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Diagrarting: theorising and practising new ways of writing and drawing

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ABSTRACT

This article explains what is meant by the neologism, coined by the author, 'diagrarting'. It shows how diagrarting could be a new form of writing and drawing which is useful for writers, teachers and learners. In brief, the phrase diagrarting combines the words diagrams, dialogue and art. Diagrarting involves adopting an artistic identity when making marks on the page. To diagrart, one must write and draw, and believe you are creating art, no matter how crude you think your work to be. A diagrart is invariably rough and ready, and possibly not comprehensible to anyone else but its author. A diagrart is made intelligible through dialogue. If working alone, an author may talk to their diagrart, asking themselves about what it means, what they have learnt from it and so on. If working with other people, a diagrart is explained through conversation. This article shows how and why diagrarting could be an important practice for writers, artists, teachers and pupils to adopt in different contexts, providing empirical evidence of its success in the author's own creative practice and in an inner-city school.

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Introduction: the problems with teaching visual learning

Writers have always doodled and drawn to inspire themselves; teachers have always used visual aids to explain. Indeed, the first written forms of language were visual: words were often visual representations of things. The earliest types of writing 'appeared almost 5500 years ago in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq)' and took the form of 'pictorial signs' (Clayton 2021). In this sense, we can see that it is the first human drawings – now dated back about 40,000 years ago (Aubert, Lebe, and Oktaviana 2019, 442) – that are the antecedents of writing. In this case, there was no arbitrary relationship between the signifier – a visual representation – and the signified – the thing being represented – in the way that there is with using the Latin alphabet (Joseph 2001). Words visually resembled the things they signified – and still do in some alphabets. Words were straightforward in the sense that they were not collections of letters attempting to represent sounds. The visual word was a 'form' of the thing represented. This is the fundamental, raw power of a drawing: it speaks more directly to the viewer than a word. It is pre-verbal. It engages the imagination and mind

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in a different way from a non-visual word. Kress and Leeuwen write in their seminal book *Reading images the grammar of visual design* (2006):

> … educationalists everywhere have become aware of the increasing role of visual communication in learning materials of various kinds, and they are asking themselves what kind of maps, charts, diagrams, pictures and forms of layout will be most effective for learning. To answer this question they need a language for speaking about the forms and meanings of these visual learning materials. (Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, 14)

As Kress and Leeuwen point out, visual learning is clearly beneficial to learning in many ways, but we need to conceptualise it differently in order to perceive and reap its benefits. Many children love drawing before they are told they are 'bad' at it. They draw before they write words (Katz, Klages, and Hamama 2018).

Writers and teachers have always tried to harness the power of visual representations with varying degrees of success (Cooke, Griffin, and Cox 1998). In the current contemporary educational landscape, there are a plethora of visual strategies that writers and teachers of all subjects are urged to employ with themselves and their students (Shaw 2019, 316). Many have different names: spider diagrams, visual organisers, graphic organisers, concept maps, flow charts, matrixes, storyboards, doodles, the trade-marked Mindmaps devised by Tony Buzan (Buzan and Harrison 2010), double-coding notes and so on. A great deal is accompanied by rules and guidelines of varying degrees of complexity (Buzan and Harrison 2010).

Possibly the chief problem the writer, teacher and learner face is finding the right strategy to choose from given such a bewildering array. Connected to this is a secondary and related problem. Teachers of reading and writing, like myself, are predominately interested in nurturing meaningful aesthetic responses from their students: getting them to respond to art in a comprehending, sensitive and imaginative fashion (Gilbert 2016). Labels like 'visual organisers' 'Mindmaps' fail to represent what is happening when a writer draws and labels a picture after reading a descriptive passage in a novel, responds with some abstract art after reading a poem, devises a diagram to illustrate how a plot of their story might work. They fail because these terms do not connote the artistic, dialogic and diagrammatic processes which are involved in making visuals in such contexts.

This lack of a decent word to sum up what happens when you visually and imaginatively 'diagram', write and converse about concepts and knowledge has led me to coin a new word and form of writing:

Diagrarting

This article shows what diagrarting is, and then explores why this new form of writing is needed by writers and teachers. Once a clear definition and rationale for diagrarting has been established, the article shows how I use diagrarting as a form of artistic practice and how it can be used in practice-led research, and how I used diagrarting with my pupils (14–15-year-olds) to help them respond both creatively and analytically to a difficult text they were reading for a formal examination, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

The article has the dual, inter-related audience of both writers and teachers in mind. It aims to speak to them both because it views writers as people who teach themselves, and teachers of writing as writers who use their knowledge of writing to teach it (Smith and

Wrigley 2012). It also perceives the processes of reading and writing to be inextricably linked (Barrs 2000) and as a result, seeks to argue that diagrarting is not only a new form of writing but also a new way of responding to texts.

What is diagrarting?

As has been said, diagrarting is a neologism composed of the words: dialogue, diagrams and art. It sums up what many writers do when they doodle, draw, write and discuss what is on their mind at any given time. Diagrarting is a deliberately broad term which seeks to encapsulate both the more mechanical aspects of visualisation and the more artistic elements of putting one's thoughts on paper.

On one level diagrarting is about reification in that it aims to 'thingify' (Reification 2011): to turn a writer's thoughts, feelings, concepts and knowledge into marks on the page – into 'things'. Concomitantly, it is also about the spoken word, discussing what one has 'reified' on the page.

Above all, it aims to give a writer permission to diagram, discuss and make marks on the page in the way will best help them learn and create. This may mean that they produce something which they might judge a 'bad' drawing or a scruffy set of notes. The production of a 'good' visual is not primarily the point, the main thing is that the diagrart is a creation in itself as well as an aid to understanding and the imagination.

My diagrart 'What is diagrarting?' (Figure 1) shows what is involved.

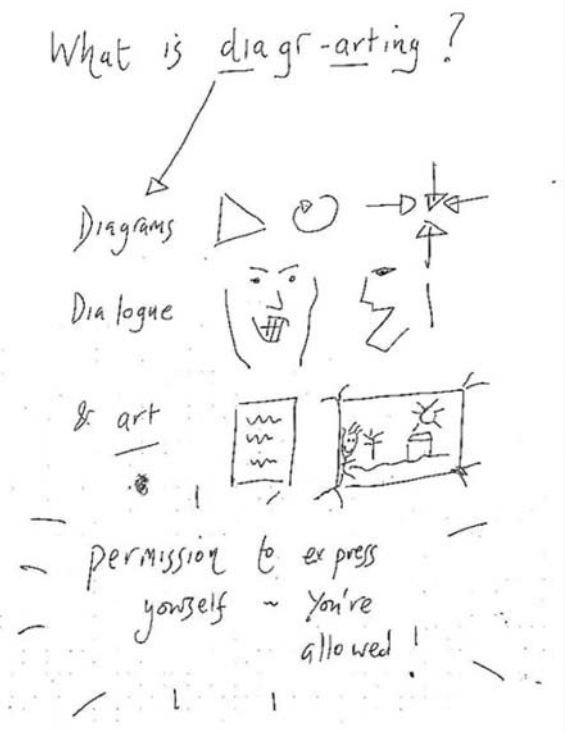

Figure 1. What is diagrarting?

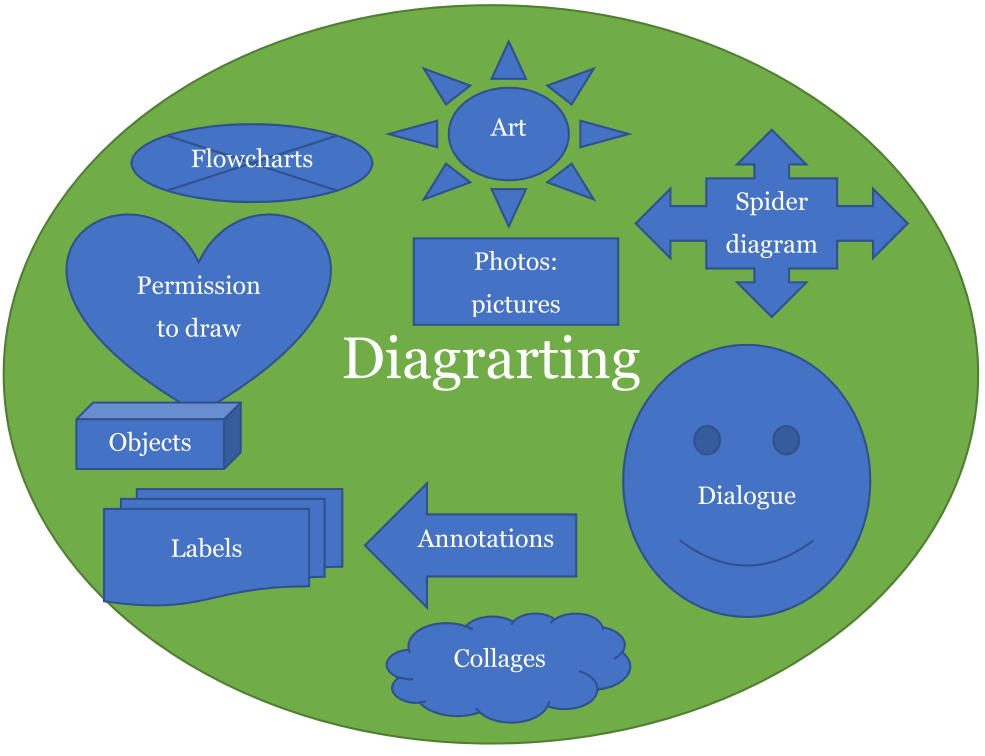

Figure 2. Diagrarting as a big set.

You will see in this diagrart that I have combined crude visual representations of faces, pictures and writing on pages to convey visually the essence of diagrarting: the combination of writing and drawing, which is both highly functional but also has an artistic element to it. As I say in the diagrart, the point of this new form of writing is to give 'permission to express yourself'.

While diagrarting includes things like annotations, visual organisers, drawing and labelling, it is a bigger 'set' than these things, and includes them (see Figure 2). It is, above all, about inculcating a spirit of discovery through using words, art, dialogue and diagrams.

Diagrarting is not a chaotic, formless process. The creator of a diagrart should be willing to discuss it with their peers or in their own heads: to ask questions such as 'What do I mean by this diagrart?' 'What am I trying to say?' 'What are my next steps from this?'

This could be an internal dialogue a writer has with their own diagrart or it could be questions they ask of a peer. The diagrart is there to nurture 'dialogic teaching'; learning through talking (Fisher 2011).

In terms of using diagrarting in schools and workshops, it should be stressed that the 'Rights of the Writer' should apply:

(1) The right not to share
(2) The right to change things and cross things out
(3) The right to write anywhere

(4) The right to a trusted audience
(5) The right to get lost in your writing and not know where you're going
(6) The right to throw things away
(7) The right to take time to think
(8) The right to borrow from other writers
(9) The right to experiment and break rules
(10) The right to work electronically, draw or use a pen and paper (Wrigley 2014)

So, it may be that the diagrart is kept private, but the diagrarter does need to be able to discuss what they learnt from doing their diagrart and/or what it is seeking to represent.

Why create this new form of writing?

As has been said, there are no immediately accessible nouns or verbs in writing and teaching discourses which adequately express what many writers and teachers 'do' with visuals when working on their own writing or teaching students.

