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Fan Fiction in the English Language Arts Classroom

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Collaborative Fan Fiction in the English Language Arts Classroom

by

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Abstract

Inspired by the observation of an obvious deficit in students' comprehension of higher level literature, as well as an apparent weakness in both verbal and written critical analysis skills, this study explores the creation of collaborative fan fiction by students as they read the classic text, *The Great Gatsby*. Fueled by research in the areas of fan fiction, participatory culture, and cooperative learning, this inquiry took place over the course of six weeks in a high school English class comprised of 10th and 11th grade students. Throughout the study, the researcher examined student survey results, videos of students as they collaboratively created fan fiction, and the fan fiction writing assignments themselves, noting the overarching theme of collaboration. Within that theme appeared patterns relating to authorial ownership, positive and negative social interdependence, and effective collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Rationale for research

I have been teaching eleventh grade honors English and AP Language and Composition in North Carolina for the last seven of my seventeen years of service as a teacher. Each year, I work diligently to prepare my students for the AP exam as well as the state-mandated English III exam. We read advanced literature as well as write essay after essay. I incorporate a variety of rigorous reading and writing assignments designed to help students build advanced reading and writing skills. I work hard to balance new teaching opportunities and literary practices with the expectation of high growth on standardized tests. Recently, close observation of class discussion and student writing has made obvious a deficit in my students' comprehension of higher level literature, as well as an apparent weakness in both verbal and written critical analysis skills. This became quite obvious to me at the completion of my unit on *The Scarlet Letter* in September of 2017. While my students turned in all of their assignments, their close reading dialectical journaling assignment (a double entry notation where students put quotations from the text on the left side of the page and their personal reflections on the quotations on the right side) revealed a mere surface level understanding. One aspect of the assignment required students to find examples of literary techniques in play within the text. Only the most elementary examples were noted. For instance, my students cit-ed many usages of simile, but no one commented on Hawthorne's juxtaposition of the beauti-ful wild rose bush sprouting just beside the ugly prison door and what that implied about the law of nature in comparison to the law of man. Their essays revealed a similar lack of person-al connection, comprehension, and awareness of deeper meaning. I realized then that my stu-

dents are reading, but not coming to a thorough understanding of the literature. They are producing assignments, but not delving deeply to engage in critical analyses of texts.

I am creating assignments that are being completed, but the desired learning and student growth is not occurring. In reading canonical texts, students are struggling to connect and comprehend. As I considered weaker areas of student performance, my mind traveled to discussion sessions where students' lack of participation made them appear uncomfortable and apathetic. They are seemingly most comfortable when I lecture, allowing them to act as passive observers with little interaction with their peers or me. While I intentionally choose texts that call for the guidance of an instructor, I never intended my class discussion to be teacher-centered, but rather student-led and student-focused. While these surface level readings may work to answer standardized test questions, they are not enough. I want my students to develop their proficiency as critical, analytical, and creative writers in any number of rhetorical situations.

Motivated by my personal perceptions of disengagement, as well as stagnant growth in reading and writing among my students, I began to search for tools and practices to help me improve my instruction. I scoured readings saved from the graduate level English Education classes I had been taking for the last three semesters. My attention was captured by the essay, "Why Heather Can Write" from the 2006 book, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* by Henry Jenkins. The essay discussed a young lady who was so inspired by the Harry Potter series that she launched her own online fictional version of the newspaper *The Daily Prophet*. Young people from all over the world joined, writing articles about the fictional characters they love in their best imitation of J.K. Rowling's authorial voice. These

students were reading and writing, not only by their own volition, but enthusiastically. My

initial reaction was, "I wish I could get my students that interested in the pieces we read in

class." My second thought was, "Why couldn't I?" I was simply fascinated by the idea of fan

fiction acting as a bridge between students and writing success. My interest piqued, I posted

the simple question, "Anyone on my fb into reading or writing fan fiction?" on my social

media. I had no idea what to expect. My peers made comments such as, "a fan just doesn't

know the characters, no matter how devoted they may be to the material, like the author does.

