

**Negotiated, Contested and Political: The Disruptive Third Spaces of Youth Media Production**

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## **Negotiated, Contested and Political: The Disruptive Third Spaces of Youth Media Production**

### **Abstract**

Traditionally media production with young people has been characterised by an aspiration to ‘give voice’ or ‘empower youth’ (Blum-Ross, 2017) but this core value is under threat. Recently, the rationale for undertaking youth media production has shifted to focus instead on enabling young people to acquire digital skills to serve the needs of rapidly changing creative industries (Blum-Ross and Livingstone, 2016); to be entrepreneurs in a gig economy. In this paper we share qualitative data from a young people’s media production project run in libraries in a city in the United Kingdom where participants were invited to create videogames / stories. We adopt Potter and McDougall’s (2019) notion of Third Spaces as negotiated, contested and political to enable us to identify the ways in which pedagogical choices of setting, software and style of facilitation combined to support young people’s critical and creative engagement with digital media and society. We reframe notions of third spaces, seeing less a bridge between linguistic and cultural domains and instead arguing that Third Spaces are productively disruptive. We conclude by proposing a new set of pedagogical principles for critical reflection in the development and funding of digital media production with young people.

### **Keywords:**

Third Spaces, videogames, youth, libraries, media production, storytelling, digital technology, agency, empowerment

### **Figures:**

Figure One: Twine Game User Screen

Figure Two” Twine Game ‘Backend’ Interface

Figure One and Two are screenshots from the games made by children which we have permission to use via UoN ethical consent process. They are also publicly available in the libraries via games hubs.

## Youth media production in the 21st-century

The past twenty years have seen a growth in the use of media production in arts projects, youth work, makerspaces and libraries (Hobbs, 2019). In these contexts media production has traditionally been associated with voice, agency and democratisation particularly for marginalised groups (Dezuanni, 2011, Blum-Ross and Livingstone, 2016). Media production is also increasingly part of participatory and visual research methodologies in which young people are invited to represent their own experiences to wider audiences, rather than being represented by researchers. For example, in the field of critical disability studies, video has been an important medium for self-representation and the disruption of the existence of a 'single story' of disability (Rice et al., 2016).

Blum-Ross (2017, p.5) provides a useful critique of what she describes as the rhetoric of youth media production, demonstrating that young people's engagement with media production does not necessarily support empowerment. She argues that discourses of 'empowerment' are often used in youth media in ways that do not pay attention to the challenges of shifting from an 'abstract discourse to practical outcomes.' Hauge (2014) similarly argues that 'agency' needs to be reconceptualised to pay closer attention to current complex and affective events in youth media production. Rather than concede to the challenges of reconceptualising agency and voice, we suggest in this paper that research has an important role to play in the further development of digital media production pedagogies.

In the 21st-century, the affordability and accessibility of digital technologies and high-speed internet has led to an expansion of opportunities for young people's media production. Increasingly, the focus of this work has been on developing a future workforce with digital skills (Facer, 2019). Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2016) caution against the way that media production has been reframed in neoliberal terms in relation to entrepreneurialism and express concern about what this might mean for young people. Facer (2019 p.3) challenges the dominance of future-focused narratives of education and technology, arguing that young people need opportunities to make and share stories in order to 'identify and articulate desires, hopes, fears and dreams for the future and to engage with the rich complexities of the present.' Indeed many in the field of literacy claim that making media is a matter of social justice and that those without access cannot be part of increasingly

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3 participatory cultures (Jenkins et al., 2006). Like Cannon (2018) we therefore  
4 suggest that digital media production should be embedded in school curricula, not to  
5 enable the preparation of a digitally skilled workforce but rather to provide all children  
6 and young people with an important context for critical and creative engagement with  
7 the world. However, in the UK the opportunity to embed digital media production is  
8 limited by national curriculum and testing strategies so that most of this work takes  
9 places outside school. Although, as in the case of this project, there is often pressure  
10 to provide informal activities for children which use art, media or sport to support  
11 formal learning rather than as activities which have an intrinsic value of their own.  
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19 Given the threat of the neoliberal skills agenda in both formal and informal settings, it  
20 has become imperative to better understand how youth media production  
21 pedagogies support storytelling that disrupts dominant narratives. Our purpose in this  
22 paper is therefore to share data from a youth media production project where young  
23 people made videogames in their local libraries. We adopt Potter and McDougall's  
24 (2019) concept of Third Spaces which enables us to pay attention to pedagogy and  
25 process in the broadest sense in relation to the library as a context, the choice of  
26 Twine as the software and the style of facilitation. We begin by reflecting on the way  
27 in which Thirdspace theory has come to inform research in relation to media, literacy  
28 and digital media production.  
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### 38 **Moving into Third Spaces**

