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Collaborative writing with young people with disabilities: raising new questions of authorship and agency

Candice Satchwell

Abstract

How an author communicates with a reader is a central consideration in the critical examination of any text. When considering the communication of ideas from young people whose voices are seldom heard, the journey from author to audience has particular significance. The construction of children and young people as 'authors' is important, especially for those with learning difficulties or who struggle to comply with the current emphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammar. This article relates to a UK Research Council-funded 3-year collaborative research project involving the co-creation of fictional stories with young people with disabilities to represent aspects of their lives. Drawing on frameworks from narratology, I analyse the co-creation of one of the stories and present an interpretation and elaboration of the discourse structure of narrative fiction to illustrate the complexities of the relationship between the multifaceted 'author' and community 'reader' of these stories. The combination of qualitative research and fictional prose has particular characteristics and implications for the dissemination and communication of research findings. An extension of feminist critique of Barthes' claim for the death of the author provides new insights for engaging children in writing with their own voice.

Key words: writing, story telling, narrative, identity, fiction, disability, creativity, research methods, children's literature, digital literacy/ies

Introduction

Tracking the journey of a text from author to reader involves first identifying who the author and reader might be. While these concepts may appear straightforward in the production of a conventional academic article, for example, the concepts of author and reader are less simple when considering research data which have been transformed into fictional prose by a research team comprising academics, young people with a range of (dis)abilities, writers and designers. The 3-year research project, Stories to Connect, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, resulted in the production of around 50 fictional short stories and animated films, conveying young people's life-narratives of "resilience and transformation". In this project, the young people provided their 'stories'

as interview data or through other creative means and are positioned as central agents in the production of knowledge about their lives. While the voices of co-researchers with intellectual difficulties are poorly represented in academic journals (Strnadova and Walmsley, 2017), by creating works of fiction based on the young people's experiences and ideas, the project aims to reach a much wider and more diverse audience than might be achieved through conventional academic outlets. Interrogating the notions of 'author' and 'reader' is therefore an important step in communicating the findings of our research. It is empowering for young people to see themselves as agentic in the creation of their own stories (Cremin, 2015; Gardner, 2017), and the innovative methodology we have used in our project has implications for practice in educational and community settings. In an era when the young author's voice is in peril of being lost because of the emphasis on spelling, punctuation and grammar, it is important to consider ways and means of eliciting that voice (Grainger, Goouch and Lambirth, 2002, 2005), particularly for those whose voices are seldom heard. For young people to see themselves as authors, they need to be taken seriously as agents in their own lives.

Context

The research project arose through the coming together of children and young people who were part of a participatory group associated with a university in England and academics from three universities who were interested in literacy, education, well-being, narrative, digital design and children's literature. The children and young people all accessed services provided by a UK charity that supports vulnerable children. A core group of these young people were keen to get their voices heard and were already involved in various action research projects, for example, collecting disabled young people's perspectives on their own disabilities and lobbying for better access to public transport. Once the project began, the research team, aiming to operate in a community-based participatory research paradigm (Israel et al., 1998; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010), included a discrete group of 11 young people – incorporating existing members of the original group and new young people who accessed the

charity – who became the project's young co-researchers. Over 3 years, the team of researchers and young people participated in regular workshops, held in the evening in term-time and during the day in the summer vacation. The young people learned about interviewing techniques, confidentiality and other ethical issues; explored notions of stories; worked with children's authors; and helped to design phygital[1] artefacts. The young people and the academics spent many hours working together using a wide range of arts-based methods to explore stories and ways of presenting their lives, and the young people were supported to go out and collect interviews from their peers in a variety of settings including colleges, schools, youth groups and personal spaces. In addition the young researchers interviewed one another, and the academic researchers conducted interviews with the young people themselves, their carers, parents and sometimes their teachers or other significant individuals in their lives. To date, the result has been the collection of over 130 interviews which have been transcribed and analysed by the team to identify themes contributing to resilience and transformation. This paper focuses on one aspect of the creation of one story in this much wider project.

