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The short story beyond print media

Digital narratives and affective learning

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Abstract: The concept of 'short fiction' has recently expanded to include multimodal, digital forms. Our chapter examines how short digital texts create new horizons for collaborative, affective, and open-ended learning processes that encourage pupils' empathy development. Both of us use forms of digital short fiction in our GLU teaching. In this chapter, we share our conceptions of these kinds of texts and the ways they can contribute to technologically mediated aesthetic learning processes and to the aims of the English subject. Erika explores interactive fiction (IF), a non-linear mode of writing with elements of gameplay that can function as a collaborative playground/testing-ground for investigating what literature feels like for the reader. Jennifer explores fan fiction—that is, stories written by fans based on popular cultural texts—and argues that reading and writing fan fiction can foster empathy, encourage students to consider different perspectives, and allow readers to transform into writers.

Keywords: English, digital fiction, interactive fiction, fan fiction

Sammendrag: Definisjoner av novellen som form er i stadig endring, og kan nå også innbefatte multimodale digitale tekster. Kapittelet undersøker hvordan korte digitale tekster skaper nye horisonter for samarbeidende, affektive og åpne læringsprosesser som støtter elevers empatiutvikling. Vi bruker begge ulike typer korte digitale tekster i vår GLU-undervisning. I dette kapittelet deler vi våre perspektiv på disse tekstene og hvordan de kan bidra til teknologisk medierte estetiske læringsprosesser, samt til læringsmålene i engelskfaget. Erika utforsker interaktiv fiksjon (IF), en ikke-lineær og spillbasert tekstform som kan fungere som en kollaborativ arena for å undersøke hvordan litteratur føles for leseren. Jennifer utforsker fanfiksjon – det vil si historier skrevet av fans basert på populære kulturelle tekster – og diskuterer hvordan lesing og skriving av fanfiksjon kan fremme empati, oppmuntre studenter til å vurdere ulike perspektiver og la lesere forvandles til forfattere.

Nøkkelord: engelsk, digital fiksjon, interaktiv fiksjon, fanfiksjon

Introduction

The short story was perhaps the first literary mode to move online. On the internet, the features that often distinguish short stories—not only brevity, but also formal experimentation and open-endedness—are both virtues and necessities, making short stories well-adapted to digital environments and 'hyperreading'.[1] Today, digital short fiction thrives on literary magazine websites, on social media and beyond. Thinking of digital short fiction as *short stories*, as we do here, expands the short story concept, encouraging us, as readers and as teachers, to explore new possibilities for the short story.

In this chapter, we focus on a specific affordance of digital short fiction: its ability to create affective engagement and provide opportunities for an empathetic response to the experiences of others. Affective engagements with texts have become a central consideration in literary and literacy studies in the twenty-first century, with particular focus on how and why affective responses to classroom texts may cause, or prevent, failure to thrive scholastically. The term *affective responses* is often used synonymously with *emotion* or *subjective experience*, but it goes beyond this. When first defined by Tomkins (2008/1962), it specifically referred to pre-emotional, embodied responses, such as disgust. In relation to texts, it can best be described as 'what connects, touches and moves students, or perhaps what keeps them stuck' (Dernikos, 2018, p. 4), as reading and writing are no longer seen as 'technical, neutral skill-sets' but instead 'as social, cultural, political… and multimodal practices… shaped by dynamic social interactions and complex power relations' (p. 3).

This chapter will examine how digital short fiction can blur the binary between reader and writer, creating new horizons for collaborative, affective and open-ended learning processes. We will discuss digitally specific forms of text that we use in our English teacher training classes: interactive fiction (IF) and fan fiction (FF). Our own teaching is discussed only in general terms, both to preserve the privacy of our students and because our primary aim is to introduce teachers to two emerging short story forms, not to prescribe

1 Hayles (2010) associates 'hyperreading' with 'search queries… filtering by keywords, skimming, hyperlinking, "pecking" (pulling out a few items from a longer text)… fragmenting… juxtaposing, as when several open windows allow one to read across several texts, and scanning' (p. 66).

how to use them in the classroom. Our discussion explores ways in which these texts can be used to achieve the aims of the English subject—with particular focus on the interdisciplinary themes 'Democracy and Citizenship' and 'Health and Life Skills'. However, the chapter is likely also relevant for teachers of other languages.