The story just reads differently and I'm too traditional to appreciate the change!" However,

one of my most gifted former students commented:

> Fan fiction, to me, is like a release. It is a release of emotion, of pent-up
>
> feelings, of anger, of sadness, of love about a fandom integral to me and many
>
> others. It can move author and reader to tears be it in laughter or shared pain. It
>
> connects people who each love a fandom so much that they can't leave it with
>
> just the books, the TV Series, the movies, the comics. They need more and want
>
> more, it is an expression of love for what has become a large part of their life. I
>
> love reading fan fiction and being part of the community surrounding Harry
>
> Potter fan fiction because I can connect with people who share my passion and
>
> who can relate to my dissatisfaction or elation with the Harry Potter series as JK
>
> Rowling wrote them. The characters you love so much are put in different
>
> situations, maybe have vastly different lives but in the core of it all, they are still
>
> the characters you love. The impact of fan fiction on my life has been
>
> astronomical, it makes me think, it makes me criticize what I once held as

flawless while also showing me that not all the flaws I thought I saw were there.

It constantly and consistently helps me develop intellectually as I interact with

the range of authors on the internet. As I help them correct grammar or get into

a debate on whether or not Dumbledore actually saw Ariana in the Mirror of

Erised, I feel closer and closer to the community I love.

When I read her comment, I began to wonder if I could be missing out on a potentially

valuable learning tool for my students. Originally, my feelings were more along the lines of

my peers. I thought of fan fiction as one step above plagiarism, not a potential classroom tool.

Interestingly, some of my friends began to question their teenage children about fan fiction.

They relayed to me that their children were quite complementary and enthusiastic about the

subject. The school-age generation seemed to see fan fiction with a different set of eyes than

my peers. I began to further consider the potential of fan fiction as a classroom tool for

engagement, comprehension, and writing growth. I could not help but notice that, while

Heather began the website, it was through the work of many writers that it grew to its current

proportions. Could I shake things up in my classroom by bringing in this nontraditional means

of connecting with a text, while advancing both reading and writing skills? If fan fiction

provided such a close connection between readers and the world of Harry Potter, could fan

fiction also allow students an entry point into canonical texts? My focal point immediately

centered on *The Great Gatsby*, an important piece of canonical literature planned for my class.

I did not want my students to miss the various meanings and values in what many

critics consider one the finest novels in the American canon.

While scholarly work is beginning to accept fan fiction as a literary genre, there is a

significant gap pertaining to fan fiction as a classroom strategy. I found many articles encouraging teachers to consider fan fiction as a writing strategy, but little on the best practices of using the strategy or classroom results. A need for research into this potential learning tool is present and powerful.

My next decision involved my desire to see my students interacting more closely with one another. I came upon the work of several researchers (Cook, 1991; Duin, 1986; Holubec, 1992; Johnson and Johnson, 1987; Slavin 2014) who advocate the use of cooperative learning groups to foster skills in both verbal and written communication. I decided implement collaborative writing groups to respond to literature through the creation of fan fiction.

With this in mind, my initial research questions are as follows:

• What happens, if anything, when students collectively write fan fiction while reading *The Great Gatsby*?

  • What happens, if anything, when students read and write collectively?

  • What happens, if anything, to students' level of reading comprehension when fan fiction is used?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before utilizing fan fiction as a learning strategy in my classroom, I examined the current scholarly research on this topic. In order to fully engage in my research questions, I first established an understanding of the genre and nuances of fan fiction. Because students would be working in groups, I needed to delve into the best practices of collaborative learning so that I could set up the groups in a manner that optimized opportunities for growth as students created fan fiction. A lack of knowledge of fan fiction or poorly planned cooperative learning groups and sessions could have negated the learning experience of my students.

Participatory culture ethnography

The phrase "participatory culture", coined by Henry Jenkins (1992), was first used to describe a social culture in which online users share in the creation of content. In 1986, beloved movie character Ferris Bueller noted, "life moves pretty fast." Thirty years later, those immortal words ring truer than ever. Today's students have grown up in an era of mass digital globalization. The dissemination of ideas and products moves swiftly across borders and around the globe. In years past, roles between producers and consumers were quite clear. Originally, consumers passively took in offerings by media producers. In the classrooms of my youth, for instance, I read books and wrote book reports which were simply summaries of the books' plots. I wrote my first book report in first grade, my last in twelfth. The assignment simply grew in length over the years. I was raised to be a consumer and the thought of writing stories about characters I read about never occurred to me, a child of the pre-internet 1980s. Jenkins (2006) points out that, thanks to the digital era ushered in with dawn of the Internet, consumers of the new millennium are quite the opposite: "Rather than talk about media

producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants

who interact with each other according to a new set of rules." (p. 3). In her article, "Online

Fan Fiction, Global Identities, and Imagination," researcher Rebecca Black (2009) posits,

"while new technologies enable greater media saturation and widespread dissemination of the

symbolic materials contained therein, technological advances also facilitate the creation of

contexts in which consumers play an active role in interpreting and recontextualizing

media" (p. 397). We, as a society, are no longer passive consumers of products and content.