Theoretical framework: the creation of the author

Within the discourse structure developed by narratologists, from Booth (1961) through to Chatman (1978) and Rimmon-Kenan (2002), various levels of communication can be discerned between author and reader. In the original framework, the text was positioned as carrying the author's message, with the author as producer of the text and the reader as consumer of the text. In a work of fiction, the message is mediated by one or more narrators and by various characters whose thought, speech and actions convey both information and a point of view. While I would not subscribe to the view that meaning resides in a text, nor that a message can be conveyed wholesale from one person to another, I am interested in the question of identifying "the real author" in a co-constructed text. For classical narratologists, the author is a relatively unproblematic construct, the main issue being to distinguish between the author, the implied author and the narrator (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, pp. 3 and 90). As an example of applying the framework, I will describe the discourse structure of *Jane Eyre* (1847 [2006]), a novel about a fictional character created by the author Charlotte Brontë.

At the time of their writing, Brontë, and her two sisters Emily and Anne, felt obliged to take on the personae of three male writers – Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell – whose names appeared on the covers of their respective novels. The audience that Charlotte Brontë was writing for (the Implied Reader) was the Victorian middle class. Their image of the author, Currer Bell (the Implied Author), would have been a mysterious, literate, creative man. However, if I go and pick up the book from my shelf now, the Real Reader is me, and the Real Author is Charlotte Brontë. I know certain things about Charlotte Brontë, and from this have created (along with many other people) an image of a brilliant, strong, forthright Victorian young woman with an isolated and tragic life. As a reader in the 21st century, I have a very different perspective from the first readers – not least on who the author is or was – but the novel still resonates with me, as it does with readers of all ages, all over the world. Leech and Short (1981) discussed and then rejected the level of 'implied author' and 'implied reader', but conceded "it should always be borne in mind that *author* means *implied author* and *reader* means *implied reader*" (p. 262). I prefer to retain the distinction, however, on the grounds that "who we think the author is" has an impact on how the message is received, while "who the author really is" is of importance when we consider questions of agency, voice and power. I would also suggest that the implied reader (i.e. the audience for which the writing is intended) is a useful category in examining how the communication takes place. For example, while the original implied reader of *Jane Eyre* was the Victorian middle class, the continual repackaging of the novel by publishers and booksellers implies a different audience: it began to be sold as a novel for young people during the latter part of the 20th century, having been firmly categorised as dealing with adult themes in the 19th (Coakley, 2016). My application of the discourse levels of *Jane Eyre* is presented in Table 1.

In *Jane Eyre*, readers often conflate the author with the narrator, i.e. they assume that Jane Eyre who is telling the story, is Charlotte Brontë. That is to say, they assume that the thoughts and feelings as expressed by the first person narrator, who is also the main character in the book, are also those of the author. The illusion that the narrator is directly addressing the real reader as the narratee is reinforced by Brontë's famous line, "Reader, I married him" (chapter 38), further blurring distinctions between the various constructs inherent in the framework. In the case of *Jane Eyre*, I suggest that the layers can, in fact, be distinguished (according to the diagram), and no-one would dispute that Charlotte Brontë is the author of *Jane Eyre*. On the other hand, in the stories from the project under discussion here, it is the construct of the author itself that is open to debate.

Nunning (1999) charts the differences between 'classical' and 'post-classical' narratologies. Whereas writers including Rimmon-Kenan (1983, 2002), Chatman (1978) and Short (1996) presented the relationship between author and reader as a way of providing a template for all kinds of fiction, in isolation and free from

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[1] 'Phygital' is a term combining 'physical' and 'digital'. The project has produced a variety of phygital artefacts to tell our stories. One is an old suitcase which when opened contains a screen and a set of 3-D printed objects which enable different films with narration to appear on the screen. Another is a rabbit in a hat with a screen embedded in the rabbit and a wand to change the films; and a third is a digitally interactive picture map.

