders IF such a pedagogically disruptive resource, as the choices contained within works of IF have a variety of noteworthy affordances. Consider, for example, this fieldnote:

'What is it about IF that can be helpful for creating a dialogic climate with students not used to this form of interaction? As I've already explored, it offers a multiple-choice problem that is:

- Constrained
- consequential,
- contestable.

However, it also provides:

- concrete or specific things to talk about. It is not an abstract problem.
- a common ground that participants share - no matter what their background, they have a shared experience which they can refer to.
- an authentic problem that is not open to an endless number of solutions. There is a difference between open and authentic! An open question does not always sustain momentum because there is no milestone or end point that one can observe or experience. Therefore, they can be less satisfying to discuss!
- unpredictable; an opportunity for teachers to relinquish control. Teachers can be the biggest obstacle to engineering dialogic spells, I think. IF introduces that element of unpredictability.'

(Fieldnotes, 25th May 2021)

In this fieldnote, I make a connection between IF and a 'dialogic climate', highlighting my conceptualisation of IF as a digital resource that offers 'affordances for dialogue' (Major and Warwick, 2019, p.394). As Major and Warwick write, quoting from Cook et al. (2019), a 'material-dialogic perspective does not view digital technology as artificially separate from the activities of the teacher and the learners; rather, it envisages a "voice" for the technology within intra-actions' (p.401). In considering the affordances of IF, I consider the ways in which its voice can inform the dialogic quality of lessons.

The choices in the works of IF that I have developed are 'constrained' in the sense that each choice offers students a small number of links to choose from as they read. I have found this to be somewhat advantageous, because, as Schwartz writes, 'there is a cost to having an overload of choice' (2009, p.3). Considering the behaviour of consumers, Schwartz writes that a 'large array of options may discourage consumers because it forces an increase in the effort that goes into making a decision. So consumers decide not to decide' (p.20). Consequently, I suggest that a constrained choice in a work of IF can motivate students to state preferences and to participate actively in the reading process by making choices. Moreover, in an era in which AI threatens the decision-making capabilities of learners (Ahmad et al., 2023), IF is arguably a valuable resource that can facilitate decision-making through the use of constrained choice.

Choices in IF can be 'consequential' in the sense that they affect what will come next. As such, student participation in choice-making allows them some influence over the trajectory of the lesson, and it is this influence that makes IF disruptive to CentreTown Academy's default learning flow. As Turner and Rowe write, it can be 'hard to find schools where participation in decision-making is everyday practice' (Rowe and Turner, 2020), and I suggest that IF can enable teaching that is more participatory than default pedagogies. In one focus group with a group of girls who had read and discussed *Gretel, Redesigned* with me, a student noted that 'everyone was involved in explaining their different reasons for choosing different sentences and words' (28th March 2023). In another focus group, a student who had read *WHWYCYE* and *Aboard the SS Mendi* in my English lessons

commented that 'most of the time it's just us answering questions and like analysing texts, instead of us having the freedom for what we want to see in the future' (28th March 2023). Another remarked that 'we had our own say in it' and that 'really, when a teacher chooses all the tasks for you, it really gets, um, boring. But also, it just, it limits our own thinking ability' (28th March 2023). These remarks suggest that students noted the novel and participatory nature of the IF-reading/playing experience and the ways in which it contrasted with lesson activities to which they were more accustomed. Similarly, in interviews and a focus group with colleagues, teachers remarked on the 'sense of agency' (focus group, 30th November 2023) that IF can offer students and the way that it can be 'empowering' for them (interview, 1st December 2020). The constrained and consequential nature of the IF choices can also, I have found, provide classroom talk with a particular and helpful form of 'forward momentum' (Reznitskaya and Wilkinson, 2017, p.9); in discussing and making choices, we are constantly thinking about how the narrative will build and progress.

Perhaps most importantly, choices in works of IF can be framed as 'contestable' and authentic questions. Although they take the form of constrained choices, there is not necessarily a correct response, and the reasons individuals might offer in support of their decisions cannot always be prescribed. There are a potentially infinite number of personal reasons for making a specific choice. Such choices are contestable because they 'invite multiple interpretations' and elicit 'reasoning' (Reznitskaya and Wilkinson, 2017, p.59). They are authentic in the sense that they do not have prespecified correct answers (Nystrand and Gamoran, 1991). Contrastingly, inauthentic (or test) questions do have prespecified answers. Therefore, authentic questions, in contrast to test questions, can evoke 'substantive engagement' (Reznitskaya and Wilkinson, 2017, p.261) because they encourage students to think about the question and the text rather than the answer that the teacher is already thinking of.

In bringing authentic, contestable problems into the classroom, IF becomes disruptive, for CentreTown's default pedagogy is characterised by a higher degree of pre-specification and, consequently, inauthentic, monologic questioning. For example, in my interview with Mr Harris, he

said that 'one of our problems is that, at that stage, we've kind of taught them to sing song to such a specific degree that [...] too many of our students are incapable of [...] independent interpretation because they feel constrained by being told right and wrong all the time' (interview, 8th February 2021). This comment highlights the monologic and inauthentic forms of talk and questioning that are problematically common in CentreTown Academy English lessons. Similarly, Ms Ellis, having watched a different lesson, suggested that my use of IF 'allows them a voice, rather than thinking that we're wanting a certain answer all the time' (interview, 29th June 2021). Again, her comment suggests that teachers often end up asking questions that have specific and prescribed answers. I therefore hold that IF's disruptive affordances derive from its foregrounding of choice. Choices in works of IF can help the English classroom become a space where students' views are valued, and student responses are not merely 'judged as right or wrong depending on whether or not they guessed what was in the teacher's mind' (Mercer and Howe, 2012, p.14).

7.2 The Challenges of Working with IF

Introducing and developing an IF-based intervention posed challenges. Stepping away from the default learning flow required me to respond to situations which might otherwise not have emerged. In this section, I shall describe some of the challenges that my disruptive intervention posed and explore the manner in which I theorised and responded to them.

It is unsurprising that IF, when used in educational contexts, produces challenges. Evans highlights that 'hypertext fiction presents a number of challenges to readers and what they have come to associate with reading printed texts' (Evans and Po, 2007, p.58). Reading a work of IF can be an entirely different experience to the experience of reading a printed text (Kopas, 2015a). Furthermore, Landow argues that electronic hypertext 'challenges now conventional assumptions about teachers, learners, and the institutions they inhabit' (Landow, 2006, p.272). It does so by 'transferring some of their [the teachers'] power and authority to students' (p.275). In the context of my study, the

foregrounding of choice and the resulting influence of student input upon lesson trajectory reflects the connection that Landow makes between non-linear hypertexts and changes in power dynamics.

Using IF in the classroom can also pose practical problems. For example, almost 30 years ago, in his exploration of hypermedia as a learning resource, Wilhelm described the difficulties involved in booking computer rooms and responding to malfunctioning computers and computer programs (Wilhelm, 1995). Similar challenges can still arise today in technologically dependent lessons.

Using IF as a means of enabling classroom talk can also prove challenging. For example, dialogic forms of talk are dependent on reciprocity: when entering into dialogue, participants 'listen to each other, share ideas, ask questions and consider alternative viewpoints' while teachers 'ensure that they have ample opportunities to do so' (Alexander, 2020, p.131). Providing such opportunities can be difficult because it requires teachers to relinquish some control over what is discussed (Boyd and Sherry, 2024). I have found the question of how best to relinquish control whilst simultaneously enabling and encouraging students to listen and interact with one another to be a complex one.

7.2.1 Lesson Structure

Firstly, placing non-linearity and choice at the heart of my teaching practice raised questions about how lessons might best be structured and facilitated. Whereas CentreTown Academy's standardised learning flow requires teachers maintain control over the lesson's trajectory, the inclusion of choice in works of IF required me to reflect upon the best way to manage and facilitate the choice-making process. Initially, I asked students to vote for the link that, based on our discussion, they would like to select. For example, in the first lesson in which I read *WHWHCYE* with a class of students, I orchestrated a vote in the following way:

'You can either choose tastes or sights. Raise your hands if you choose tastes [Pause]. Raise your hands if you choose sights [Pause]. Ok I think sights has it, although Joana, Joana your argument was very convincing, so I'm very impressed with that.'

(Lesson, 4th December 2020)

Reflecting upon the way in which I orchestrated this vote, I noted that Joana had previously ‘made a great point about tastes, but I went with the popular vote instead. This felt like an error - I should have praised and credited her great response by being convinced and selecting tastes’ (fieldnotes, 4th December 2020). Similarly, Ms Sands, who observed the lesson, made the following comment:

‘Because I thought she made a much more convincing argument as well, and actually – although the rest of the class democratically voted for sights – like, I don’t know – which one trumps the other? What are you... What are you telling your class of value?’

(Interview, 4th December 2020)

This highlights the problematic nature of using votes when reading works of IF with a class. If a good or effortful argument or interpretation is voiced but ignored, then an opportunity is lost, for the teacher has not shown students that effort and high-quality argumentation can lead to success in the English classroom. As the construction of interpretive arguments in response to literary texts is central to the study of English, this is unfortunate. Similarly, while using a voting system is a way for teachers to relinquish control over the lesson’s trajectory when reading a work of IF, it does not necessarily help to produce dialogic forms of talk. Whilst relinquishing control or yielding the floor is an important step for dialogic teachers to take (Murphy et al., 2009; Boyd and Sherry, 2024), it must be accompanied by other strategies if it is to support the opening of dialogic space and the nurturing of students’ listening skills.

I responded by altering the way in which I facilitated choice-making in my lessons. The alteration I made arose from my interview with Ms Sands (4th December 2020), who asked whether I would ‘consider getting a high attaining pupil like that to [...] potentially make that decision on behalf of the class, based on their peers’ comments?’ In subsequent lessons, I did this, assigning to certain students the role of judge. Assigning roles to students is an approach that is said to support student discussion in the classroom (Voice 21, 2022), and the judge was a role that I introduced in order to help students structure and improve our IF-based discussions. Arguably, the judges took on the role of formative peer assessors, evaluating the arguments verbalised by their peers in order to make

decisions about next steps (Black and William, 2009). In a subsequent lesson, I explained this to the same class:

‘At the end of each passage, I’m going to ask a few people which link they think we should select, and we’re gonna have two judges today – Ted and Joana – and they’re gonna be judging whose argument we should believe, which link we should select based on what people say.’

(Lesson, 8th January 2021)

Similarly, in a later lesson with a group of A level students, I adopted the same approach, inviting a student – Peter – to ‘come to the front’ and ‘work as our judge’ (lesson, 6th July 2021). This ‘judge’ strategy was not without its problems. In a fieldnote after the year seven lesson in January 2021, I noted that ‘[p]upils were not great at listening to each other. I should have chosen a more trusted ally than Ted as a judge.’ However, in an interview after the lesson, Ms Morrison remarked that ‘the judges, I thought, were genuinely evaluative and were really listening and commenting and responding’ (interview, 15th January 2021). Considering this lesson, some evidence of the judges’ attentive listening can be found in Joana’s evaluative remarks:

‘I would say... I mean personally I would pick Pau-Paul and Frederic, but, er, from what people were saying, erm, it takes its toll is more efficient and more convincing because we get to know about the character’s background.’

(Lesson, 8th January 2021)

Here, Joana is attempting to base her judgment on the arguments that others have made, rather than her own response to the text. In an A Level lesson, when Paul worked as a judge, he too adopted a similar stance:

‘I’d go for floated at us, based on... I liked, um, Rebecca’s point, when she said that, ‘cos like the waiter isn’t in the sentence, that again, she’s like, they’re not even there, and it shows that kind of dehumanizes them.’

(Lesson, 6th July 2021).

To support the judges in their evaluative work, I developed frameworks that might help them. For example, in one lesson, I attempted to support judges by providing them with the following three questions to guide their thinking:

- Who expressed their opinion the most **clearly**?
- Who offered the most **convincing** evidence and reasoning?
- Who was the best at using **critical** terminology?

(Questions taken from resource used in lesson, 28th January 2021)

Later, reflecting upon my own usage of this 3C framework (Clear, Convincing and Critical) in a subsequent lesson, I recognised that it could be problematic:

‘I was judging them on their individual contribution, rather than seeing their utterance as part of an ongoing dialogue. The 3Cs had me focusing on individual performance rather than collaborative thinking. Perhaps the 3cs is problematic therefore, as it encourages me to give feedback to individual students, rather than positioning myself as more of a participant.’

(Fieldnote, 26th May 2021)

The use of assessment criteria for the evaluation of arguments in support of specific choices directed some of my attention away from engaging with the ideas and contributions of my students and towards prescribed notions of how such ideas should be expressed. It can therefore be said to have somewhat undermined the reciprocity that might otherwise have emerged between me and my students. The hierarchy of power that my use of judges cultivated between students also served to undermine classroom reciprocity. Using judges as a means of implementing a version of Black and William’s peer assessment framework, a framework that incorporates the clarification of success criteria and the activation of students as peer assessors, therefore came to feel problematic in the context of IF-based, whole-class discussion and my own dialogic aspirations.

The influence of the judges upon levels of student participation was also remarked upon by some of my colleagues. Mr Faulks remarked that using a small group of three judges ‘kind of let everyone

else off the hook' (interview, 9th February 2021). Somewhat similarly, Mr Byatt 'loved the role of the judges' but suggested that they did not need to remain the same for the entire lesson because this might 'allow them to coast out of other things' (interview, 4th March 2021). My colleagues' remarks highlight a problem that I, like other dialogically oriented teachers, face when attempting to facilitate and participate in meaningful classroom talk: A 'meaningful exchange with 1 student always comes at the expense of hearing other students' voices and securing their sense of involvement' (Bouton et al., 2024, p.194). It is difficult to facilitate dialogue that engages an entire class of students. In my context, the year seven lessons to which I refer involved a class of more than 30 students, rendering the participation problem more acute. In later lessons that involved smaller groups of older students, the question of who was and was not participating was less problematic. However, using judges to aid in the choice-making process during collaborative IF-reading activities certainly foregrounded questions of participation and equity, because the judges had more opportunities to talk than the rest of the class.

While voting, student judges and evaluative frameworks can be used to structure choice-making during whole-class, collaborative IF reading, such strategies come with challenges. This is not to say that these challenges are insurmountable or that, consequently, the collaborative reading of IF is not a worthwhile classroom endeavour. In an interview with Ms Morrison and Ms Ellis after a remote lesson during lockdown, we discussed the advantages of collectively reading *WHWYCYE*. We contrasted the collective, whole class reading of IF with an individual approach to reading (allowing each student to read the story for themselves using their own device). Ms Morrison said, 'I also think there's a lot to be said for like going on that journey as a class, 'cos that is quite an exciting adventure' (January 15th, 2021). In the same interview, Ms Ellis also suggested that collective reading can 'force them to think more about their choices' rather than arbitrarily 'go[ing] with what they fancied'. The educational advantages of the adventure that is collaborative IF reading is something to which we shall return (see Section 9.1.1), but the value of this adventure must be considered in the light of the potential challenges that accompany it.

7.2.2 Curriculum Integration

Another challenge I encountered was IF's relationship with the existing school curriculum. Teaching IF-based lessons that were not already an integral part of CentreTown's prescribed curriculum required me to consider the extent to which such lessons aligned with curricular goals. As Shelton and Scoresby have argued, 'activity-goal alignment' can be considered to be an important principle for writers of educational IF to consider (Shelton and Scoresby, 2011, p.114). However, it was not a concept that I had fully considered when writing *WHWYCYE* because I was not clear on what the activity of reading the story would involve, and because my goals were initially somewhat explorative. As a result, in an interview with Ms Sands, I referred to my *WHWYCYE* lessons as 'an interlude' (interview, 4th December 2020), and in a note taken in 2021, I remarked upon the 'problem of curriculum alignment' (fieldnote, 11th January 2021). These comments show an awareness of the disconnect which existed between the IF I had written and the curriculum I was expected to enact. I must therefore note here that the English teaching colleagues who participated in this study permitted and enabled me to explore the affordances of IF and to deviate somewhat from the existing English curriculum. Therefore, I recognise the way that my colleagues supported the explorative research that I was doing, despite the fact that I did not always uphold the school's approach to teaching or follow the department's shared and central curriculum.

As I increasingly used IF as a means of facilitating whole-class discussions and dialogue (Holdstock, 2021b; Holdstock, 2023), it is unsurprising that this question of curricular alignment arose. Various researchers have noted the tension that teachers experience between their desire to facilitate classroom dialogue and the pressure they are under to cover the material prescribed in the curriculum they are enacting (Lyle, 2008; Coultas, 2015; Snell and Lefstein, 2018; Myhill et al., 2020; Bouton et al., 2024). As Lyle writes, 'Many teachers work to strict timetables and content-led curriculum requirements and struggle to see how dialogic talk can become a regular feature of classroom practice' (Lyle, 2008, p.228). As my research progressed, I responded to the tension that existed between curricular constraints and my dialogic desires by creating works of IF which related directly to literary texts that students were studying. For example, stories like *A Great Gatsby* (AGG)

and *A Party at Gatsby's* invited my A-Level students to respond playfully and creatively to the language used by Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*, a text which they were studying as part of their English course. As such, the links between these stories and the curriculum were robust. AGG, for example, invites students to experiment, to make changes to Fitzgerald's opening sentences and to consider the consequences of such changes, enabling students to gain insights into the potential significance of Fitzgerald's own language choices. However, in an interview with Mr Byatt after a lesson in which I read AGG with a class of year 12 students (16–17-year-olds), he remarked that I 'may have actually disrupted a student's understanding of the [original] text' by getting them to imagine alternative versions of Fitzgerald's novel (interview, 29th June 2021). Again, questions of curricular alignment were here brought to the fore, despite the explicit connections that exist between *The Great Gatsby* and AGG. His comments again highlight how my teaching disrupted the CentreTown Academy curriculum. The existence of branching alternative trajectories within a single work of IF provides it with this capacity to disrupt. From a dialogic pedagogical perspective, and considering the potentially constricting nature of prescribed and crowded curricula, such forms of disruption are arguably desirable; providing students with opportunities to pursue tangential branches of inquiry can be seen as one of IF's exciting affordances.

7.2.3 Participation

As I have already touched upon, my focus on verbal communication and whole-class dialogue raised questions about inclusion and participation, for a tension emerged between my desire to facilitate dialogue and my desire to engage all students. This tension influenced the way that I understood and designed choices; in a fieldnote taken on 30th June 2021, I considered the inclusive benefits of contestable choices or questions:

'Contestable questions that require students to make a decision can encourage more interaction. They are arguably a helpful form of contestable or evaluative question. If a contestable question refers to a common ground or a finite number of potential answers, the question may not appear to be entirely open, but it is open to an almost infinite range of ideas when it comes to reasoning. Therefore, it focuses attention on student reasoning whilst also rendering the problem accessible to all.'

A constrained but contestable choice is open to many responses, making it simple and accessible, but it is also open to debate. However, even if a choice contained within a work of IF is accessible to all, there is no guarantee that all students will think about or discuss that choice. This potential problem was exacerbated by the COVID-19 lockdowns and the shift to remote learning. As I noted on 29th January 2021, it is hard to get every student to pay attention to the lesson and to engage with activities in a remote setting:

‘Some students did not respond verbally or in the chat. Should I allow them this right not to voice opinions? What can I do anyway? Should we just abandon dialogue because some won't / can't participate?’