Creators of content no longer have full control of what happens to their product. The

reimagining of texts and sharing of creations are hallmarks of the participatory culture.

Jenkins's initial and subsequent works on participatory culture are referenced by every scholar

who wades into the discussion (Pecoskie, J. and Hill, H., 2015; Black, R., 2009; McWilliams,

Hickey, Hines, Conner, and Bishop, 2010). As a teacher, I recognize a need for thorough

familiarity with the participatory culture of my students. According to librarian Tracy Kell

(2009), "Fan fiction provides a participatory culture that fosters an excellent learning

environment." This is a departure from the type of solitary learning that I grew up engaging in

and, in turn, lead my student in. In his article, "Fandom Studies as I See It" Henry Jenkins

(2014) asserts, "Today, there is an urgent need to develop a more nuanced account of what is

participatory about fandom, as the nature of participation—especially as it relates to digital

media—is being debated within the domain of art, culture, politics, education, and

religion" (p. 93). Participatory literacy affords students the opportunity to interact with

content as well as create their own, employing their creativity and reasoning abilities. This is a

new type of literacy that allows students more autonomy than ever before in their studies.

Naturally, our participatory culture has spawned participatory literacy practices. According to researcher Paul Jurmo, who coined the term in 1993, characteristics of a participatory literacy program include:

- Activities emphasize what learners already know.

- Learners participate actively, taking responsibility and control as much as possible. Learners work as a team: respecting each other, supporting each other, building on each other's strengths. Learners identify problems and figure out how to solve them.

- They use "critical thinking" skills.

- Learners take risks and "stretch" themselves to try something new. (p. 6)

These objectives enhance the intellectual development and growth I was working towards with my research. A strong understanding of participatory culture and literacy were imperative for me as I planned to incorporate fan fiction into my classroom.

Defining fan fiction

My research questions required that I gain a thorough understanding of the definition of fan fiction before beginning this research with students. While fan fiction can be created using many different mediums, critics (Jenkins, 1992; Pugh, 2005; Zukauskas, 2015; Heckellson & Busse, 2014) concur that fan fiction is created when writers use characters and settings from established works to create new stories. Matthew and Adams (2009), while assessing fan fiction in the English Language Arts classroom, assert, "Fan fiction is just what its name implies: it is fiction written by fans, often teenagers, of novels. Movies, television, or other media. This fiction is based in the worlds created by the authors, but young fans extend,

elaborate, or appropriate the text for their own purposes" (p. 35). While I associate fan fiction with creation, namely writing, the definition can vary slightly among scholars. Public library researchers who focus on "fringe" publishing, Professors Heather Hill and Jen Pecoskie (2015), describe fan fiction as a "subset of self-publishing…generally based on a root, or beginning text from which fan fiction authors base their own texts" (p. 611). For my research, I used more commonly accepted definition of fan fiction as a new work created using established characters and settings. However, all of these scholars assisted me tremendously by allowing me to enter my classroom with a firm understanding of the most accessible way to define and describe fan fiction to my students for the context of our classroom. It was vital to my research that not only I understood the concept, but they did as well.

Historical examples of fan fiction

        In my classroom, each time I introduce a new author or literary work, I spend time making sure my students understand the historic events that shaped the writings. While I had grown to understand fan fiction from a modern standpoint, I was driven to uncover its genesis. Was fan fiction a modern phenomenon or a practice coming down through the ages? Some scholars believe fan fiction goes all the way back to the early Robinhood myths, when a would-be author, whose name is lost in history, decided to create the character of Lady Marion to add romance to the tale. Others argue that fan fiction cannot predate copyright. Regardless, there is no denying early writers, including Shakespeare, ruthlessly plundered history and mythology for characters and plot (Pugh, 2005). One of the first well-known instances of fan fiction occurred in the late 1800s when Arthur Conan Doyle killed off his beloved character, Sherlock Holmes. Doyle, bombarded with angry letters, later remarked that

he could not have earned more censure had he killed a flesh and blood man. Several years

later, American actor William Gillet acquired the rights to one of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes

plays, rewrote it extensively, and created a smash hit. Gillet's version was so well-received

by audiences that he starred in it the rest of his life. In fact, he is credited for inspiring Doyle

to once again write about the character (Pugh, 2005). Many other works based on classic

literature have been released, such as William Thackeray's 1850's sequel to Ivanhoe and Jean

Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a prequel to *Jane Eyre*.