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41 Literacy scholars have turned to the concept of Thirdspace<sup>1</sup> to make the case for  
42 valuing children's home literacies at school. Gutiérrez, (2008 p.43) conceptualised  
43 Thirdspace as a 'transformative space where the potential for an expanded form of  
44 learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened' and linguistic and  
45 semiotic resources are included in this conception. This idea has permeated other  
46 fields, for example, Adams (2009) suggests that libraries have the potential to act as  
47 'third places' that is to say, physical places for learning which are not home or school,  
48 that could offer new forms of literacy activity, including videogame playing and  
49 production. Moje et al., (2004) and Pahl and Kelly (2006) conceive of Thirdspace  
50 slightly differently, as a pedagogic space which bridges a gap between home and  
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58 <sup>1</sup> Please note we adopt the form of expression of the theory as used by each  
59 respective author.  
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3 school literacy domains and enables marginalised students to draw on their home  
4 knowledge to connect with more academic learning. Cannon, Potter and Burn (2018  
5 p.118) see digital media production as a Thirdspace which renders the ‘boundary  
6 between home and school’ more fluid. The nature of the analogy we use to  
7 understand and explain Third Space is less benign.  
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12 We return to Bhaba’s (1994) original conception of the term where the ‘other’ or a  
13 third dimension, is brought into being by the existence of two dominant discourses  
14 entwining in momentary ‘in-between thinking’. We imagine this otherness resulting  
15 from a moment of conflict; a moment in which meaning is contested, prompting  
16 negotiations which are inherently political. Potter and McDougall (2017) use the term  
17 ‘working in the third space’ as a way of recognising that under certain circumstances  
18 the existing habitus of home and school can intersect and be disrupted or  
19 reimaged. The reference to Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of habitus is important. It is  
20 the habitus, the existing ways of thinking and doing things that are potentially  
21 disrupted or reimaged in Third Spaces. Third Spaces therefore transgress  
22 disciplines and traditional concepts about expertise and knowledge (Potter &  
23 McDougall, 2019). This is to say that Third Spaces are not bridges over which ideas  
24 can flow together seamlessly, but instead can be imagined as sometimes dormant  
25 sometimes volatile, chemical elements which need heat, or light or physical proximity  
26 to react and be transformed. In moments of reaction and resistance, the cultural  
27 experiences of young people can become powerful and the hierarchies of learners  
28 can be disrupted. Potter and McDougall (2019) identify the need for Third Spaces to  
29 be ‘negotiated, contested and political’ to enable ‘shape shifting’ in relation to  
30 pedagogy and power and this has useful parallels with Butler’s contemporary notion  
31 of agency as located not in the person but in ‘a complex choreographed scene with  
32 many kinds of elements – social, material, human – at work’ (in Bell, 2010 p151).  
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47 We therefore operationalise Potter and McDougall’s (2019) conception of Third  
48 Spaces as ‘contested, negotiated and political’ in relation to the social, material and  
49 human contexts of digital media production. From Dahya’s (2017) perspective,  
50 context is defined as the ‘pedagogical design, setting, media genres, and  
51 technological tools as influential parts of the work young people complete (or  
52 abandon).’ For Dahya, context also refers to the broader settings and interactions  
53 between factors that shape what young people produce and how they participate in  
54 digital media production practices. We therefore focus on the ways in which differing  
55 contextual elements combine and react in key moments to bring Third Spaces into  
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3 being. In particular, we examine the way the social, material and human were at work  
4 in the libraries, the software and the facilitation that shaped the way the young  
5 people experienced the project. Before we do so, we provide a brief summary of the  
6 project and the methodological approach.  
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### 10 11 12 13 **The [Name of Project] Project**

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16 [Name of Project] was a 12-month [Name of Funder] funded programme run in  
17 partnership with [Name of Libraries], [Name of Museum] and [Name of Initiative]. The  
18 programme, which consisted of 36 workshops and 4 further events in libraries across  
19 a city in the East Midlands, and was devised by library senior leaders and their  
20 partners in response to the ever-increasing popularity of videogames for young  
21 people. The library venues selected were predominantly located in economically  
22 disadvantaged boroughs of the city. The project aimed to examine how libraries  
23 could support young people to gain literacy and digital skills through the making of  
24 videogames.  
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32 Twine, a free to download piece of software, was used throughout the project as a  
33 tool for creating games/stories.<sup>2</sup> Workshops were facilitated by staff from the National  
34 Videogame Arcade and often involved children working in pairs and groups to design  
35 their own game/story. Twine, an open-source programme, is used principally for  
36 generating non-linear stories, responsive narratives and basic games. It has an  
37 active online community through which many users share stories and ideas on  
38 various forums, as part of the social context for learning (Williamson & Facer 2004).  
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### 46 **Methodology**