Reflecting on the role of talk in the remote classroom, Mr Faulks suggested that discussion was not really a viable activity to pursue when teaching remotely:

‘I mean, as an aside, it was really interesting and quite sad how much background noise there was in so many of the kids' rooms, or wherever they were – I was like, “this is insane” - and I think it's because, erm, you know, I haven't really forced my students to speak at length, in my lessons; I haven't really encountered that too much. Erm, and yeah, I think you're right, I think basically, I think in an online lesson, I don't think we can force them to contribute verbally, which is quite annoying, because, because of the background issue, because of technology. [...] So, I haven't really pushed dialogue, and I don't think really it's something that you can do effectively, erm, remote teaching.’

(Interview, 9th February 2021)

This suggests that the collaborative, whole-class reading of IF, an activity that depends upon verbal discussion, was rendered more challenging by the move to remote teaching. I sought to respond to this issue by asking all students to participate in choice-making by writing their preferences in the chat during online lessons, but then only calling on volunteers who put their hands up to participate verbally. I also attempted to keep episodes of talk short in order ‘to avoid drift’ and to try to keep as many students as possible engaged (fieldnote, 3rd February 2021). However, inviting only confident volunteers to participate verbally is not an ideal solution. In fact, the question of who gets to

participate in classroom discussions is a question that arose towards the beginning of my classroom research:

‘Students who have experience of getting answers right and who are confident in the world of the classroom are more likely to get to take part in discussions. How do I open up the floor to everyone, even those that don't have that pre-fabricated confidence?’

(Fieldnote, 13th September 2020)

In attempting to read works of IF collaboratively and to facilitate dialogue by discussing contestable choices with my students, I came up against the problem of ‘equity in the distribution of teacher attention and student participation’ (Bouton et al., 2024, p.194). However, this is a ‘thorny dilemma’ (p.194) that others have faced before me, and not a phenomenon that is necessarily specific to my work with IF. In fact, if English is a subject within which knowledge ‘emerges through social exchanges’ (Mello et al., 2019, p.185), English teachers must necessarily become comfortable and proficient at navigating such challenges, regardless of the resources they are using.

7.2.4 Behaviour for Learning

Reading and discussing works of IF affected the ways in which my students and I behaved in the classroom. As a result, questions of how best to manage or respond to the behaviour of students during these lessons were raised. In facing challenges that arise during talk-intensive lessons, I am not alone. Bouton et al. note that, in dialogic lessons, ‘the relaxation of teachers’ authority, together with eliciting students’ voices and actively seeking conflict, can help generate dialogic space, but they can also unravel the gentle fabric of norms that hold the classroom together, leading to the discussion deteriorating into disorder’ (Bouton et al., 2024, p.194). As I understand English to be a subject within which knowledge emerges through the dialogic exchange of ideas, I recognise that English teachers must become comfortable with both the weaving and the disintegration of this gentle fabric. To help maintain order in the talk-rich classroom, it is recommended that teachers ‘prepare students for engaging productively in dialogic space’ (p.194). For example, teachers can develop ground rules for use with students in the classroom (Mercer, 2000). However, using ground

rules for talk can exclude some students, because rules that 'make normal talk a rule-breaking activity' can serve to illegitimate 'the meaning-making faculties of the child' (Lambirth, 2006, p.63). Considering classroom talk from a behaviour management perspective then, we see again just how thorny a dilemma the question of participation can become.

I did not choose to establish ground rules when I began using IF in the classroom, and by stepping away from the CentreTown learning flow and allowing student voices and choices to exert influence over lesson trajectories, I disrupted norms and routines, producing a degree of disorder in my own lessons. This was particularly true during the IF-based lessons that I conducted early on in my research with my year seven class. For example, consider the following fieldnotes:

'Behaviour was not immaculate and I did not maintain a disciplined approach to behaviour management throughout. However, whenever the paired discussions began, there was a lot of talk.'

(4th December 2020)

'I learned a lot about my students, but behaviour wasn't immaculate. It wasn't a lesson I would have liked to be formally observed for.'

(4th December 2020)

'Also, when I am questioning one or two people, others drift: they are not listening and evaluating one another's ideas.'

(9th December 2020)

These fieldnotes convey my concerns regarding the ways in which students were participating in IF-based activities, and the pressure I felt to uphold 'immaculate' behavioural standards. My concerns were shared by Ms Sands, who remarked that, in a lesson she watched, students were 'talking when you wanted silence' and that I could be 'tighter or firmer on that' (interview, 4th December 2020). Our concern regarding the behaviour of students is reflected in some of the utterances I made over the

course of the lesson Ms Sands was referring to. I repeatedly reminded students not to speak over each other, to stop fiddling with stationary and to listen to one another. These utterances suggest that I was struggling to channel the attention of all students in the group towards the joint reading and discussion activities we were attempting. Here, I must also note the material significance of my data gathering methods; by using a single recording device to collect classroom data, I channelled my own attention towards whole-class discussions rather than student-to-student paired or small group discussions. My focus on whole-class collaborative reading arguably made the management of behaviour more challenging, as facilitating whole-class discussions required me to repeatedly ensure that all students had stopped talking and could listen to the person who was speaking at any given moment. Moreover, the fact that my school-based lessons took place in single-computer classrooms also influenced my decision to focus on collaborative, whole-class readings of IF, as these material conditions made it more challenging to allow groups of students to read the story on their own devices. Similarly, the teacher-led nature of CentreTown's default learning flow informed the way in which I sought to use IF in the classroom; as group work and more student-led forms of lesson activity were not normalised at CentreTown Academy, I did not opt to use IF in such ways. I reflected on how I might later use IF in a contrasting way in a fieldnote taken on 7th January 2021: 'This makes me think that the best environment for this IF would be a multi-computer classroom, where the environment is controlled by the teacher but there is less drift time because everyone is working in a small group.' Here, I suggest that group work could be an appropriate means of minimising disorder and ensuring that all students are participating.

During the Covid-19 lockdowns, various additional barriers to participation prevented students from engaging in the manner I might have hoped. For example, malfunctioning hardware prevented students from participating, and various distractions affected the quality of student attention. Mr Faulks remarked upon this, saying that 'the whole world of the internet is there, so they could be on, you know, they could have another tab open; they could be – it's much harder for them to concentrate' (interview, 9th February 2021). Remote teaching, therefore, made whole-class discussion and collaborative IF-reading more challenging. I am not alone in finding this, as other

teachers also found 'difficulty in including students who were not engaging online' (Wilkinson, 2021, p.41). During focus group discussions, students themselves also commented on the many distractions and challenges they faced in the remote classroom.

7.2.5 Technical Challenges

Working with IF posed technical challenges for me, challenges that were intensified by the COVID-19 lockdowns and the initiation of remote teaching. In one early school-based lesson, we read a passage that did not quite fit onto the projected screen. In a fieldnote after the lesson I wrote that 'I didn't scroll down enough! they didn't see the line 'Your Hans is dead!' disaster' (fieldnote, 4th December 2020). As Twine is not a tool designed for the production of projected presentations, it is easy to produce passages that are too long for the projection space that is available, a fact that, on one occasion, resulted in my class only partially reading one of the passages contained within *WHWYCYE*. This a simple but important fact for teachers interested in using IF to bear in mind. Another simple but important technical challenge that I faced was the school's internet security settings, settings that are designed to ensure that students cannot access inappropriate content from school devices. Initially, the site I used to host my works of IF – *itch.io* – was blocked, and it was only after consulting with the IT team at CentreTown Academy that I was able to access my *itch* page via school devices. In my first IF-based remote lesson, this challenge reared its head again, as students who had been issued school Chromebooks were unable to access the site to which I directed them. Fortunately, my colleagues in the IT team were later able to resolve this issue.

7.3 Chapter Conclusions

In this chapter I have begun responding to the following question: How can introducing works of IF into the secondary school English classroom affect the quality of my teaching practice? I have shown that IF affected the quality of my practice by generating an array of challenges and disruptions. IF challenged me to consider how best to structure choice-making in IF-based lessons; it raised questions of how easily the reading of IF can be integrated into a school curriculum; it obliged me to grapple with thorny issues such as unequal levels of participation and disorderly forms of behaviour

during talk-intensive lessons; and finally, it imposed some technical obstacles that I was obliged to overcome.

However, all of these challenges must be considered in the light of the potentially positive disruptions that my usage of IF provoked. I argue that the ways in which IF disrupted CentreTown Academy's learning flow must be seen in a positive light because said learning flow supports a conceptualisation of education that is inappropriate for the subject of English (Eaglestone, 2020); English is a subject in which student responses play a central role, whereas using direct instruction to implement a knowledge-rich curriculum places excessive emphasis on prescribed propositional knowledge. By foregrounding student choice and voice, IF can pose challenges, but it can also serve to reframe English as a fundamentally social subject in which 'knowledge is made by all the people in the classroom together as they develop their own "ideas and emotions" and do not simply recall things deposited or drilled into them' (p.12).

In attempting to use IF to prize open dialogic space and support literary sociability, I 'ripped up' CentreTown Academy's default learning flow. This disruptive process saw me question the value and purpose of prescribed curricular learning objectives. It forced me to explore how novel, non-linear resources might best align themselves with existing school curricula. It helped me recognise the value of contestable choices in the dialogic English classroom. It enabled me to reflect upon my own relationship with mandated pedagogical practices, and it enabled me to think about how best to conceptualise knowledge in the subject of English. Moreover, researching the introduction of IF into the secondary school English classroom enabled me to discuss and explore such ideas with my colleagues at CentreTown academy. Therefore, while I argue that researching the classroom usage of IF has been challenging and disruptive, I assert that the challenges and disruptions that have emerged have ultimately been advantageous and worthwhile.

8 Teaching and Learning with IF

In this chapter, I continue my response to the following question: How can introducing works of IF into the secondary school English classroom affect the quality of my teaching practice? I first do so by examining how teaching and learning with IF made me, my colleagues and my students feel. I then consider the ways in which IF affected my classroom practice. Finally, I explore the forms of learning that IF made possible. To conclude the chapter, I draw together the pedagogical affordances of IF, outlining the distinctive affordances of IF as a teaching resource.

8.1 The Affect of IF: 'Story + Choice = Engagement'

Researching the pedagogical possibilities of IF affected the ways in which my students, my colleagues and I experienced lessons. In this section, I will therefore examine how IF affected us, considering the ways that teaching and learning with IF made us feel.

In the subject of English, feeling is important. Pleasure is a factor that cannot be ignored by those interested in helping students to develop their reading, writing and literacies. There is a good deal of evidence to suggest that enabling students to read and write for pleasure can be positively impactful (Education Standards Research Team, 2012; Young, 2019). Although some foreground the significance of effective vocabulary instruction (Beck et al., 2018), teachers do not have sufficient time to explicitly teach students all of the vocabulary that they might need (Anderson and Nagy, 1993). Therefore, where vocabulary is concerned, enabling students to take pleasure in reading and writing is a useful way of increasing the likelihood of students being repeatedly exposed to a range of new words.

Respecting a reader's choice of text can help young people develop a positive relationship with reading, and has been linked to higher levels of achievement (Clark and Rumbold, 2006). Similarly, enabling students to choose their own subjects for writing helps them to take pleasure from writing

(Young, 2019). As choice is central to IF, this is noteworthy, and it is therefore worthwhile considering the pleasure that reading, writing and teaching with IF can evoke.

In my fieldnotes, I repeatedly observed that I found teaching with IF to be pleasurable. I referred to IF-based lessons as ‘enormously enjoyable’ (7th October 2020), ‘Fun’ (29th January 2021), ‘good fun’ (4th February 2021), and ‘really enjoyable’ (4th November 2021). After reading *Gretel, Redesigned* with a group of students, I also wrote that the experience ‘really lifted my spirits’ (5th July 2022). Part of this pleasure arose from the fact that I had conceptualised and produced these works of IF myself. Contrastingly, on another occasion, and in a fieldnote I took by hand, I noted that ‘Monday was a sh*t day because I taught lessons that were mostly prepared by others. I felt like a passenger and was dissatisfied’ (fieldnote, 1st December 2021). For me, part of the pleasure of teaching with IF came from the autonomy that my research afforded me. By developing my own innovative lesson activities, I resisted the push for ‘uniformity of practice’ that is encouraged at exam factory schools like CentreTown Academy (Hutchings, 2015, p.23). I agree with Yandell, who (referring to the Ark English mastery programme) suggests that encouraging uniformity of practice through the use of pre-planned and shared resources entails a ‘fundamental deprofessionalisation’ of teachers (Mansell, 2019), and I found my research into IF to be a pleasurable means of resisting this deprofessionalisation.

Colleagues and critical friends who either read the works of IF that I developed, watched me teach with said works, or used one of the texts in their own lessons, found pleasure in the experience. Their articulation of this pleasure might be explained by their positive relationships with me; I had worked alongside some of my English teaching colleagues since 2016 (Mr Harris, Ms Ellis, Ms Morrison and Mr Byatt). We frequently discussed and debated subject-specific topics and approaches to our work, and we maintained strong professional relationships that, over time, became friendships. However, the frequency with which my colleagues and critical friends referred to the pleasurable nature of their IF experiences remains noteworthy. Ms Winn, after watching me teach with *The Doodle*, wrote that she ‘really enjoyed the interactive element’ (feedback provided by

email, 17th September 2020). She later described *WHWYCYE* as ‘beautiful’, ‘touching’ and ‘great fun’ (email, 11th November 2020). Similarly, Ms Morrison ‘really enjoyed’ reading *WHWYCYE*, describing it as a ‘journey of discovery’ (interview, 1st December 2020). Having watched a lesson in which *WHWYCYE* was used, Mr Harris said that he ‘felt very passionate about it’ and that he ‘found it engaging’. He did, however, qualify his statement, saying that this affective response was ‘circumstantial’, but ‘not irrelevant’ (interview, 8th February 2021). His comments simultaneously suggest that IF can evoke a pleasurable response, but that pleasure is not necessarily a primary concern.

Other teachers made comparable remarks. Ms Sands enjoyed watching my approach to IF develop and was ‘keen to try out’ teaching with *WHWYCYE* in the future (email, 26th February 2021). Ms Ellis, after watching a year 12 lesson in which we read *A Great Gatsby (AGG)*, stated that she ‘really liked it’ and that ‘there were so many points where I actually wanted to volunteer an answer’ (29th June 2021). Likewise, Ms Lee took pleasure from seeing students read and discuss *Gretel, Redesigned*, saying that ‘it was really enjoyable to hear them speak in that way’ (interview, 7th July 2022).

Ms Lee was not alone in deriving positive feelings from the way that students engaged with IF. Having tried using *Gretel, Redesigned* in a lesson of his own, Mr Smith said that ‘it was really cool’ because his students were eager to participate and ‘actually got quite, almost competitive’. He stated that IF was a ‘novelty’ for his students, which might explain why ‘they were clearly quite into it’ (focus group, 30th November 2023). In fact, several teachers commented on the way that IF seemed to positively affect students. When Ms Ellis read *WHWYCYE* for the first time, she felt that students would ‘really like the idea that they have ownership over the conversation and the dialogue you’re having regarding a text’ because ‘very often, it’s down to the teacher, and the teacher’s choice of questions’ (interview, 11th November 2020). Ms Ellis’ comment suggests that students might enjoy IF because of its disruptive, choice-based nature. When Ms Sands saw the first lesson in which I taught with *WHWYCYE*, she noticed one student who was ‘so desperate to speak’ that he was

'leaping out of his seat' and clearly felt 'frustrated that he couldn't respond' (interview, 4th December 2020). This suggests that some students did feel motivated to participate in conversations that emerged in response to the choice-based works of IF that I shared with them. In the same interview with Ms Sands, I commented that students were 'more enthusiastic', noting that when they were asked to discuss choices with their partners, 'the conversation started loudly and on topic'. Again, this suggests IF motivated students to participate in paired conversations. After my second *WHWYCYE* lesson, Ms Sands noted that it was a 'great lesson in terms of student enjoyment and student engagement' (interview, 12th January 2021), and after observing a later IF-based lesson, Ms Morrison remarked that some of the student 'responses were very passionate, and like, really well delivered' (26th February 2021), suggesting again that IF evoked strong feelings from certain students and motivated them to participate verbally.

Considering the effect of IF upon student motivation, Mr Byatt made an explicit connection between the motivation to participate and the presence of choice; after observing a lesson that featured *WHWYCYE*, he remarked that 'story + choice = engagement' and that 'there is just something innately engaging about that' (interview, 4th March 2021). Ms Lee's comments support this idea, for she too noted that the girls she watched discuss *Gretel, Redesigned* 'really did engage with the topic, and they were interested' (interview, 7th July 2022). During the focus group I held with teachers who had used *Gretel, Redesigned* in their lessons, Mr Stone said that the students 'enjoyed doing' the IF-based activity because it gave them opportunities to make choices, and Ms Sands reported that her students were 'really engaged and really keen to share their ideas' (focus group, 30th November 2023). Ms Sands went on to report that her students asked her a question at the end of the lesson: 'Could you get Mr Holdstock to make another one?'

My colleagues and I felt that the works of IF I developed evoked pleasure in students, motivating them to participate verbally by presenting them with choices. Students also made comments that further support these claims. In a focus group, Jem spoke about the IF-based lessons he had experienced in year seven, saying that they were 'interesting' and 'quite fun' because 'we had our

own say in it' (focus group, 28th March 2023). His comments suggest that being presented with choices that could influence the trajectory of both the lesson and the narrative was enjoyable. Milla found the lessons similarly 'exciting'. Amir's comments during the same discussion suggest a comparable sentiment. He stated that IF 'can actually get you thinking about things in a more, like, dynamic way'. He explained further: 'Rather than just sort of [...] taking in information and depositing them into questions, it actually makes you think what you're learning about.' His comments suggest that IF rendered the activities more exciting for him when compared to other forms of activity. Larissa – reflecting on the experience of reading and discussing *Gretel, Redesigned* – said that she 'found it fun [...] because you get to choose what happens' and because IF makes readers 'feel like they are in charge of the book' (focus group, 28th March 2023).

Therefore, the data I have collected suggest that teaching, reading and learning with IF can be enjoyable. This pleasure may derive from the way that IF-based lessons differ from lessons in which teaching is conducted in a default, uniform manner, but it may also derive from the presence of choice. As pleasure is an important factor to consider when seeking to develop the literacy skills of students, this finding is significant.

8.2 IF-based Pedagogy

Initiating and developing a disruptive and enjoyable, IF-based intervention made certain pedagogical strategies possible. Introducing IF into my research-assemblage produced affective flows, rendering specific strategies more available to me (Fox and Alldred, 2015), and in this section I will identify what these strategies were.