Modern fan fiction

While fan fiction has existed for centuries, the advent of the Internet provided an

enclave for fans to gather, create and critique, allowing fan fiction to be shared in a whole

new way. For instance, on September 10, 1993, the Fox network aired the pilot episode of *The

X-Files*. The first online fan site, alt.ev.x-files was created less than three months later.

According to researcher Bethan Jones (2014), the producers of the show even lurked on fan

sites to see what worked, or did not work, with the audience. *The X-Files* is certainly not

alone in possessing an avid internet fan following of would-be writers. Journalist Alexandra

Alter (2012) points out:

The Web's largest fan-fiction site, Fanfiction.net, hosts several million works, including

pieces based on the Bible, Shakespeare, TV shows like *Lost,* cartoons like *My Little Pony*, and

video games like *Halo* and *Final Fantasy X*. The site hosts close to 600,000 pieces of Harry

Potter fan fiction, and nearly 200,000 based on *Twilight*. Fan opinion was used to shape the

storylines, providing an early example of the erasure of the line between creator and audience.

(p. D-1).

The case for fan fiction in the English Language Arts classroom

While fan fiction may be considered an age-old writing practice, fan fiction did not appear in academic publications until the 1980s (Heckellson & Busse, 2014). Because teachers look to academic literature to inform pedagogy, fan fiction is just beginning to carve a niche for itself in the classroom, leaving an ideal opening for my research. In the introduction to their book, *The Fan Fiction Studies Reader*, Kristina Busse, founding co-editor of the online journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, and English Ph.D. Karen Heckellson (2014) assert, "An increasing number of scholars are turning to fan studies to engage their students as a result of the overlap between fan studies and other disciplines related to popular and cultural studies, including social, digital, and transmedia studies." Henry Jenkins (2014) insists there is "something valuable to be learned through academic research into subcultures, audiences, and readers-fandoms was, in many ways, the ideal intersection between the three" (p. 93). While fandom (a term used to refer to a group of fans of a particular work of fiction) is as old as creative media itself, the study of fandom in academia is now becoming valued as well. Busse and Heckellson insist the field is "quickly growing as an academic interdisciplinary subdiscipline. Fan studies offers a theoretical apparatus that explains much of the appeal of current audience responses and user-generated content" (p. 1). English Language Arts teachers typically look to academic research for innovative ideas to inform instruction in their classrooms Although there are references to the use of fan fiction in the English Language Arts classroom, there exists few examples of the actual production of fan fiction in the classroom. This is the point where my research enters the current conversation.

At its heart, fan fiction is a reader response practice that allows readers to grapple with canonical literature to create their own interpretations and meanings. Researcher Louise Rosenblatt (1968), pointed that, no matter what teacher instructions are, the reader is always "paying attention to the images, feelings, attitudes associations that the words evoke in him" (34). Every reader brings with him certain notions about social issues, cultural mores, even mankind as a whole. Applying Rosenblatt's logic makes it apparent that today's students are bringing all the aspects of their highly digital world with them as they sit down with a text. According to Natalia Samutina (2017), a leading researcher at Poletayev Institute for Theoretical and Historical Studies in the Humanities, the study of fan fiction can illuminate the reading skills, strategies, and practices of this first generation of digital natives. While fandoms are certainly not new, the advent of the Internet allowed fans to find one another and form their own communities based on this shared interest. Samutina asserts, "an internet user will acquire certain strategies of reading, which continue to inform this person's subsequent reading," (p. 254) thus allowing the reading of fan fiction to influence and alter a reader's pattern of comprehension and analysis. Although fan fiction has not received a great deal of scholarly attention, it is undeniably a sophisticated literary phenomenon. After conducting a case study centered on the infamous fan fiction turned bestseller, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Hill and Pecoskie (2014) argue that fan fiction highlights the often-unexplored connection between authors and readers:

> …the connection between reader and author is explicit and embedded
>
> throughout the entire creative and publishing processes and in both digital and
>
> physical arenas. Readers and authors interact with one another throughout the

creation process. Readers contribute enthusiasm, support, and feedback for the initial

piece of text that influences the author to continue. Storylines and characters are

developed with input from the reading community and early publicity comes from the

grassroots level, through face-to-face and online communication. This

illustrates that there is not a fleeting or one-way connection from reader to author, as

readers are not passive recipients of a completed work. Instead, this case study

demonstrates that readers are active agents within all stages of the texts' development

and of its publicity, which occurs throughout the creation process and after. (p. 620)

Today, many high school students feel a disconnect with many of the great works of literature

foisted on them by classroom teachers. In fact, English Language Arts teacher and researcher,

Kelly Gallagher (2009), asserts that lack of interest in reading materials, coupled with the fact

that teachers have discarded lengthy, challenging works in favor of shorter texts and passages

that lend themselves to test preparation has led to a mass "readicide" among our students. He

defines this term as, "the systematic killing of the love of reading" (kindle location 118). I can

attest that very few of my students read for pleasure. They do not see the impact, nor even the

relevance, books can have on their lives. The research of Samutina (2017) along with Hill and

Pecoskie (2014) fosters the idea that fan fiction could be used to help my students connect to

canonical literature and authors. My research aimed to explore this potential connection and

utilize it to get my students reading and developing those critical thinking and writing skills.

Fan fiction has been shown to have the potential to improve confidence in writing

among internet fan fiction community members through its very nature of acceptancy.

According to researcher Kavita Mudan Finn, who studies the intersection of history and

popular culture, and Shakespeare specialist, Jessica McCall (2016), "a fundamental characteristic of fan fiction is its openness and availability to all contributors no matter how illogical the interpretation or rewriting." This inclusive community offers a place of acceptance to hesitant writers. Writing abilities in the fan fiction world can range from novice to advanced, mirroring my current classroom where levels of writing ability vary greatly from one student to the next. Fan fiction, according to Finn and McCall (2016), "offers a radical and safe space for students" (p. 29). Through the research and affordances of this writing strategy, I strove to make my classroom a place of acceptance while encouraging students to create with a similar enthusiasm and authenticity as internet fan fiction writers.

As my research demonstrates, fan fiction can potentially improve student comprehension by helping to break down the disconnect between students and canonical literature. Finn and McCall (2016) assert that creating fan fiction allows students to grapple with the literature to find meaning on their own. They state, "pedagogically speaking, the amateur nature of fan fiction undercuts the authority of 'Shakespeare' and empowers students to make meaning out of Shakespeare through a method that requires they translate the text for themselves rather than rely on commercially published 'translations', such as No Fear Shakespeare . . ." (p. 29). This research resonated strongly with me. My students frequently substitute internet resources that summarize the text by chapter and offer analyses of important quotations, for their own reading. By using this crutch instead of reading for themselves, they blindly accept another's interpretation of the text rather than forming their own, as well as deprive themselves of the analytic skills developed by grappling with the literature and reaching their own conclusions. Fan fiction forces readers to make their own

meanings through their transactional experience with the text. While the theme of the book

may be chosen and presented by the author, readers are responsible for making their own

meanings from the text. According to Finn and McCall (2016), "creating, reading, and writing

fan fiction preserves the multiplicity and complexity of meaning in the text rather than

replacing it…" (p. 29). Fan fiction communities often demonstrate a cohesive, productive

collaboration that we, in the classroom, often struggle to produce.

Teachers know that a voracious reader is an advanced reader. Researchers McWilliams,

Hickey, Hines, Conner, and Bishop (2010) assert, "fan fiction communities are known for

their deep engagement with and close reading of source material—practices that align closely

with the goals of many language arts teachers. They, therefore, offer an opportunity to support

learners' development of traditional literary analysis skills while engaging with a technology-

supported writing community" (p. 241). Fan fiction readers constantly seek out new authors

and engage in lengthy discussion and analysis of the fan fiction works they have both written

and read. Therefore, fan fiction writers have learned the expected reading behaviors and

conventions required to be part of the online fan fiction community. They regularly engage in

close reading, revisiting of the original text, and collaborative discussion with other fan fiction

author—strategies that we teachers often struggle to foster in our students. As Samutina points

out, "Readers never cease talking about what they read, writing lengthy recommendations of

the texts they enjoyed, joining more or less provocative discussions about characters'

interpretations, 'bad endings', and general principles of fandom writing–thus time and again

answering for themselves and others questions such as 'what do I read?', 'why do I read?',