A label such as diagrarting can be very helpful in bringing a sense of professionalism and prestige to what, for many, is a low-status activity, which might be described derogatively as 'doodling'. However, as recent research shows there are significant educational and therapeutic justifications for doodling which include better memory retention as well as stress relief and improved focus (Pillay 2016).

This is an important reason for inventing this neologism: to give some standing to an activity which is a vital tool for many writers and teachers. If another more attractive, 'catchy' name can be found, then that is to be welcomed; the contention is not primarily that the phrase 'diagrarting' should be used, but that an engaging label should be found to encapsulate what is happening when we write and draw in this way.

The name has been used in part to counter-act some of the issues with other names, which could be construed as inhibiting the writing process and learning generally. For example, the concept of spider diagramming has the power of its image – the spider – but also the possible negative connotations of an arachnid (which some people, though certainly not all, find troubling!). Graphic organisers can be very helpful to help organise, classify, rank, compare and contrast information (Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock 2001, 18–28) and diagrarting certainly includes these strategies – as we shall see in the findings section – but this approach to organisation can fail to engage writers, and can be enforced far too rigidly by teachers, leading to negative results: demotivated, confused pupils who don't understand fully what to do or why they are doing it (Marzano 2009, 35). Other phrases such as 'sketchnotes' have a disposal quality to them and do not encapsulate the idea of discussion. Diagrarting aims to open up new ways of thinking about any topic and the artistic process itself; it does this by promoting a permissive aesthetic environment which fosters flow and debate (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). It forces people to think differently about the aesthetic worth and value of their marks on a page.

Diagarting can create different realities, new worlds and possibilities. The very word 'diagrarting' (or any similar neologism) creates a new reality. It is what Deleuze and Guattari would call a 'concept'. The translators of *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari's book where they philosophize about concepts, Tomlinson and Bushell write:

> Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts. They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator's signature. (1994, 5)

Diagrarting is a 'fabrication' which I have invented because existing pedagogical concepts connected with writing and visual learning are too narrow or inappropriate. Deleuze and Guattari write:

> All concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges. We are dealing here with a problem concerning the plurality of subjects, their relationship, and their reciprocal presentation. (16)

From a Deleuzian-Guattarian perspective, there is no 'reality to reflect upon' only a jostling of concepts and things being 'affected' by other things, a 'plurality of subjects' (16). Diagrarting is a concept which opens a creative space where its creator can productively come to terms with this jostling of concepts and affects. It provides its creator with 'affordances', which are defined by Pahl and Rowsell as 'the possibilities that a particular form offers a text-maker' (2005, 34); it 'affords' new possibilities. It provides these 'affordances' because it is a 'multimodal literacy' – it gives its creator a chance to reify their knowledge using the different modes of writing, drawing, pictures, photos and objects (Kress 2003; 35–59: Pahl and Rowsell 2005, 25–47).

As a Deleuzian-Guattarian concept, diagrarting operates in a few different ways.

- It is an artistic practice. It creates art: innovative modes of expression, new realities and alternative worlds.
- It is an imaginative form of practice-led research: visualising and writing about one's research by diagrarting provides new and unique knowledge.
- It is a description. It describes, in supplying a new name for a multimodal reification, what human beings have done since the inception of writing: a combination of pictures, words, abstract drawings.
- It is a pedagogical exhortation which helps learners break free of the shackles of writing and to scribble, to doodle, to draw 'badly', to think as they reify, to escape from the shackles of hackneyed written and pictorial forms.

Figure 3 is diagrart which aims to capture these thoughts in a pictorial sense. It seeks to show that diagrarting is a low-stakes but high-status form of aesthetic expression. My drawings no doubt could be construed as crude, ill-formed and lacking entirely in aesthetic worth. Fair enough! But to me, they are important: after dialoguing in my head about what I had drawn (see 'what is diagrarting' section on this) I realised that the tortured face represented my inner critic, regularly beating myself up about how bad my work is; the labyrinth is the mystery of the artistic process; its flow and strange paths. The dancing stick person is about permission.

My impulse to devise the concept of diagrarting comes from participating in a dance class called '5Rhythms'. The dancer Gabrielle Roth invented the idea of 5Rhythms (Roth and Loudon 1998) to give everyone the chance to enjoy dancing without feeling that they needed to follow any prescribed steps or moves. In brief, she suggested five rhythms that the participants in the class would follow: flow, staccato, chaos, lyricism

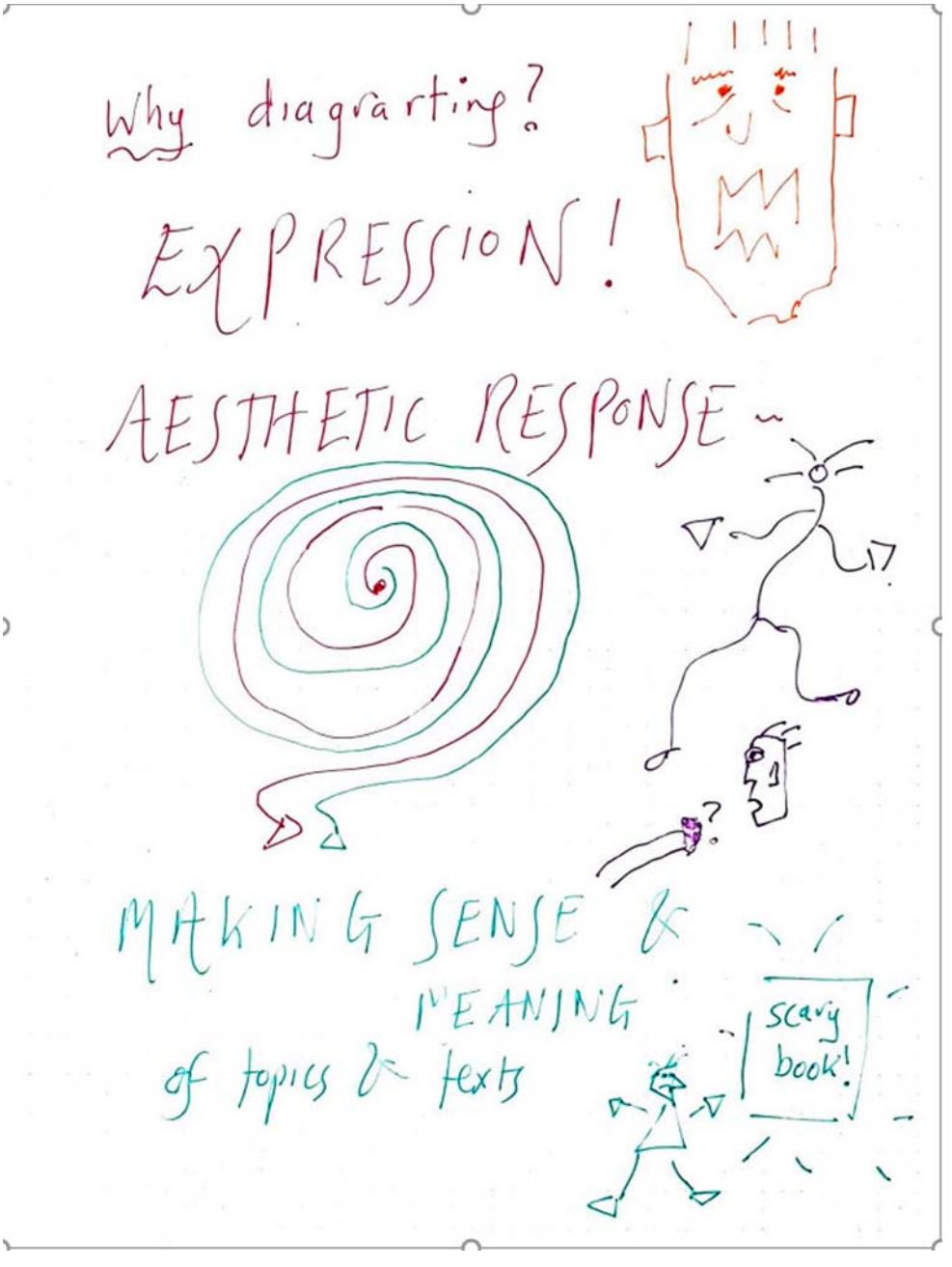

Figure 3. Why diagrart?

and stillness. The dancers are given 'permission' to move how they want as the music follows the five rhythms. The concept of permission is central (Roth and Loudon 1998). Attending this class over the course of a year had a transformative effect upon the way I viewed myself and the way I moved. Not only did it free me up to move how I wanted when I listened to music, it also showed me the importance of practising at being 'given permission'. It was only after completing a few sessions that I realised

how much I'd changed in my attitude to movement and many other things. My idea of diagrarting seeks to nurture a similar practice of giving permission, and aims to be a habitual, conscious process.

Diagrarters should be aware that they have been given permission to express themselves how they want to. As has been previously mentioned, it links strongly with Simon Wrigley's concept of the 'Rights of the Writer' (2014) which contains a list of 'rights' that all children should be entitled to when they write, which include the 'right to work electronically, draw or use pen and paper' (Wrigley 2020). In an article written with Jeni Smith, Wrigley shows when teachers are given this kind of permission to write, their teaching of writing improves, but their research shows how important it is for teachers to develop writing as a low-stakes, habitual practice which affords them the space to express themselves privately (2012). This idea of nurturing a private, expressive language is explored by Tristine Rainer in *The New Diary* (2004). Of particular interest is her advocacy of drawing and images in her section entitled 'Maps of Consciousness'. Rainer writes:

> Some diarists use free drawings or the special mapping techniques of clustering as they would free-intuitive writing to tap their inner consciousness. Such maps of consciousness image what's in your mind. The process is a meditation. You relax and without intent allow the pen to move where it will go on the page. You let your hand lead and see what it makes as it goes … It requires no artistic talent to make maps of consciousness. They can be stick figures or shapeless blobs. Their purpose is your own enjoyment and self-awareness, not accuracy or beauty. Sometimes when I am particularly confused I draw a map of all my conflicting parts. (69)

For me, the concentric circles in Figure 3 are just such a map of consciousness; an attempt to abstractedly reify the notion of diagrarting: the abstraction symbolises what I have already suggested but it also shows my confusion. The notion of aesthetic response cannot be fully captured by reification, and the concentric circles suggest this. This idea that reification can be a safe space to represent confusion is important and links to the notion of what Dweck calls 'Growth Mindset':

> in a growth mindset, people believe that basic abilities can be developed through hard work, good strategies, and good mentoring … students in a growth mindset focus more on learning. Their main goal in school is to learn, they put in the effort and strategies needed to acquire knowledge, and they stick to difficult tasks, learning from their mistakes and setbacks. They have more grit. (Dweck 2014, 10)

Diagarting is a place where writers, teachers and pupils can make mistakes, express confusion, reflect upon what they know and don't know. They are not being expected to produce a perfect piece of work; rather the strategy is there to encourage 'flow': 'the sense of effortless action' (Csikszentmihalyi 1997 Chapter 1). Diagrarting is a corrective to the privileging of certain ways of writing in the English-speaking world. In many different spheres, including schools and universities, writing is perceived as the highest form expression. Diagrarting implicitly challenges this hierarchy by inviting diagrarters to deploy their multiple intelligences: their visual/spatial intelligences are activated by drawing, their 'intra' (inward/reflective) intelligences are used because diargarter must reflect upon their own practice; and it necessitates the use of interpersonal (between

people) and linguistic intelligences through its use of writing and conversation (Gardner 2006). In this sense, it is an inclusive pedagogical practice.