Background

In its first sentences, the English Subject Curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2020) stresses the importance of developing skills 'for communicating with others… regardless of cultural or linguistic background' and their 'understanding that their views of the world are culture-dependent… [to] open for new ways to interpret the world, promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudice' (pp. 2–3). More specifically, the curriculum emphasises that engagements with texts will help students to 'build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others' identities' (p. 4). Although not explicit in the curriculum, these statements reflect a belief that reading can develop both self-insight and *empathy*—that is, the ability to understand the feelings of, and to feel alongside, others. Empathy is one of the pillars of *emotional literacy*, a term popularised by Steiner and Perry (1997) that refers to

> the ability to understand ourselves and other people, and in particular to be aware of, understand and use information about the emotional states of ourselves and others with competence, including… the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions, and respond to the emotions of others. (Weare, 2004, p. 2)

The confluence between reading and empathy has been discussed for over a century, with academic publications on the subject dating back as early as 1915. However, 'claims as to the impact of reading on readers' ability to become more empathic, tolerant and better people are divided' (Malan, 2013, p. 105).

Written texts reflect the internal lives and feelings of others in ways that other media cannot. According to Keen (2006), 'narrative techniques—such

as… first-person narration and the interior representation of characters' consciousness and emotional states—support… character identification, contributing to empathic experiences, opening readers' minds to others, changing attitudes, and even predisposing to altruism' (p. 9). Bishop (1990) argues that the more one reads about a wide variety of perspectives and experiences, the more empathic and understanding of difference one will become. Nikolajeva contends that texts for young readers encourage what she terms 'emotional ekphrasis', that is, an explanation and evocation of specific emotions (2012b, p. 277) through their invitation 'to feel, through vicarious experience, understand how other people feel, … project our own emotions onto fictional characters and test, in a safe mode, situations that we fortunately will not encounter in real life' (2012a, p. 1).

However, literature is not necessarily as effective in developing empathy as some might argue. Novice readers, for example, often have a 'similarity bias'—that is, they empathise most with characters like themselves and may struggle to empathise with people unlike themselves (Malan, 2013; Bishop, 1990). As such, opportunities for empathy development are not equally accessible. While there has been a slight increase in English-language books with 'diverse' protagonists in the past decade, most protagonists are still white, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, neurotypical and middle- or upper-class (Booth & Lim, 2022; Bishop, 1990; CLPE, 2023; Dahlen & Hyuck, 2019; Ramdarshan Bold, 2019; Tyner, 2018a, 2018b). This means that some young readers will often see themselves reflected and 'grow up with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and value in the world', while others rarely see themselves reflected and are forced either to develop the ability to empathise with people unlike themselves from an early age or to abandon literature altogether in order to minimise affective injury to themselves (Bishop, 1990; Dernikos, 2018). This is one of several reasons why students from minority groups may struggle to develop print literacy (Dernikos, 2018).

Moreover, as Malan (2013) emphasises, 'fiction that engages a reader with the emotional plight of a character does not necessarily translate into actions in the real world towards people who are similarly suffering, marginalised, or victimised' (p. 106). For example, Thomas (2019) and Bullen, Moruzi and Smith (2018) discuss the Twitter storm that followed the release of the first *Hunger Games* film in 2012, when some commentators explicitly stated that they could not sympathise with the young girl character Rue because she was

played by Black actress Amandla Stenberg.[2] They wrote online that they had pictured her as a 'little blonde innocent girl' and that, because she was depicted as Black, 'her death wasn't as sad' (Bullen, Moruzi & Smith, 2018, p. 1). Such responses 'raise questions about readers' affective investment in the welfare of fictional characters, how… emotions interact with cultural beliefs and ideologies, and the extent to which reading fiction influences readers' (Bullen, Moruzi & Smith, 2018, p. 1). Nonetheless, research has suggested that literature with a clear social justice message—even if that message is metaphorical and does not translate one-to-one to prejudice in the real world—is likely to make its fans more tolerant of different ways of living and different viewpoints, as well as less tolerant of authoritarianism (Gierzynski & Eddy, 2013).