8.2.1 Yielding the Floor

Firstly, using IF in the classroom enabled me to 'yield the floor' (Murphy et al., 2009, p.761) and to make more space for my students' voices. For me, this involved both reducing the frequency and length of my own contributions and paying closer attention to my students' remarks. For the dialogically minded teacher, yielding the floor is advantageous, as it allows for increased levels of

reciprocity and dialogue between teacher and students (Alexander, 2020). In fact, the potential for this shift in teacherly identity positioning was identified early on in my research. In an interview with a critical friend (Barney, a teacher who I had worked with during my training year at a different school), we read and discussed an early draft of *WHWYCYE*. Reflecting on the story, Barney remarked that ‘it’s teaching students to read with a critical eye and to kind of question what they’re reading and to make inferences without you having to start at the beginning of the lesson and say, “today we’re working on inference”’ (interview, 11th November 2020). Barney’s comments suggest that IF has the potential to allow teachers to step away from the position of the expert at the front. This notion was of interest to me, and it is referred to multiple times in my fieldnotes. In September 2020, I asked myself ‘how do I get students to take the lead in the conversations?’ (fieldnote, 17th September 2020). Later, I recognised that IF offers ‘an opportunity for teachers to relinquish control’, remarking also that ‘[t]eachers can be the biggest obstacle to engineering dialogic spells, I think’ (fieldnote, 21st May 2021). These fieldnotes suggest that IF enabled me to yield the floor to my students, but also that I had the desire to do so. Therefore, IF’s capacity to support such an approach must be seen as entangled with my own values and pedagogical desires. Transcripts of classroom talk which exemplify my yielding of the conversational floor are explored in Chapter 9 (see, for example, Table 15 and Table 16).

8.2.2 Feedback

Yielding the floor in this way involved a deviation from typical IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) patterns of classroom talk (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) and some temporary withholding of verbal feedback. In fact, IF affected the form and timing of feedback that students received. For example, in one early lesson, evaluative feedback of student responses was withheld while three different students were invited to contribute (lesson, 29th January 2021). It was only after the third contribution that I highlighted an area for potential improvement in student contributions: ‘No one’s used any, any critical vocabulary yet, so let’s go one person down, see if they can add that to their argument.’ Here I provide feedback to the students that have spoken already, rather to an individual student. In a later lesson, I waited until students had come to some form of agreement before trying to prompt

students in any specific direction, saying ‘It seems like we’ve come to an agreement. Um, what we haven’t talked about is, what’s the actual difference being highlighted here?’ (lesson, 29th June 2021). After this lesson, I noted that ‘towards the end of each round of discussion, I found myself guiding the talk more in order to ensure that students were making explicit connections between language choices and their interpretations’ (fieldnote, 29th June 2021). Here, I note that my feedback or guidance came not immediately, but ‘towards the end of each round of discussion’. Similar remarks were made in other fieldnotes, and in one, I remarked that ‘between each passage’ there was a ‘window for offering feedback’ (7th July 2022). This resonates somewhat with Desilets’ observation that IF’s unique structure offers ‘special opportunities for direct teaching’ in a way that more linear texts might not (Desilets, 1999, paragraph 27). After the *Gretel, Redesigned* session, Ms Lee noted the effect of my feedback upon the quality of student talk, remarking that in the first passage-based discussion, students ‘were speaking over each other’, but that after receiving some feedback between passages, their talk became ‘more structured in the way that they allowed each other to [...] speak’ (interview, 7th July 2022). This also suggests that IF provided me with opportunities to provide feedback based upon the quality not just of individual student answers but on the quality of their verbal interactions too.

8.2.3 A Shift in Identity Positioning

Yielding the floor and withholding feedback was not easy, for (as Mr Harris remarked) the ‘teacher-as-facilitator-model’ contrasts dramatically with CentreTown Academy’s default approach to teaching (interview, 8th February 2021). Mr Harris described the school’s approach to teaching as follows:

‘Our policy in the school, of sort of suggesting that knowledge is binary, um, and that *has* to be established, and what essentially you need to do is, is get that binary knowledge, um, fixed, and then give opportunities to understand that knowledge through independent and transformative practice.’

In using IF, I did not attempt to fix knowledge but rather sought to enable the exchange of ideas. In contrast to the above-described approach, I sought to make more space for students to express

themselves in response to a text. This space emerged from the choices that IF made available, from the gaps and differences between the links and passages that students encountered.

Mr Byatt made a comparable remark, describing a model of teaching that positioned the teacher 'as central node' and going on to suggest that I was 'trying to move [...] as far away from that as possible' (interview, 29th June 2021). Although I was not doing this for the entirety of the lessons in question, there is certainly classroom evidence to support Mr. Byatt's claim. Firstly, many of the questions I posed were aimed at enabling students to express their own ideas, rather than testing their understanding of ideas that I had introduced explicitly. Questions such as 'Can anyone build on that?' (lesson, 4th December 2020) or 'Joana, do you agree with Johan, Joana, that you wanna go for blood?' (lesson, 29th January 2021) suggest just this. Moreover, in certain lessons, I made my withdrawal explicit. In one lesson, I said, 'I am gonna try and say as little as possible as we go through this, but what I'm looking for is, you guys need to be making arguments as to why you think we should make certain choices' (lesson, 29th June 2021). In the same lesson, I told students that I would try to 'keep my mouth closed and hear what you guys have to say', as well as inviting one student to 'lead this discussion for us'. In another lesson, I stated that 'I'm gonna be quiet. I'm gonna direct traffic as much as I can without saying anything' (lesson, 6th July 2021). Finally, in the session in which I read *Gretel, Redesigned* with a group of students in an after-school society, I said 'I'm gonna close my mouth. You got this. How do you want to start your story?' (5th July 2022). My utterances suggest that IF was enabling me to yield the floor and to adopt the role of teacher-as-listener. After observing one lesson, Ms Ellis remarked upon the fact that the lesson 'was a lot more student-led' than other lessons (interview, 29th June 2021). This again highlights the way that IF enabled a degree of withdrawal from the position of expert leader.

I was not alone in experiencing this shift in identity positioning. In the focus group with teachers who had tried using *Gretel, Redesigned* with their classes, Mr Smith remarked that IF enabled him to take a more 'hands off' approach (focus group, 30th November 2023). Similarly, Mr Stone remarked that, 'compared to a lot of the discussions I do in my lessons, there was a lot more focused engagement

without my intervention'. The fact that he did not need to intervene to the same extent as he might have done otherwise again signals a shift in Mr Stone's identity positioning. Somewhat similarly, Ms Sands remarked that 'they [the students] actually had a position on something and I was enquiring about that position'. Ms Sands' comments again suggest that identity positionings had been altered; students had thoughts to express, and Ms Sands was seeking to listen and understand, rather than lead as an expert. The fact that Mr Stone, Mr Smith and Ms Sands all remarked upon the way IF affected their identity positioning is interesting when one considers that both Mr Stone and Mr Smith were recent additions to the department. As such, they offered a relatively fresh perspective. Although I mentored Mr Stone during his first year as an Early Career Teacher (ECT) at CentreTown Academy, and although (in my capacity as Associate Assistant Principal) I was overseeing the professional development of them both as ECTs, I had had few interactions with either of them about my research and about the possible role of IF in the classroom. For this reason, I found their comments to be particularly noteworthy.

8.2.4 Vicarious Presence

To say that IF enabled me to withdraw entirely from the position of expert leader would be an exaggeration, and it is also not a position that I would be keen to vacate entirely. As a teacher, I recognise that my knowledge and experience can benefit the students in my lessons. However, IF arguably enabled me to distribute my expertise in a particular manner. In reading works of IF with my students, I hoped that they would comment on language choices that I had made when writing the works of IF, reflecting on their significance. Arguably, the way that I included and designed choices within some of my IF prompted students to make such comments without me having to verbally ask them to do so. As such, I suggest that it is possible for IF to help English teachers enact a form of 'vicarious presence' in student-led conversations (Warwick et al., 2010, p.350). A work of IF can allow the teacher to remotely inform student activity by nudging them towards considering the significance of different language choices, choices that are brought to the attention of students by the presence of hyperlinks and the need to select a hyperlink to continue. In the words of Warwick et al., 'the teacher uses the task structure to guide and mediate the pupils' actions, enabling them to

interpret and act upon the teacher's intentions for the task' (Warwick et al., 2010, p.351). In exploring the relationship between vicarious presence and IF, my research also builds upon the work of Desilets, who claims that IF 'adds an evaluative dimension of considerable instructional power, an element that operates even when the teacher isn't around' (Desilets, 1999, paragraph 27). For example, in a fieldnote taken on 4th December 2020, I reflected that, during an IF-based lesson, 'Students often commented on key words, sometimes prompted by me, sometimes not.' Later, after another lesson, I noted to Mr Harris that 'there was one student who was saying that they wanted to select corpses over, over body, or something. [...] They didn't say it, but they were choosing that because it was a plural noun and there was gonna be more stuff for them to see if they selected that [...]'. I noted this was done 'without me having to, kind of, dictate it'. Indeed, during the lesson in question, a student – Marc – had explained why he wanted to choose one link ('corpses') over another ('blood'). Without direct prompting, he commented on the word corpses:

'I think that we should go with corpses 'cos it would be good to know about all the different people that the main character had been fighting with and how he had a connection with them.'

(Lesson, 29th January 2021)

Marc noticed that the word 'corpses' is plural, and he predicted that, if selected, subsequent passages would reveal information about the different people with whom the protagonist had been fighting. By contrast, the 'blood' in question came from the body of just one such person. Without prompting, he observed something significant about the links from which he was asked to choose.












The possibility of achieving vicarious presence through the medium of IF interested me; in a fieldnote in which I reflected upon the writing of *WHWYCYE*, I noted that 'I could have taken a stylistician's approach and made links reflective of a specific type of choice (e.g. verb type or pre / post modifying phrase). This would do the alignment work for me.' In *AGG, A Party at Gatsby's* and *Gretel, Redesigned*, I did just this, making the choices that students encountered whilst reading, stylistic choices – choices that asked them to decide between linguistically comparable options for how

sentences should be written. In doing so, I aimed to enable students to discuss language choices without being regularly prompted. As commenting on language is central to the study of English, such activities align easily with learning aims within English lessons.

8.2.5 Gestures

IF heightened my awareness of the ways in which a teacher can distribute expertise and support within their resources. As a consequence of this, and as a result of adopting more of a teacher-as-listener positionality, I developed further pedagogical strategies and resources. Specifically, I began to develop a set of gestures that I could use to help students generate contributions and to structure their conversations, without having to verbally contribute myself. This is noteworthy, as Hattie (referencing Yair) suggests that 'students spend 85 percent of their time listening (or pretending to listen) to a teacher talking' (Hattie, 2008, p.32; Yair, 2000). Using gestures to invite student talk can be viewed as a means of reducing teacher talk and potentially increasing student participation. Table 9 depicts a set of gestures that I began using to direct conversational traffic, non-verbally. These gestures are not always easy to deploy, but they became part of my teaching repertoire. After one lesson in which we read *AGG*, I remarked that 'I used strategies to help me refrain from delivering feedback. It was hard to be true to these strategies when the conversation needed stimulating. Strategies include non-verbal gestures and getting students to lead the discussion' (fieldnote, 29th June 2021). Colleagues saw promise in these gestures. Ms Ellis said, 'I really like that you've got signals that you use, rather than speaking to them all the time, and I think it forces them to stop being as dependent on the teacher, and it also allows them a voice, rather than thinking that we're wanting a certain answer all the time. It kind of removes that aspect of, err, I don't know, something that we train them all the way through school I think, subconsciously.' Arguably, the introduction of IF into my research-assemblage enabled the development and usage of this approach.

Table 9: My 'Dialogic Gestures'

What do you think? What can you add?	
Why do you think this? Can you say more?	
Do you agree or disagree?	
Can you challenge that idea? Can we consider a rebuttal?	
Could you repeat that?	
Could you clarify yourself?	
Can you provide some evidence to support this idea?	
Can you connect your idea to what someone else has said? What's the connection?	
Would you like to share a <i>different</i> idea?	
Can you put this idea into context?	
Can you summarise the ideas that have been shared?	
Can you rephrase that, using appropriate terminology?	T

8.2.6 Creative Writing

Often, in contemporary schools, students' 'movement, voices, and bodies are subjected to tight forms of control, discipline, monitoring, policing, and assessing' (Wong and Cushing, 2023, p.494).

Contrastingly, IF helped me to allow students a voice. This emphasis on student voice is also identifiable in the increased levels of attention I began paying to the role of creative writing in the literature classroom. *AGG, A Party at Gatsby's*, and *Gretel, Redesigned* are all resources that can be used to explore the meanings of literary texts, but they simultaneously function as creative writing prompts. After one lesson with a group of year 12 students, I remarked that '[i]t was nice to give students an opportunity to do some creative writing; this happens little in the lit [literature] classroom at KS5 [Key Stage 5]' (fieldnote, 29th June 2021). Mr Byatt saw potential in this use of IF, remarking that 'this method works better for the iterative process of creation than it does for the iterative process of analysis' (interview, 29th June 2021). Here, Mr Byatt begins to comment on what IF might best be used to teach, and the skills that it can help to develop in students, a topic that shall be explored further in Section 8.3.6.

8.2.7 Modelling Metalinguistic Argumentation

As my work with IF developed, I began to include a particular form of 'metalinguistic modelling' (Devanny, 2022) in my works of IF and in my lessons. For example, in a lesson that featured *Aboard the SS Mendi*, students read the following short paragraph that was contained within the title passage of the story itself:

'I think we should select the preposition 'aboard'. This is because I would like to find out about the characters on the ship, rather than the ship itself. The word aboard suggests that we will discover more about the people that are on the ship, rather than reading a description of the setting.'

(Holdstock, 2021a)

Here, I model a process that I shall term 'metalinguistic argumentation' – the making of reasoned arguments in support of particular language choices. Simultaneously, I am modelling how students can begin reading/playing the work of IF together. This paragraph was accompanied by a brief verbal commentary from me:

'It has a clear preference at the start [...]. It also uses that nice, sort of terminology: preposition. [...] Then, we've got a bit of a justification. [...] Then I'm gunna look at the word a little closer. [...] So we see it's a clear argument; it's got some convincing reasoning; and it's even got like a quote in there that is analysed.'

(Lesson, 11th February 2021)

By modelling how IF can be discussed and how metalinguistic arguments can be made in this way, I model in a manner that is particular to the genre of IF. This modelling had a somewhat positive impact. Speaking of the same lesson, Ms Ellis 'noticed that you modelled a lot to the students, and I think it had a huge impact on how well they answered. [...] They knew a lot more what you wanted of them' (interview, 26th February 2021). This form of modelling was also something that I took into subsequent works of IF and lessons. For example, the following paragraph is a model paragraph that is included in *AGG*:

'I think we should choose 'A Great Gatsby' because I feel that using the indefinite article rather than the definite article creates an interesting contrast - is he unique and 'Great', or is he one of many?'

(Holdstock, 2024a)

Such forms of 'metalinguistic modelling' (Devanny, 2022) can help students attune to the ways in which language choices are made and the meanings they can help to produce. As shall be explored, this form of attunement is a linguistic sensibility that IF can nurture.

8.3 Learning with IF

In the lessons that I taught featuring works of IF, students were given opportunities to develop and practise a variety of skills, sensibilities and practices. Therefore, in this section, I identify the forms of learning that I found IF able to facilitate, identifying, for example, the 'literacy practices' (Street, 1993, p.82) that IF enabled.

8.3.1 Inferential Prediction

Firstly, it became clear from the outset that IF's use of links and choices rendered inferential prediction central to the classroom reading experience. This was because links had to be selected in order to proceed, and selecting a link involved making inferences about what a word might suggest and predictions about where it might lead. Noting this, Mr Harris commented on the way that IF could encourage students to 'infer' (interview, 8th February 2021). In the very first lesson I recorded, a student (Milla), read a passage from *WHWYCYE* and predicted that the character would open their eyes to discover 'a lot of chaos going on' (lesson, 4th December 2020). Some students, like Johan, began to use the word 'predict' within their explanations (lesson, 8th January 2021). These predictions were often expressed in a tentative way, using modal verbs. Joana, for example, after reading a passage about a sickly Munitionette in *WHWYCYE*, stated that, if a particular link were selected, 'you could be able to find out more about the factory itself' (lesson, 8th January 2021). Noah did something similar when responding to a passage describing the sinking of the SS Mendi, stating that 'as he's plunging, he might feel scared of what will happen when he is in the water, so we learn more about his feelings' (lesson, 11th February 2021). In a student focus group, Jem identified the way that IF made him and his classmates 'think forward in time' (28th March 2023), making predictions about what would happen if a given link were chosen. IF's ability to prompt prediction is significant, for prediction is a reading strategy that can support comprehension (Palinscar and Brown, 1984) and develop reading proficiency (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019).

8.3.2 Evaluative Discussion

The more I read and discussed works of IF with my students, the more evident it became that, as students were discussing passages, they were engaging evaluatively with the choices before them and with the ideas of other students. This was something that was drawn to my attention during my early interactions with colleagues. In an interview with Ms Morrison after she had read an early draft of *WHWYCYE*, she stated that links 'could be asking [for] an evaluation of why you're choosing that word' (interview, 1st December 2020). I later took fieldnotes that affirmed this idea, writing that 'IF encourages students to make evaluative choices' (fieldnote, 9th December 2020). This notion came

with me into the classroom, and I frequently found myself asking students whether they agreed or disagreed with a link preference that another student had stated. Observing this, Ms Sands noted that I placed ‘a strong currency on the pupils interacting with one another’ (interview, 4th December 2020). In so doing, I sought to facilitate dialogue by drawing multiple ideas and perspectives into the conversations that occurred. Often, such questions would occur at the third turn in a given conversational episode, and as Alexander states, it is often what happens at ‘the third turn that makes talk dialogic rather than monologic’ (Alexander, 2020, p.118). Students themselves made frequent use of the verbs ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’, suggesting that they were, to some extent, engaging with each other’s ideas. The substantive depth of this engagement varied; some students merely stated whether they agreed or disagreed before giving their own reasoning. Others offered more nuanced evaluative responses. For example, Joana, playing the role of judge, made the following remark, setting her own preference against the arguments that had been shared previously:

‘Personally, I would pick Paul and Frederic, but, er, from what the people were saying, um, it takes its toll is more efficient and more convincing, because you get to know about the character’s background.’

(Lesson, 8th January 2021)

Hearing how the judges listened and responded during this lesson prompted Ms Morrison to state that she thought the judges had been ‘genuinely evaluative’ (interview, 15th January 2021). Very similarly, Mr Byatt, after watching a later lesson, stated that he was ‘really impressed’ with the ‘evaluative responses of the students at that level’ (interview, 4th March 2021). Similarly, Ms Ellis noted how, in another lesson, students were ‘picking up on what other people had said and incorporating that into their choices and their own arguments’ (interview, 26th February 2021). In some cases, this took the form of polite disagreement. At one point, Jem disagreed with Milla, saying ‘I see where Milla’s point is [...], but [...]’ (lesson, 11th February 2021). Similarly, when discussing *Gretel, Redesigned*, Larissa initially expressed her agreement with other students, before ultimately providing a contrasting argument:

'I, I agree with what they are saying, but I slightly disagree because you could say that she is turning to her brother because they are both there as a pair, so she's saying it, she's thinking, she's turning to her brother so that she can consult him with the idea, because the situation both gonna affect both of them.'