Diagrarting in action

Examining my own practice

As the person who invented diagrarting, my first job was to explore exactly how it might work. I diagrarted this list:

The act of handwriting this list (Figure 4), as opposed to typing it – my normal mode of writing now – helped me focus my thoughts and illustrates how diagrarting can be a form 'practice-led research' in that diagrarting offers a tool to think with and create new knowledge. In this sense, diagrarting offers the chance for people to research their thought processes.

There is some evidence that handwriting has significant cognitive benefits above typing (Chemin 2014: Medwell and Wray 2014). The numbered list made me realise that Michael Rosen's idea of 'secret strings' could be part of diagrarting. A secret string is 'anything that links one phrase to another' (Rosen 2011). This act of drawing arrows, of making use of the flexibility of the pen/pencil/brush flowing over paper helps the diagrarter make connections. I felt this when I linked the concept of secret strings to 'respond visually' (see Figure 4). The rough drawings of stick people, faces and the sun made me feel liberated, freed me up from the stuffy constraints of academia, and helped me enter a childlike state, providing me with a sense of flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Guideline 5 in Figure 4 puts a central emphasis upon dialogue and clarity: diagrarters need to make sense of what they have reified by talking about it.

There was a sense of urgency to make diagrarting comprehensible because I was about to teach my trainee teachers about using visuals in the classroom in connection with teaching the novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson (2002). This short novel, published in 1886, is a popular set text for high-stakes, summative examinations in English Literature sat by all sixteen-year-olds in England and Wales at the time of writing, and is, in my experience, taught ineffectually in many classrooms, with teachers struggling to engage teenagers with its plot, characters and themes. I wanted to see if diagrarting could help motivate students, so I set a creative diagrarting task for myself on it, with a view to advocating it to my trainee teachers if it worked. This creative task was to consider what one of the main protagonists of the novel, Gabriel Utterson, might have dreamt after he had read the confession of his friend Henry Jekyll. As a result, I diagrarted his dream.

These are four of my diagrarts (Figures 5–8).

What struck me after completing these diagrarts – as opposed to using only a written word response – was the way in which I was conscious of the bodies of the main characters. The act of drawing them made me aware of the characters' facial expressions, their heads; the way Utterson's stomach turned at the sight of Hyde; the knuckly hairy hands of Hyde; the crushing of Utterson's head and of Sir Danver's Carew's body; the trampling of the eight-year-old girl; the small size of Hyde's body inside Jekyll's clothes. My crude stick men brought home to me the physicality of the text; the act of drawing pulled me into the narrative in a very embodied fashion. It also made me 'see' the story more clearly. Things

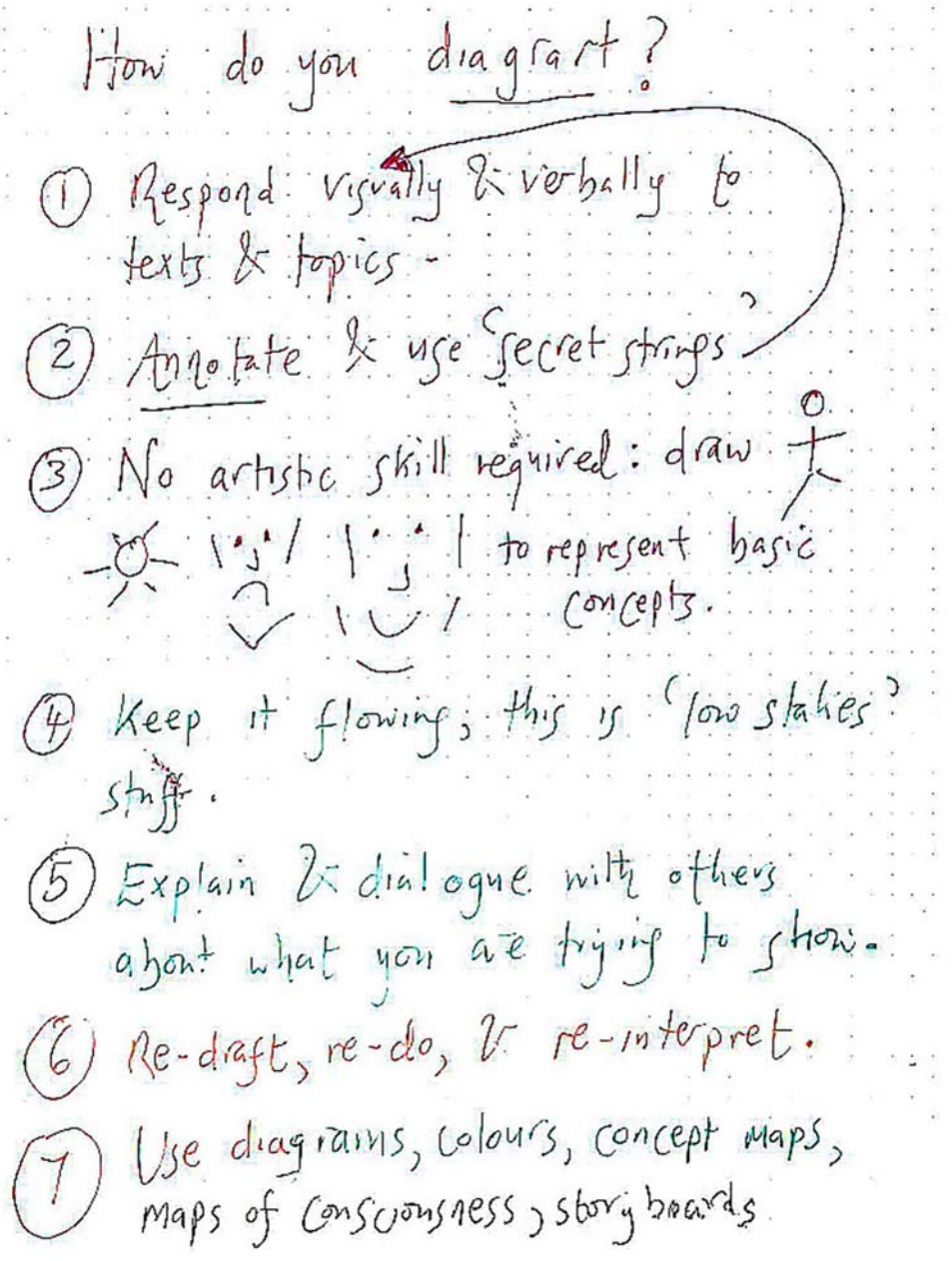

Figure 4. How do you diagrart?

like the contrast of the doors of Sir Danvers Carew's area and the scruffy door where the little girl was trampled was really highlighted when I decided to draw the background to both these attacks. The diagrarting gave me a deep sense of the physical and social contexts of these attacks. The use of secret strings and annotations was very helpful in orientating the action, naming it, summarising it. I also found doing the diagrart very

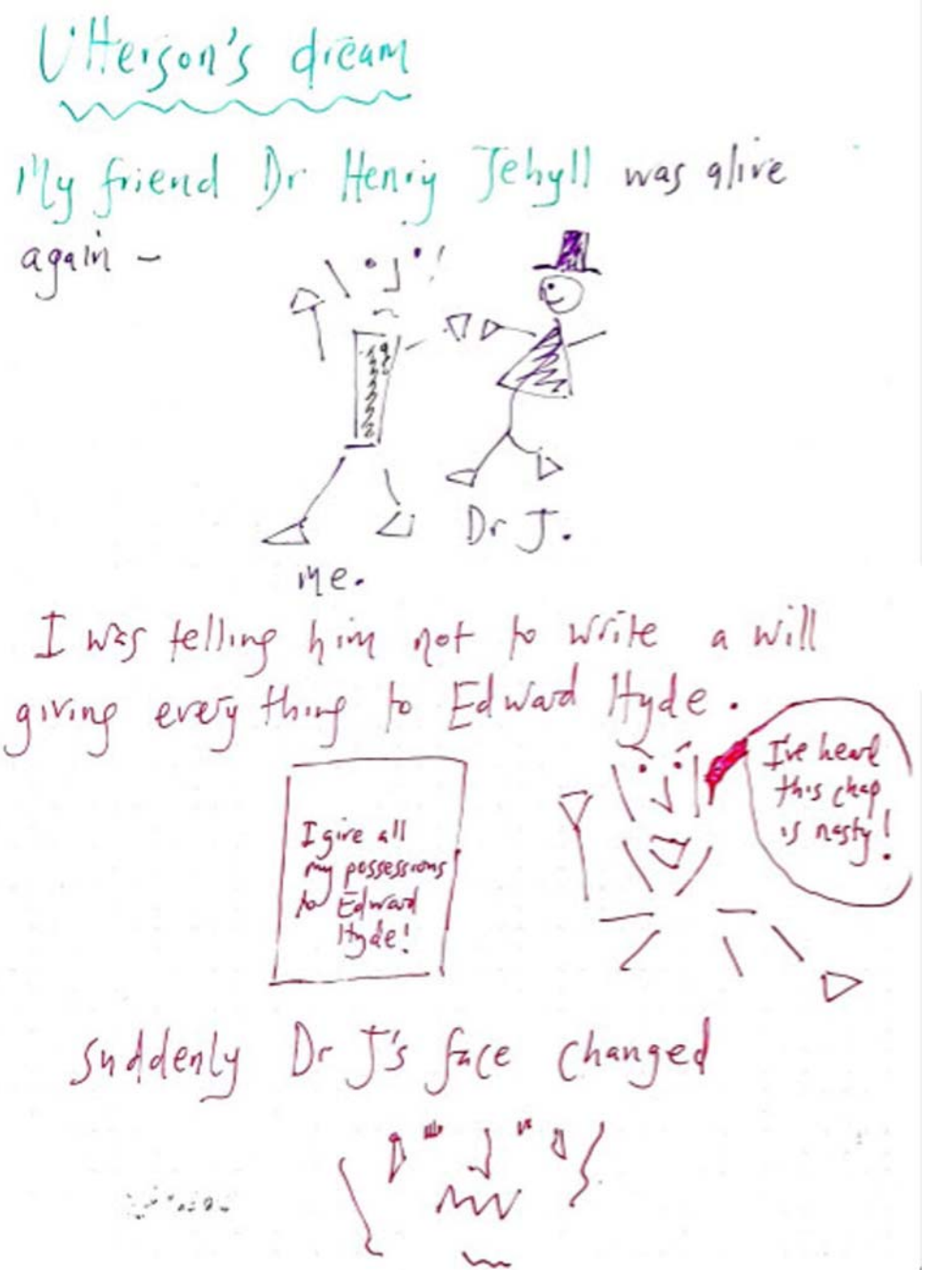

Figure 5. Utterson's Dream Part 1.

motivating and mildly humorous because it gave me a chance to express myself artistically.

I actually enjoy looking back at it for a number of reasons.