How, then, can we understand the relationship between reading and developing empathy—and what role does affect play in this relationship? How can texts script our affective responses, and what circumstances are needed for such scripts to help develop empathy? If we believe that there is a 'relationship between representation and narrative empathy, affect and reader positioning, and emotion and ethics' in texts for young readers, and if we are asked by the curriculum to use these texts 'as tools for emotional socialisation, enculturation, political persuasion, and moral or ethical education' (Bullen, Moruzi & Smith, 2018, p. 2), then discussing how texts might (or might not) be useful in the classroom to encourage empathy is essential.

This chapter focuses specifically on the use of short fiction in the classroom—that is, it examines short fictive narrative texts rather than a broader range of short texts that could include nonfiction. We discuss *genre* as separate from *form* here, because although form is certainly a part of genre, twenty-first-century uses of the term typically foreground content, with readers categorising texts into ever-shifting 'fuzzy sets' that comprise their understanding of a genre (Attebery, 1992, pp. 12–13; Duggan, 2020). We therefore discuss short fiction as more a form than a genre, although it does comprise aspects of genre.

The one thing critics of the form agree on is that short fiction is difficult to define. More specifically, they argue that there is only 'one clear feature of

2 Rue is explicitly depicted as Black in the books, but since whiteness is more commonly associated with innocence in western cultures (Thomas, 2019; Bernstein, 2011), many readers nonetheless envisioned her as white. See Thomas (2019), Bernstein (2011), and Bullen, Moruzi & Smith (2018) for more on this topic.

the short story' critics agree on: 'its short length' (Malcolm, 2012, p. 36). Some of this disagreement comes down to terminology—the terms 'short story' and 'short fiction' are relatively new and encompass a wide range of stories previously referred to as 'tales', 'sketches', 'impressions', 'vignettes', 'nouvelles', 'fable', '*conte*' or 'novella' (Malcolm, 2012, p. 35). Furthermore, short fiction does not follow a specific plot arc or use a specific narrative technique. While some definitions specify that short stories tend to follow a conflict-resolution story presented in a 'logical-chronological sequence' and 'eschew substantial amounts of exposition' (Malcolm, 2012, p. 36), this is not always the case. Finally, because short fiction is primarily defined by its length (short) and its rhetorical mode (fiction), content and genre can vary significantly, with genres from psychological horror to romance making use of the form.

In this chapter, we discuss how two recent forms of short digital texts—fan fiction (FF) and interactive fiction (IF)—can be used to develop empathy. Short works of FF and IF often look very different from traditionally published, linear short stories, but as we hope to show in this chapter, the possibilities of the short story—in particular, this genre's use of brevity and compression to create aesthetic and affective intensity—are also borne out, often in innovative and striking ways, in these digital narratives. FF is often categorised by readers' expected emotional responses or characters' expected emotional arcs through the use of tags like #Hurt/Comfort (Lowe, 2020). Moreover, as Wilson (2016) suggests, more than other kinds of fiction, FF relies on affective hermeneutics and reception, that is, both on 'gaining knowledge through feeling' (para. 1.4) and on responding with feeling (para. 1.2). IF, using different affordances, shares this focus on the affective experience and response of the reader. Both these digital forms, then, might recall Flannery O'Connor's comment on fiction in general and short stories in particular: 'The meaning of fiction is not abstract meaning but experienced meaning' (1969, p. 96).

We argue that it can be fruitful to focus on digital short fiction that aims to create embodied and affective responses in readers in the classroom when aiming to develop readers' emotional literacy.[3] Both IF and FF draw on the traditions of *body genres*, that is, genres that aim to elicit affective responses

3 As regards digital texts, we have previously discussed digital comics and their call for embodied and affective responses. See Kvistad & Duggan (2023) for more on this topic.

in their readers (Kvistad & Duggan, 2023; Williams, 1991). As defined by Williams (1991), the term *body genres* refers to texts that evoke emotional, embodied and affective responses in audiences by providing scripts for these responses through characters' behaviours. Such responses can include audiences' flushing when watching or reading romance, for example, or their flinches in response to horror. Because of the scripted, intense relationship between audience and character, such texts tend to be deeply character focused. The perceived proximity between character and audience, Williams suggests, forces audiences to be 'caught up in an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen' or page (p. 143). While these genres and their audiences have historically been disdained by critics and scholars for their perceived 'lack of proper aesthetic distance, a sense of overinvolvement in sensation and emotion' (Williams, 1991, p. 143), it is our contention that it is precisely this closeness that supports readers' development of emotional literacy and empathy.