'how do I read?', and 'what do I think about it?'" (p. 257). In my classroom, I labor to move

my students beyond the initial, cursory first read when I need to them to be willing to return to the text again and again to decipher meaning. Fan fiction communities, instead, are fostering close and repeated interactions between readers and texts. As Matthew and Adams (2009) posit, "Finding a way to get students to enjoy reading and respond to literature spontaneously is the holy grail of the language arts educator" (p. 36). Using collaborative fan fiction as a vehicle, I worked to accomplish this in my classroom. One of my goals was, and continues to be, that my students as readers not simply be empty vessels to be filled by the literature, but rather active participants engaging, analyzing, and interpreting the work.

Collaborative writing

Professor Robert Slavin (2014) wrote, "Cooperative learning refers to teaching methods in which students work together in small groups to help each other learn academic content" (p. 785). Early work on collaborative writing shows that its practice can lead to growth for all members of the writing group. A 1997 classroom study by Helen Dale provides evidence that coauthoring a piece of writing forces students to spend more time in the planning and revision stages than they would working alone. Researchers Jones, Murk, and Jones (2012) point out, "Despite our insistence that community and collaboration are key… the lone writer writes on, continuing the accepted paradigm in the literary world" (p. 91). Typically, novice writers do not devote enough time to the planning process when they work in solitude. As multiple students coauthor a piece of writing, they are forced to articulate plans and choices before beginning to write. Dale (1997) discovered by interviewing her subjects that many had never engaged in planning before being placed in collaborative writing groups. Additionally, those students who had never planned were in a position to observe group

members who planned regularly. Collaborative writing is rooted in the socially constructed nature of language. Students grow intellectually through the social interaction that allows them to observe and absorb the cognitive process of their peers.

Over the course of the last several years, my district has pushed for the creation of student learning teams, groups of students working toward the same end with specifically defined roles, in the classroom. In the English classroom, writing often remains a solitary activity, although many researchers have cited the potential benefits of collaborative writing. For instance, writing scholar, Peter Elbow (1999), suggests one of the greatest benefits of cooperative writing is that it forces students to articulate, and often defend, writing choices. He asserts, "When people write alone, they make countless simple and complex writerly decisions tacitly, instinctively—without articulating the reasons for them…" without even truly considering their own reasoning (p.1). Forcing students to defend their own arguments, as well as challenge those of their peers, holds a two-fold benefit for my students. First, by defending or challenging ideas, they are engaging in the type of thinking that will prepare them for crafting the argument essay on the Advanced Placement Language and Composition exam. Second, this sort of reasoning forces them to delve more deeply into the text for support of their argument. For instance, in a case where two students discussed the symbolism of the green light to Gatsby, one student stated that it symbolized money. Other group members clarified that Gatsby had money, so they needed to look more deeply at what Gatsby did not have that could inspire the obvious feeling of longing.

As I considered the idea of challenging my students to create fan fiction, I began to ponder strategies I could utilize to best set them up for success and growth. I have learned that

fan fiction is most often created among a community of writers sharing an affinity space, a term coined by James Paul Gee (2005) to represent the often-virtual places where people gather based on common interests. My goal was to replicate that connection in my classroom by using collaborative learning to foster participative learning. As fan fiction is community oriented, collaborative writing groups provide peer support, as well as force students to discuss and really think through the writing they are engaging in.

Cooperative learning gurus, Johnson and Johnson (2009) describe cooperative learning practices as heavily influenced social interdependence theory. They explain, "Social interdependence theory exists when the outcomes of individuals are affected by their own and others' actions. There are two types of social interdependence: positive (when the actions of individuals promote the achievement of joint goals) and negative (when the actions of individuals obstruct the achievement of each other's goals)" (p. 366). Through my research I have learned that scholars agree that cooperative learning works, but their reasonings for that success diverge. Slavin (2014) suggests that cooperative learning will work with some students because they are motivated by their own self-interests. They will plan, create, and revise with their teammates because they want their grades to be excellent. In my classroom, I have several students who approached groupwork in that manner. Among my students, there is a vested interest in earning the title of valedictorian; therefore, every assignment matters for the grade. Yet, applying the theory of social interdependence (Johnson and Johnson 2009) led me to consider that my success in cooperative learning depended largely on group members willingness and determination to work productively together. Members of a cohesive group will work together, not because of they want individual success, but because they want the

group to succeed. In order to have this positive interdependence, the students must be in

agreement on and working towards mutual goals. As Johnson and Johnson (2009) assert,