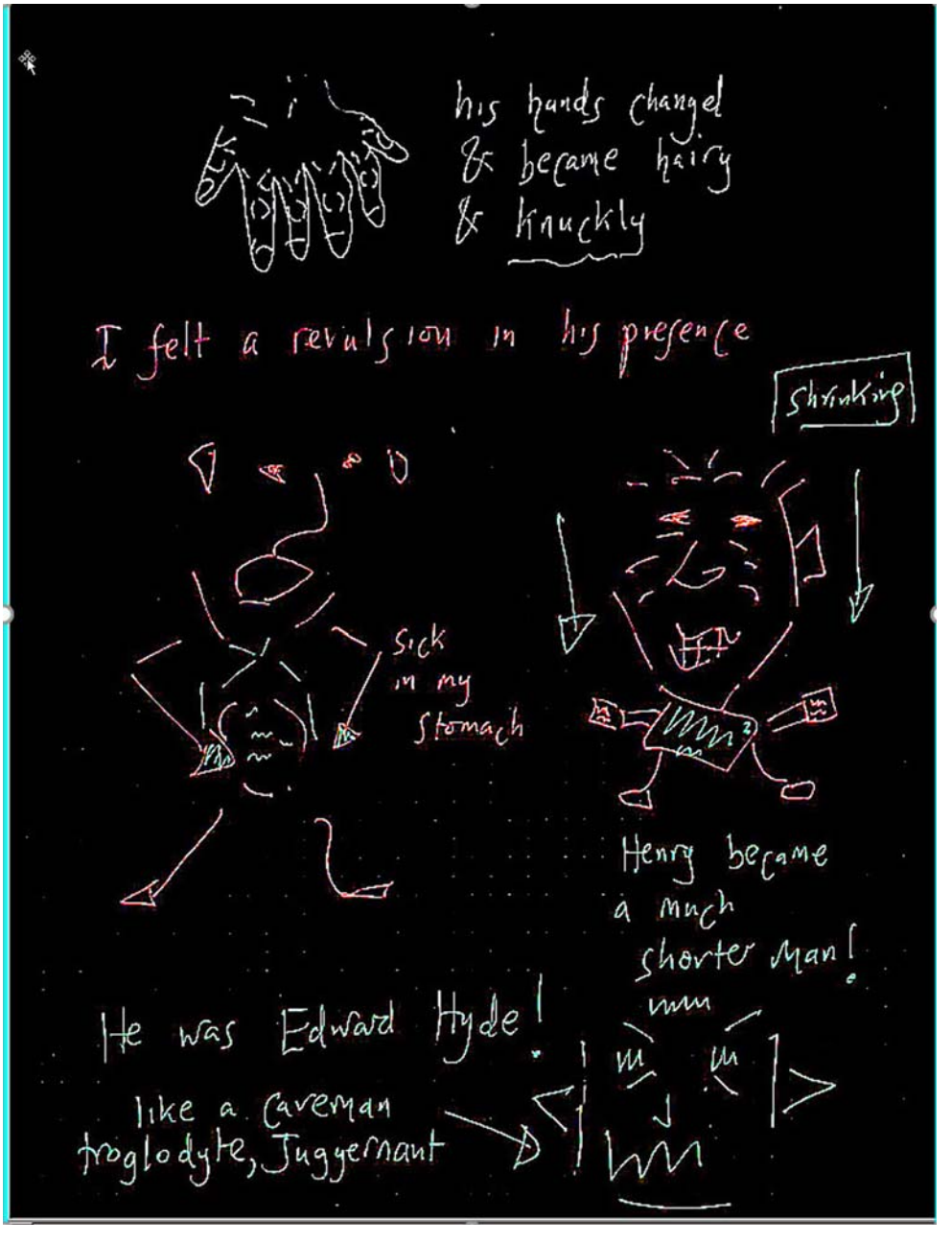

Figure 6. Utterson's Dream Part 2.

First, I can see very quickly what I articulated, far more quickly than if I had to read a wholly 'word' text on the same theme.

Second, I find the diagrart enables me to think holistically and creatively about the story: it makes me realise, for example, how important the imagery of hands, bodies, violence and doors is in the novel. These images are what stay in the readers' minds very

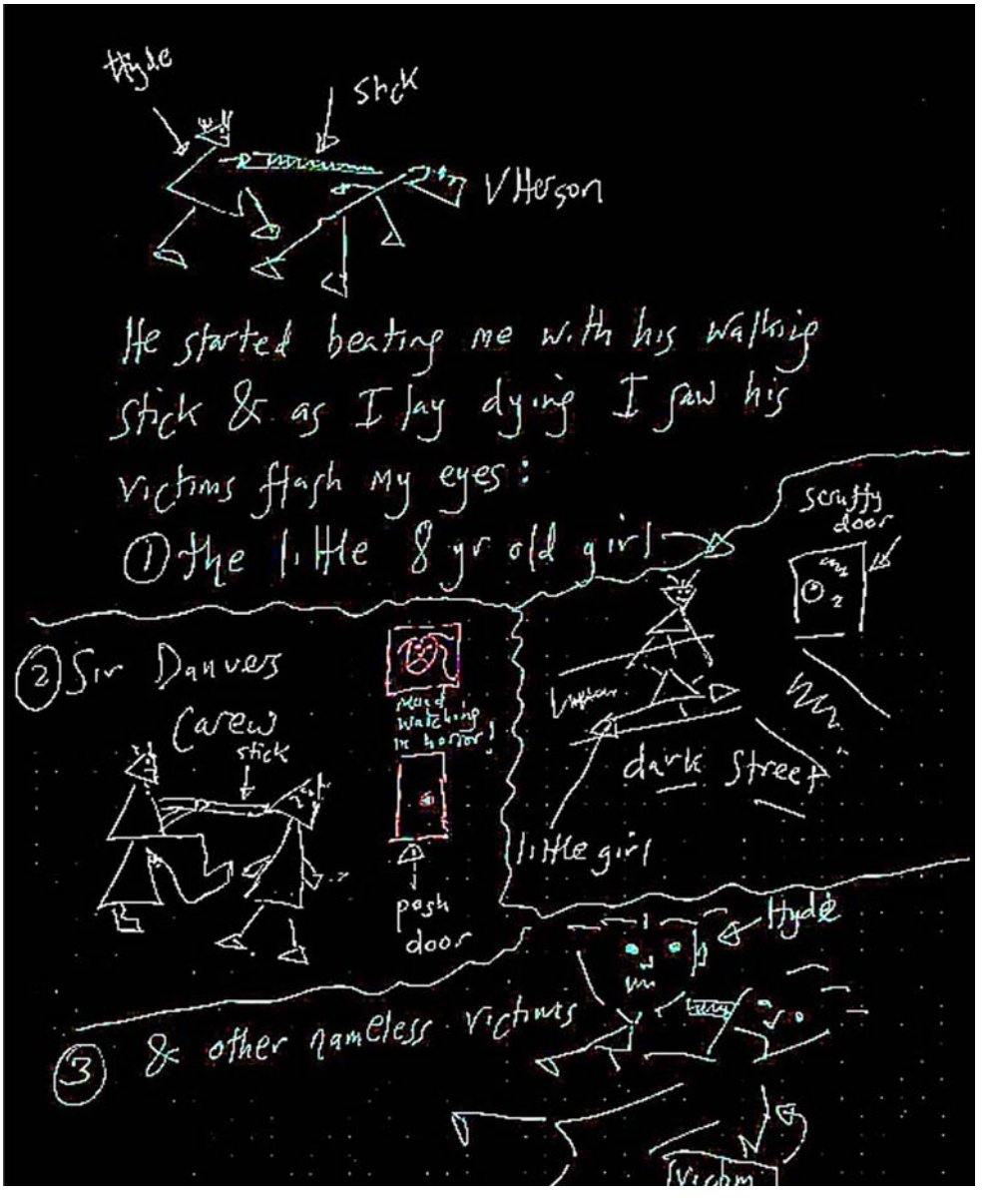

Figure 7. Utterson's dream Part 3.

powerfully after reading it. The act of diagrarting necessarily provides this overarching perspective.

Third, I enjoy the 'release' of the diagrart: I like the 'badness' of my drawings. Because much of my professional identity is invested in the idea of being an effective writer, the act of writing is always, to a certain extent, a 'high-stakes' affair for me; I need to feel that I am 'good' at it. Therefore, re-reading work that I judge as 'poor' or 'weak' can be a very dispiriting and demotivating experience, leading to thoughts that I should give up, not publish it etc. Because none of my professional

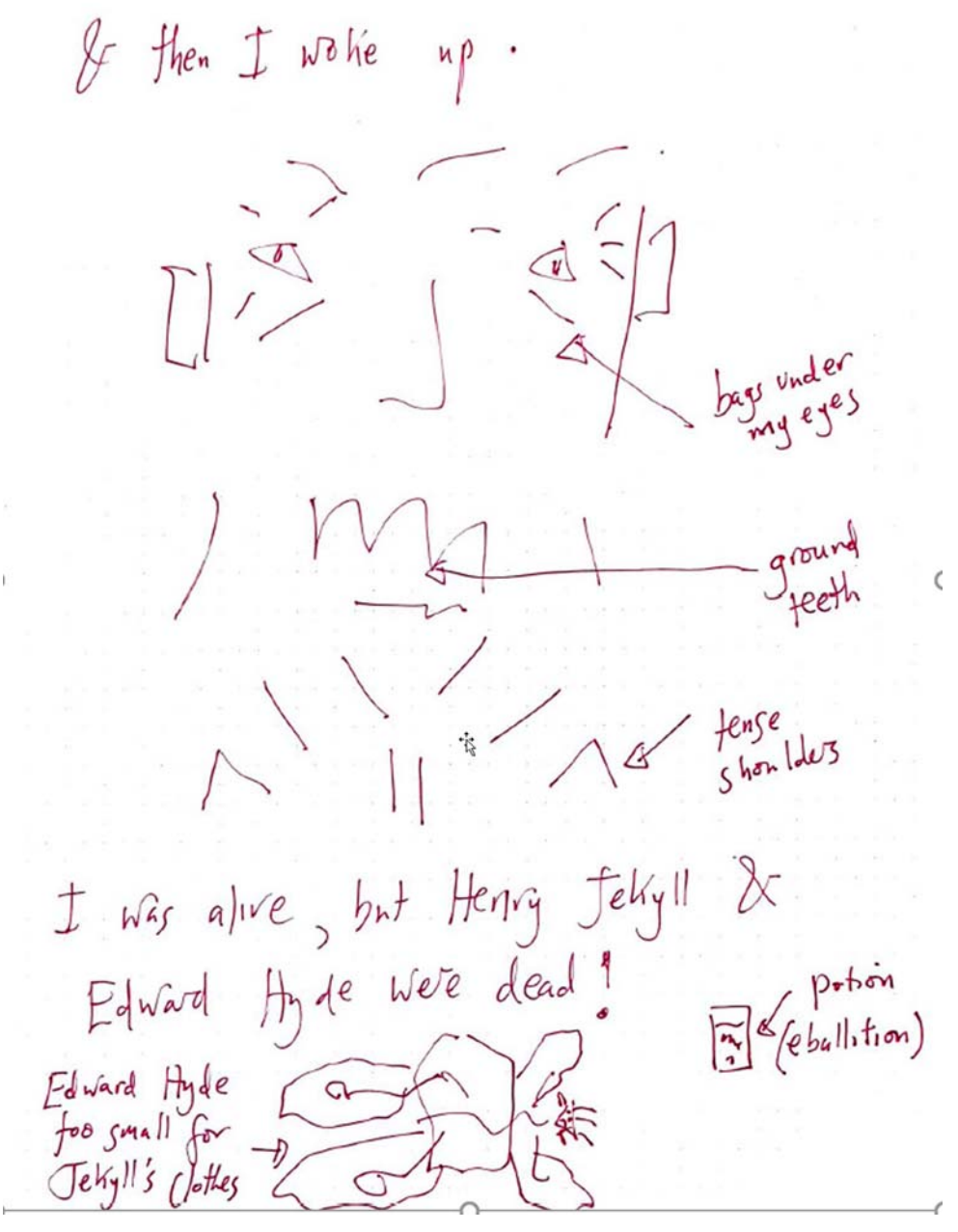

Figure 8. Utterson's Dream Part 4.

identity is invested in being a 'good' artist, I am free to produce something that could easily be judged by many people as 'bad' art. I can be playful and revel, to a certain extent, in my own incompetence. The chief goals here are to speak to myself through the act of diagrarting.