(Lesson, 5th July 2022)

When evaluative agreement did occur, students would sometimes elaborate on the previous student's contribution. In a year 12 lesson, for example, Lily said that she agreed with a preference that Charis had stated before going on to offer a more detailed and analytical explanation as to why she would make the same choice as her classmate. In such moments, students were collaborating effectively, building meaning from the text, but also from one another's contributions to the class discussion. During these lessons, I found that IF enabled me to engage my students in conversations that were both 'collective' and 'deliberative'; students talked together, discussing and evaluating different points of view (Alexander, 2020, p.131).

8.3.3 Argumentation

During these IF-based discussions, I realised that IF could encourage students to form and express arguments. This was because we were mostly reading the works of IF together, and students had to convince others as to why choices should be made. Early on in my data gathering, I noted that I 'should focus on argumentation' (fieldnote, 9th December 2020). In lessons, I observed that students were increasingly able to provide reasons in support of their choices. Often, these reasons were signposted by the conjunction 'because'. In fact, during the lessons I recorded, students would often begin their verbal contributions in very similar ways, as the following examples demonstrate:

- 'I agree with Noah **because...**' (8th January 2021)
- 'I think I would choose sit there, tired and afraid, **because...**' (8th January 2021)
- 'I wouldn't choose Germany, **because...**' (28th January 2021)
- 'I would pick ship **because...**' (11th February 2021)
- '**Because** we have already had "In my younger years," I would...' (29th June 2021)
- 'I agree with Harriet **because...**' (5th June 2022)

After one lesson, Ms Ellis observed that it was the act of collaborative reading which encouraged this form of reasoning, for if students were not having to explicitly communicate their choice preferences with others, they would be more likely to ‘go with what they fancied rather than really thinking about why they’re making a choice’ (interview, 15th January 2021). Similarly, in another interview, Mr Byatt noted that I was using IF to get students engaged in ‘verbal reasoning’ and ‘verbal engagement’ that was structured in a fashion that could ‘later enhance written reasoning’ (interview, 4th March 2021). To use Britton’s words, IF helped me to produce a ‘sea of talk’ upon which certain forms of argumentative writing might later float (Britton, 1970, p.164).

8.3.4 Metalinguistic and Metanarrative Attunement

As students made and discussed arguments relating to the choices that confronted them, they developed an awareness of the significance of said choices. In deliberating and making reasoned and collaborative choices, they gained some ‘conscious control’ of the relationship between linguistic choice and meaning (Myhill et al., 2020, p.16). They became more attuned to the significance of linguistic choice. I noted this in an early fieldnote, when I suggested that IF ‘could help students attend more closely to the choices they make as readers and as writers’ (fieldnote, 4th November 2020). The later works of IF that I developed drew more deliberate attention towards the relationship between writers’ choices and meaning. However, even in early lessons that featured *WHWYCYE* and *Aboard the SS Mendi*, students demonstrated some attention to linguistic detail, and this attention arose from the choices that were before them.

An example of this has been explored in Section 8.2.4, and also can be seen in Table 12: Faced with two links (‘blood’ and ‘corpses’), Alex and Marc stated a preference for ‘corpses’ because, compared to the blood that was coming from one individual body, the corpses link might reveal more information about the wider scene and ‘all the different people’ that were on the battlefield (lesson, 29th January 2021). Consequently, after this lesson, Mr Harris remarked that IF represented a ‘really good way of getting students to focus on language’ and of providing students with a ‘sense of consequence’ to their language choices (interview, 8th February 2021). Sometimes, this focus on

language was on the word level, and on other occasions, it was on a more narrative level. For example, in a lesson on 11th February 2021, Amir explained his choice of link by stating that ‘we want to know about the character that we’re developing rather than learn about the ship’. Here, he states a preference for character development over setting description, indicating an awareness of the relationship between his choice and the narrative’s structure and development.

Later works of IF (*AGG, A Party at Gatsby’s* and *Gretel, Redesigned*) were written with the intention of bringing about metalinguistic attunement. As a result, students commented on such things as the impact of changing the point of view from first to third person (lesson, 21st June 2021); the effect of choosing superlative adjectival forms over comparative or absolute forms (lesson, 21st June 2021); the impact of metaphor and verb choice (lesson, 6th July 2021); and the role that imperative sentences can play when compared to interrogative sentences (lesson, 5th July 2022). Ms Ellis noted the way that I was using IF to enable metalinguistic engagement with texts, saying that my ‘students were having to really think about the choices that the writer had made in much more depth than they ordinarily would if they were given the whole passage’ and that students ‘were definitely thinking about linguistic choices in a much more meaningful way than the kind of standard responses that we normally get, and it forces them to think about effect, which I really like, rather than just feature spotting’ (interview, 29th June, 2021).

In my fieldnotes, I made a similar observation, noting that, when working with IF, I could use ‘difference as a tool for facilitating language analysis’ (fieldnote, 30th June 2021). In a student focus group, Esme also stated that, while reading *Gretel, Redesigned*, they became aware of ‘undertones’ that they otherwise ‘wouldn’t have noticed’ (focus group, 28th March 2023). This suggests that the choices contained within the text got students thinking about language in a way that they would not otherwise have achieved. Reading such a work of IF, it seems, enables a form of metalinguistic attunement that is unavailable in other contexts. While students were commenting on language, they were also contemplating the consequences and undertones that their language choices implied. The

reading was not 'shorn of the subjectivity of a personal response to literature' and was therefore more than an exercise in 'technique-spotting' (NATE, 2020, p.5).

8.3.5 Coherence

At times, as my students discussed the choices before them, they made comments that suggested they were considering the ways that different choices might relate to one another. They were considering 'the relations of meaning that exist within the text' and using these relations to make choices that they felt might help the text cohere as a unified narrative (Halliday and Hasan, 1976, p.4). IF's potential in this area was identified early on by Ms Ellis, who stated that IF 'emphasises cohesion' and might help students to see 'the ways that different parts of a text can connect together' (11th November 2020). In my year seven lessons, students made connections between the choices before them and the passages they had encountered previously. Sometimes these connections were quite simple; Sabina chose one link over another because she felt it would introduce more new information to us, rather than covering ground already encountered (lesson, 8th January 2021). In the same lesson, Milla made a slightly more sophisticated choice when she selected the hyperlinked word 'sights' due to the fact that the story had already made references to 'eyes'. She therefore felt this decision would 'go better' with the story as a whole. In a later lesson, Amir chose one link over another because he felt it would focus more of our attention on a character called Franz, a character whose trajectory we had already begun to follow. Here, he showed an awareness of how the story might cohere as a narrative. Similarly, in an A Level English literature lesson in which we discussed *A Party at Gatsby's*, Charis chose the verb 'floated' because she felt it added to 'the atmosphere that was created with the amusement [...] park' (lesson, 6th July 2021). Here, she makes a connection between the language choice before her, and the preceding passage of the novel from which *A Party at Gatsby's* is derived, a passage that we had discussed and in which Gatsby's party is compared to an amusement park. In a fieldnote, I remarked upon the advantages of presenting students with an 'interrelated series' of choices, and I here conclude that IF can help students attend to the ways that language choices in written texts can help a text cohere into a unified narrative.

8.3.6 Critical-Creative Writing

Over time, I also became aware of IF's potential as a resource that could support the teaching of creative writing, to the extent that I now deem IF to be a valuable way of helping students to take a more deliberate and engaged approach to the craft of writing. Like Anderson, who finds that the act of making a choice can help trigger 'engagement' and release 'creative energy' amongst students (Anderson, 2016), I suggest that the interrelated choices contained within a work of IF like *Gretel, Redesigned*, for example, can help students better attend to the craft of writing. To use the words of one of my students (Kaylee), IF can transform the writing process; instead of 'just [...] writing sentence after sentence', students working with IF can begin 'really thinking about' the 'effect' their choices might have upon readers (focus group, 28th March 2023).

This realisation was not immediate. In an initial interview with one critical friend during which we read *WHWYCYE* together, I said that I saw IF as means of helping students to produce 'improved responses to texts, rather than creative writing' (interview, 11th January 2021). It was Mr Byatt who later asked me whether I could not 'apply it directly to story writing, and get them to think about choices in that respect?' (interview, 4th March 2021). He felt that an IF-based approach to teaching in the English classroom 'works better for the iterative process of creation than it does for the iterative process of analysis' (interview, 29th June 2021). I would now retort that, from a critical-creative perspective, creative and analytical approaches need not be so separated, and that creative engagement with a text, perhaps through a process of textual intervention (Pope, 1995), can support deeper textual understanding.

IF's affordances for the teaching of creative writing came to the fore during the workshop in which I read *Gretel, Redesigned* with a group of year 10 students (5th July 2022). Prior to the workshop, students had been given a copy of the fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* (Ashliman, 2002) to read. During the workshop, we revisited the original plot before collaboratively reading and discussing *Gretel, Redesigned*, a work of IF that sees reader/players redraft a short section of the fairy tale by making a series of choices. Towards the end, students were invited to engage in a creative writing activity.

Table 10 explores the variety of ways that students redesigned Gretel in their own writing after collaboratively reading my work of IF.

I suggest that my students, in creating various alternative portrayals of Gretel, began to think deeply about Gretel’s characterisation. The characterisation of Gretel in the story of *Hansel and Gretel* (Ashliman, 2002) is shaped by patriarchal discourses; although she bravely pushes a cannibalistic old woman into an oven, saving herself and her brother from death, she is consistently portrayed as voiceless, subservient and hysterical. Students’ creative responses resist this characterisation, presenting her in a variety of ways, and this creative resistance is suggestive of noteworthy critical-creative engagement with aspects of the narrative. Given that their writing was conducted after we had read and discussed *Gretel, Redesigned*, I argue that the act of reading/playing this work of IF enabled them to engage with Gretel in this critical-creative way.

Table 10: Students’ characterisation of Gretel in their creative writing

Student	Gretel’s characterisation			
	A proactive leader	An oppressed victim	A defiant or uncooperative sister	(Super)naturally inspired
1	‘Gretel sprang into action. She lifted up brother off the floor and told him to go into the corner of the room and be very quiet.’			
2		‘She was never taken seriously, to him, she was just a deer in headlights. She wished she could say something, anything but it would never come out. She was stuck.’	‘Gretel knew what was about to insue but she wasn’t going to let him know that.’	

3	<p>“I know what to do.” She looked above and saw the bright blue skies, almost like they were leading her way.’</p>		<p>“Stop lying”. She could tell from his face, eyes wide and scared, he didn’t know what to do.</p> <p>“Just let me think.”</p>	<p>‘Suddenly it was like a river of ideas went flowing through her head.</p> <p>She looked above and saw the bright blue skies, almost like they were leading her way.’</p>
4	<p>‘Breaking away from her thoughts, she grabbed her jacket and swiftly moved outside, providing no verbal answer.’</p>		<p>‘Breaking away from her thoughts, she grabbed her jacket and swiftly moved outside, providing no verbal answer.’</p>	<p>‘The stars twinkled like a candle on a birthday cake while the moon lit up the sky. White pebbles were scattered like loose change on the ground.’</p>
5		<p>‘Gretel was quite tired of her brother infantilising her; treating her like a baby, even though they were the same age. In Hansel’s eyes, he would forever be the big, brooding lion whilst she was just a frail little kitten. Always in need of shelter and protection.’</p>		
6	<p>‘Hansel followed quickly his tail dangling between his legs.’</p>		<p>‘Gretel stated politely, “I do too. When you figure what to please consult me.” Gretel sounded off sassily with a cheeky smirk plastered on her face.’</p>	

In their writing, some students presented Gretel as a proactive leader who knew ‘what to do’ and who ‘swiftly’ ‘sprang into action’. It seems likely that this decision was taken in response to the discussions engendered by the language choices contained in passages from *Gretel, Redesigned*.

For example, I am reminded of Harriet and Chrystal's contributions to a discussion that is transcribed in the following chapter (Table 16, Section 9.1.4). In this discussion, both students considered the connection between a verb phrase ('began to think') and the independence that it suggested about Gretel as a character.

Other students showed Gretel to be oppressed, infantilised and 'never taken seriously'. This again can be linked back to choices contained in the work of IF and the corresponding discussions that took place. For example, *Gretel, Redesigned* provides reader-players with a choice relating to how Hansel interacts with his sister, and this choice may have shaped the ways that students portrayed Gretel's relationship with her brother. *Gretel, Redesigned* asks students to decide whether Hansel should speak to his sister using an interrogative sentence ('What are we going to do, Gretel?') or the original imperative ('Be quiet, Gretel, and don't worry.'). Student exposure to this choice may very well have influenced their decisions regarding whether or not to portray Gretel as a character who is 'stuck' in an oppressive sibling relationship.

Having watched me discuss *Gretel, Redesigned* with my students, Ms Lee remarked that the IF allowed students to 'think about how they wanted the character to be presented' (interview, 7th July 2022). She suggested that, in deliberating over the language choices before them, students were thinking about the relationship between language choice and characterisation, about the way that writing can align with one's writerly intentions to varying degrees. In attending to and evaluating the extent to which choices might align with writerly aims, students were refining their craft. Take, as an example, a comment made by Kaylee during a discussion of *Gretel, Redesigned*. She said that she and her neighbour felt 'that urgently was [...] the better decision' because it portrays Gretel as 'taking action using her own autonomy'. Were they to pick the contrasting adverbial ('in fear'), Gretel would be made to seem less autonomous and more reactive (lesson, 5th July 2022). Her comments show how Kaylee and her neighbour were deliberating over the relationship between choice and meaning. They were engaging in a deliberative practice that is part of the process of writing. They were

composing a text by making choices in response to their own sense of purpose (Cremin and Myhill, 2011). It is this form of deliberation that IF can enable.

8.4 Chapter Conclusions

My research shows teaching and learning with IF to be an enjoyable experience, and I assert that IF has the capacity to evoke pleasure in the students and teachers who engage with it. Given that the numbers of students taking A Level English is in decline (Roberts, 2024), this is significant, for rendering the subject more enjoyable might make it a more attractive option. Moreover, the important role that pleasure plays in literacy development (Education Standards Research Team, 2012) means that any reading intervention which evokes pleasure and enjoyment should be taken seriously.

Building on existing research into the dialogic and pedagogical affordances of classroom technology such as the interactive whiteboard (Hennessy, 2011) and video games (Arnseth et al., 2018), I have also shown that IF has the capacity to initiate noteworthy pedagogical changes: it influenced my identity positioning in the classroom and allowed more space for the voices of my students; it altered the manner in which I deliver verbal feedback; it allowed me to be vicariously present during discussions, supporting student dialogue without necessarily speaking; it initiated affective flows that enabled the development and implementation of novel teaching strategies such as the use of dialogic gestures; it supported a critical-creative approach to the teaching of English literature; and it led me to incorporate the modelling of metalinguistic argumentation into my practice. IF's contributions to the development of such changes in teaching practice is important, for it suggests that non-linear, choice-based resources can perform a valuable role in the English classroom, potentially supporting dialogic forms of teaching. It also highlights that a change in classroom resource can trigger significant changes in practice and that teachers should therefore reflect upon the impact of the more linear resources they routinely employ.

Finally, building on research into the educational potential of IF (Kozdras et al., 2006; Short, 2007; Desilets, 2015), I have identified a set of skills that IF can help students to develop in the context of the secondary school English classroom: IF can be used to help students practise and develop

inferential prediction. It can also help them to engage in evaluative discussion and argumentation. IF helped me to nurture my students' metalinguistic attunement, drawing their attention towards the ways that a text can cohere. Finally, IF showed itself able to support the development of students' critical-creative writing craft. In conclusion, I therefore argue that teaching and learning with choice-based resources like IF can be a highly valuable endeavour in the context of the secondary school English classroom.

9 IF and Classroom Talk

Whilst teaching with IF, and as I reviewed and analysed the data that I collected, I identified noteworthy relationships between the works of IF that I had written, and the classroom talk that was occurring in my lessons. In this chapter, I therefore respond to the following question: How can introducing works of IF into the secondary school English classroom affect the characteristics of the talk taking place during lessons? To do so, I begin by introducing the living theory that I have developed about the relationship between IF and talk. I then proceed to unpack this theory through reference to transcripts of IF-based classroom talk. I outline the ways in which discussing works of IF can transform the classroom into a more collaborative and less hierarchical environment. I then explore the ways in which IF enabled my students to engage with the dialogic nature of language through talk. After this, I explore the ways that IF invited and enticed my students to participate in text-based classroom discussions, before finally exploring the relationship between IF, classroom talk and metalinguistic understanding. I conclude by drawing attention to the significance of the findings that this chapter reveals.

9.1 My Living Theory

Much of my data analysis focused on the characteristics of the classroom talk that emerged during lessons featuring works of IF. For example, while reviewing and coding my data, I generated a variety of codes that all relate to the characteristics of the talk that was occurring within my lessons:

- **Questioning** (how I used questions in my lessons)
- **Third turn** (what happened at the third turn during my verbal interactions with students)
- **Withdrawal** (when I, the teacher, stepped back to give students space to think and to talk)
- **Inclusion** (considering who gets to speak and participate in classroom discussions)
- **Evaluative interaction** (when students were heard interacting with one another's ideas, rather than exclusively with the teacher's)
- **Cumulative** (when ideas grew and developed through successive student contributions)
- **Reciprocity** (when teachers and students spoke with one another in a less hierarchical manner than might otherwise occur)
- **Attunement** (when students expressed an awareness of the links between language and meaning)
- **Argumentation** (when students were engaged in making reasoned arguments).

As I collected, reflected upon and analysed my data, I developed living theories regarding the relationship between IF and classroom talk. These living theories might best be summarised as follows: Reading and discussing Interactive Fiction in the English classroom can be a collaborative endeavour that reveals to students the dialogic nature of language, inviting their voices into that dialogue, enticing them to participate in it, and helping them to develop a metalinguistic understanding of the meaning-making process.

In this chapter, I explain how I formed this living theory, drawing upon transcripts of classroom talk to identify and explain the characteristics of IF-based discussion that led me to these conclusions. I draw upon various transcripts of classroom discussions, each taken from a different lesson in which IF was used, and each accompanied by a snapshot of the IF passage being discussed (Tables 9-14).

9.1.1 Reading IF: a Collaborative Endeavour

Reading IF with students caused my lessons to deviate from the typical lesson structure that the CentreTown Academy learning flow encourages (see Section 7.1.1). My primary focus was not the direct or explicit teaching of pre-defined content. Consequently, working with IF impacted the power dynamics that were at play in my lessons. Mine was a dialogic endeavour that sought to create 'structured, non-hierarchical conditions' for learning (McCallum, 2012, p.89). These less hierarchical conditions helped render the reading of IF a collaborative endeavour.

We can see these less hierarchical conditions in the words that I spoke to my students. In the transcript contained in Table 11, for example – an excerpt from the first IF-based lesson that I recorded as part of this project – all of my utterances are questions. I ask students if they can 'imagine how the character is feeling', to 'build on' other students' ideas and to clarify the ideas they have already expressed. Instead of directly instructing students, I am working with them and seeking to foreground their voices. Similarly, in the transcript that is contained in Table 13, the feedback that I offer to Marvin comes only after I have heard from Milla and then asked Marvin whether or not he agrees with her. Again, the voices and opinions of students take a central role. Likewise, in Table

14, I pose multiple questions, showing my eagerness to hear the ideas that my students can form in response to the passage in question. In Table 16, the non-hierarchical nature of the discussion is evident in the fact that I make just one contribution before five different students share their own ideas. Here, I did not dominate the conversational floor, but instead allowed space for the voices of my students to interact with the question I posed and the passage we were reading. Although I, as the teacher, was still directing the flow of conversation through my questions and the selection of resources, I was not directing or instructing students, but rather exploring ideas with them, in a more collaborative fashion.