First, Erika will explore IF, a non-linear mode of writing that incorporates elements of gameplay. Erika's use of IF in the language classroom draws on both game studies—examining readers'/players' embodied, affective and empathetic responses to IF—and research on IF as a classroom tool for literary understanding and text creation. As students both read, play and create IF narratives, IF becomes a collaborative playground and testing ground for investigating emotions and how literary texts reflect and evoke them.

Then, Jennifer will introduce FF—stories written and shared by fans based on popular cultural texts such as films, television shows and books. She will discuss how readers use FF as a counterstorytelling practice to reimagine popular stories from minoritised perspectives (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016), as well as consider how FF can best be used in the language classroom for the development of emotional literacy. This includes how FF can foster empathy, encourage students to consider different perspectives and transform readers into writers.

Finally, in the conclusion, we will discuss the benefits and limitations of using these modes of storytelling in the language classroom to foster emotional literacy, with a particular focus on the development of empathy.

Interactive Fiction (IF)

IF developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s through early computer games and choose-your-own-adventure novels. IF works are text-based story-games, usually written in the second person, where the reader/player moves through the narrative by making choices. As with other game narratives, IF can be highly interactive, with player choices making a major difference to the story, or almost linear, with few real choices to make. IF is a subset of *hypertext writing*—writing in which links take you from one part of the text to another, as opposed to *linear writing*, where you progress from start to finish without diversions. We often associate this form of writing with the internet, but hypertext writing is not necessarily digital—for instance, in physical choose-your-own-adventure books, you can choose between different options for how to proceed by turning to different pages. This means there are multiple pathways through the text and many possible endings.

Early IF games tended to be *parser-based*, meaning that the player types in what they want to do: 'go east', 'pick up umbrella' and so on. Present-day IF tends to be *choice-based*, meaning that the player clicks links to move through the story. Choice-based IF is often considered more accessible to play, but it can also be more accessible to write. Today, indie creators of IF often work in Twine, an open-source tool that makes it possible to write choice-based games without programming experience, and which has led to a huge rise in independently made IF.

IF is not inherently a short form, and the ergodic[4] element means that an IF game can take much longer to traverse than a non-interactive text with a similar word count. Still, a wide range of IF is playable in anything from a couple of hours to a few seconds, and short-form IF can provide a masterclass in telling a powerful story in few words—for instance, *Queers in Love at the End of the World* (Anthropy, 2013) takes place just before the world ends, and in its ten-second runtime the player must decide how to spend their brief remaining time with their lover.

Here, I want to discuss the potential of short-form IF as a way of opening up new paths to literary understanding in the classroom. As a teacher

4 'Ergodic' in this context is Aarseth's term for texts that require unusual kinds of effort—like solving puzzles or making choices—to read (1997, p. 1).

of English literature didactics, I recognise IF's potential to affect my students', and, in turn, their future pupils', understanding and experience of literature. I work with IF with my students to make the form available to them as a tool in their own classrooms, but the qualities that make IF useful in schools also make it useful in my own classroom. Prior practitioner research has explored the ways in which both creating and playing IF games can help develop traditional reading and writing skills, especially for students who are not already enthusiastic readers and writers. Pereira (2014) discusses IF as a source of authentic text that, due to its interactive and gamified element, motivates language learners to engage in extensive reading, as well as noting its potential for immediate feedback on language errors, since written game commands need to use correct spelling and syntax in order to work. Ensslin (2006) studies IF as a potential collaborative writing format for developing literary analysis skills, while Tran (2016) examines it as a format for creative text production. In my own teaching, however, the most important role IF plays is affective: whether students are writing these games or playing them, IF allows for powerfully emotional approaches to reading and writing literature.