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49 Young people were invited to take part in the project through online marketing, and in  
50 person via school recruitment visits and by library staff across six library sites located  
51 in disadvantaged communities. The project was freely available but the participants  
52 were asked to sign up through an online booking form which involved gaining  
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57 <sup>2</sup> The texts made in Twine are narratives which offer the reader options - a blue or a red door.  
58 To go forward or go back. The author must plan for there to be consequences for every  
59 choice and it is possible to see how each narrative element relates to other - see figure 1.  
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3 parental consent. The only criteria that was used for recruitment was age which was  
4 set as 14-25. These participants were invited to complete two online questionnaires  
5 as part of their involvement in the workshops. The first young people's questionnaire,  
6 completed by 39 individuals, aimed to explore participants' pre-existing experience  
7 and knowledge of the workshops, including coding experience, literacy and reading  
8 interests. The second questionnaire, completed by 23 young people, sought to gain  
9 insight into participants' overall programme experience. Additionally, interviews with  
10 20 young people and key programme staff were also conducted. Alternative  
11 methods, including a Twine version of the interview, were also produced to explore  
12 young people's experiences across different modalities. 12 workshop and event  
13 observations were also undertaken. The young people's game / stories produced in  
14 the workshops were then summarised for analysis. Interviews were transcribed and  
15 field notes summarised to facilitate discussion between the researchers and project  
16 partners. The particular focus of this paper emerged through the process of writing  
17 the evaluation and presenting the work internationally which led us to theorise the  
18 production pedagogies involved in the game / story design. An ethical approval  
19 process was followed so that participants were aware of the rationale for collecting  
20 data about their experiences of the project and their right to withdraw their  
21 involvement. The young people often wanted their authorship to be strongly flagged  
22 which was the case in the project dissemination, but not in our reporting of the  
23 project. To provide anonymity and to be consistent across sites, we have not given  
24 pseudonyms here but simply refer to types of participants – young people, facilitators  
25 and library staff.

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41 In our analysis we used the notion of Third Spaces as negotiated, contested and  
42 political (Potter and McDougall, 2017, 2019) as a lens for identifying the ways in  
43 which social, material and human aspects of the context setting (libraries), the choice  
44 of software (Twine) and the style of facilitation produced moments of productive  
45 disruption. In our account of our analysis we provide a wide angle, overview of key  
46 issues that emerged alongside close up snapshot examples which enable a richer  
47 exemplification.