Table 11: Data excerpts from a lesson conducted on 4th December 2020

<p>IF passage (taken from <i>WHWYCYE</i>)</p>	<div style="background-color: #f9e79f; padding: 20px; text-align: center;"> <p>Desperate, you let your eyelids fall.</p> <p>You close your eyes and think of home, remembering the sights, the sounds, the smells, the tastes and the textures of belonging.</p> <p>At this moment, it's all that you can do.</p> </div>
<p>Transcript of corresponding discussion</p>	<p>Teacher (SH): Can we imagine how the character is feeling at this moment?</p> <p>Olivia: Maybe, umm, maybe he's feeling, um... May- Maybe he's feeling [inaudible]</p> <p>SH: Say again? Say again – I didn't hear you.</p> <p>Olivia: Maybe he's feeling like really stressed, upset, he probably wants to be with his family.</p> <p>SH: So stressed, upset, wants to be with his... You think it's a he? His family?</p>

	<p>Olivia: It could be any gender, but like... [inaudible]</p> <p>SH: Brilliant - Okay. Can anyone build on that, telling me why someone might want to be with their family, at a moment? Anil, you had your hand up bud.</p> <p>Anil: Because, when there was like World War One, they sent people to like different places, um, to the countryside. And he's probably moved away, and he's tryna remember – 'home' is London – and he's tryna remember how London felt.</p> <p>SH: So it could be – are you referring to evacuees who are sent away?</p> <p>Anil: Yeah.</p> <p><i>[A few minutes later, we continue our discussion and try to decide which link to select]</i></p> <p>SH: Does anyone else disagree and want to try and convince me that we should select something else other than <u>sights</u>? Joana.</p> <p>Joana: Er, I think <u>smells</u>, because, er, they could give us some background. Like, for example, we could like smell cooking, like in the kitchen, like family members, so we could also like tell where they're from.</p> <p>SH: So if we select <u>smells</u> – that's interesting – we might find out where the person is from, because... what? Because...</p> <p>Joana: Because, er, like you could have like traditional cooking.</p>
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The collaborative quality of the talk that I used IF to facilitate is perhaps most evident in Table 14, Table 15 and Table 16. It is a quality that emerges because the passages and corresponding discussions derive from works of IF that have their own particular voices, voices that shape the material-dialogic space they help form (Hetherington and Wegerif, 2018; Cook et al., 2019). Take a moment to re-read *AGG* or *Gretel, Redesigned*, and you will see that they involve the reader in a creative choice making process that asks them to develop a text of their own. So, in Table 15, when the students agree, stating that they would like to select the 'youngest and most vulnerable' link, they collaborate with the text before them, with one another, and with me as they make a language choice. Likewise, in Table 16, students share their various perspectives in response to the question I posed ('which one are we going to go for?') and the choice contained within the IF passage at hand.

These IF-based discussions were shaped by the sorts of questions and talk moves that I made. The contestable choices that are contained in the IF passages allowed me to pose questions that were also contestable and therefore open and authentic, for they did not have corresponding, prescribed, correct answers. Instead, they sought to reveal the thinking of my students. The following questions allowed space for students to share their own ideas, without dictating the reasons that might be used to justify them:

- 'Can we imagine how the character is feeling at this moment?' (Table 11)
- 'what next?' (Table 13)
- 'what you saying?' (Table 14)
- 'which one are we going to go for?' (Table 16)

Interestingly, in Table 15, a student asks another similar form of open-ended question: Charis asks, 'What do you think Maya?' In this lesson, I relinquished more control of the whole-class discussion by asking Charis to chair part of our discussion. Like the questions listed above, Charis' question was also open and contestable. The fact that students were often willing to provide extended responses to such questions, and to the choices contained within the passages they were reading, suggests to me that group readings help IF passages become part of what might be termed productive 'big questions' – questions that are ripe for discussion because they are contestable, authentic, central and clear (Reznitskaya and Wilkinson, 2017, p.59).

Let us consider, for example, the question that I pose to Milla in Table 13: 'what next?' While this question is only two words long, it is contestable because it invites more than one perspective into the discussion; Milla and Marvin do not agree upon which link to select, both suggesting a different response and providing their own reasoning. It is an authentic question, because it comes from a place of curiosity. I am eager to hear which link they each want to select, and why. It is also a question that is central to the text and to the lesson, for it will impact the trajectory of the narrative we collectively encounter. Finally, it is a clear question, because, when seen in tandem with the passage and the links contained within it, all students understand what I am asking them to do. Overall, we

see that my voiced question and the IF passage intra-acted to formulate a discussion question that brought contrasting perspectives into the conversation.

Considering further my role in the collaborative, IF-based discussions that I facilitated, I note the way that IF enabled me to withdraw somewhat from the discussions taking place. In the discussions contained in Table 15 and Table 16, I withdraw in order to yield the conversational floor, making more space for the voices of my students. I believe I was able to do this because of the way that IF, when discussed and read collectively, helps produce the above-described big questions. Such IF-based questions enable teachers who are so minded to begin withdrawing slightly from classroom discussions. To yield the floor in this way can help to facilitate academically productive forms of student-to-student talk (Murphy et al., 2009; Boyd and Sherry, 2024). In Table 15, for example, Bobby's first remark offers a preference ('youngest and most vulnerable') and highlights the way that this language choice might help the reader to infer why the character's father gave them some advice. As such, Bobby considers the way the reader might make meaning from the language chosen by the producer of the text. Maya builds on this, adding that this decision would create a noteworthy contrast with the adjective 'great'. Again, Maya is considering the way language could be used to make meaning for the reader. The students are working together, exploring the potential significance of language choices, an activity that is central to the subject of English. They are doing this with minimal input from me. Likewise, in Table 16, Harriet, Chrystal, Larissa, Kaylee and Stephanie consider the different ways that the choice before them might impact the characterisation of the character Gretel in the text that they are co-producing. Harriet suggests that one of the options available will empower Gretel to a greater degree, whilst Kaylee and Stephanie suggest that the other option might be preferable as it presents her as a more compassionate individual. The students are exploring the process of meaning making in some depth, thinking hard about how language choices might be seen in the light of typically patriarchal social relations, and I am yielding the floor to them to enable them to engage in this form of discussion.

As well as the initiation questions that are posed, the talk moves that I make across almost all of the transcripts included in this chapter help to produce talk that is part of a collaborative endeavour.

Consider these follow-up questions, for example:

- 'Can anyone build on that, telling me why someone might want to be with their family, at a moment?' (Table 11)
- 'Does anyone else disagree and want to try and convince me that we should select something else other than sights?' (Table 11)
- 'Marvin, do you agree with that?' (Table 13)
- 'Lily, do you agree we should go his?' (Table 14)

These questions help students to listen and engage with the reasoning of others (Michaels and O'Connor, 2015). As such, they can help to foster cumulative forms of talk in which participants interact with one another's ideas.

Furthermore, instead of offering evaluative feedback, I would often pose guiding questions that helped students to elaborate, to clarify or to verbalise their ideas with greater precision. Consider the following questions, for example:

- 'You think it's a he? His family?' (Table 11)
- 'So it could be – are you referring to evacuees who are sent away?' (Table 11)
- 'we might find out where the person is from, because... what? Because...?' (Table 11)
- 'Could you clarify that for me? What do you mean?' (Table 14)
- 'Ah, so you think the I is the Gatsby there?' (Table 14)
- 'Could you clarify for me: what is the difference between his and my, in terms of... If we were writing a sentence that starts with "In his" and "In my," what's the difference?' (Table 14)
- 'So... And how might that change the novel?' (Table 14)
- 'what we haven't talked about is what's the actual difference being highlighted here: young and vulnerable', younger and more vulnerable', vulnerable', youngest and most vulnerable'... What's the... What's the diff... What are the differences here?' (Table 15).

By posing such questions rather than offering explanations or declarative feedback, I show a commitment to facilitating educationally productive forms of classroom talk, for they are all questions

that encourage students to think further about the problem before them; as Nystrand and Gamoran write, 'what ultimately counts is the extent to which instruction requires students to think, not just report someone else's thinking' (Nystrand and Gamoran, 1997, p.72).

It is the contestable nature of the choices I included in the IF passages I wrote that rendered these talk moves accessible to me, a teacher who values the personal responses of students and who seeks to make them more central to learning in English. Unlike a more linear lesson structure, the non-linear nature of IF encouraged me, as the teacher, to interrogate the reasons why students felt certain lines of narrative inquiry to be preferable to others. IF encouraged me to demonstrate a degree of 'response-ability' (Boyd, 2016, p.226) or 'contingent responsiveness' (Cao et al., 2023). As it is a non-linear and somewhat unpredictable resource, I had to listen and adapt my questioning in response to the voices and choices of my students.

However, it is important to note that my response-ability and the extent to which I was able to orchestrate less hierarchical and more reciprocal, collaborative discussions was limited by certain factors. It is partially for this reason that I have included Table 12 within this chapter, for the transcript within it demonstrates some of the ways in which the strategies I used to structure the reading of IF texts limited the collaborative nature of the talk it engendered. For example, the transcript is taken from a lesson in which I assigned to certain students the role of 'judge'. This alone created a sense of hierarchy in the room. It encouraged certain students to evaluate rather than to build upon the ideas of others. This is what I was doing when I said, 'Let's go to our judges. Um, we've had several arguments there – we've heard from Johan, Joana, Marc and Alex. Um, Sabina, who do you think made the most clear argument?'

Furthermore, in Table 12, my verbal responses to the contributions of students did not serve to expand dialogic space. In fact, I offered immediate feedback to Joana, Marc and Alex before inviting other students to contribute. As such, I limited the dialogic space available by focusing student attention on their own utterances and upon the success criteria that I had prescribed. During the lesson in question, I had informed students that I was looking for arguments that were clear,

convincing and which used critical terms such as metalinguistic terminology (e.g. word classes). In the discussion transcript, my preoccupation with these success criteria is evident in my responses. In offering feedback to three consecutive students, I do not create a fully supportive or collaborative environment, instead encouraging students to consider the quality of their own arguments. The imposition of success criteria, it appears, limited my response-ability as well as the dialogic quality of the discussion by partially 'deny[ing] students the opportunity to engage with texts on their own terms' (McCallum 2012, 90). As such, it limited the dialogic affordances that IF might offer.

I also hold that the online environment contributed to the way that dialogic space was thus constrained; as all students had their cameras switched off and there was a visible list of student names down the right-hand side of my screen, with students whose hands were digitally raised appearing first, I was perhaps inclined to engage more with individual students than with the class as a connected social group. The discussion in Table 12 took place during the COVID-19 lockdown and formed part of an online, remote lesson. Teaching in this period posed a range of challenges (see Sections 7.2.3, 7.2.4 and 7.2.5). It was hard to hold the attention of students, and some students chose not to participate in lesson activities. Teachers found that students produced 'rushed, minimal work' and that it was difficult 'to assess student understanding and to identify misconceptions' (Watson et al., 2021, p.11). I found that discussion was one activity that was particularly impacted by the pandemic, with some students choosing not to engage or, for example, engaging only via the chat bar during the lesson's video call. This made the orchestration of classroom discussion challenging.

Table 12: Data excerpts from a lesson conducted on 29th January 2021.

<p>IF passage (taken from WHWYCYE)</p>	<p>As quickly as it all began, the shelling stops, but the screaming goes on. Carefully, you look around. Desperate to find him, you crawl from shell hole to shell hole, dragging your body over the corpses of other men, looking for your friend.</p> <p>Then, you find him. His eyes are glazed over. You shake him, thinking he must be stunned. You try to give him some water from your flask, but as you lift his head you feel a wetness at the back of his neck. It is blood.</p>
<p>Transcript of corresponding discussion</p>	<p><i>[Johan posts a written response in the chat bar]</i></p> <p>SH: Ok so Johan is selecting <u>blood</u> because he wants to know why the friend is bleeding. Ok, let's go to someone else. The next person down is Joana; do you agree with Johan, Joana, that you wanna go for <u>blood</u>?</p> <p>Joana: I agree with Johan because we already know that we have a connection with Franz, since he was a childhood friend and we could have more emotion through <u>blood</u> instead of <u>corpses</u>, which we don't really have any more connection with.</p> <p>SH: OK, I like that. Convincing argument, um, for me anyway, er, and you're agreeing with Johan. Let's go to one more person – see if they can... See if they can say that, or agree or disagree, but also use some, some critical language. So, er, Marc is the next person down. Marc, do you, are you... Er, What next? What would you like to go for?</p> <p>Marc: Uh, I think that we should go with <u>corpses</u> 'cos it would be good to know about all the different people that the main character had been fighting with and how he had a connection with them.</p> <p>SH: Ok, so a counterargument. Um, and you're saying for all the other people, not just one person. No one's used any, any critical vocabulary yet, so let's go one more person down, see if they can add that to their argument. Let's go to Alex.</p> <p>Alex: Um, I would say <u>corpses</u>, as the word corpses connotes, like, many, so obviously there's gonna be many people there, so, so, like</p>

that could, that could basically help, basically like, like describe the scene more, of like what happened.

SH: Ok, pause there Alex. I like you've tried to use the word connotes. Remember that a connotation has to be an abstract noun. Let's go to our judges. Um, we've had several arguments there – we've heard from Johan, Joana, Marc and Alex. Um, Sabina, who do you think made the most clear argument?

Sabina: I th... Well, I think it's a tie between Marc and Alex, 'cos like Alex was very clear with his point and sayin' like cor- it connotes many.

SH: Ok, remember a connotation has to be an abstract noun though, and, um... So who do you think was the clearest, not the one with the best critical vocabulary, but the clearest?

Sabina: I think it might have been Marc.

SH: Ok, you're going for Marc. Right, Anil, who do you think had the most convincing argument?

Anil: Um, I think it's a tie between Joana and Marc, um, because, um, I didn't really, um, get convinced by, um, Johan, but when, um Joana started sayin', I was thinking over to blood, and then Marc countered it by saying cors... corpses. So I'm not really sure.

Although the collaborative nature of the IF-based discussions I facilitated may have been limited by these factors, the way that students spoke with one another indicates that the discussions were collaborative. Students often showed signs of having listened to one another and were willing and able to build upon or respond to the ideas of their peers in a cumulative fashion. Even in Table 12, the transcript suggests that students were listening to one another. Anil, for example, remembered which link the three other contributors opted for and the extent to which they each convinced him. The cumulative nature of the student-to-student talk that IF enabled is better seen in Table 11, where Anil builds on Olivia's point by explaining that people might miss their families after being sent to the 'countryside' during the First World War. Likewise, in Table 13, Marvin responds to Milla's point, disagreeing with it. This suggests that their contributions are connected by the fact that they are both debating the same choice. In Table 15, Maya builds upon Bobby's contribution by agreeing with him and making a further connection; Maya agrees, before adding that the decision to go for the

'youngest and most vulnerable' option would create a noteworthy contrast with the adjective 'great'. Maya is considering the way language could be used to make meaning for the reader, whilst also building upon Bobby's previous contribution. Perhaps the best example of the cumulative form of talk that IF can be used to engender is in Table 16: Larissa, Kaylee and Staphanie each responded to or built upon the previous contributor's utterance. Like I did elsewhere, they demonstrated a degree of response-ability, and the choice that IF put before them helped enable this form of response-ability.

9.1.2 IF and the Dialogic Nature of Language

I hold that classroom readings of IF can begin revealing to students the dialogic nature of language. IF can foreground the fact that people respond to language in different ways, and that there is therefore no fixed link between words and meaning. IF can show students that every 'word is a two-sided act' (Voloshinov, 1973, pp.86-87) and that we are all active participants in a social dialogue (Bakhtin, 2008). The role that choice plays within the works of IF that I developed shows students that the differing perspectives we each bring to a text, whether it be one we are reading or one we are writing, have significant consequences. Our choices as readers and writers impact the meanings that can emerge from language.

This is perhaps most evident in the moments of disagreement that discussions of IF passages evoked, for these disagreements highlight the differing perspectives that individual readers and writers bring to the table. On one level, this can be seen in Table 13, when Marvin and Anil disagree with Milla. While Milla is interested in the backstory of the ship, Marvin and Anil focus more on a character within the story. As such, the fact that they disagree echoes the fact that a story can be told in many different ways, and that a story's trajectory is dependent on the preferences of the writer and the responses of the reader. Table 16 offers another interesting example. Harriet chooses one link because it portrays Gretel as having 'thoughts of her own' and thus portrays her as more empowered than the available alternative might do. However, Larissa, Kaylee and Stephanie highlight the fact that the other choice available may ascribe more 'wisdom' and 'compassion' to

Gretel. Again, we here see that language choices are never simple, and that they can be read, interpreted and responded to in multiple ways.

This suggests to me that IF can help students talk about texts dialogically, helping them to recognise that language choices and meanings are constantly being negotiated, remaining open to re-creation and re-interpretation. While IF does not necessarily aid a teacher in explicitly teaching this theory of language use, it does help students to experience the social quality of language choices and communication for themselves, through talk.

Table 13: Data excerpts from a lesson conducted on 11th February 2021.