So to sum up, diagrarting for myself affords:

- Moments of flow
- A time and space to be artistic
- A practice which facilitates research
- Insights into the imagery of a text
- A good way of summarising a text in an inventive way
- Enjoyment and speed in the process of creation and re-reading
- A way of dialoguing with myself about what a text means to me

Examining pupils' use and views of diagrarting

In March 2020, I taught a revision session on the novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (2002), lasting three hours in total to 60 Year 10 (14–15 year olds) pupils at an inner city school in London. Using and following my university's research ethics (Goldsmiths 2021), I obtained the written, informed permission from the headteacher of the school and the carers of the children for me to use their work in my research. My methodological approach sought to make the research emancipatory and highly ethical; all the participants provided their informed consent.

The students had studied the book in the Autumn term of 2019, and their teachers were keen for them to have a revision session on it before the pupils took a mock exam on the novel. This text was a 'high-stakes' text for both the pupils and teachers: if the pupils did not achieve highly in their mock exam, they would be required to do extra work and their parents/carers would be informed. This is because in Year 11, the following year, the students were due to sit a formal General Certificates in Secondary Education (GCSEs) in English Literature by which they and the school would be publicly measured. Because of the way statistical information is generated based on these GCSEs, success or failure in English Literature is very significant for both schools and pupils. This is important to point out because it helps understand the reactions to diagrarting that follow and sets them in context.

During the session, I suggested a number of revision techniques to help students better understand the novel and remember 'key quotes': the students are not allowed to take the novel into the exam and, as a result, memorisation of important words, phrases, authorial techniques, narrative events and characters is vital to success. The first strategy I explained to the students in a twenty-minute introductory lecture was diagrarting, and then I asked the students throughout the three-hour session to diagrart their notes, analysis and comments. I also suggested other revision strategies such as using role-play to help empathise with a character in the novel and thereby remember key elements about them in an emotionally engaged way. With all the revision strategies, including diagrarting, I briefly explained the learning theory behind them. With regards to diagrarting and learning theory, I stressed the importance of visualisation to aid memory because it is a more basic brain function than 'word' writing and facilitates the spotting and creation of patterns.

Students' feedback on this session indicated diagrarting had made the biggest impact upon them and this was the revision strategy that they responded most positively too. In a certain sense, this is not surprising because it was the strategy that most heavily connected with their previous learning: all of them had had a go at devising concept maps, spider diagrams and visual organisers at some point in their education, although,

perhaps surprisingly, the pupils indicated they rarely drew in their lessons. One pupil said that diagrarting reminded her of her primary school, where she had been encouraged to draw and label a great deal. 'But I don't do that now, because most of my teachers would think it's babyish,' she said. This chimes with the previously cited Grainger et al.'s research (2003) which indicates that many teachers place little value on drawing and visuals when teaching more formal academic subjects such as English, Maths and Science.

In their feedback, students were asked to write about what they had learnt, and what they would like to learn more about, and were to invite to mention diagrarting. However, they were not compelled to do so. Ninety-five per cent of the responses explicitly talked about diagrarting in a positive fashion. There was only one negative comment about diagrarting, which we will examine in a minute.

Pupils' responses included:

PUPIL 1: 'The diagrart helps me visualise my ideas and thoughts'.
PUPIL 2: 'How to associate images for my revision through the use of diagrarting'.
PUPIL 3: 'Diagrarting is a good way to study creatively and effectively at the same time. You can visualise things and the story a lot better and the visualisation helps you make links between points'.
PUPIL 4: 'Diagrarting helped me understand things physically, and it will make enjoyable looking back at my notes and seeing what I learnt'.
PUPIL 5: 'The diagrarting seems very effective as it is about organising your ideas, and more fully explaining and visualising your thoughts and ideas to make a better formed arguments'.
PUPIL 6: 'Personally, I felt that the most effective revision exercise was the diagrarting as it assisted my retention of the quotes as well as urging a deeper insight and understanding. Drawing and then annotating the work helped me visualise the quote, hence making the meaning easier to remember. I will use the technique in future to help me remember'.

Their responses indicated a real enthusiasm for visualising ideas, with students seeing the ways in which the visualisation made their learning more 'creative' and 'effective' (Pupil 2). They also perceived the ways in which diagrarting can help organise their thoughts and form 'better arguments' (Pupil 5). Above all, many of the students viewed diagrarting as a way of more deeply understanding a text (Pupils 3, 4, 5, 6), offering a chance for pupils to reflect upon it by perceiving patterns and meanings (Pupils 3, 4). Perhaps not surprisingly given the nature of their exam, many pupils were enthusiastic about it because they felt it would aid their memorisation and understanding of quotes. The one pupil who responded negatively to diagrarting felt that it would impinge upon their 'work', distracting them from the task of writing exam answers.

In the section below, I have provided a number of the pupils' diagrarts, and categorised them by the ones which were:

- Text heavy: these diagrart were all 'wordy'
- Text light: the predominant reification was the visuals
- Using symbols: these students clearly enjoyed leaving 'realistic' representations behind

The reason for categorising the work in this way was to keep the focus upon the representation of information, (how it was said) as opposed to categorising the diagrarts according to content (what was said).

Text heavy

The students who used diagrarting in a 'text heavy' fashion were all exclusively 'analysing quotes'. They were doing this because I had modelled this method on these PowerPoint slides (Figures 9 and 10).

What is interesting about their responses is that not a single pupil copied my slides but used the ideas in my slides to analyse their own quotations.

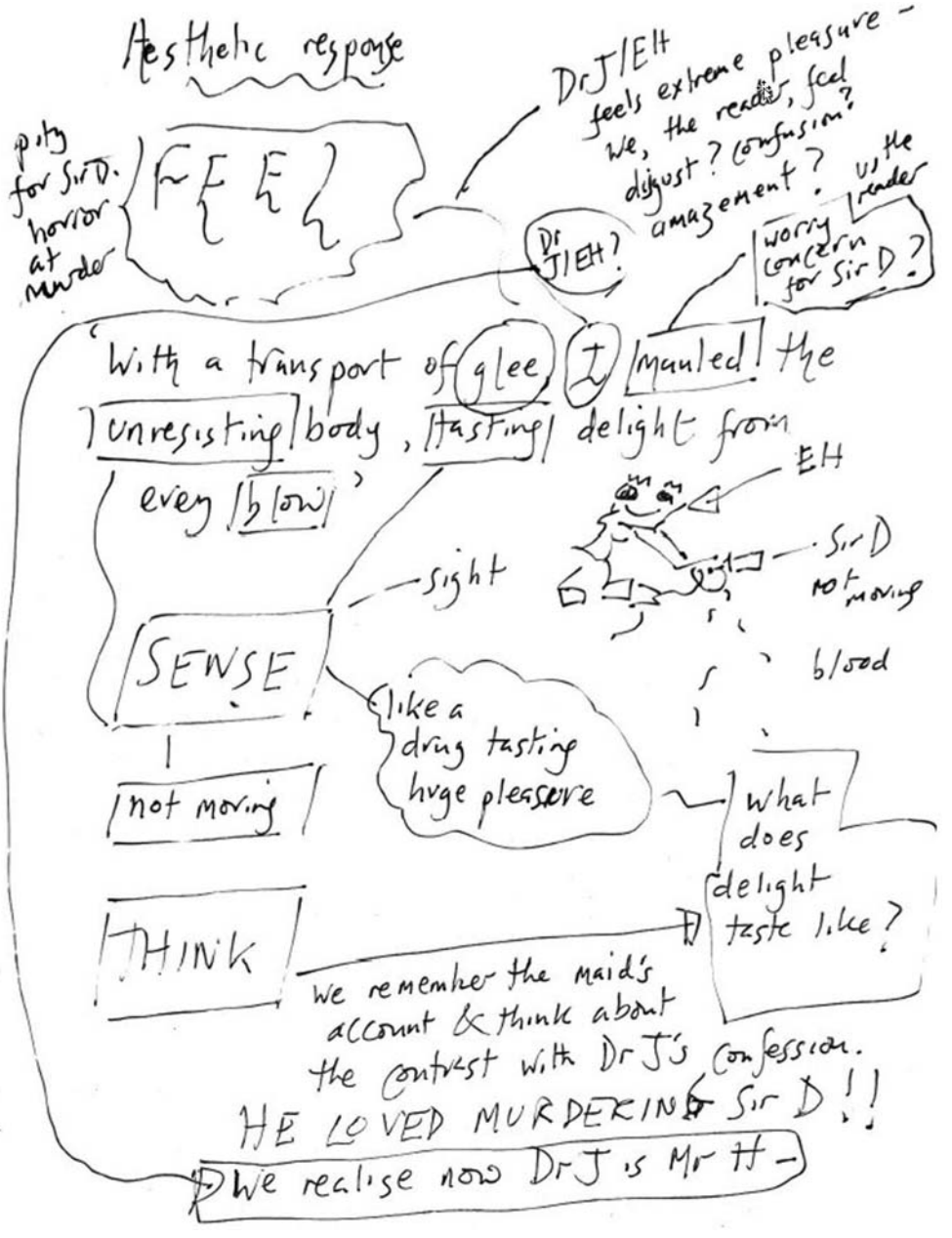

Figure 9. Author's slide: I wrote this slide to illustrate how to analyse quotes using diagrarting.