Table 1: Discourse levels in Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre		
Communication mode		
Real author Charlotte Brontë	Written text	**Real reader** You, me
Implied author Currer Bell – literate, mysterious man, *or* a version of Charlotte Brontë – strong, tiny, tragic, brilliant writer	Written text	**Implied reader** Victorian middle class *or* Young adult readers
Narrator Jane Eyre	Written text (or audio version)	**Narratee** 'Reader ...'
Character e.g. Jane Eyre	Dialogue in written text	**Character** e.g. Mr Rochester

the contamination of culture and history, newer narratologists examine texts in contexts (see, for example, David Herman, *Narratologies* 1999). Although there is a move in focus from text to context, from general to specific, and from binarism to "holistic cultural interpretation" (Nunning, 1999), there is still little focus on the author. Indeed, Walsh (1997) even simplifies the much-debated author/implied author/narrator divisions by concluding that "the narrator is always a character who narrates, or the author" (p. 505). Still the construct of the 'real author' remains relatively unproblematised, although feminist critics (e.g. Kaplan, 1986, Walker, 1990) have debated the politics of author recognition. I take this argument further to suggest that young people with disabilities can and should be recognised as the authors of their own narratives.

The collaborative author

In our project the author is multifaceted and complex. The young people do not have the social or cultural capital required for writing and publishing their stories autonomously, but they are privileged possessors of the knowledge of their own lived experiences. As Cremin and Myhill (2012) discuss, "working alongside a range of professional writers … can be a valuable opportunity for young writers" (p. 90) in the development of "authorial agency and ownership" (p. 88). While Cremin and Myhill refer mainly to creating and developing children's writing through workshops led by established writers, our work has involved young people working alongside "more knowledgeable others" (to use Vygotsky's (1978) term) who take on the role of writing the stories provided orally by the young people. When the young people have disabilities which preclude them from physically writing their own stories, the role of the more knowledgeable other becomes to provide motor or linguistic skills, rather than to provide the 'knowledge' content

of the story, which remains the possession of the young people. While the National Curriculum that the young people are likely to have experienced at school emphasises the importance of syntax, grammar and spelling, the emphasis in these story-making activities has been on the voice of the young person and their agency as the author of their own life-narrative.

In this project, young people are taking on the role of both initiator/producer and creator of texts. That is to say the stories begin from the young people's observations or perspectives, and the young people are implicit in the production of the story. Being part of the project then provides the young people with the means to communicate with the general public in ways that might never have been possible otherwise. Stories have been constructed from a range of sources, including interviews, observations and direct input from the young people wanting to create fictional stories. Some stories are created from one or more transcripts, with additional elements from other sources, such as events in workshops, comments from young people and details from different transcripts. With the collaboration of researchers, children's authors, illustrators, animators and designers, the stories are reconfigured in different ways. In this process, a conglomeration of people have produced unique stories that by the time of final production might be said to have no one identifiable author. The stories belong to many people, and in this sense are arguably more amenable to being communicated to many people, and thereby inducing empathy.

There is no means of tracking precisely which ideas come from where – as there also is not in any other form of communication. Drawing on Northrop Frye (2002) and Pierre Bayard (2007), Arthur Frank (2010) notes that "Stories are textures of resonances" – an echo of Barthes' assertion that "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes, 1967, p. 146). Barthes suggests that the

consequent "death of the author" allows us to focus on the reader and relieves us from having to discern a " 'secret' ultimate meaning to the text" (ibid., p. 147).

Extending the idea of the death of the author, and drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (2013), our stories can be seen as fictional assemblages. Our stories – along with their digital and physical manifestations – are assemblages of layers of interpretations and representations, encapsulated. As such, the story assemblage is still fluid and open to further combinations – which in turn lead to ongoing opportunities for resonance and reverberation as people engage with the stories.