<p>IF passage (taken from <i>Aboard the SS Mendi</i>)</p>	<p>You tighten up your life jacket, trying desperately to keep your balance as the deck of the ship tilts. Other people shove past you, confused, shouting through the darkness and the fog.</p> <p>All you can hear are screams and splashes. You realise that around you men are leaping into the sea. They are leaping for their lives.</p> <p>The ship is sinking, and you now have no choice.</p>
<p>Transcript of corresponding discussion</p>	<p>SH: Er, I will go to, er, at the top, Milla's got her hand up first so let's hear from Milla. Milla, what next?</p> <p>Milla: Um I'm not sure if you've already um said this, but I wanted to know like, I would pick '<u>ship</u>' because like - we would know '<u>you</u>' would have to jump if you were like, if the ship was sinking, like all the other people would do, but you would be kinda following them, but if you would go for '<u>ship</u>' you could find a bit more about where the ship started to fill up with water and how it like started to sink.</p> <p>SH: Ok, so you're saying '<u>ship</u>' cos you wanna find out more about the ship sinking than the individual person, it seems like. Marvin, do you agree with that?</p>

	<p>Marvin: I disagree because finding out, finding out the person, if you choose '<u>you</u>', you will find out more about the person and how and why he came on the '<u>ship</u>'. I kind of a- I kind of like... I see where Milla's point is, with seeing the '<u>ship</u>', why um it might of went on the sea or why it sank, but mostly '<u>you</u>' because you'll find out where the g-, probably where the guy's from or, or why he came on the ship or, or where he's going.</p> <p>SH: Marvin, Marvin I'll pause you there. I really like your argument. You've made... You've stated a clear preference; you've given some convincing reasoning; You've also considered the other argument, which is really nice. That's above and beyond – really impressive. Um. One thing you could have improved upon is thinking about using that critical vocabulary - like the noun '<u>ship</u>', for example. So, we've had Milla saying um '<u>ship</u>', Marvin saying '<u>you</u>'. Let's have one more, um, next person down in my list is err, Amir. You're the next person with their hand up.</p> <p>Amir: OK. So, I agree with Marvin and I think that we should choose '<u>you</u>', because it, it's a- actually quite similar to the narrative, I mean the choice that we made before. If we choose '<u>you</u>', then it will probably like focus more on you; we want to know about the character that we're developing rather than learn about the '<u>ship</u>', which would be more indirect, and I just don't think that would be a good idea and way to make the story going. Also, I really like the use of the phrase '<u>you</u>' have... 'now have no choice', because it's a lot more intriguing and interesting than just outright saying like, the ship is sinking, and I feel like if we take that narrative then it'll have more of an interesting feel and just, it'll be generally more exciting.</p>
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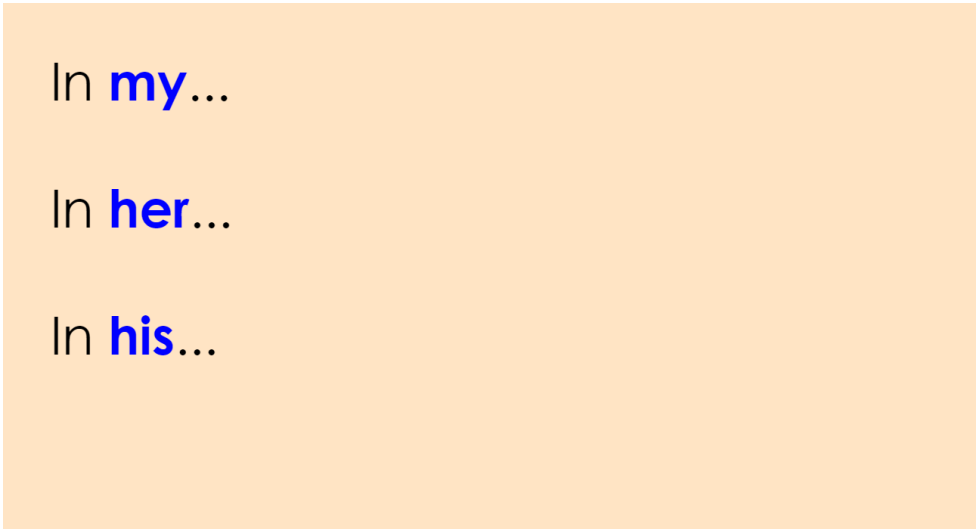
9.1.3 IF as an Enticing Invitation

Nystrand, who has extensively researched the characteristics of productive classroom dialogue, writes that 'if students are to become substantively engaged, they must do more than comply with the procedures of classroom interaction' (Nystrand, 1997, p.25). Somewhat similarly, Wegerif writes that dialogic education is dependent upon the emergence of different voices and perspectives: 'If two voices merge into complete unity then the dialogue between them ceases and so the meaning ceases' (Wegerif, 2013, p.29). It is noteworthy then, that I have found IF capable of inviting students to substantively engage in text-based discussions and to voice their own textual responses. Rather than directing them to participate in a specific, prespecified and compliant way, IF can help teachers to invite students' ideas and responses into the lesson. In the context of this research, the non-linear,

choice-based structure of IF helps to make this possible. In contrast to lessons that follow a linear trajectory, supported by a pre-populated deck of presentation slides, IF's non-linear form and responsive structure invites students to express their ideas. This invitation to self-expression represents a resistance to what Nystrand terms 'extreme monologism' (Nystrand, 1997, p.21) – lessons in which only the voice and perspective of the teacher really count and 'students try to figure out what the teacher is thinking' (p. 9). Even when my own utterances became suggestive of a preoccupation with success criteria and metalinguistic terminology, students were still articulating their own preferences in response to the choice before them.

IF's capacity to invite and entice students to engage and self-express is evident in the transcripts I include in this chapter. Firstly, notice the lengthy contributions that students make to discussions; in Table 13, Milla, Marvin and Anil all offer extended responses to the passage we are reading and the choice contained within it. Likewise, in Table 14 and Table 16, Sarah, Lily, Joy, Harriet, Chrystal, Larissa and Kaylee all offer extended contributions. This may seem like an insignificant observation, but research into teacher-student classroom dialogue highlights the importance of extensive participation. In one study, Howe et al. found that, 'so long as students participated extensively, elaboration and querying of previous contributions were found to be positively associated with curriculum mastery, and elaboration was also positively associated with attitudes' (2019, p.462). Their research highlights the importance of enabling students to offer extensive responses, rather than short answers.

Table 14: Data excerpts from a lesson conducted on 29th June 2021.

<p>IF passage (taken from <i>A Great Gatsby</i>)</p>	 <p>In my...</p> <p>In her...</p> <p>In his...</p>
<p>Transcript of corresponding discussion</p>	<p>SH: Um... Joy, what you saying?</p> <p>Joy: Um... Because we've already had 'In <u>my</u> younger years', I would have gone with 'In <u>his</u>', because I feel like it could um basically reinforce a certain contrast that could be ex- explained later on or [inaudible] within the introduction.</p> <p>SH: So, it could be explained later on. Could you clarify that for me? What do you mean?</p> <p>Joy: Um 'cos I feel like with the title itself: I mean <i>The Great Gatsby</i>, it could be like, just, I dunno how to explain it, but it's like, you're presenting the idea of him going into that, like the superior status that the title suggests.</p> <p>SH: Ah, so you think the / is the Gatsby there?</p> <p>Joy: Yeah.</p> <p>SH: Ok so you think it might, it might focus our attention on Gatsby. Interesting. Erm, do you agree, er Lily, do you agree we should go <u>his</u>?</p> <p>Lily: Um... Yeah, I mean, based on what she said, she makes a good point that like, you know, 'In <u>his</u>', it could refer to the Gatsby so we're like kinda intrigued to find out more, you know, who is this Great Gatsby and why is he so like respected? so yeah...</p>

	<p>SH: Could you clarify for me: what is the difference between <u>his</u> and <u>my</u>, in terms of... If we were writing a sentence that starts with 'In <u>his</u>' and 'In <u>my</u>', what's the difference?</p> <p>Lily: Is it the perspective? Like-</p> <p>SH: -yeah what is th-</p> <p>Lily: Like the point of view, like, it changes from first to third.</p> <p>SH: So... And how might that change the novel?</p> <p>Lily: It could turn... Like, <u>my</u> is like more personal, like, kinda' like you know speaking from his experiences and like upbringing, whereas in <u>his</u> – you don't know who's really speaking or who is being... It's not... It changes the kind of personal tone to a more kind of just general one, I think.</p> <p>SH: Interesting. So we've had two people saying <u>his</u>. Sarah, do you wanna come in with a counterargument, or do you want to back them up?</p> <p>Sarah: Well gonna say '<u>his</u>' is more like... to say why wouldn't you choose '<u>my</u>' like, even though '<u>my</u>' would be more personal, so like the reader might be able to like, what's it called, relate to what is being said. I said '<u>his</u>' because it kinda shows that maybe the person that's being spoken about has been like, very influential, like significant, that they have to get someone else to tell their story, so if it being from their perspective.</p>
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Within their extended responses, my students were able to express how they were thinking *with* IF and *with* others. They spoke of the choice before them, and the contributions of others, highlighting the entangled nature of the understanding that was emerging during the reading experience. This suggests that IF not only invited students to engage substantively but entangled them in a material-dialogic assemblage of relations. Consider, for example, Maya's contribution in Table 15 or Larissa's contribution in Table 16; these students were thinking with their peers' ideas and with the work of IF before them. Larissa, for example, both agrees and disagrees with Harriet and Chrystal, providing reasoning that explains her position, a position that she has formed in response to a passage from *Gretel, Redesigned*.

Student contributions were numerous and extensive, and the extensive nature of student responses is explained by the fact that students routinely provided reasoning within their responses. As I have mentioned previously (Section 8.3.3), students regularly used the conjunction ‘because’ to signpost the fact that they were attempting to explain their reasoning. The reasoning that students offered came in various forms. Students drew upon historical knowledge, personal experience, narrative experience, linguistic observations, their own curiosity and their own writerly intentions when providing reasons during our IF-based discussions. The following list provides examples of each of these differing forms of reasoning, all taken from the transcripts that I have included in this chapter:

Historical knowledge:

‘Because, when there was like World War One, they sent people to like different places, um, to the countryside. And he’s probably moved away, and he’s tryna remember – ‘home’ is London – and he’s tryna remember how London felt.’

(Anil, Table 11)

Here, Anil draws upon his own knowledge of evacuees during the First World War, something that we have not discussed in our English lessons, but that Anil may have learned in another lesson. I note that Anil could be referring to the more large-scale evacuation of children that occurred during the Second World War, but he is nonetheless displaying an awareness of the connection between war and evacuation.

Narrative experience:

‘OK. So, I agree with Marvin and I think that we should choose you, because it, it’s a- actually quite similar to the narrative, I mean the choice that we made before. If we choose you, then it will probably like focus more on you; we want to know about the character that we’re developing rather than learn about the ship, which would be more indirect, and I just don’t think that would be a good idea and way to make the story going.’

(Amir, Table 13)

Here, Amir's reasoning is based upon his experience of the narrative so far; he suggests that we, as readers, are more interested in the developing characterisation of the protagonist than we are in the ship that serves as the narrative's setting.

Linguistic observations:

'it could turn... Like, my is like more personal, like, kinda' like you know speaking from his experiences and like upbringing, whereas in his – you don't know who's really speaking or who is being... It's not... It changes the kind of personal tone to a more kind of just general one, I think.'

(Lily, Table 14)

Lily here justifies her choice through reference to her linguistic observations; she has noticed the difference in perspective that each of the choices before her might offer and explains the semantic significance of her preferred choice.

Personal experience:

'Er, I think smells, because, er, they could give us some background. Like, for example, we could like smell cooking, like in the kitchen, like family members, so we could also like tell where they're from.'

(Joana, Table 11)

Joana draws upon her experience of kitchen smells here to explain why one link might be worth pursuing. Kitchen smells are unlikely to have been discussed in another lesson, so she appears to be drawing on her own memories and experiences, making connections between the passage and her knowledge of typical kitchen-based activities.

Personal Curiosity:

'Um I'm not sure if you've already um said this, but I wanted to know like, I would pick 'ship' because like - we would know 'you' would have to jump if you were like, if the ship was sinking, like all the other people would do, but you would be kinda following them, but if you would go for 'ship' you could find a bit more about where the ship started to fill up with water and how it like started to sink.'

(Milla, Table 13)

Milla explains herself by outlining her own interest in the ship. She feels that the 'you' link will take her in a direction she can quite easily imagine, but that the 'ship' link will reveal information that she is curious to discover.

Writerly intentions:

'Um, I think we should go for 'began to think' instead of 'turned to her brother', because um when you say that she immediately turns to her brother after she's like, been given a sense like of fear, it kind of relates back to how, um, women are always expected to um go to that male figure in their life, and how they were like, they couldn't do anything for themselves but rather go to that dominant male person to sort out the situation. Obviously, you will say that she began to think shows that she has thoughts of her own and she is able and capable to sort out the situation by herself, without a man present in her life.'

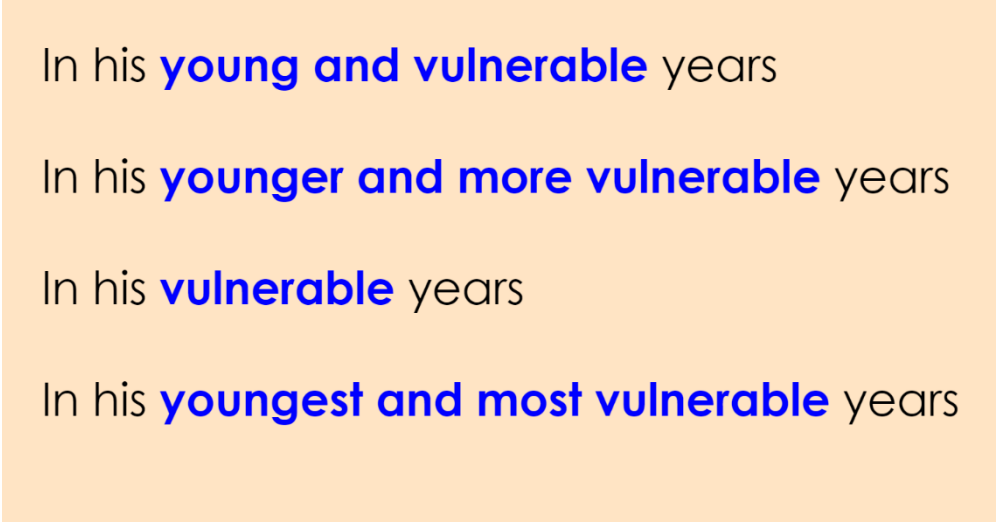
(Harriet, Table 16)

Reading *Gretel, Redesigned*, Harriet explains her preference as a writer – she wants Gretel to have 'thoughts of her own', a writerly preference that explains her choice of link. She justifies her position through reference to the meaning that *she* wants to create.

The fact that students were able to reason in this range of ways when responding to IF passages is indicative of the open-ended nature of the contestable and consequential choices that IF placed before them. It is also due to the fact that I wrote various forms of IF: *AGG* and *Gretel, Redesigned* are writing games that encouraged students to explain themselves through reference to their personal writerly intentions, whilst *WHWYCYE* and *Aboard the SS Mendi* were narrative texts that placed less emphasis on writerly intentions. That being said, the fact that students had the freedom to reason in a range of ways and felt able to draw upon *their* experiences, *their* curiosity and (in some cases) *their* writerly intentions when explaining themselves, suggests that IF allowed students a voice and a degree of autonomy. Inviting student voices into classroom talk is an essential part of dialogic teaching, for without a diversity of voices, dialogic space cannot emerge. Permitting personal forms of textual response also helps students to feel that their voice matters in the classroom, something that is not a routine occurrence in the secondary academy environment: This is because,

‘from the moment children and teachers enter the school gates, their movement, voices, and bodies are subjected to tight forms of control, discipline, monitoring, policing, and assessing’ (Wong and Cushing, 2023, p.494). In the English classroom, strategies such as the over-reliance on writing acronyms such as PEE can serve to marginalise ‘student choice, voice and personal response’ (Gibbons, 2019, p.36). This may partially explain the positive affective impact that working with IF had; students found pleasure and enjoyment in my IF-based lessons as it allowed space for them to choose and to express more personally formed responses, as I discussed in Section 8.1.

Table 15: Data excerpts from a lesson conducted on 29th June 2021.

<p>IF passage (taken from <i>A Great Gatsby</i>)</p>	 <p>In his young and vulnerable years</p> <p>In his younger and more vulnerable years</p> <p>In his vulnerable years</p> <p>In his youngest and most vulnerable years</p>
<p>Transcript of corresponding discussion</p>	<p>Bobby: Um... ‘In his <u>youngest and most vulnerable</u> years’, um... Because... The emphasis on the fact that he was at his most... Errr... He was in his <u>youngest and most vulnerable</u> state shows that he must have been at a point in his life when he was very inexperienced and he must have seen some sort of damage in his life which led to his father giving him such advice [inaudible].</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Charis: What do you think Maya?</p> <p>Maya: I agree with Bobby, um, ‘In his <u>youngest and most vulnerable</u> years.’ There’s emphasis on the vulnerable, and it kind of shows that, the younger he is, the more vulnerable he is. Then like, when, um... As he grew up he’s become more, he’s become less</p>

	<p>vulnerable, and he's become stronger which is why now he's referred to as being great. And yeah...</p> <p>Charis: Does anyone have a different opinion?</p> <p>[silence]</p> <p>SH: No one? Ok interesting. Thank you, Charis – it seems like we've come to an agreement. Um, what we haven't talked about is what's the actual difference being highlighted here: '<u>young and vulnerable</u>', '<u>younger and more vulnerable</u>', '<u>vulnerable</u>', '<u>youngest and most vulnerable</u>'... What's the... What's the diff... What are the differences here? Yeah – Sarah.</p> <p>Sarah: You could say that the last sentence has a superlative, and then the second one has a comparative adjective. So that's...</p> <p>SH: Yeah.</p> <p>Sarah: Both of those put more emphasis on the vulnerable, rather than the first, the first and the third.</p> <p>SH: Right, so these two are putting more emphasis on the youth and the vulnerability, whereas these two...</p> <p>Sarah: They're just like, they're just saying like, not really emphasising much.</p> <p>SH: Ok. What's the difference between this one and this one?</p> <p>Sarah: That one just... The third one just talks about his vulnerability, like he could have been born [inaudible] old age or middle age, but the first one says when he's young as well.</p>
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9.1.4 IF and Metalinguistic Understanding

As explored in Section 3.4.3, there is a growing body of research exploring the benefits of metalinguistic discussion and understanding in the context of the English classroom (Myhill et al., 2020; Myhill et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2021; Healey, 2024; Newman, 2024). With this existing research into metalinguistic understanding in mind, it is noteworthy that I have found reading IF to help students engage in metalinguistic talk - talk that (1) is functionally oriented, (2) considers texts dialogically, (3) gives voice to metalinguistic understanding and (4) provides teachers with

opportunities to assess, guide and model the expression of metalinguistic understanding (Holdstock, 2023).

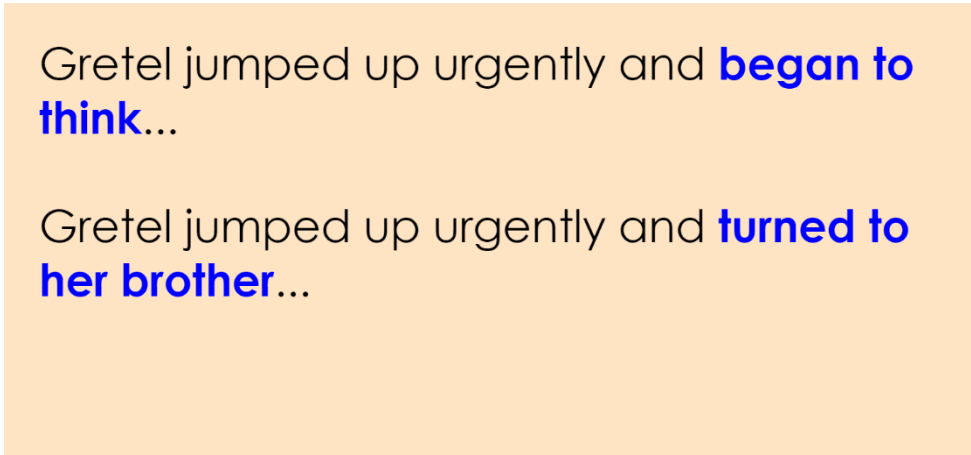
In this chapter, to consider the metalinguistic characteristics of the talk that IF facilitated, I shall focus in particular on the way that students, as they read and discussed works of IF, were able to voice their metalinguistic understandings of texts. Some of the IF-based talk that I recorded was characterised by students voicing metalinguistic commentaries and explanations during our discussions. This does not mean that they were routinely using linguistic terminology in their spoken responses, for metalinguistic understanding does not necessarily require students to use such terminology (Myhill et al., 2020). Instead, metalinguistic understanding is voiced through reference to the relations that exist between linguistic choice and the meanings or effects that arise from said choices.