#### 52 53 **i. Libraries**

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57 Given the ubiquitous and historical public understanding of the role of libraries as  
58 providers of quiet spaces for selecting and reading books and accessing information,  
59 the presence of the project in these spaces was anticipated to be important. From  
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3 the outset the material arrangements in libraries were contested. 'Business as usual'  
4 was interrupted by the introduction of new people into the space as one Librarian  
5 pointed out:  
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8 *You are getting people who don't usually use the space to use the space.*  
9 *And you are going to get Joe Bloggs to walk in and interrupt it and that's fine*  
10 *because they also might find it interesting and we can share that interest with*  
11 *them.*  
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16 Where the project took place in the main public arena of the library, the facilitators  
17 signalled its presence with posters and resources. We also observed the young  
18 people increasingly taking up spaces such as seating areas, marking them with their  
19 coats and bags and gathering up resources, mainly books and leaflets. The use of  
20 sound in games was clearly something the young people recognised as incompatible  
21 with the traditional practices of libraries. For example, one participant commented  
22 that it would be an unsuitable environment to come and play online shooter games.  
23 However, although all the library spaces were quiet at the beginning of the sessions  
24 we noticed some young people being increasingly more vocal, allowing their voices  
25 to resonate.  
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34 In sites where the project took place in the library, the daily routine was disrupted,  
35 establishing a different rhythm and ambience which meant that 4.00pm became the  
36 beginning of something rather than the end both for the young people and the library  
37 staff and users. By contrast, a particular issue arose in some libraries where the  
38 sessions took place 'in meeting rooms off the beaten path' as one facilitator  
39 suggested:  
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42 *We didn't really interact with any other space. We were just in that computer*  
43 *room.*  
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46 The 'sterile environment' away from the public library space limited the opportunity  
47 for any sort of disruption. Interestingly, when asked about the opportunity for  
48 videogames to be in libraries in the long-term the young people in these groups were  
49 hesitant:  
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52 *But gaming here would just create more of a social atmosphere, whereas*  
53 *libraries are not that social ... you wouldn't say "I'm going to the library*  
54 *because I wanna play video games".*  
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57 The use of rooms away from the main library space appeared to limit the extent to  
58 which the activity prompted moments of disruption which needed to be negotiated.  
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3 Being in a space where negotiation is required, was not in our view something to be  
4 avoided but instead seemed highly productive.  
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8 The tensions that arose due to the disruption of the norm in material, social and  
9 human ways opened up the need for negotiation. Most of the library staff took an  
10 interest in the young people's progress, communicating with them and the facilitators  
11 and accommodating change. Indeed they became mediators who negotiated for the  
12 young people. For example, in one session an adult wanted the librarian to move the  
13 young people from the computers so that he could fill in some important official  
14 documents. This interaction attracted the attention of others, silencing the room and  
15 creating a strained atmosphere. The librarian took the opportunity to briefly explain  
16 the project and the need for the young people to use the space. Empowered by this  
17 validation the young people then volunteered to 'budge up' so that one of the  
18 computers they were using became available. The disruption to established human,  
19 material and social elements created a 'scene of agency' which established the  
20 entitlement of young people to be in libraries, using the computers and wifi to create  
21 videogames. As a result of this moment, those involved, embarked on a lively  
22 discussion in which videogame expertise was taken seriously and again disrupting  
23 the notion of the videogame as absent from libraries.  
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35 This moment can be seen as one in which a Third Space emerged due to the  
36 managed confrontation between those who are situated by the context as in  
37 opposition. A similar process takes place in documentary film-production focused on  
38 civic engagement and dealing with issues such as knife-crime, or stop and search  
39 (Goodman and Cocca, 2014) or radio broadcast (Soep, 2012) where young people  
40 create content which brings them into a discursive space with people who either  
41 share their concerns or are the cause of their concerns. Like Potter and McDougall  
42 (2017) we would suggest that this aspect of the Third Spaces of youth media  
43 production can happen in a school context but that giving young people have some  
44 choice in the topic of production and ensuring they encounter pertinent people and  
45 places is critical to establishing possibilities for negotiation and politicisation. Where  
46 projects are linked to formal learning goals or teacher-led civic engagement the  
47 opportunities for negotiating and contesting ideas may be limited.  
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57 Contesting and negotiating within the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) of libraries became  
58 transformative, and in this sense political, enabling both the young people and the  
59 adult users to see libraries and perhaps each other in different ways. We are reading  
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3 these as creating 'small p' political moments in which young people have  
4 opportunities for criticality in relation to their own context which creates the possibility  
5 of a wider civic engagement. For example, in the view of one Library Assistant the  
6 project was seen to have changed the 'feel' of the library:  
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9 *Traditionally you associate the library with somewhere where you have to be*  
10 *quiet and where you can get your books. I think it's become more of a social*  
11 *hub now where people do numerous things.*  
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14 For the young people who did not use the main library space, this possibility did not  
15 surface as readily. Working in the public space of the libraries determined the extent  
16 to which the young peoples' presence and the activity they were undertaking was  
17 open to being contested or negotiated. This in turn determined the extent to which  
18 they saw the spaces they were working in, as contentious. Where their presence was  
19 contested this was political and prompted critical thinking about what and who  
20 libraries are for.  
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## 28 **ii. The Affordances of Twine**