In the course of our research to date, we do not officially attach an author's name to the story, and yet we do – in the research team's casual conversations, the story presented here is known as 'David's story'.[2] According to Deleuze and Guattari, "The proper name is the instantaneous apprehension of a multiplicity" (p. 37), acknowledging that a name is simply a means of providing a label for an assemblage that coheres together, albeit one that coheres with numerous contradictions and uncertainties. Therefore the author is doubly redundant. If, as they claim, "Every statement is the product of a machinic assemblage, in other words, of collective agents of enunciation (take 'collective agents' to mean not peoples or societies but multiplicities)" (p. 37), it is always impossible to assign one story to one author. Put more simply, Cheryl Walker (1990) summarises the arguments of Foucault and Barthes: "Individuals cannot be authors, in part, because there is no such center or integrated core from which one can say a piece of literature issues" (p. 552).

Whilst agreeing that this more democratic approach to literature is liberating, I suggest that when we are seeking to convey the voice of an otherwise silenced individual, a return to an examination of 'the author' is important. David's voice is itself the product of its own socio-cultural-historical (and biological) context, as are the voices that help that voice to be heard. But I suggest that an appreciation of the constitution of this 'author' helps us to understand whether consciously co-constructed fiction has a particular value in connecting with its reader. Our aim is to speak to the general public through instances of fictional narratives. How does our process of co-construction actually work as a means of communication?

The creation of a story

The interviews collected in the project were transcribed. Thereafter the transcripts have been used in a variety of ways, one of which is to create fictionalised accounts that resonate both with the young people whose

experiences they draw on and our young researchers. Other stories have been created more directly with one or more young persons creating fictional narratives that reflect aspects of their lives. Presented below is one such story that was created quite early in the project, initially in a workshop conducted by a children's author who visited to help the young people to think about the requirements of a good story. The examination of this one story serves as an introduction to the 50 or so stories that result from the project.

'Gorgeous Shirts' is a short story produced with David, a young man with Down syndrome, who has a stammer and idiosyncratic patterns of grammar and morphology resulting in problems with speech intelligibility. David also has physical and intellectual difficulties with writing. What David lacks is "the art or skill of effective communication", which Leech and Short (1981, p. 210) provide as the original definition of 'rhetoric'. We might say, therefore, that the contribution of other members of the team is a means of providing David with the rhetoric of text (ibid., p. 209) or, indeed, the rhetoric of fiction (Booth, 1961, 1983; Walsh, 2007). The outline of the story was created during a workshop with an invited author, Adele Geras, who came to help our young people to think about ingredients for a story. After her introduction, I rapidly drew up some simple prompts based on her instructions: characters' names; what they always have with them; what they like; what they dislike; where they go; what happens; and then the young people worked on flipchart paper with researchers and volunteers to get down some ideas about characters, events and locations. Later, I worked up the brief details into the following narrative. All of David's original ideas are included, and very little has been added, apart from phrases and information required for continuity and coherence. My role in the production might best be described as David's 'creative-scriber'.

Gorgeous Shirts

Justin Fitzgerald loves free-running through the streets. He wears tracksuit bottoms and old shirts that he picks up in charity shops. Even though they are second-hand he is particular about the shirts he chooses. His favourite has a lightning and thunder design. In his pockets he always has some loose change, a key for a car he doesn't own, and an old wallet with no money in it.

Justin struggles with speaking and has a stutter. He likes running because no-one can ask him questions. Sometimes he plays practical jokes on unsuspecting people – dropping a stink bomb or a water bomb and then running away.

He often runs past homeless people on the street. They worry him. He's not sure why but they make him feel uncomfortable. He's also nervous around girls, but that's a different kind of feeling. He doesn't like people who are mean or

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[2] In the context of this article, it is important to note that David is the young man's real name, used here with permission from him.

wind others up, and he hates all types of weapons and bombs (apart from stink bombs and water bombs which are fun).

Even though Justin Fitzgerald doesn't generally keep still, he has to stop running every now and then. One of the places he rests is the bus station. There are always a lot of people around, and nobody takes much notice. If he keeps his head down people usually ignore him. But one day, sitting on a bench with his headphones in, and wearing a shirt with a dragon on the front, he notices a girl he has seen a few times before.