Evidence to support this claim can be found in the transcripts contained in this chapter. In Tables 9-11, students demonstrate their metalinguistic understanding of the choices they face as readers. Firstly, Joana (Table 11) highlights that selecting the word 'smells', in the context of the passage being discussed, could lead to a description of the character's 'background' and the 'traditional cooking' that occurred in that character's kitchen at home. She uses this explanation of the potential effect of her preferred choice in order to justify her position; she highlights the effect that choosing one hyperlinked word might have, an effect that the other hyperlinked words would not have. In so doing, she explores the relations between readerly choice and meaning, demonstrating her metalexical, metasemantic and metatextual understanding of the text. She shows that she can identify words, comment on their meanings and explain how these meanings relate to a textual character. Similarly, in Table 12, Marc and Alex choose 'corpses' over 'blood' because, in the context of the passage, they feel that the plural noun corpses will reveal more information about 'all the different people' present, rather than just one individual. Again, their readerly choice is rooted in their understanding of language; they recognise that the different links focus the reader's attention on different aspects of the scene at hand. They demonstrate a degree of metasyntactic understanding

by verbalising their recognition of the morphological difference between the two words. Finally, in Table 13, Marvin and Amir choose 'you' over 'ship' because they too recognise the way that each link will affect the reader and the narrative; they demonstrate metatextual (or metanarrative) understanding when they suggest that selecting 'you' will focus more attention onto a specific character, something that they are eager to achieve. They have a metalinguistic understanding of their readerly choices, but it is also interesting to note that their explanations are somewhat writerly; they monitor the language of the passage and the links with a view to manipulating the story and to controlling how the text will focus the reader's attention moving forwards. Where IF is concerned, therefore, collaborative reading and discussion is a metalinguistically rich activity.

In tables 12-14, students demonstrate their metalinguistic understanding of the choices they face as re-creative writers. Consequently, they frequently consider texts metapragmatically by considering the relationship between their writerly choices and the meaning which an imagined reader might produce. Joy, Lily and Sarah (Table 14) discuss how the choice of perspective that they are required to make will alter the meaning of the text, acknowledging that a first-person perspective will strike a more personal tone, whilst a third person perspective could foreground a character's influence and significance. They thus consider the function of the language options before them. In Table 15, my students and I discuss the differing effects that a variety of adjectival forms and phrases might engender. Here, the discussion is both metasyntactic and metapragmatic, for we are considering how contrasting adjective phrases might affect readers differently. Finally, in Table 16, we similarly discuss the way that two different verb phrases might affect the characterisation of Gretel. In all of these examples, students explore the relations between linguistic choices and the effects they might have. As such, they are developing and expressing their metalinguistic understanding of the language before them. They are also exploring the function of their language choices by considering their potential semantic impact in a dialogic fashion. Simultaneously, they offer me, their teacher, opportunities to assess and to guide their metalinguistic thinking. Largely, this guidance and assessment is conducted via the questioning strategies that were explored in Section 9.1.1, but also via the feedback strategies that were explored in Section 8.2.2.

Table 16: Data excerpts from a workshop conducted on 5th July 2022.

<p>IF passage (taken from <i>A Gretel, Redesigned</i>)</p>	 <p>Gretel jumped up urgently and began to think...</p> <p>Gretel jumped up urgently and turned to her brother...</p>
<p>Transcript of corresponding discussion</p>	<p>Mr Holdstock: Ok – whole group – remember, one voice, one voice at a time, um... Let's try and come to a conclusion – which one are we going to go for?</p> <p>Harriet: Um, I think we should go for '<u>began to think</u>' instead of '<u>turned to her brother</u>', because um when you say that she immediately turns to her brother after she's like, been given a sense like of fear, it kind of relates back to how, um, women are always expected to um go to that male figure in their life, and how they were like, they couldn't do anything for themselves but rather go to that dominant male person to sort out the situation. Obviously, you will say that she began to think shows that she has thoughts of her own and she is able and capable to sort out the situation by herself, without a man present in her life.</p> <p>Chrystal: Um, I agree with Harriet because I think the '<u>began to think</u>' will give her more independence, than turning to her brother, because it shows like a dependence on her brother but for thoughts, instead of herself, so...</p> <p>Larissa: I, I agree with what they are saying, but I slightly disagree because you could say that she is turning to her brother because they are both there as a pair, so she's saying it, she's thinking, she's turning to her brother so that she can consult him with the idea, because the situation both gonna affect both of them.</p>

	<p>Kaylee: Me and Stephanie, we had like a similar idea; like she had like the wisdom to know that this might be an issue that like has to be worked on together, for them to like get the best outcome.</p> <p>Stephanie: And it shows her compassion towards him.</p>
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9.2 Chapter Conclusions

In this chapter I have demonstrated why I theorise that reading and discussing IF in the English classroom can be a collaborative endeavour that reveals to students the dialogic nature of language, inviting their voices into that dialogue, enticing them to participate in it, and so helping them to develop a metalinguistic understanding of the meaning-making process.

In so doing, I have shown that the IF-based discussions I facilitated were collaborative, in the sense that they involved my students and I listening to one another and talking in a cumulative fashion, building upon and responding to one another's contributions. IF enabled us to contribute responsibly to discussions, and said discussions were more reciprocal and less hierarchical than conversations which might otherwise occur in the secondary school environment. My own contributions to IF-based discussions were often characterised by a deviation from the IRF recitation script and the use of talk moves in order to extend student thought. With these findings, I build upon existing research into the dialogic affordances of digital resources such as the Interactive White Board (Mercer et al., 2010; Hennessy, 2011) and digital games (Arnseth et al., 2018) by identifying some of the dialogic affordances of IF in the context of the secondary school English classroom.

The talk that IF enabled included a variety of voices and perspectives. As such, I argue that IF can help open up dialogic space (Wegerif, 2013), the space that emerges between differing perspectives. The voices that formed this space were varied; students offered a range of different forms of reasoning in their responses. The personal, individual nature of these responses is noteworthy, as students' own voices and preferences can often be marginalised in the secondary academy environment. By identifying the manner in which IF can contribute to the formation of dialogic space within the context of the secondary school classroom, my research makes a significant contribution,

building upon existing research into the role that technologies can play in creating dialogic space (Wegerif and Major, 2019). Moreover, I have shown that engaging dialogically with IF foregrounds the social and dialogic nature of language. IF can help students to experience the way that language choices and meanings are constantly being negotiated. IF encourages students to recognise that language and meaning remain permanently open to re-creation and re-interpretation.

Finally, the talk that IF enabled featured students expressing their metalinguistic understanding of the language contained in the passages before them. As a development of metalinguistic understanding can help students develop as writers, this finding is noteworthy. Thinking as readers and as writers, my students were often able to verbalise connections between the choices they were making and the meanings and effects that could consequently emerge. By identifying IF's ability to support metalinguistic thinking and understanding (Holdstock, 2023), my research supplements existing pedagogical research (Watson et al., 2021; Devanny, 2022), offering academics and teachers alike insights into how IF, choice and non-linearity can support and enhance their work.

10 Conclusions

10.1 Vignette: A Farewell Card

During my final few days at CentreTown Academy in May 2024, after almost eight years of working at the school, I was approached by two students from year 10. I remembered their names and their faces, but a little fuzzily – I had not taught them since they were in year seven, several years previously.

It was during break time, and I was on my way to the staffroom to fetch myself a drink. At the time, I was preoccupied with the miscellaneous tasks that needed completing before my departure, as well as a leaving speech that I would have to deliver in a staffroom event that afternoon.

We chatted for a minute or two in the large central atrium of the school's main building, and I confirmed to them that, yes, I was leaving the school at half term.

The next day, during break, these two girls sought me out again, this time on the English corridor up on the first floor. Beside one of those glass-walled classrooms within which I had taught so many lessons, these two students presented me with a card. I opened it and read it, surprised.

*I discovered that it was signed by many of the members of the year seven class that I had taught during lockdown, the class with whom I had first read and discussed some interactive fiction. They were the students with whom I had read *The Doodle and What Happens When You Close Your Eyes* for the first time. They were the students whose names, pseudonyms and classroom contributions I had pored over and reflected upon for several years. I felt I knew them all well, despite the fact that I had actually taught none of them in the intervening time.*

In the card, they expressed their thanks and wished me well. Some of them referred back to lockdown and to their behavioural foibles during our lessons together. One even encouraged me to enjoy the path I had chosen! Would they have written such a comment if it wasn't for IF? It was touching, for although I had had relatively little contact with this form group in the intervening years, they cared enough to buy, sign and deliver a card to me.

It caught me off-guard, stopped me in my tracks and made my voice waver.

I couldn't help but feel that, without IF and without my research, that card would never have come into my possession. Those two girls would never have sought me out to say farewell.

(3rd July 2024)

10.2 A Material Difference

In this concluding chapter, I shall first highlight the limitations of my research before summarising the contributions that my study makes to the field of education and the possible implications and avenues for further inquiry that emerge from my findings.

However, before doing so, let me briefly consider the above vignette. Written in response to a particular encounter, the vignette emerged unexpectedly from a unique constellation of people, ideas and materials: my research-assemblage. The vignette forms part of a line of flight (Colebrook, 2001; Deleuze and Guattari, 2003) and exists as an unexpected consequence of my decision to engage in action research exploring the possibilities for IF in the classroom. The students, their written and spoken sentiments, those classrooms, works of IF that I wrote and that we read in class, the conversations we had along the way, the process of reporting upon my research; all of these are referenced in or connected to the above vignette, and they are all part of the various and interconnected lines of flight that emerged from my research and the introduction of IF into my practice. As such, the vignette foregrounds the way that the intra-actions between elements of my research-assemblage have made a material difference; the card that I have rested on the table before me as I write this chapter would not be there if I had not, for example, sat down to write *The Doodle*. Furthermore, having recently left CentreTown Academy to take up a position as a lecturer in teacher education at a university, I am aware that my research-assemblage has also made a difference to the course of my own life. The vignette is a reminder to me of the difference that research makes.

My research into IF has also made a significant difference to my wider practice as an English teacher. Systematically reflecting upon my practice and exploring a range of pedagogical theories and

frameworks has helped me to think profoundly about such issues as classroom talk, questioning strategies, the role of choice, lesson resourcing and the English curriculum. Consequently, I now plan, teach, listen and observe in ways that I did not previously. I have encountered and experimented with new ways of working, and I have become increasingly aware of how, for example, different pedagogies and strategies can be characterised as monologic, dialogic or critical-creative. Moreover, through conducting this research, I have become more able to articulate theories, ideas and educational values, an ability which will support my work in teacher education.

In the same way that my colleagues' contributions to and participation in this study made a difference to my research, this research has also made a difference to the thinking and practice of my colleagues at CentreTown Academy. I am very grateful for the time and energy that my colleagues contributed to this research. Their experience, expertise and feedback enabled us to develop theories and attitudes relating to the role that IF can play in the classroom and the ways in which it can intra-act with pedagogy. Our conversations enabled us to look again at the purpose of English teaching, contrasting ways of planning and resourcing lessons, and the ways that we conceptualise success in the context of our practice as English teachers. As I have already mentioned, during my time at CentreTown Academy, and as a result of the research into classroom talk that this study involved, I was invited to lead a CPD programme focussing on dialogue. As part of this programme, I distributed small printouts containing a menu of talk moves that teachers could use at the third turn during classroom interactions. These printouts were small, enabling teachers to slide them into the identity card holders that hung from their lanyards and to refer to them as prompts. Several of the teachers who attended the CPD sessions I led still referred to these printouts years later. Consequently, I believe that work deriving from this study made a material difference to the lives and practice of my teaching colleagues at CentreTown Academy.

10.3 Limitations

To consider the limitations of my study is to consider the way that my research-assemblage has shaped research events and my understanding of them. My research-assemblage functions in the

way that Barad describes apparatuses: 'apparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering. Apparatuses enact agential cuts that produce determinate boundaries' (Barad, 2007, p.148). The boundaries or limitations of my study are created by the intra-actions between components within my research-assemblage and the agential cuts that thus occur.

A few of these cuts seem worthy of particular attention. Firstly, my research predominantly focuses on my own practice as a teacher, writer and researcher; the findings that I shall here summarise, while having emerged from lessons, interviews and focus groups in which other teachers and students participated, are the product of sustained attention to my own practice. I do not provide an in-depth account of how IF has shaped the lessons of other teachers, working in other classrooms or other schools. This is partly due to the counter-cultural nature of my research; as I was enacting pedagogies and practices that did not align with CentreTown Academy's existing models and its approach to teaching and learning, it would have been difficult and potentially unethical of me to encourage other teachers to make extensive use of IF in their lessons. That being said, the participation and support of my colleagues greatly enriched this study and enabled us all to develop more nuanced understandings of our practice and of the role of IF within English lessons.

Furthermore, my research arises from my own values, my own experience of existing as a living contradiction and my own distinctly privileged positionality. The living theories and findings that I here summarise are inseparably entangled with these parts of my research-assemblage. That being said, I am not alone in valuing self-expression, dialogue, reciprocity, student voice and creativity. Moreover, CentreTown Academy is a school whose culture and policies can be compared with other secondary schools in England. For example, CentreTown Academy has taken inspiration from other schools in the development of its policies: Mossbourne Community Academy (2024) and Michaela Community School (2024), to name two high profile examples. Consequently, the entangled living theories that I present are undoubtedly noteworthy to other English teachers and researchers working in the fields of Education, English, Literacy, and, more broadly, to teachers working in

comparable schools and classrooms, schools in which cognitivist and behaviourist approaches to schooling are favoured over more sociomaterialist or socio-cultural approaches.

My methodological approach and my selection of data gathering and analysis methods have also helped form the boundaries of my research. I have not, for example, gathered and analysed data that can quantify the impact that IF might have upon examination results or test scores, instead opting to explore the ways in which I sought to use IF as a means of better aligning teaching practice with my educational values. In so doing, I have reflected upon and analysed my experiences of researching IF-based teaching and writing practices, building living theories regarding the possibilities and affordances of IF when introduced into the secondary English classroom. Much of this theorising was abductive, and I therefore make claims about IF that I deem to be plausible, claims that are based upon my experiences and the data that I have gathered. The manner in which I collected classroom data also forms a noteworthy borderline of my study. As I recorded classroom audio using a single recording device, rather than, for example, videoing IF-based lessons or using multiple recording devices positioned around the classroom, my attention was channelled towards the relationship between IF and whole-class, predominantly teacher-led forms of classroom discussion. My research sheds little light on the ways that IF can affect the classroom talk that occurs between students or within student groups. Somewhat similarly, much of the literature I build upon channelled my attention towards classroom talk, and although I collected some of my students' written work, this study has not produced extensive findings relating to how IF might influence the quality of students' written work. Likewise, I have not explored how students engage with the writing of IF. Instead, my focus is on how IF and accompanying pedagogies can be developed for use in the secondary school English classroom. Jewitt, in considering the ways teachers make use of Interactive White Boards, highlights that the teacherly design of new texts has 'the potential to realize new pedagogies' (Jewitt, 2008, p.54). Similarly, my research reports upon the ways in which I designed new works of Pedagogical Interactive Fiction and developed accompanying pedagogies.

10.4 Contributions

In this section, I shall consider each of my research sub-questions in turn, identifying, in responding to them, the academic contributions that I have made. As I do this, I shall highlight the ways in which my findings relate to existing research into IF, education and pedagogy. In responding to my sub-questions, I also summarise the ways in which my research responds to my main research question: How might the introduction of IF into the secondary school English classroom influence the quality of textual entanglements being facilitated?

10.4.1 What Can Producing a Work of IF that is Set in a Secondary School Classroom Reveal about my Position as a Teacher, a Writer and a Creative Practitioner?

Firstly, in responding to the above question, I developed a unique approach to the exploration of positionality-as-assemblage. By using the creative writing of IF and rhizomatic, autoethnographic playthrough analysis to conduct self-reconnaissance as part of my action research, I identified factors that shaped the way I was positioned in relation to CentreTown Academy, the school where I worked. I found that privilege, values, policies, pedagogies, personal memories and the relations and intra-actions that occur between such elements contributed to my positionality and practice as a teacher, researcher and writer working at CentreTown Academy. My self-reconnaissance helped me to recognise that my belief in the value of self-expression explains the discomfort I experience when faced with exclusionary and impersonal modes of instruction. Moreover, by reflecting, for example, upon the connections that I perceive between my memories of my own mother's illness during my childhood, a fictional character from *The Doodle*, and the bridge or divide that can exist between home and school life, I identified, articulated and explored my belief in the entangled relationship between school knowledge and personal knowledge. In such ways, combining the creative writing of IF with rhizomatic, autoethnographic playthrough analysis enabled me to explore my positionality and, by extension, my own educational values, in a personal, novel and nuanced manner. Given the education sector's preoccupation with the improvement of measurable outcomes, such a nuanced account represents an important counter-narrative and a noteworthy act of

resistance, an act that could inspire and enable others to explore and recognise their own values and the vital role that they play in their educational practice. This is important work, for the experiences, voices and values of individual teachers can easily be marginalised in the drive for better student examination results and improved school inspection reports: performativity relegates teachers' values to a position of secondary importance (Ball, 2003); surveillance strategies pressure teachers into constantly exemplifying the teaching standards and 'exceeding the minimum requirements' (Page, 2017, p.11); and the 'what works' approach to research and evidence makes it 'hard to step outside the discourse to examine it more critically' (Yandell, 2019, p.432). I have provided teachers and researchers with a novel methodological means of stepping outside of dominant approaches and discourses, of exploring, expressing and unearthing aspects of teacherly positionality and practice that might otherwise remain unseen.

Secondly, my research also builds upon existing research into the experiences of teachers as writers (Cremin et al., 2020) by exploring some of the affordances of writing IF, as a teacher. I find that the writing of IF enabled me to think deeply about my personal positioning as a teacher, potentially due to its capacity to support the creation of 'games exploring personal experiences' (Friedhoff, 2013). Consider, for example, the various identity positionings that my research drew to the fore. My self-reconnaissance helped me recognise the way that the following range of previously embodied identity positionings affected the way that I understood teaching and my teacherly self:

- An insecure French student
- An able-bodied White male
- An authoritarian teacher
- A linguistically privileged individual
- A socio-economically privileged individual
- A student of the violin
- A son
- A PhD student
- A creative writer of IF

This list exemplifies some of the ways in which I came to recognise and consider the complexities of my own positionality and the array of entities and relations that constitute my positionality-as- assemblage. In such ways, writing IF helped me to develop a more explicit awareness of the nature of my practice. Therefore, I assert the value of enabling teachers to become writers of IF by arguing that it is an activity that can facilitate reflective forms of practice. Interrogating one's own theories and beliefs is part of what makes a reflective English teacher (Zwozdiak-Myers, 2011), and writing and reflecting upon IF that is set in a school environment can, I have shown, enable teachers to interrogate their theories and beliefs regarding their own practice and positionality.