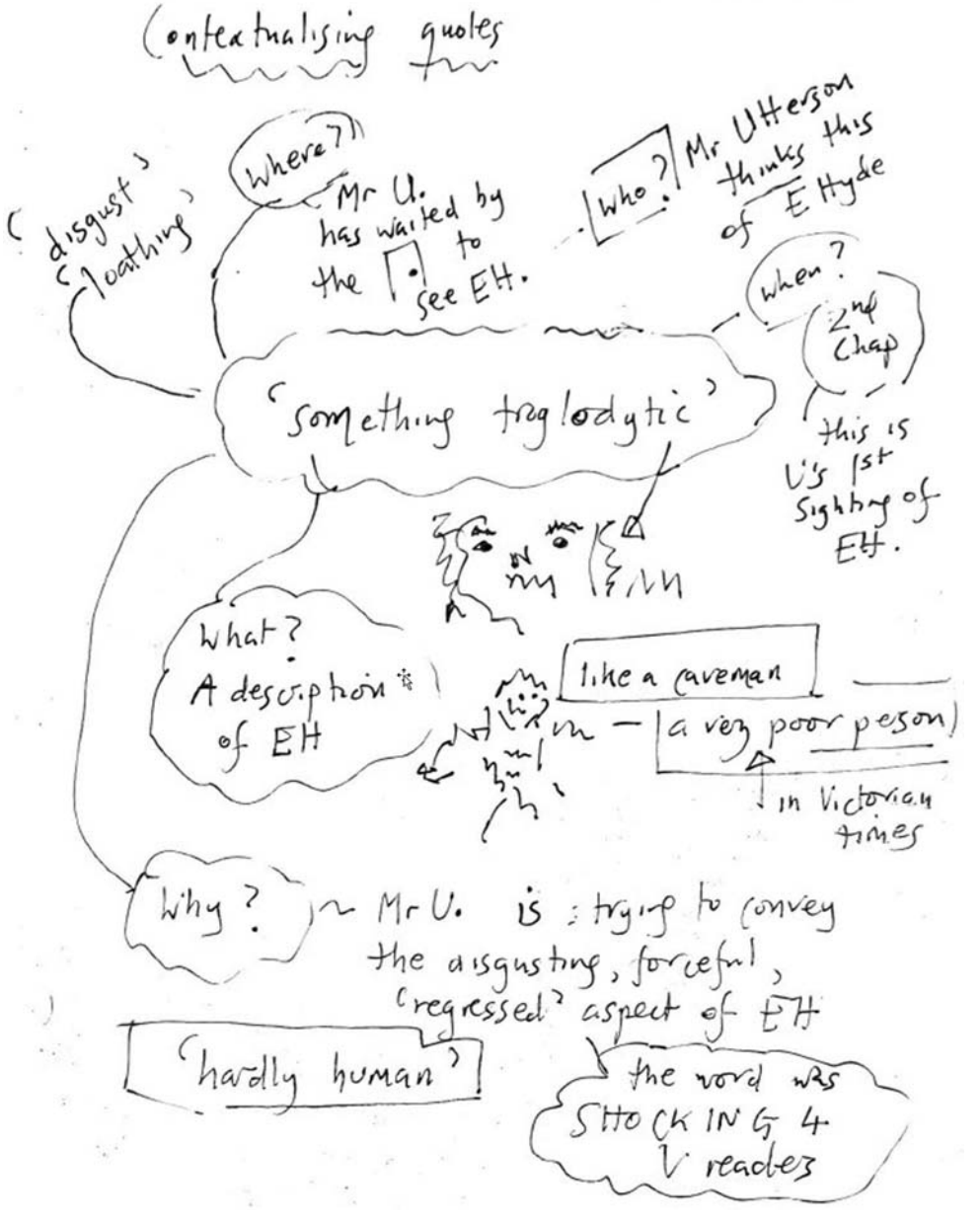

Figure 10. Author's slide: I wrote this slide to illustrate how to set quotes in their contexts.

Figures 11 and 12 (Pupils 7 & 8) are similar to the sorts of notes I observed in the students' books, with important caveats: all of the notes were produced in a linear fashion using bullet points, and none of them had accompanying pictures. The centring of the quote in the page, the spraying out of comments, the 'boxing' of words, the use of stick people was all unusual in the context of their exercise books. Most students used a 'concept map' structure, taught to them in previous years and shown in my own slides (Figures 9 and 10), but one pupil used a series of 'democratic' headings

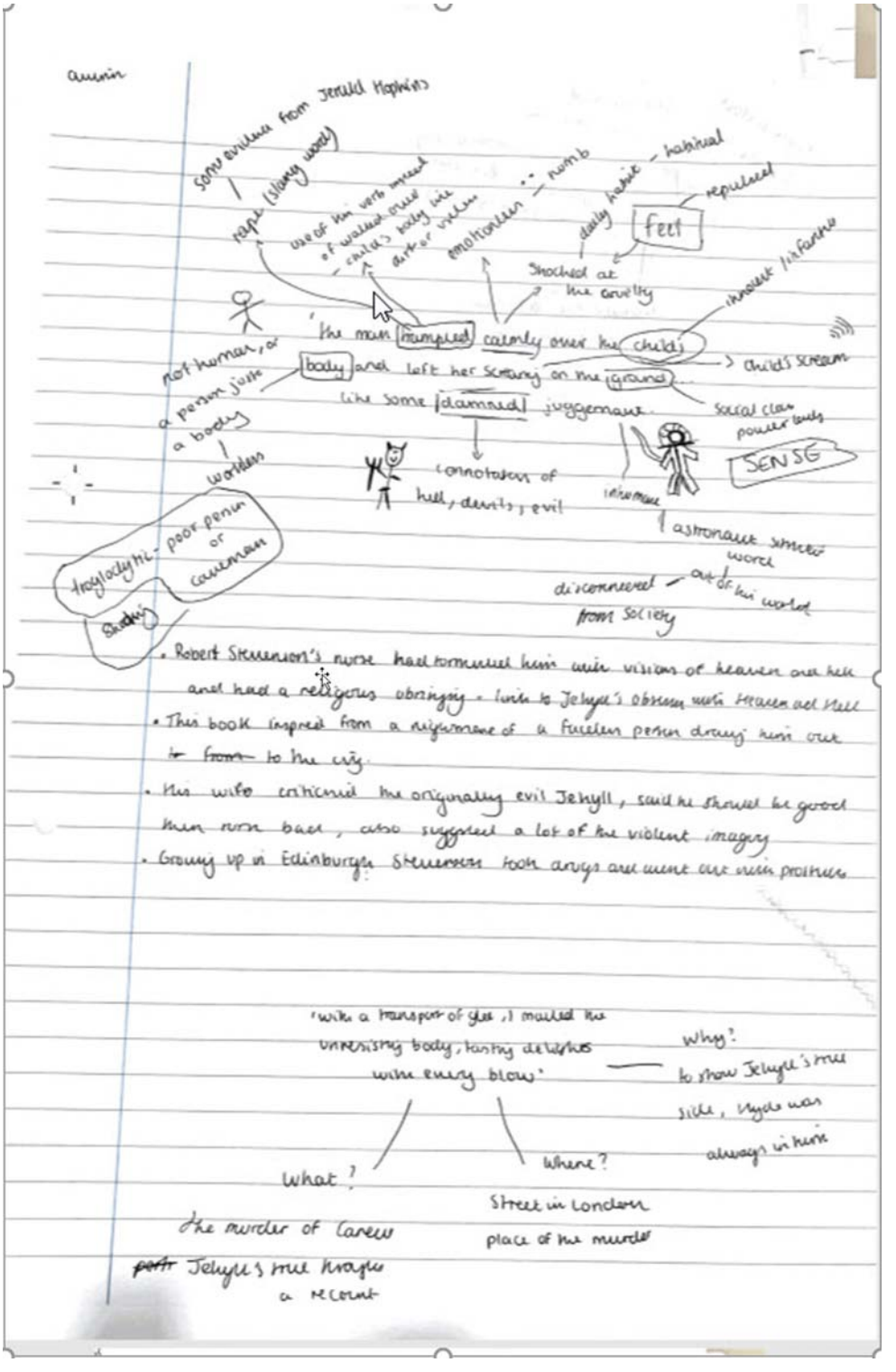

Figure 11. Pupil 7.

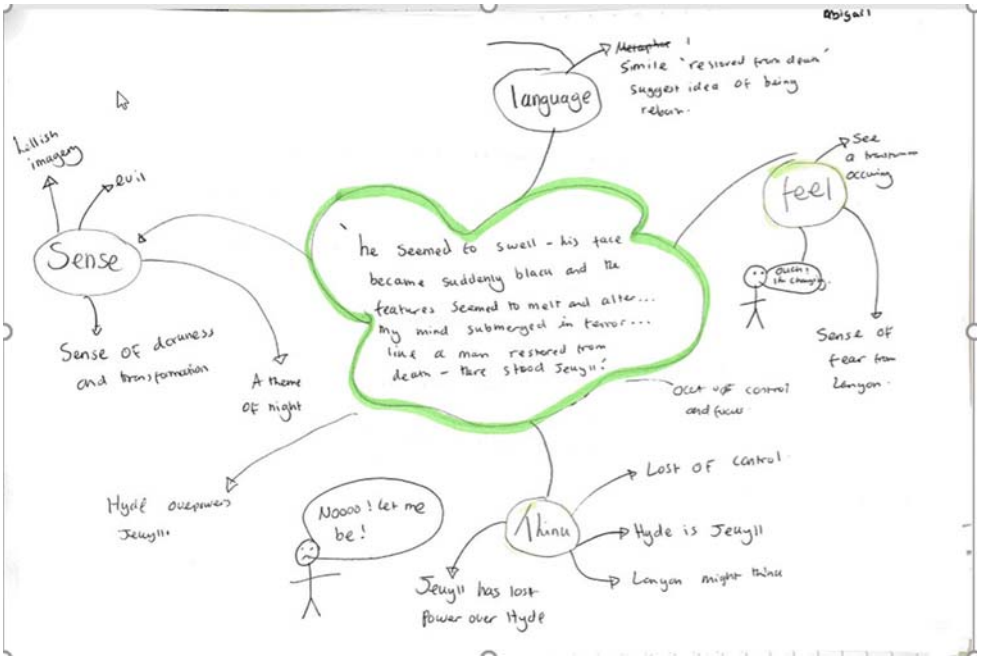

Figure 12. Pupil 8.

(Figure 16, Pupil 12), with no concept being given 'central status' in the way all the concept maps gave central status to the quote.

Concept map structure

Figures 13–15 all use the concept map structure and are 'text heavy' in that their pages contain quite a bit of writing. Nevertheless, the visuals play an important role in their diagrarting. In my observations, these students had to spend quite a bit of time 'dialoguing' about their diagrarts with their fellow pupils to explain fully what they meant. They all use colour to highlight certain concepts and ideas.

Headings structure

In Figure 16, Pupil 12 used headings to capture all their learning from the session on one page at the end of the session. The page is well organised with the characters of the novel on the left, with their names in larger writing and coloured over, and key concepts on the right. There are two small pictures of two ideas I explored in my talk: comparing the structure of the novel to a banana and a rotten apple. Colour is important here, as is the use of space, dividing the information into two approximate columns.

Text light

The following diagrarts, Figures 17–19, are also responses to the task that Figures 11–15 were responding to, but there is much less text, and an obvious relish in drawing,

Figure 13. Pupil 9.

mostly in a literal fashion, though not always. In some cases, quotes from the text have been used, but in others, the diagrarter has added their own words, such in Figure 17, the word 'help' balloons out of the stick girl being trampled by the 'furious ape' Hyde. In this same Figure 17, you can see the power of diagrarting in the way the diagrarter has represented 'bones r audibly shattered': this is an important quotation from the description of Hyde murdering Sir Danvers Carew, and one that I highlighted in my talk. Instead of copying down what I said, the diagrarter has represented it with a bone being cracked in two and the onomatopoeic word 'crack' being inserted.

Figure 14. Pupil 10.