She is standing by a bin, on tiptoes, trying to read the bus timetable. One of the things Justin notices is that she always wears gorgeous shirts. She clearly has good taste. She also wears a pair of trainers with no laces. When he looks more closely he can see she has a nose ring and a tiny tattoo on one cheek.

A sudden nip at his ankle brings him to his senses. He realises he has been staring. Now he remembers – the girl always has an angry dog with her. He imagines she's the kind of person that would surround herself with lions, tigers, an elephant and a bull if she could. She seems even less inclined to talk to other people than Justin.

The dog gnarls through bared teeth. Justin finds himself gnarling back. Very slowly, with her eyes on the dog, the girl makes her way towards Justin. Neither speaks, but she pulls the dog away sharply, and sits tentatively on the bench near to Justin.

Justin and the dog continue to growl, and the girl – who is called Bob, has to fight to stop smiling. Annoyed with herself, she tries to rearrange her face to look both disinterested and slightly cross. Justin looks up. Before he can think about it too much, he speaks:

"Which b-b-b-bus are you w-w-waiting f-f-f-for?"

The girl points towards Stand 5.

Despite Bob's best efforts to resist, the ice has been broken.

"What about c-c-c-oming for a c-cup of t-t-tea with m-m-me?" After a few days of not-by-chance meetings at the bus station, Justin has the courage to ask her.

It turns out that Bob finds talking difficult too. Sometimes when she speaks other people just hear garbled noises. Bob's favourite mode of communication is interpretive dance, but she only feels confident enough to do that with people she knows really well, and there are hardly any of those.

Gradually Justin recognises that her speech is not garbled at all. In fact she makes complete sense. And for some reason when he talks to her he barely stutters. If he avoids words beginning with p and t he is pretty fluent.

Together they go to cafes, and pubs. Justin finds out that Bob likes both beer and wine, and she likes the kind of food that grown-ups eat (Justin calls it 'old food'), like scallops and other weird types of seafood. She also likes dumplings. But she won't eat Chinese food and can't stand pickled eggs.

Bob only ever used to run in the dark, but Justin manages to persuade her to go free-running with him. From climbing walls they start to climb mountains, and they both decide they want to work for the Mountain Rescue. To practise their mountaineering skills they hitch-hike to Switzerland and climb the Matterhorn.

Bob dances a lot these days, and Justin looks people in the eye.

Discussion: the journey from collaborative author to public reader

This short narrative has been created through collaboration between the young man David, an adult researcher at the initial workshop, and a creative-scriber. The details of clothes and possessions for both characters came directly from David, including Bob's unusual collection of animals: the creative-scriber made a decision to keep the angry dog as a real companion, and the other animals as imaginary. David's lexical choice is reflected in "lightning and thunder", rather than the more common (but less accurate in terms of order of events) collocation of "thunder and lightning". His use of the term 'gorgeous shirts' seemed rather idiosyncratic at the time, and became the title of the story because it directly reflects his word choice, while also being the symbol for the connection between the two characters. The characters' likes and dislikes clearly reflect David's own. David himself is a keen dancer, and his feelings of unease about homelessness have since been channelled into a desire by him to research into homeless people's experiences – to share their stories.

Two details were added by myself as creative-scriber: the dragon on the shirt was inspired by a design from a young man who came to just one of our workshops. He contributed little in terms of speech or writing, but he left us with a beautiful drawing of a dragon: which has now become the 3-D printed model that symbolises this story in the phygital suitcase of stories. The detail about running in the dark is from a young woman in another interview collected during the project. Other young people made suggestions and gave their approval on drafts of the story. This assemblage of ideas was a deliberate strategy, arguably contributing to greater resonance of the story's meaning.

After the story was written, it was narrated and a short animation was produced to accompany it. The final film was inserted into a phygital (physical–digital) artefact designed and produced by the research team. The details of the animation and design process add

further layers to the assemblage and to the construction of the story's 'author'. The characters are clearly representative of some aspects of the story's instigator, which David would like to be communicated more widely. I suggest that the inability to speak intelligibly and the feelings associated with that are conveyed by this story; also the difficulties with initiating a relationship. The aim of the stories produced through the project is to increase empathy in those who hear them, and it is hoped that someone hearing this story may think differently next time they encounter someone who struggles to speak.