Thirdly, responding to the above question involved the production of a work of IF – *The Doodle* – a work of non-linear fiction that sheds light upon aspects of contemporary secondary school life. As such, it is a work of IF that could become a valuable educational resource, enabling academics, teachers, students and trainee teachers to reflect upon the lives and experiences of students and young carers. It is a resource that could contribute to the practice of professionals working in education. For example, I recently used the story in a session with a group of trainee English teachers, and the story enabled us to have a fruitful discussion about the barriers to learning that some students can face, often without us knowing. This is just one example of the ways in which *The Doodle* can contribute to knowledge development within the field of school-based education.

10.4.2 How Can Works of IF be Produced for Use in the Secondary School English Classroom?

By interrogating the ways in which I was able to produce works of IF for use in the classroom, I identified component parts of my own pedagogical creative assemblage, an assemblage which produced various works of IF. Through consideration of this assemblage, I highlight the extensive and various writerly resources that can become entangled in the creation of PIF, including the people, concepts, texts, tools and contextual factors that can be involved. In so doing, I highlight the resources, complexities and challenges involved in developing innovative and creative forms of practice. This is useful information for a potential PIF creator or innovative practitioner to access.

However, the extensive resources involved in the PIF creation process also render the PIFs that I have created more noteworthy, for they have been created for use in the classroom and can therefore be used by teachers without the need for them to engage in the potentially extensive PIF creation process. That being said, the practical expertise that I have developed through an extensive exploration of PIF design has been valuable in and of itself, and I would encourage others to engage in similar projects.

All of the PIF created as part of this project are potentially useful resources for teachers to use in their own classrooms. As such, they may make material contributions to classroom practice. Table 17 outlines some of the potential educational uses of each of the stories created as part of this project. In addition to all of the uses listed in the table, all of these works of IF could be used as a means of facilitating IF-based classroom discussions and could therefore be usefully employed by educators seeking to develop the oracy skills of their students.

Table 17: The potential educational uses of the works of IF created as part of this project.

IF	Potential Usage
<i>The Doodle</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a text to be read, discussed and studied in its own right • As a means of introducing and exploring with school students or trainee teachers some of the issues faced by young carers
<i>What happens When You Close Your Eyes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a means of exploring the range of ways that the First World War impacted people from around the world. • As a means of diversifying the narratives featured in schemes of work exploring the First World War and corresponding literature.
<i>Aboard The SS Mendi</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a means of exploring and introducing students to the story of the SS Mendi and the South African Native Labour Corps.
<i>A Great Gatsby</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a critical-creative means of exploring Fitzgerald’s use of language and narrative framing at the start of <i>The Great Gatsby</i>. • As an interactive creative writing prompt.
<i>A Party at Gatsby’s</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a critical-creative means of exploring Fitzgerald’s use of language in chapter 3 of <i>The Great Gatsby</i>. • As a means of exploring Fitzgerald’s portrayal of power dynamics in 1920s America

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As an interactive creative writing prompt.
<i>Gretel, Redesigned</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a critical-creative means of enabling feminist interrogations of the fairytale <i>Hansel and Gretel</i>. • As a critical-creative means of exploring the connections between language and characterisation. • As an interactive creative writing prompt.

In examining the ways in which I approached the production of IF for use in the secondary school English classroom, I also provide writers of Pedagogical Interactive Fiction (PIF) with a set of questions that could serve as a useful starting point for their own projects. Of particular note are the following:

- *How will the work of PIF relate to the curriculum?* As, for many teachers, PIF will be a novel addition to their curriculum, it is important to consider how the text can be designed so as to enable curricular integration.
- *To what extent will the activities involved in reading/playing the text complement and align with the learning outcomes you would like your students to achieve?* The question of alignment is key for individuals seeking to design PIF for the classroom; if reading/playing the text does not involve a form of activity that supports skills relevant to the discipline or curriculum, the PIF risks being of limited use in the school environment.
- *How will you structure your work so as to ensure it remains manageable?* As I discovered when writing *The Doodle*, it can be difficult to maintain control over the structure and scale of a work of PIF. It is therefore advisable to consider how you will structure the text before commencing.
- *What sort of choices do you want to include?* In the context of the English classroom, this is a key question, for choices can be designed for different purposes. If, for example, you seek to promote critical-creativity and metalinguistic attunement, choices such as those contained in *Gretel, Redesigned* can be produced to support this goal.

Furthermore, for English teachers seeking to create works of PIF for use in their own classrooms, I offer three recommendations, all of which emerge from my work with IF. I recommend that teachers of English consider the ways that IF can support three specific pedagogical approaches: choice-based approaches to the teaching of grammar, reading and writing (Myhill, 2021); textual intervention as a critical-creative pedagogical approach (Pope, 1995); and an integrated approach to the conceptualisation and teaching of reading and writing, or (as Oatley terms it) 'writingandreading' (2003). By highlighting the way that IF can complement such pedagogies, I make a significant contribution to subject-specific pedagogical research in English.

10.4.3 How Can Introducing Works of IF into the Secondary School English Classroom Affect the Quality of my Teaching Practice?

I have found that introducing non-linear works of IF into the secondary school English classroom can disrupt 'default' pedagogical practices (Hall et al., 2012, p.7) and consequently alter the ways in which students experience learning. Although I therefore assert that the classroom usage of IF is not easily compatible with the design and implementation of knowledge-rich curricula built around prespecified and mandated bodies of knowledge, I find that it does make space for the expressive voices of students to inform the quality of classroom teaching and learning. For an English teacher like myself, who values 'dialogic space' (Wegerif and Yang, 2011) and 'literary sociability' (Doecke, 2019), and who believes that English students should be encouraged to do more than 'simply recall things deposited or drilled into them' (Eaglestone, 2020, p.12), this is a significant and hugely positive finding. It is exciting to have developed resources that can effectively engage and entangle students and their voices in the dialogic processes of reading, writing and storymaking. Compounding this, I also find that teaching with IF can evoke pleasure in the students and teachers involved, an affective dimension of classroom-based education that is all too often and readily forgotten. Whilst teaching with IF via the extensive facilitation of whole-class discussion can raise questions and pose challenges, I argue that it is therefore also an extremely worthwhile endeavour.

Using IF in the classroom also supported the teaching and learning of a specific range of ideas, skills and sensibilities: inferential prediction, evaluation, argumentation, metalinguistic and metanarrative attunement, textual coherence, and a deliberate approach to the craft of creative writing. This list is significant, because it aids teachers, researchers and game or PIF designers to better identify the various ways that the playing/reading of non-linear, choice-based materials might align with relevant learning goals (Shelton and Scoresby, 2011).

Finally, I found that IF contributed to the emergence of pedagogical practices such as the usage of dialogic gestures as teacherly 'talk moves' (Michaels and O'Connor, 2012, p.10), gestures that help teachers to foreground the voices of students during episodes of classroom discussion. Furthermore, I have shown how IF can enable teachers to yield the conversational floor, withhold feedback during classroom discussions and incorporate critical-creative activities into their practice. Such practices can serve to enrich the classroom study of English and support my claim that the usage of IF in the English classroom can be an enormously valuable experience for the teachers and students involved.

10.4.4 How Can Introducing Works of IF into the Secondary School English Classroom Affect the Characteristics of the Talk Taking Place During Lessons?

I find that reading and discussing IF can support collaborative, dialogic forms of text-based talk by inviting and enticing students to share and discuss personal and differing perspectives. The sharing of such perspectives helps open up dialogic space in the classroom (Wegerif, 2013; Wegerif and Yang, 2011). I also find that IF can enable students and teachers to speak and listen with responsibility (Boyd, 2016), thus supporting reciprocity. Overall, I therefore contribute to the field of dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2020) by identifying the ways in which IF can support and enable dialogic pedagogical strategies (Holdstock, 2021b). This builds upon existing research that explores the dialogic affordances of other digital resources (Hennessy, 2011; Arnseth et al., 2018). For example, I argue that IF can support deviation from the ubiquitous IRF recitation script (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975), a pattern of classroom talk that does not make the most of talk's potential as a vehicle for

learning. Moreover, I find IF capable of supporting the production of contestable and authentic questions that, in turn, can support academically purposeful discussions (Reznitskaya and Wilkinson, 2017).

The quality of these discussions is noteworthy. I find that certain forms of IF can enable the facilitation of metalinguistic talk. I have also developed a useful framework for conceptualising metalinguistic talk (Holdstock, 2023), a framework that defines metalinguistic talk as (1) functionally oriented, (2) dialogic in the way that it considers texts, (3) enabling students to voice their metalinguistic understanding and (4) providing teachers with opportunities to assess, guide and model metalinguistic understanding. IF's ability to support the facilitation of metalinguistic talk is significant, as it can contribute to the development of students' writing skills. Therefore, I build upon existing research into metalinguistic talk, variously described elsewhere as metatalk (Newman and Watson, 2020; Watson et al., 2021) or metalinguistic dialogic talk (Myhill et al., 2020), by unearthing the ways in which IF might serve as a pedagogically appropriate resource for teachers hoping to support the development of metalinguistic understanding. In this way, my research also makes a timely contribution, as it is only relatively recently that researchers have begun to illustrate 'how talk may be orchestrated in the classroom to support learning about language use, and what the impact of this talk may be on writing' (Newman, 2024, p.2).

10.5 Outlook

Reflecting upon my findings, a range of avenues for further research and practice emerge. The educationally advantageous affordances of choice-based, non-linear ludonarratives as educational resources are worthy of further investigation. For example, researchers, writers and teachers could consider the following questions, among others:

- How might the works of IF that were developed as part of this study, along with comparable texts, be used by teachers in other classrooms?
- What might teachers working in contrasting school environments discover about the possibilities for IF as an educational resource?

- How might more multi-modal ludonarratives that incorporate, for example, images, videos or videogame technology, affect the quality of teaching and learning occurring in classrooms?
- How could such other ludonarrative forms be employed by teachers of English?
- How do pedagogies developed alongside linear resources compare to pedagogies developed alongside non-linear resources?
- How might the implementation of non-linear teaching resources alter the culture of a school or department?
- How might IF best be employed as a tool for teacher training and development?
- How might other teachers experience the creative writing of IF?
- In what other fields might the combination of the creative writing of IF with rhizomatic, autoethnographic playthrough analysis be used as a methodological strategy, and what might it reveal?
- How might my framework for conceptualising metalinguistic talk be applied in different research contexts?
- To what extent might IF be used to enrich or adapt existing pedagogical interventions and strategies? For example, how might IF be used to enact a grammar-for-writing teaching intervention?
- What effect can an IF-based intervention have upon the quality of students' writing?
- To what extent could IF help students to think about and understand the ways in which texts can be structured?
- How might IF be used by teachers to facilitate group work and paired student discussions, and how might IF influence the quality of said discussions?

All of these questions emerge from my research-assemblage, and I hope to explore at least some of them myself. For example, I have already begun to explore the role that IF might play in the context of teacher education, and I am also interested in designing more playful, non-linear resources that can be used to support the development of metalinguistic understanding, critical-creative approaches to English and creative writing pedagogies. Having conducted this study, I am also interested to explore how IF might be used to support students' understanding of the role structure plays in their writing. The production of works of IF that encourage and enable students to discuss and make choices about how they structure a text could help students towards a better understanding of the ways in which structure affects meaning. As I have found that IF can help students think about how a text coheres, it seems possible that appropriately designed works of IF

might help students develop a better understanding of how decisions regarding the sequencing and arrangement of content in a text can affect its meaning. Furthermore, since becoming a lecturer in teacher education, I have been invited to join a research team exploring how digital, videogame-like experiences can be designed and used within the heritage sector. As such, I am already starting to consider the school-based educational affordances of multi-modal, game-like ludonarratives that are designed to enable learning and engagement with heritage sites and artefacts.

In sum, IF has made a difference to my practice as a teacher, writer and researcher; incorporating IF into my work has taken me on a developmental journey that I would not otherwise have taken, a journey the likes of which has perhaps not been taken previously by any other English teacher. No other teachers, for example, have written a work of PIF using Twine in order to enable dialogic, metalinguistic, feminist interrogations of the language of a fairytale such as *Hansel and Gretel*. As part of my research, I wrote such works of IF for my pupils, providing them with branching narrative and linguistic avenues to discuss, choose and explore. In this way, using digital technologies like Twine, I empowered my students to become actively entangled with the storymaking process. IF, Twine, my students and I became part of a research-assemblage that developed over time; before during and after the COVID-19 lockdowns, we discussed and responded to works of IF that I had written. In the process, I developed living theories regarding the affordances of IF and so became a more reflective, experienced and effective teacher. At the same time, my pupils became more engaged and enthused learners, capable of sharing and discussing their own ideas relating to the process of storymaking.

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12 Appendices

Appendix 1: Signed Ethical Approval Form

Department of Educational Studies Ethical Practice in Research Form

Name: Samuel Holdstock	Degree: MPhil/PhD Education
Student Number: 33547680	Year of Degree: 1
Title of Research: Textual Transactions: Interactive Fiction in The Secondary School English Classroom	
Supervisor (s): Francis Gilbert & Vicky Macleroy	

Section 1:

	YES	NO	N/A
I have reflected carefully on the research that I propose to undertake.	✓		
I have reviewed the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, fourth edition (2018) and 'Good practice in Educational Research Writing (2000) published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). Note that, depending on your research topic, you might need to review other published ethical guidelines (e.g. BPS, BSA, BAAL).	✓		
I have discussed the ethical aspects of this research with my supervisor, and my research complies with these guidelines.	✓		

Section 2:

Research Checklist:	YES	NO	N/A
1. Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent? (e.g. young children, children, adults with learning or communication difficulties, patients). Note that you may also need to obtain satisfactory CRB clearance (or equivalent for overseas students).	✓		
2. Will the study require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for initial access to the groups or individuals to be recruited? (e.g. children at school, parents, patients, people in custody, members of organisations)	✓		
3. In the case of action research will the researcher inform the sponsor/host of the work they propose to undertake? (e.g. head of school)	✓		
4. Will the research be carried out without the knowledge and/or consent of the participants? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)		✓	
5. Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. race, bullying, sexual or drug activity)?		✓	
6. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?		✓	
7. Will the study involve prolonged data collection or repetitive testing?	✓		
8. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		✓	

If you have ticked 'no' for all questions in Section 2, then please sign below and arrange for your supervisor (or module coordinator) to sign this form. If you have ticked 'yes' to any of these questions, then please complete and sign the second page of this form.

Signature of student:	Date:
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Signature of Dissertation supervisor or module coordinator:	Date:

There is an obligation on the Dissertation supervisor or module coordinator to complete sections 3, 4 and if necessary 5 below, in order where appropriate to bring to the attention of the Departmental Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

Section 3:

<p>Provide a brief outline of your research (what do you want to find out? What will you do to find out (your methods)? Consider including information on who, where, when, how, and why:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I intend to explore the possibilities for Interactive Fiction (IF) in the English classroom. • I shall begin by composing some autoethnographic reflections about my experiences with IF. • I shall then conduct cycles of Action Research, exploring the possibilities for IF in the classroom. • As Action Research is a somewhat open and unpredictable approach, the trajectory of my research is not entirely fixed. • Data may be gathered in some of the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keeping a journal and taking field notes • Gathering existing school documents and teaching resources • Conducting interviews • Conducting Focus Groups • Observing lessons • Recording lessons • Gathering examples of student work • Leading and recording workshops with teaching practitioners. 	
<p>Set out the ethical issues arising from your research below. Include sensitivity, confidentiality, and informed consent:</p>	<p>Identify how you intend to address each of these ethical issues:</p>
<p>1. Consent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I shall seek consent from school gatekeepers. - I shall offer the parents of students participating in the research the opportunity to withdraw consent for their child to participate. - When conducting interviews, I shall gain the consent of participants for interviews to be recorded and for the data to be used for research purposes.
<p>2. Confidentiality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants shall be carefully anonymised. - All data will be confidential unless a safeguarding issue arises, in which case I will follow school policies.
<p>3. Sensitivity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I shall act reflexively throughout, reflecting upon my own social and institutional position and the influence it could have upon my research. I shall also pay close attention to the potential ethical consequences of my research, making sure to reflect upon the impact my research has upon those connected to it.
<p>Comments of Dissertation supervisor or module coordinator:</p>	


Sam has reflected carefully on how he intends to carry out his research and discussed all these aspects with his supervisors. I fully support this research study which meets all the ethical requirements outlined above.	
Signed (Student)	S. Holdstock
Print name	S. Holdstock
Date	09/05/20

You must now submit this form to your supervisor (Dissertation) or module coordinator (for other modules). If you do not submit this form, your dissertation (or research report) will not be able to be submitted. Once signed, include the form as an Appendix with your assignment.

Section 4

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This project has been considered using agreed Departmental procedures and is now approved. This approval is valid for a maximum period of five years.

Signed (Dissertation supervisor or module coordinator):	
Print name	Dr Vicky Macleroy
Date	20 th May 2020

Optional section 5: If the supervisor(s) or module coordinator has further queries , this form should be referred to the Head of Programme, who may also request advice from the Chair of the Ethics Committee. The process should be recorded below:	
Comments of Head of Programme:	
Signed (Head of Programme)	
Print name	
Date	
Comments of Chair, Ethics Committee:	
Signed (Chair, Ethics Committee)	
Print name	
Date	

Appendix 2: Code of Research Practice

1. Wherever possible, I shall gain the consent of research participants (and, where necessary, the parents of participants) for data to be recorded and/or used for research purposes.
2. Wherever possible, participants shall be carefully anonymised.
3. Wherever possible, data will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, unless a safeguarding issue arises, in which case I will follow school policies.
4. Where possible and appropriate, I will offer participants the opportunity to critique drafts of my research reports.
5. Where possible and appropriate, participants will receive a copy of the final report.
6. I shall pay close attention to the potential ethical consequences of my research, making sure to reflect upon the impact my research has upon those connected to it.
7. Should I seek to publish my research, permission shall be sought from relevant participants.
8. The research will attempt to explore pedagogical practice. I hope and envisage that the Action Research process and the final report will be of benefit to the school and to those who take part.

Appendix 3: Example of Letters Sent to Parents and Carers

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am teaching your child English this year and am greatly looking forward to helping them develop their reading, writing and communication skills.

So far, I have been very impressed with the work that the class has completed and the behaviour they have demonstrated in their English lessons. It looks like this is going to be a good year!

As well as being a teacher, I am also a researcher. This year, as part of my PhD, I am conducting a research project into the ways that Interactive Fiction (a form of digital storytelling) can be used in the classroom. My research suggests that using Interactive Fiction in the classroom could have learning benefits for your child, helping them to develop their literacy skills.

As part of this project, I intend to make audio recordings of some of the year 7 English lessons that your child is due to attend. I also intend to make copies of some of the work that students in this class produce. Students will be informed that I am collecting this data, and it will be used for educational and research purposes only. When using the data I collect, students shall be carefully pseudonymised. Also, the data I collect will be treated with the strictest confidentiality, unless a safeguarding issue arises, in which case I will follow school policies.

If you have any concerns about this research project, or if you would like to discuss it with me, please do get in contact. You can either call the school and ask to be put through to me, or you can email me directly.

My email address is [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully,

Mr. S Holdstock