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31 The choice of the software Twine, and its particular affordances, strongly determined  
32 the way the project unfolded. Affordances, as outlined by Gibson (1979) relate to  
33 what is made possible by the design of a text or tool. As we have described earlier,  
34 Twine is a piece of free software for creating game/stories which offer the  
35 reader/player choices and consequences. Many games creation projects with young  
36 people use Scratch, a programme designed to teach coding that is now widely used  
37 in the primary technology curriculum in UK schools. In this sense the choice of Twine  
38 contested implicit assumptions about the purpose of games-making, focusing the  
39 project more strongly on the stories the young people wanted to tell than on specific  
40 skills development relating to coding. This created a shift in pedagogy so that the  
41 young people were not being constructed as inexpert, because they were all experts  
42 in stories, especially as in this case, they were invited to draw on their experiences of  
43 popular culture.  
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53 Twine, is also a non-profit making, open-source programme with an active online  
54 community providing a wider social context for learning (Williamson & Facer 2004).  
55 Using a tool which works in this way, counters the more entrepreneurial approach  
56 where learning to use a piece of software is seen as an accomplishment that  
57 distinguishes you from your competitors in the gig economy. Using open-source  
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3 software in education presents young people with alternatives reasons for creating  
4 content. Indeed many games created in Twine have civic purposes, for example  
5 Depression Quest<sup>3</sup> is an interactive story which explores self- management of  
6 depression. Interestingly, many of the game/stories dealt with serious or what the  
7 young people themselves called 'dark' issues, although some were darkly humorous.  
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12 Another way in which the choice of Twine contested existing socio-cultural and  
13 pedagogic practices, was in the way in which stories could be created collaboratively  
14 rather than individually as would usually be the practice in school. Although most  
15 texts are made with an audience in mind Twine creates moments where the games  
16 designer must explicitly plan for the responses of the reader / player:  
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19 *I've learnt how to entice the reader, because normally I just think about the*  
20 *world (from my point of view). Now I know that you have to keep them*  
21 *interested as well.*  
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27 Twine appeared to open a negotiated space in which the young people engaged with  
28 an imagined reader who may or may not share the experience of texts and everyday  
29 life. This is a complex, challenging space where the socio-cultural aspects of making  
30 meaning, usually an implicit process, become more tangible. We all draw on our  
31 experiences of life and of other texts (Kress, 2009) in our storytelling. Even the most  
32 original texts are original only, in relation to other texts that have gone before. Our  
33 previous narrative experiences may include games, films, books, comics, graphic  
34 novels as well as the everyday, but they entwine in our memories in ways that are  
35 difficult to pin down. Authors do not always remember where ideas came from and  
36 how they evolved. However, the visual and spatial design of Twine makes the  
37 narrative elements and their connections to each other visible and the process more  
38 explicit :  
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45 *Storytelling is about getting your point across ... And voices as well – I can*  
46 *imagine a voice but I can't type a voice to make people think that's what they*  
47 *sounded like.*  
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59 <sup>3</sup> <https://the-quinnspiracy.itch.io/depressionquest>  
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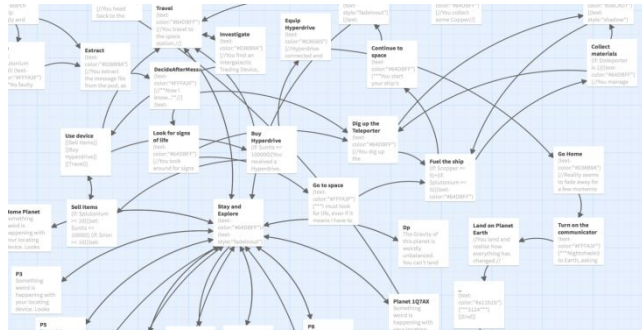


Figure One: Twine Game 'Backend' Interface

By clicking between playing, coding and writing the game / story and checking for coherence, the designer or author of the story steps into and out of the diegetic world. This resembled the fantasy play of young children who step out of the fictional world to plan and direct each other. We observed pairs of young people, working together in pairs with their heads so close together it would not have been possible to put a piece of paper between them. They frequently moved in and out of the story and the design process enabled intense collaboration.

The process of creating a Twine story was therefore markedly different to the way the young people created texts in school and this was regularly commented on. This resulted in a different sort of agency to emerge which involved the participants in a creative flow which only disintegrated due to creative differences or in order to test out the effect of the work in progress. This was again seen as different from school where you could be asked to stop to do something else at any moment. This ability to have some autonomy about when to stop and when to restart prompted the sort of critical distancing that is needed to create a coherent finished text. For example, one pair of boys asked others to play their game /story and realised that they were creating far more of the bad or dark side of their story than good. They decided they needed to add to the 'good' pathways but reflected that it was more fun 'being evil.' This also provided an opportunity for what we would suggest is a small political consideration of morality and the way in which it is presented in popular media.

Another way in which participants were able to exercise autonomy and thus agency was in the development of story ideas. It is important to note that this relates to facilitation too, but we are focusing here on the way Twine invites or even requires multiple narrative threads and in this context we observed that knowledge and experience of popular culture and everyday life became entangled. Although it was certainly the case that ideas from different domains flowed together, this did not