By using collaborative participatory methods, the project has the potential to create stories which each reflect more than one voice. The application of a framework from narratology which assumes one 'real author' helps to highlight the complexity of the relationship between author and reader in a piece of fiction which is co-constructed. The collection of voices, while led by David, can be heard as louder than David's alone. Along the journey of collaborative construction, the 'author' becomes lost, but then emerges more strongly in the final version of the story.

Table 2 presents the discourse structure of 'Gorgeous Shirts', by way of comparison with the structure of *Jane Eyre*. In this case, the narrator is a version of the character Justin, who is a fictionalised, idealised version of David, who experiences difficulties in communication. The character of Bob we might argue is another version of David – this time a female character. The project aimed to create stories of "resilience and transformation". In David's story, resilience is shown in the adoption of strategies to survive, e.g. by avoiding face to face interaction by running fast and by avoiding the use of *p* and *b*. Bob uses the strategy of protecting herself with an angry dog and a set of fictional animals and substituting interpretive dance for speech. Transformation for the pair of them is in their empathic relationship: points of connection like difficulty with speech and the wearing of beautiful shirts means that they understand one another, and their joining together makes them stronger.

For the real David, this is a fantasy – as *Jane Eyre* was for the real Charlotte Brontë. And similarly, by making this story, David is communicating more effectively with the general public than he does in his daily struggles in life. Even though we may see David as quite different from ourselves, we can all frequently feel that we are talking nonsense that nobody else understands. And we all create fantasy versions of ourselves that make us feel less alone.

The focus in this article is on the author, and what this means for the author–reader relationship. To elucidate the complexity of our stories (and theoretically all stories if we accept that all stories are assemblages) in this respect, Table 3 below focuses on only the construction of the 'real author' and 'real reader', i.e. only the top layer of Tables 1 and 2. Before arriving at a conglomeration of contributors as 'author', there are several stages to go through, as illustrated in stages 1–4 in Table 3. It is only after these contributors have been collected together that we can consider how the 'real author' relates to the 'real reader'. This indicates the collection of real individuals who contribute to the final story, a combination of people which is unlikely to concur with the 'implied author' that the reader constructs when they hear the story. Nevertheless, I suggest that the multiple resonances that emerge from the multiple contributors enhance the potential for the story to continue to resonate. While Barthes (1967) claims that the author is dead, I am suggesting that the author is fizzing with life.

Table 2: The discourse structure of 'Gorgeous Shirts'

	Gorgeous Shirts	
	Communication mode	
Real author David (instigator), Dan (researcher), Candice (creative-scriber), Adele (workshop leader), young researchers (editors)	Written story	**Real reader** You
Implied author A young person in the community	Written story	**Implied reader** The general public – in community settings
Narrator Young person – who holds a similar point of view to Justin	Written story or digital version of the story located in phygital	**Narratee** Member of general public
Character Justin	Dialogue and events in story	**Character** Bob

Table 3: The construction of the author in a story from the Stories to Connect project

Stage	From …	Communication mode	To …
1	Interviewee (disadvantaged young person)	Speech/drawing/writing	Interviewer (young researcher/ adult researcher)
2	Interviewee + interviewer	Speech and transcript	Researchers + writers
3	Interviewee + interviewer + researchers + writers ('creative scriber')	Speech/writing/performance/	Animators/illustrators + designers
4	Interviewee + interviewer + researchers + writers + animators + designers	Phygital artefact	General public
	Real author		**Real reader**