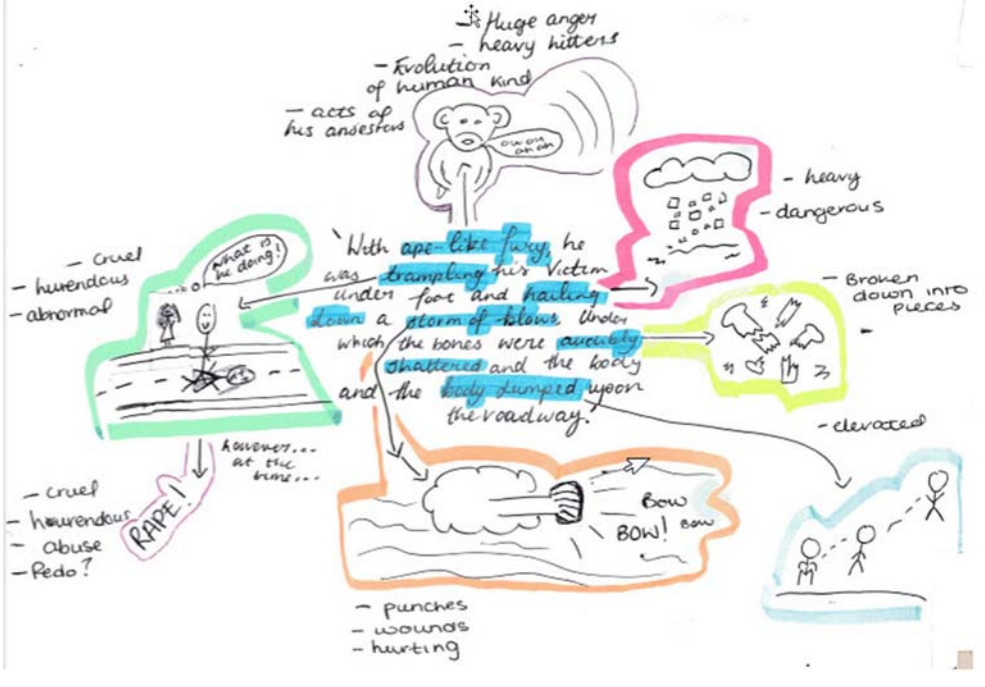

Figure 15. Pupil 11.

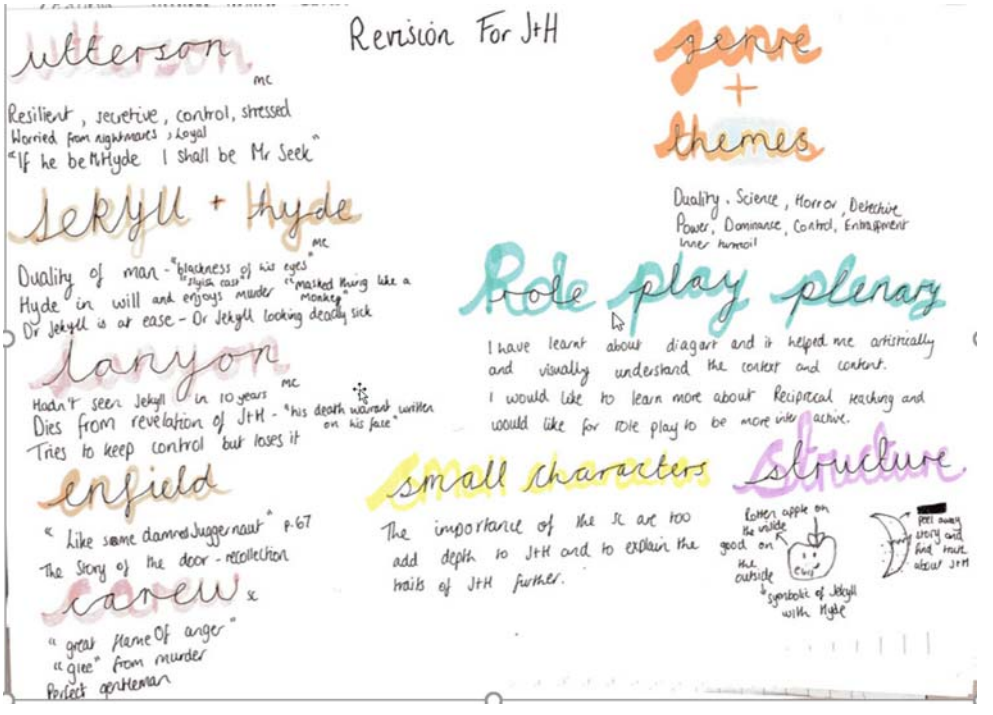

Figure 16. Pupil 12.

'Crack' is not in the text but is obviously suggested by the phrase 'audibly shattered'. Thus, it could be argued that the process of diagrarting helps the diagrarter make emotional meaning out of the novel, which uses abstract Victorian language, by 'realising' it in the form of a literal and symbolic picture: the bone is literally cracked in the picture, but it is isolated from the body of Sir Danvers in this particular picture, although Sir Danvers is represented as a stick man on the road way down below. The diagrart shows how the reader's mind is working to a degree: there is the crack, the close-up of the bone shattering, and then the bigger picture of Hyde jumping upon the body in the road. A next step for a teacher using diagrarting might be for the students to explore what the diagrart reveals about how they are processing their reading.

Using symbols

In Figures 20 and 21, we can see a Pupils 15 and 16 exploring the novel using some symbols. As I've previously mentioned, my lecture compared the novel's structure to two pieces of fruit. The novel's structure in its first part – the narrative which is largely told from the perspective from the character of Utterson – is like a banana, because layers are peeled away to reveal at the very end of this section that Dr Jekyll is Mr Hyde. The second part, which is Henry Jekyll's 'confession' (or 'Statement of the Case' as he terms it) is like a rotten apple because Jekyll looks rosy and shiny on the outside but inside is rotten, corrupted and evil. These symbols were enthusiastically adopted in the diagrarts by the pupils who created Figures 20 and 21. The banana is centre of the

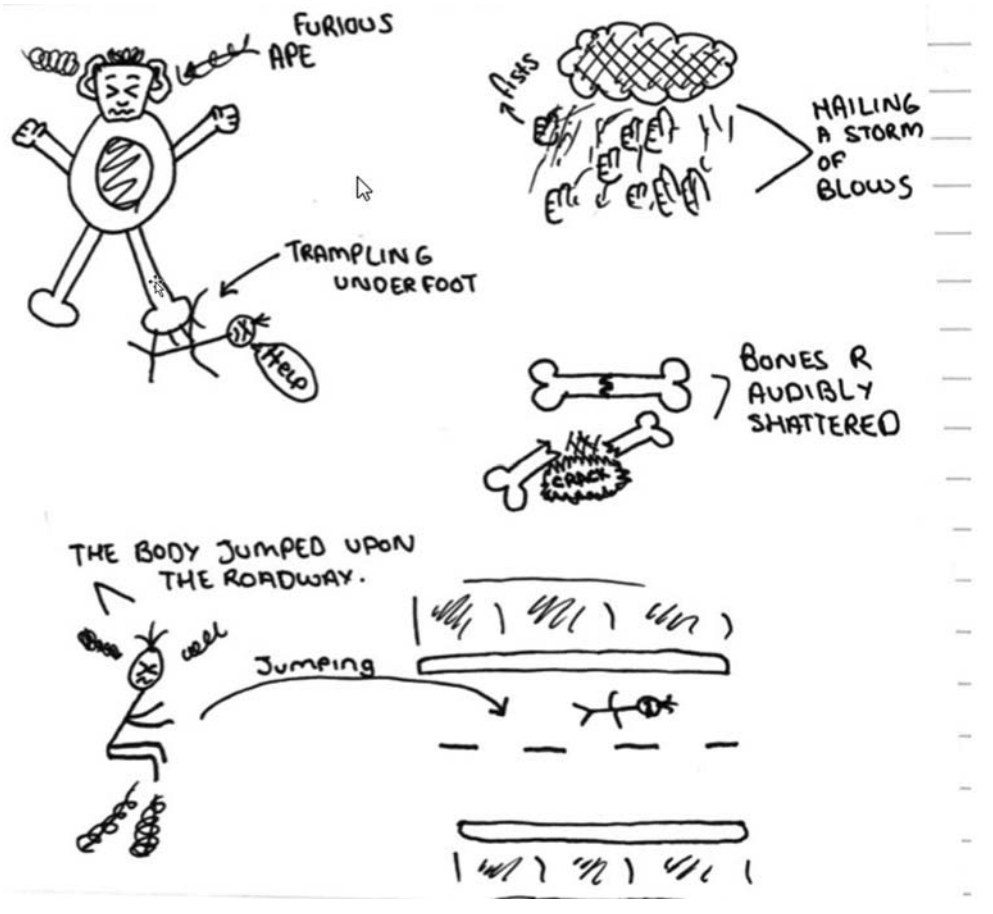

Figure 17. Pupil 13.

diagrart Figure 20, with the student commenting upon the way the truth about Jekyll is gradually revealed. The apple exclusively occupies Figure 21, with the diargarter drawing some very striking worms inside the rosy apple: there is a suggestion of energy, of consumption, of an 'eating away' here which is central to the narrative of Jekyll's Statement; Hyde eats away at Jekyll and eventually cannot be suppressed. Stevenson's conception of this character thus can possibly be more vividly rendered by a picture than in analytical prose.

Feedback

Students were asked to produce their feedback in the form of a diagrart. Figure 22 is one example of diagrarted feedback. It is worth noting that the feedback focuses upon the ways in which diagrarting can help 'you think of your own ideas and expand on certain words and feelings'. This idea of expansion is an important finding with this research. Throughout we have seen how the diagrarting affords students the chance to expand freely upon the thoughts, images, feelings they have about a text.

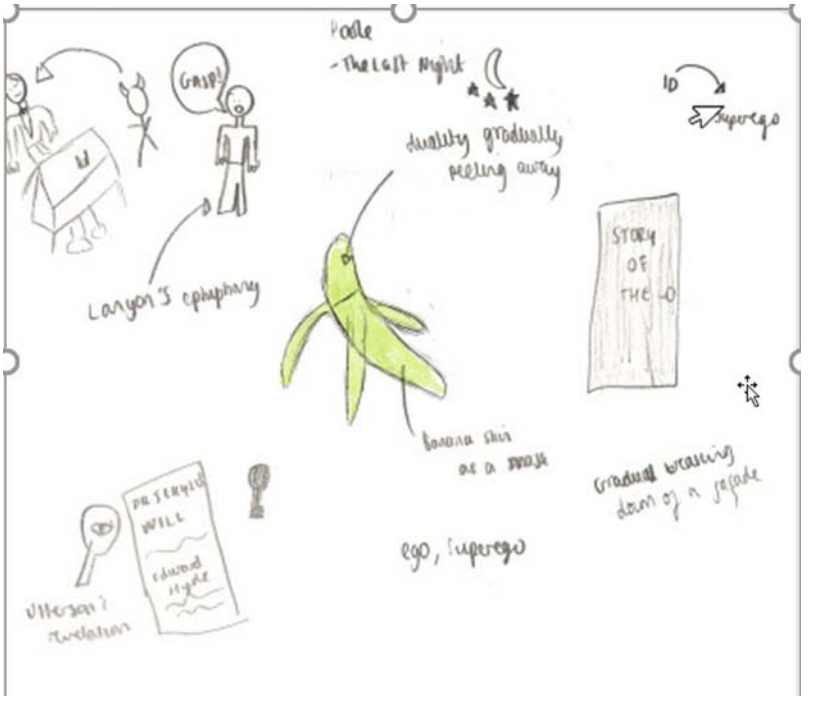

Figure 18. Pupil 13.