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3 seem to fit the common thirdspace analogy of a bridge so that a chemical reaction  
4 seemed to be a better fit. For example, in the game / story, 'Inferno', the author  
5 began the story with the protagonist hearing a screaming voice while walking home  
6 from school. The player / protagonist then realises that the city around him is on fire.  
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8 Using the affordances of Twine the author then provided the options of looking  
9 around the city or running home to rescue family members. The author described the  
10 detailed emotions and behaviour of the protagonist and drew on both fiction and non-  
11 fiction to describe living in a gang-ridden, post-apocalyptic America but there a quite  
12 a contrast between this and the way family feature:  
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17 *“Wade kicks the door down to save his sister and mum. He rushes upstairs*  
18 *towards the shouting. As he steps in he notices he is not being affected or*  
19 *weakened by the burning heat of the fire or the smoke entering his lungs.*  
20 *Instead he feels more powerful and more energised, like nothing he has ever*  
21 *felt. The heat is not bothering him at all... continue to save his family.”*  
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25 The protagonist develops super-hero powers that allow him to save his family and  
26 other innocent civilians from evil. The hero's characterisation is fictional yet his  
27 actions are depicted through everyday behaviour such as caring for his family.  
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32 The author draws on references to popular culture, such as the characterisation of  
33 super-heroes but these collide or react with personal experiences of family  
34 responsibilities, resulting in an exploration of themes such as death, social anxiety,  
35 survival and the spontaneity of life. As Inferno's storyline progresses further, the  
36 player is presented with a series of encounters such as saving a mother and toddler  
37 from a burning helicopter, finding an escape vehicle, escaping from a gang of  
38 terrorists and having to live in an armoured vehicle for 25 days. Through these  
39 dangerous events, Wade gathers strength and saves more and more people. At first  
40 glance this story may appear to be a fairly straightforward redesign of existing,  
41 generic ideas but it is important to acknowledge that this enabled an incorporation of  
42 self into the story which disrupted some of the ways a post-apocalyptic world has  
43 been represented in previous fictional texts. The ideas that emerge connect with  
44 those that have gone before both in terms of the way they are similar (the protagonist  
45 as hero) and the way they are different (in the focus on the risk to mum and sister.  
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47 The hero gains strength with each risky task he completes but he also faces ethical  
48 dilemmas more associated with the everyday than the superhero genre. For this  
49 young person, bringing together experiences of home and family with popular culture  
50 became an important opportunity to save the world.  
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3 At risk of clumsily rendering this experience more concrete than it was, we would  
4 argue that here the political emerges through the way in which the story developed.  
5 The more complex ideas about society and responsibility were not foregrounded  
6 either by the author of the facilitators. The story context of burning buildings  
7 resonated with those the author would have seen in both news and fiction and it is  
8 significant that he places himself in the story as the hero who can save the world. On  
9 the surface, the story may seem generic, but we see aspirations of empowerment in  
10 ways that it is important for facilitators to be alert to.  
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17 In summary, creating a game / story in Twine easily enabled the authors to check  
18 how the ludic elements of the story were working for the audience was important.  
19 This disrupted a traditional focus in written stories of checking for spelling and  
20 grammar and as a result the young people demonstrated a strong commitment to the  
21 idea of creating a coherent story. A further key affordances of Twine requires the  
22 author to draw on a wide range of story ideas from different sources in order to offer  
23 multiple narrative threads, providing a productive disruption of conventional linear  
24 narrative structure. In negotiating these disruptions the young people had to combine  
25 and juxtapose ideas in ways that shaped the creative process; they collaborated and  
26 took on new roles as games designers and user testers but also as powerful central  
27 protagonists in their own fictions.  
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### 36 **iii. Facilitation:**

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39 Despite the formality of a library setting, the facilitation of the project took a distinctly  
40 informal approach, which we would suggest served to contest the everyday  
41 pedagogic strategies the young people experienced at school. When asked what  
42 planning had gone into their workshops the three workshop leaders replied that their  
43 key role was about getting people comfortable with the basics, giving them the tools  
44 first and then getting them to express their ideas. Enabling the young people to  
45 develop their own stories was key to the facilitation.  
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51 One game/story '*First Date*', was created by one participant but shared throughout  
52 the devising process with the other group members who acted as potential players.  
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Figure Two: Player Screen of First Date

With only one pathway to the final ending of achieving a date, many group members played the game, followed a 'red herring pathway' and failed, at great amusement to the author who made use of personal experiences of first dates as well as ideas based on 'reality' television programmes and, in particular, 'Love Island.' Simply by requiring the young people to draw on their own socio-cultural story experiences, the activity broke with school practices where 'there is always a starter sentence' and a set of expectations which limit the extent to which young people can connect with their own experiences of stories and in particular the ways these stories have their own histories in terms of genres, authors and form. As we have argued, having free choice to decide the focus of their Twine game/stories was key to creating agency and autonomy. A myriad of narratives about outer space survival, a student's first day at university, internet chatrooms and cryptic curses plaguing humanity were developed and remixed. Themes explored included gender, politics and everyday life. Popular genres included mystery, science fiction, horror, drama, romance and adventure. Inviting home engagements with texts into a creative process often results in the appearance of transgressive elements, and this is seen in animation production with children especially which may be humorous but at odds with what might be expected in school writing. In this context young people are able to place difficult ideas at a safe distance to laugh and exercise some agency over them (Author 1, 2012). This is markedly different from contexts in which young people are asked to create media about a challenging contemporary issue, for example climate change, which also diminishes the possibility for humour and distancing.