Connecting through stories

In the transformation of interview data into fictional stories, we could be accused in our project of "artful manipulation of the data", which Watson (2009) warns against as a means of evoking empathy in the reader as the goal of qualitative research. However, I argue that such artful manipulation is exactly our intention: we are attempting to convey meanings that the young people are seldom given the opportunity to express in a public forum. Following Clough (2002), and Leavy (2015) who draws on Iser (1997) and others, I agree that the use of fictional narratives provides opportunities for connecting with an audience more effectively than through more conventional academic outlets. This is partly because the relationship between the 'author' and 'reader' of a story allows for 'multiple interpretations' (Goodley et al. 2004, p. 110), but also because the young 'author' is not a research subject (object), but an agentic participant in the production of his own story. The 'artful manipulation' that Watson decries is embraced by Clough and Nutbrown (2002) who suggest that art and persuasion are inherent in all social research which thus is 'broadly political' (p. 4). In our project, the 'art' lies in the collaborative production of fiction and dissemination of such literature via design. By telling the stories through phygital artefacts designed in collaboration with the young people, we are consciously "designing *for* empathy" (Huck et al. 2015). This is where qualitative research combined with community engagement and the production of 'fiction' has special characteristics.

Reactions to 'Gorgeous Shirts' have been collected from a range of audiences, and a small number are represented in Table 4. While there are some negative comments, the majority indicate that the story did lead to a sense of connection and empathy. Suzanne Keen (2006) provides some insight into this phenomenon:

"Character identification often invites empathy, even when the fictional character and reader differ from one another in all sorts of practical and obvious ways, but empathy for fictional characters appears to require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization." (p. 214)

Researchers examining literature from a psychological perspective describe 'successful fiction' as that which

"… moves one emotionally, and it often enables readers to take on the mindset, goals, and intentions of a protagonist, in a mode of identification or experience-taking. The concerns and circumstances of characters prompt emotions in the reader, but it's not the emotions of characters one feels. The emotions are one's own." (Djikic et al., 2013, p. 46)

Whether or not our stories can be classified as 'successful fiction' is another story, but for now I agree with Cheryl Walker who responds to Foucault's (1984, p. 120) question: "What difference does it make who is speaking?" with the following: "[W]riting is not 'the destruction of every voice' but *the proliferation of possibilities of hearing*" (Walker 1990, p. 568).

Conclusions and future work

While the author has been overlooked, assumed, obscured or killed in narratology, I suggest that an analysis of the multifaceted author of co-constructed stories is a critical factor in understanding how stories connect. An examination of the project stories' journey includes exploring where truth becomes fiction, where child becomes both narrator and narratee and where the public becomes the reader. The mediation of the phygital objects adds to the combination of multiple tellers of multiple stories from the edges of the community to create meaningful messages for people in a more central location. I suggest that our innovative methodology provides some insight into how we can access and disseminate young people's voices, with application in and out of the classroom. However, the application of a framework from narratology to community-based participatory research also raises bigger questions, for example, about the relationships

Table 4: Reactions to 'Gorgeous Shirts'

"I liked how he tried talking to her and trying to sort of like make conversations with her and now it's come out into a positive thing so he's now looking people in the eyes and she's sort of talking more. I like like the ending bit. I like how in the story he tries so hard to talk to her." (young researcher)

"A bit weird, quite amusing, and intriguing – made me want to know more." (adult female)

"The relationship between the characters was what was interesting – the way they found a meeting point, and I thought that is the case in all 'courting' situations. I bought into that." (adult male)

"Aw. That's a lovely story." (17-year-old boy)

"I've got goosebumps." (co-researcher)

"It's good words. It needs more pages, more words in, five or six pages." (David)

"I think it might be a bit boring for the children. I don't think there's enough to get them into the characters." (primary school teacher)

between different parts of the community, between researcher and participant, as well as between author and owner, between story and narrative and between teller and told.

In this article, I have focused on the construction of the 'real author' to provide fresh insights into how children with disabilities can be construed as possessors of their own knowledge and authors of their own narratives. If erasing the author is an act of oppression for women writers (Walker, 1990), the same can be said for young people who find writing problematic but who have important things to say. When the inspiration for and instigator of a story is a young person with limited access to conventional means of communication, collaborative co-construction offers an opportunity for an otherwise silenced voice to be heard. For children learning to be writers, an understanding that an author is 'alive' and agentic gives hope that they too can become real authors.

Acknowledgements

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