In previous work (Kvistad, 2025), I discuss the role of emotion in 'empathy games'—games that represent experiences the game creator has had, and that are perceived (by the creator or, more commonly, by the audience) as allowing the player to experience the same thing at second hand. Perhaps the best-known example is Anna Anthropy's (2012) *Dys4ia*, received by many players as an opportunity to share the creator's experiences of gender dysphoria. Through a video essay focusing on Ella Risbridger's *Blood Will Out* (2016), an autobiographical IF game about cancer, I argue that we should treat the idea of empathy games with a certain caution. While games, like other cultural expressions, have the potential to contribute to what Bullen et al. (2018) call 'emotional socialisation… and moral or ethical education' (p. 2), the feelings games evoke are necessarily in some sense those of the player themselves. As Anthropy (2012) has argued, the assumption that what we are experiencing is direct insight into another person's experience—an assumption that can easily be encouraged by the interactive aspect of IF games—can in itself be a barrier to insight. Yet, while fiction, including IF, may never work as an 'empathy machine', its potential to act as a tool for emotional literacy—a way to help us explore and understand our own feelings and what evokes them—is worth considering, especially in a pedagogical context.

How does IF act as this kind of tool? IF has powerful affordances for what Nikolajeva calls 'emotional ekphrasis… not merely an explanation of an emotion… but an evocation of it' (2012b, p. 277)—some of which it shares with fiction more broadly, but some of which are specific to this form. As suggested by the often-used second-person point of view, IF focuses narrative attention on the reader/player; Isbister writes that when playing a game, '*[m]y* emotions ebb and flow as *I* make… choices and see what happens as a result' (my emphasis) (p. 3). In such games, when you (the reader/player) experience frustration or fear or excitement, you are not just feeling *for*, but to an extent feeling *as* the protagonist.[5]

Moreover, IF combines textual mechanics and game mechanics to affect the reader/player's emotions. For instance, the horror game *my father's long, long legs* (Lutz, 2013) is very close to a linear textual narrative—the choices you make are not meaningful to the story outcome, and eventually narrow down to just the choice to keep moving forward. The game's protagonist looks back on their father's years-long obsession with digging a hole under the house and decides to return home to investigate what lies beneath their childhood home. Yet the limited interactivity is vital to the story's affective and physical effect. Aside from the forced compliance of having to choose to go deeper into the dark, it allows for the building of tension through timing (as when text takes a while to appear), and for fear and disorientation (as when you have to use your mouse as a torch to see the text and choose one of several half-obscured paths). Other games might use game mechanisms to physically involve you in the story, such as *With Those We Love Alive* (Porpentine, 2014), which requires the player to write symbols on their own skin as they play. Or the challenge of finding your way around in a game might itself amplify the player's emotions, as in *Anchorhead* (Gentry, 1998), where both the player and the protagonist are lost in a Gothic mansion.[6] IF can also play with frustration in other ways, as in *Queers in Love*, where the game's brief runtime creates a sense of urgency and loss.

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5 See also Bell & Ensslin (2024) for an in-depth discussion of the relationship between the reader/player and second-person narration, 'ways in which readers accept, reject, negotiate, and reluctantly role-play the characteristics associated with "you" and… the way that these positions dynamically affect reader engagement with the narrative' (p. 16).

6 I discuss this more fully in Kvistad (2019).

The form-unique mechanisms IF games use to create emotional immersion have implications for how we might use these texts in the classroom, and how our students might work with them both as readers/players and as writers. Like other fiction, IF presents a range of human experiences, but while literary qualities such as compelling characters and complex plots are very possible to achieve in IF, the form is distinguished by a focus on *experience in itself*—the experience of the point-of-view character, and the experience of the reader/player.

In the classroom, then, IF allows us to focus on how a text *feels*. Sloan (2003/1973) argues that in literary study, feelings are the material we work with: without the ability to access and understand our emotional and aesthetic responses to a text, engaging with it critically is difficult (p. 150). For instance, in my class work with *Blood Will Out*, not only does the text produce emotional engagement in students (due not least to its subject matter), but this engagement is also highly self-aware. Students attend both to how they feel and to the elements and mechanisms in the text that make them feel this way, such as the use of repetition and the randomness of game outcomes. Affective experience, then, acts as a doorway to critical understanding. The fact that IF is both text and game, creating affect in ways that overlap with, but are also distinct from, both linear literary texts and video games, seems to make these mechanisms more visible for the student reader/player. IF thus encourages students to attend both to their own affective experience of the text and to the textual qualities that shape this experience.