Again as we observed in relation to the affordances of Twine, despite process involved writing of different sorts, it was interesting to see how the accuracy of spelling, grammar, and language use was very explicitly put to one side with the support of the workshop facilitator:

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5 *It helps them gain confidence. I think for me, I am not focused on grammar or*  
6 *spelling when I facilitate the sessions. I tell the participants to get their ideas out*  
7 *onto the page and then deal with that other stuff later.*  
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11 In fact, the facilitators often referred to themselves as being 'rubbish' at spelling,  
12 undermining some of the ways that they might be seen as more expert than the  
13 participants.  
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17 We also observed a relaxed approach to getting started or planning. No one was  
18 hurried along, although some did hurry, so the pace varied for each pair. Some of the  
19 young people did plan on paper first but most went straight to the screen and worked  
20 in a quite intuitive but also collaborative way. The cue from the facilitator was to have  
21 fun, to be playful and to take risks. This was clear in terms of both ideas generation  
22 for characters, plots and settings but also written or coded expression:  
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25 *I've learnt that it can actually be anything. On Twine you could write 'ok' and it'd*  
26 *be classed as a story.*  
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30 This resulted in overt instruction only being given, when requested in order to  
31 progress with an aspect of the storytelling which placed a much higher value on the  
32 stories, rather than on learning a particular skill. Dezuanni (2011) uses Derrida's  
33 (1978) notion of free play in the context of skills acquisition in digital media  
34 production to highlight the ways in which pedagogies of production can create the  
35 possibility of 'scenes of agency' (Butler, 1990) and this connects to the pedagogies of  
36 other literacy domains such as writing, where, for example, an aspect of grammar  
37 might be overtly taught within a wider situated literacy practice rather than a  
38 decontextualised grammar exercise (Barton and Hamilton et al, 2000).  
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48 The style of facilitation contested school experiences and enabled boundary  
49 crossing. At one point one young person gave each of the facilitators nick-names  
50 based on 'Scooby Doo'. These were acutely observed, funny and shared with us,  
51 rather than said in our absence. Usually name calling such as this would be  
52 challenged but here it was a marker of the way in which power relations had become  
53 less stringent.  
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58 Potter and McDougall (2018) refer to the way in which media production establishes  
59 more 'permeable membranes' between educators and students' expertise. Drawing  
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3 on popular culture in literacy-related work, often disrupts the usual power  
4 relationships in terms of who has expertise in particular cultural texts (Buckingham  
5 and Sefton-Green, 2005) and thus expertise is not, as often experienced by young  
6 people in schools, the sole domain of the teacher. The notion of who was an expert  
7 was certainly fluid and negotiable. This often manifested in the sharing and  
8 discussion of favourite and well-known texts but also niche texts which facilitators  
9 knew less about.  
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16 In one case the facilitators also worked closely with a library staff member who  
17 became a co-facilitator. The presence of a member of the library staff member who  
18 was also learning to use Twine provided a further challenge to hierarchies of  
19 learners. as soon as they could, did his own research and used internet tutorials in  
20 order to extend his knowledge. Working with staff who were learning to use the  
21 software alongside them again resulting in a disruption of hierarchies.  
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27 Throughout the workshops a keen interest was taken in the young people's game  
28 stories. They were taken seriously, played and responded to. The young people were  
29 encouraged to talk about the games and other stories they liked and this enabled  
30 those working with people they had not met before to connect by sharing likes and  
31 dislikes. Often at the start of the session the facilitators would say their stories could  
32 be 'fun or weird' signalling an openness to their tastes and preferences whatever  
33 they would be about and the young people responded enthusiastically to this more  
34 open brief:  
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39 *Yes. It don't always have to be like a weird story. It could be like a scary one,*  
40 *a funny one or a sad one. A happy one. Or it could be all mixed together.*  
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43 In this space what counts as a good, funny, serious or well-told story is contestable  
44 and does not reference set criteria relating to curricula but does echo other texts and  
45 their creators. Older peers were often experts, whom younger group members  
46 looked to for encouragement and affirmation. Younger participants were able to  
47 establish their credentials through their expertise in games or other media, at times  
48 blurring the edges of existing boundaries of year group or physical maturity.  
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54 It was reiterated often, that the possibilities for the young people's game/ stories  
55 were endless and that everything could be edited, developed and improved in order  
56 to make it work. This open-endedness also established the project as a sociable and  
57 collaborative space with an open exchange of ideas often in evidence, as one  
58 Librarian commented:  
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3 *I also think it did encourage them to use their imaginations and it helped them*  
4 *because it let them bounce ideas off each other.*  
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8 These social exchanges of ideas were key to the way [Museum] staff were able to  
9 support the young people, to take risks in their creative work and develop their  
10 confidence without any fear of being laughed at, as highlighted by this library staff  
11 member's reflection:  
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14 *I saw confidence develop in the workshops, and the children were chatting*  
15 *and meeting new people with similar interests, laughing and really enjoying*  
16 *sharing what they had done.*  
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20 Rather than closing down the banter that often characterised communication  
21 between the young people, the facilitators navigated these interactions respectfully.  
22 Sometimes workshop leaders were on the sidelines helping someone with their story,  
23 sometimes they were the butt of jokes: 'you see what I have to put up with' and  
24 sometimes they gently joined in to help negotiate disagreements. There were lulls to  
25 this atmosphere of banter however and in each observation there were frequent  
26 moments where the participants were fully immersed in the creation of their own  
27 games.  
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## 36 **Conclusion**