Figure 19. Pupil 14.

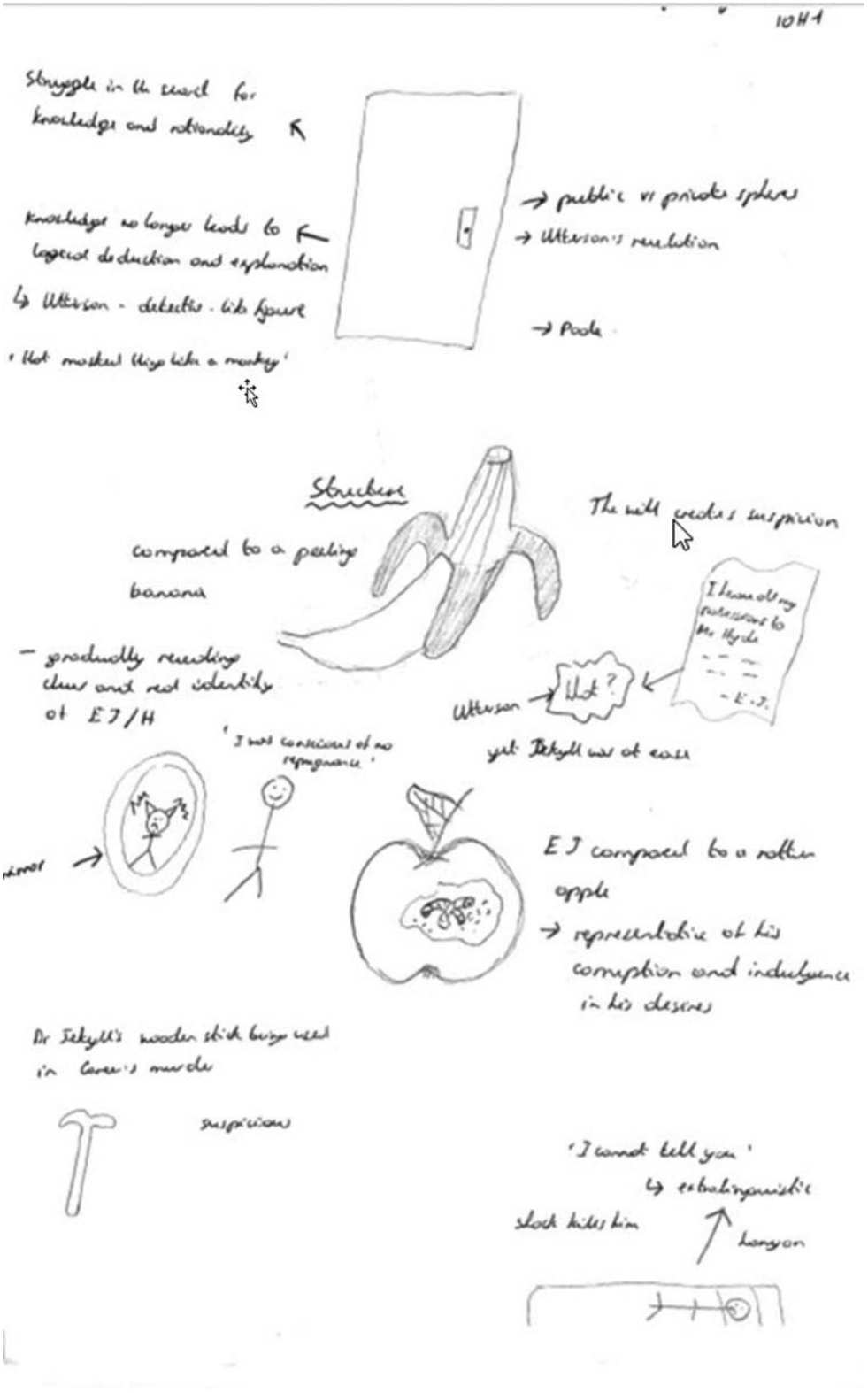

Figure 20. Pupil 15.

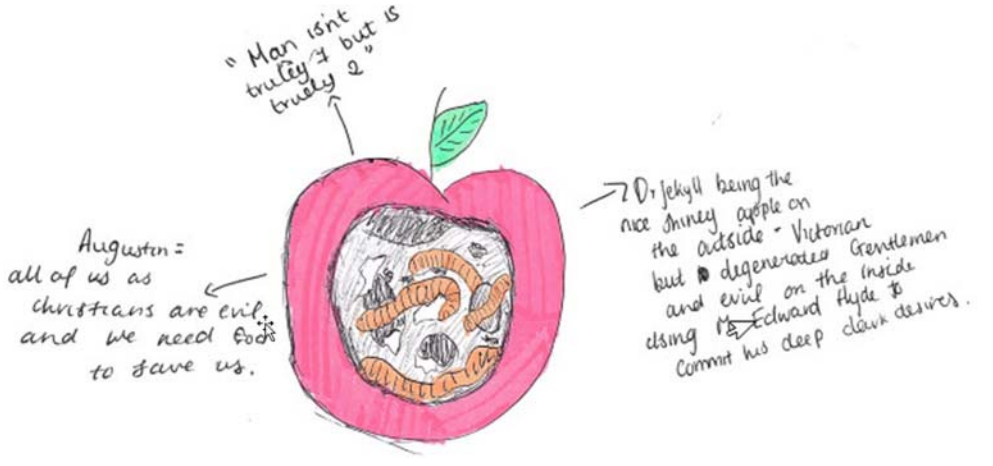

Figure 21. Pupil 16.

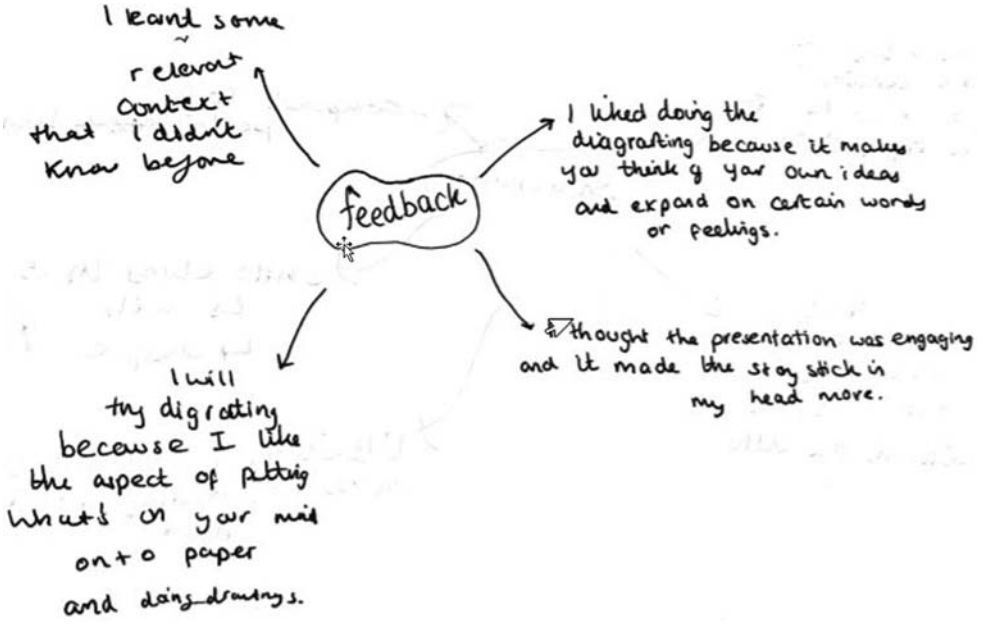

Figure 22. Pupil 17.

Conclusion

Diagrarting is a form of new communication because it combines words, drawings, art, concept maps, annotations, secret strings and visual organisers with dialogue. It can help writers be more creative because it frees them from the shackles of being 'good writers' and 'drawers', provides them with a liminal space which is between doodling and more formal concept mapping, unlocking flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). It shares strong commonalties with the idea of free writing (Elbow 1998) in that it encourages flowing, uninhibited responses to the world and texts. Crucially though, it invites

the diagrarter to have a dialogue either with themselves about what they are trying to say, what they have learnt from their diagrarting and what they would like to learn more about.

Diagrarting has implications for both writers, researchers and teachers. For writers, it could provide a new form of artistic practice and can be used to create, plan, draft and discuss their work. For researchers, it offers a new method of practice-led research, both as a type of research in itself, and a new of representing research.

As Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2017) write of participatory research:

> It is deliberately practical, seeking to improve social practice and people by having them work on themselves. In doing this it requires authentic participation and is collaborative, establishing self-critical, non-hierarchical communities and partnerships. (444)

Diagrarting affords the diagrarting this kind of space, for people to 'work on themselves' and 'establish self-critical, non-hierarchical communities and partnerships' (444) with fellow diagrarters.

Table 1. The benefits of diagrarting.

Key finding	Diagrarting	Other similar methods
Diagrarting promotes creativity and meaningful artistic practice.	The combination of diagramming, writing, drawing, annotating, concept mapping and entering into a dialogue with one's diagrart promotes divergent thinking, frees up artistic expression.	There are many other labels to use for visual learning but many of them are restrictive and not entirely suitable, often inhibiting creative responses.
Diagrarting is about permission.	Diagrarting differs from many other forms of visual learning because there are no strict rules, but rather the learner is permitted to find their visual flow.	Methods like Mindmapping which are similar have strict rules, and can inhibit flow as a consequence.
Diagrarting helps creative writers plan stories and provides all learners with an overview of a topic.	With my own diagrarting of Utterson's dream, and various diagrarts of Stevenson's novel, I could gain a real overview of a topic. This finding was shown in students' responses too.	Concept maps, Mindmaps etc. do a very similar thing: they provide a big picture outline of an idea/concept. However, diagrarting explicitly 'aestheticizes' the big picture, turning it into a form of private art.
Diagrarting helps you perceive small details.	This was shown with pupils' responses consistently, particularly with their analysing of quotations.	Once again, other methods such as concept mapping, exploding quotes etc. also offer this, but once again the emphasis on 'aesthetic response' with diagrarting is different to other approaches, which tends to be more functional.
Diagrarting is motivating.	Both in my own practice and in pupils' feedback, diagrarting is popular, and has a significant impact upon learners' engagement with a topic.	Other methods of visual learning can be very motivating too, but often there is not enough focus upon discussion and dialogue in relation to the visuals produced. Diagrarting necessitates discussion and reflective practice.
Diagrarting can be used to foster practice-led research	Diagrarting is a potentially a powerful tool for researchers because it gives them a chance to unearth the contents of their unconscious, to glean both an overview of a topic and drill down into some details. Above all, it always produces new knowledge in the way it combines drawing and writing.	Researchers diagrart their research plans, use diagrart as field notes, to shape new knowledge.

For teachers, my research shows it is greedily adopted by students, even in high-stakes situations such as revising for exams.

The Table 1 sums up my findings.

At this time when so many writers and teachers are using computers and digital representations of their writing and art, diagrarting returns us to the ancient art of making marks on a surface, of combining both abstract and literal representations and concepts to create new imaginings. Diagrarting seek to evoke a new spirit of adventure and playfulness in writers, teachers and learners.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

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