Similar effects appear when students write their own IF games. Practitioner research (for example, Tran, 2016) suggests that using IF as a class writing format is more time-consuming and challenging than using it as reading—text-based game creation platforms like Twine are designed to be accessible, but it can still take time for a new writer to feel comfortable with the tool. That said, even simple Twine creation is an opportunity to feel how the affective dimension of IF works from the other side. IF is ergodic to write as well as to play or read, demanding attention to the ludic as well as the literary dimension of reader/player experience-in short, IF has to work both as a game and as a text. However, this challenge can in itself create awareness in the writer of the way their decisions affect the reader. Novice writers often write IF by switching frequently between the writer and the reader/player perspective, making a writing decision and then playing through the game to

see if it worked as intended—which, of course, it often did not. As we learn to write in this new way, we notice that, while we can try to close the gap through iterative revision, our intentions as writers and the experience of the reader may be two very different things. This may be another of the insights that IF can bring to our work with affect and literature: the awareness that, in spite of literature's communicative potential, we can never fully bridge the gap between our own experience and that of someone else. If the assumption that we can fully and straightforwardly understand someone else's experience can be a barrier to genuine empathy, such an awareness may, instead, support it.

Fan Fiction (FF)

Another digital form that has grown increasingly popular in the twenty-first century is FF,[7] stories written by fans based on popular texts such as television shows, films and novels. FF differs wildly in length, from short 'ficlets' (under 100 words), 'drabbles' (exactly 100 words) and 'snippets' or 'vignettes' (under 1,000 words) to 'longfics' and 'epics', which can be millions of words long (FanLore, 2024). The shorter forms of FF most closely resemble short stories and are most practical for classroom use. These shorter stories usually focus most intensely on characters' emotions, too, as they respond to specific situations or experiences in a limited space.

Thus far, studies of the value of FF for education have focused on print literacy development and language learning (for example, Black, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; FanTALES, n.d.). However, some studies have also focused on the importance of FF for identity development, particularly for young LGBTQ+ individuals (Duggan, 2021; McInroy & Craig, 2018). My own experiences suggest that FF lends itself to identity development and affective learning because it tends to focus on 'what if?' questions relating specifically to characters' affects and identities:

> Fans are interested in transformations of social identity (what if a character were female, black, Jewish, queer, disabled?), as well as

7 It is, however, important that teachers do not simply share FF websites or specific stories with their students without reading them first and checking the ratings and hashtags, as many FF stories are sexually explicit.

> class identity… These are questions of background, of psychology, intended to unearth people, relationships, events, and experiences that affect our understanding of who a character is. (Coppa, 2017, p. 13)

More importantly, because those active in online communities have long used FF as a counterstorytelling practice to reimagine popular stories from minoritised perspectives (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016), FF communities tend to create a sense of belonging among those who feel Othered in society more widely.[8]

In Bishop's (1990) theoretical model of stories as windows, mirrors or sliding glass doors, reading or writing FF is best considered the latter—an immersive experience through which one gains a better understanding of why different kinds of people act as they do and learns vicariously through characters' experiences and emotions. While children's texts already 'position readers to vicariously experience characters' feelings, to know what it feels like to become someone else, including those unlike themselves' (Bullen, Moruzi & Smith, 2018, p. 1), writing or reading FF can be seen to amplify this by allowing readers to springboard from their initial responses to characters into a 'deeper consideration' of characters' and their own affects and behaviours (Lysaker & Sedberry, 2015, p. 106), thereby fostering empathy and encouraging students to consider varied perspectives. Furthermore, by allowing readers and writers to consider myriad versions of favourite characters, FF opens them up to a wider range of emotions, experiences and perspectives than a single narrative can provide. If we understand affective responses to texts 'as the catalyst for new ways of thinking about the body, cognition, subjectivity, society, ideology, and texts' (Bullen, Moruzi & Smith, 2018, p. 2), then, through FF, we can encourage pupils to deeply consider their own responses to characters, which ought to generate a better understanding of their own and others' affects and emotions—that is, to develop emotional literacy and, more specifically, empathy. FF can thus be understood as a tool that may be used in the classroom to move purposefully along the 'continuum from subliminal