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39 Whilst digital media production does not inherently disrupt power relations or ensure  
40 young people's experiences are valued, it has the potential to. In determining  
41 pedagogical approaches that make this more likely Potter and McDougall's (2019)  
42 notion of Third Spaces as contested, negotiated and political provides a useful  
43 framework for understanding the different ways the broader context provides  
44 opportunities for productive disruptions. In this project, the disruptions resulted from a  
45 library environment where it was possible for the activity to disrupt the usual day to  
46 routines and activities. The choice of software, Twine, provided new ways to think  
47 about creating stories which heightened awareness of the reader and of narrative  
48 structure but also of online spaces which are not monetised. The facilitation disrupted  
49 the young people's experiences of school where their stories are predominantly  
50 created in writing, individually and where there is always a 'starter' which limits  
51 choice. The simple act of enabling the young people to select their own ideas for  
52 stories was perhaps the most productively disruptive aspect of the project because it  
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3 encouraged them to take ideas from one form and create them in another which  
4 proved to be useful in terms of critical distancing and reflection. What is more, the  
5 ability to write themselves into fictional texts and popular genres played an important  
6 role in disrupting and appropriating those very texts, for their own uses.  
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11 This is not to say that all media production activity should use Twine or be set in  
12 libraries or facilitated in an informal style. However, there are some principles for  
13 digital media production which contribute to the extent to which they become Third  
14 Spaces and we would recommend that educators, funders and practitioners consider  
15 how these principle heighten the possibility for challenge, negotiation and criticality  
16 to:  
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- 20 • enable digital media production to disrupt (or make its presence felt) in both  
21 material and digital environments;
- 22 • enable young people to exercise agency especially in relation to story ideas,  
23 encouraging them to draw on what they enjoy, and are collectively or  
24 individually expert in;
- 25 • enable young people to try out software which is free rather than used to  
26 promote monetisation and is supported by a community of storytellers;
- 27 • think of conflict as potentially productive and negotiation as potentially  
28 political.  
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36 If we are to resist the discourse of media production as simply workforce skills  
37 development, it is important to be able to identify the ways in which the process can  
38 provide a Third Space which is distinct from and therefore challenges existing ways  
39 of doing things. This study therefore provides a set of principles as provocations to  
40 encourage policy-makers, practitioners, funders and educators to reflect critically on  
41 their rationale for digital media production with young people and urges them to pay  
42 attention to the potential for production pedagogies to create Third Spaces which  
43 take empowerment seriously.  
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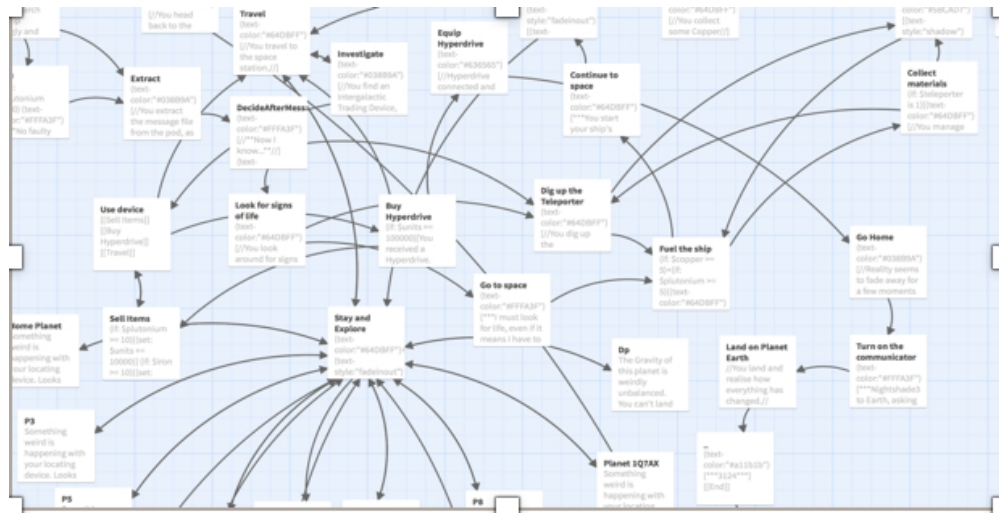
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7 She says your sense of humour is terrible.  
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10 You get annoyed that she said you have a bad sense of  
11 humour  
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14 Suck it up because she is pretty hot but has really bad taste  
15 in movies  
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