8 However, this is not always the case, and some fan communities can be excluding. See, for example, Rukmini Pande's *Squee from the Margins: Fandom and Race* (2018) or Ebony Elizabeth Thomas's *The Dark Fantastic* (2019) for more on this.

to conscious sensation', to understand how 'affect, feelings, and emotion play fundamental roles in shaping human behaviour and are shaped by it' (Bullen, Moruzi & Smith, 2018, pp. 3–4).

However, simply reading FF in the classroom or compelling students to write from specific perspectives is unlikely to be effective in aiding such development. My experience suggests that students will not engage authentically with FF unless they are given the opportunity to consider characters with whom they have genuinely connected. It can therefore be used most fruitfully when pupils are engaging with several books—for example, through literature circles, battle of the books, genre study or free voluntary reading[9]—and can choose to write FF about a character with whom they feel a connection or about whom they are genuinely curious.

Because it allows pupils freedom of choice and engages with familiar online cultures, using FF differs from more traditional, structured writing exercises. However, students who have never undertaken similar activities may struggle at first; as such, it can be helpful if you or other students in the class provide optional prompts. To use the Harry Potter series as an example, such prompts could include questions like

- What if Harry Potter never received his Hogwarts letter?
- What if Ginny Weasley fell in love with Luna Lovegood?
- What if Draco Malfoy became a spy for the Order of the Phoenix?

But prompts can also be more general and not linked to a specific book:

- What if our school was magical and [character's name] was a student here?
- What if a character from one text met a character from another text?
- What if a character lost a limb and had to learn to use a prosthetic?
- What if a character moved to another country?

FF thus offers varied opportunities for pupils' development of emotional literacy and empathy in the classroom.

9 For more on this, see Duggan & Krulatz (2017).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored ways in which two modes of short-form digital storytelling can be used in the language classroom not only to foster emotional literacy, but also to open up new ways to think about empathy and the role literature plays in its development. The textual qualities of IF and FF create, we argue, the opportunity to explore the emotional effects of literature in unusual and productive ways.

IF, with its ability to create immersion and a sense of (albeit limited) identification between protagonist and player, focuses on *experience*, allowing the reader/player to form a deeper understanding of their affective experience of the text. Similarly, students who create their own IF narratives may gain a better sense of how their own narrative and ludic choices affect the reader's/player's experience. FF, which often involves placing existing characters in new situations or exploring dimensions of their experience not focused on in the original text, focuses on *character* and *feelings*. By reading and creating FF, students can use 'what ifs' to explore characters to whom they are already attached in greater depth, examining the ways in which new contexts and situations would affect them, and even writing 'against the grain' of the original text to develop new perspectives on the world of the text and the characters who inhabit it. This allows students to consider emotion in greater depth—a key aspect of developing empathy. Both these text forms are participatory and interactive, encouraging readers to act as text co-creators by making their own narrative choices (in IF) or by exploring characters' feelings, experiences and motivations (in FF)—allowing, in both cases, for a natural transition into students' own text creation.

Some precautions are worth bearing in mind for the instructor. The ergodic element of IF may put off or exclude players who are less game-minded—walkthroughs exist for many games, allowing students to experience them more as readers than as players. Students may also feel the flow of their creative writing impeded by the challenges of coding and may wish to start by drafting their story and planning the effects they want to create, rather than coding as they go. Meanwhile, students who do not easily connect with texts and characters may struggle to benefit from writing FF. Teachers should also choose carefully if they wish to bring examples of FF into the classroom, as not all FF is appropriate for young learners.

We hope to have shown that working with these digital short story formats can both create paths to a stronger affective engagement with literature and, in Mallan's (2013) phrase, a deeper sense of 'how we "do" understanding'—the implications, the possibilities and the limits of empathy (p. 113).

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Del 4

Novellen i klasserommet