"Knowing that one's performance affects the success of group mates seems to create

responsibility forces that increase one's efforts to achieve" (p. 367). I anticipated both

positive and negative examples of social interdependence, as I knew some of my students

would come to the group well-prepared, cognizant to the fact that their classmates depended

on them, but others could potentially arrive unprepared, hindering the progress of the group.

As discussed in the Data Analysis section of this research, the students did indeed demonstrate

varying levels of preparedness for their group interactions.

Conclusion

Our current participatory culture has produced a new set of participatory literary prac-

tices. This is new type of literacy is filled with learning possibilities not yet utilized in the

classroom. Fan fiction, with its little explored potential for both literary and writing growth, is

a fine example. Collaborative learning, on the other hand, is a classroom strategy with well-

documented successful implementation. My research marries the two. By using a tried and

true learning practice to implement a new strategy, that of fan fiction, I establish my own

place in the scholarly conversation. The creation of fan fiction is a practice that normally oc-

curs in the virtual world and my inquiry situates it squarely within the traditional classroom

setting.

METHODOLOGY

Research rationale

As a frequent participant in professional development activities, I can attest to the fact that teachers are often presented with new tools for teaching that are seldom utilized outside of the session. One trend is the enormous push to create data-driven lesson plans, but teachers often struggle to see the connection between data and lesson tuning. Teachers are expected to utilize the work of others, often research scholars who have never been in the classroom. Action research gives teachers an opportunity to explore different educational avenues within their own classroom, molding future practices from evidence they discovered themselves (Dana and Yendol-Hooppey, 2014). By exploring the use of collaborative writing groups creating fan fiction while reading *The Great Gatsby*, I hoped to demonstrate the value of action research. Most importantly, I used this research to inform and develop my own classroom practice.

Context of the research

This research was conducted at a rural high school in Western North Carolina. There is no town feeding into this school, simply rural areas filled with empty buildings now that the mill system has died. One hundred percent of the 730 students who attend this school are on free lunch. Poverty is widespread and the struggle with teenage apathy is great. That said, our students have a myriad of options for success in our high school. We are part of the One-to-One Initiative that allows each student to keep a MacBook computer throughout the course of the year. Along with online courses through North Carolina Virtual Public High School, my school offers eleven Advanced Placement courses as well as numerous college classes—both

vocation and core classes. Our students have the option to graduate with their Associate of the Arts degree, at no cost. Recent reports of a heightened graduation rate have been encouraging.

I have not seen a student out in the community during the weekend in several years. They tell me they travel to the surrounding cities to eat at chain restaurants such as Outback and Olive Garden. At one time, the school was the hub of local family life and our stands were packed every Friday night during football season. Now, we have a sparse turnout, mainly family members of our twenty-four-member football team. As a product of this school system myself, I can attest that there is often an attitude of disdain from our young people towards the rural community they call home. I have often reflected on the potential connection between this common attitude and their literacy habits.

Participants

I invited twenty-three students to participate in this research. All agreed and signed the informed consent forms. They are the students who comprise my yearlong class. I teach Honors Junior English and AP Language and Composition concurrently. In this class there are sixteen girls and seven boys. Twenty-one students are Caucasian, one is Hispanic, and one is biracial. Fifteen of those students (nine girls and six boys) are sophomores due to the fact that they were permitted to take Freshman English as eighth-graders at the local middle school. Eight of these students (seven girls and one boys) are juniors. The age range was fifteen to seventeen-years-old. These students take the AP exam in May and the English III NC Final Exam in June each year. The two exams are vastly different as the English III exam includes a significant portion focused on literary analysis skills, while the AP exam consists of

nonfiction pieces and essay writing. It is my job to sharpen the skills that allow them to excel at both. Traditionally, on the North Carolina Final Exam for English III, my students have scored higher on the informational text questions, leading me to look for ways to deepen their comprehension and analysis of advanced levels of literature.

Data collection

In maintaining accordance with the National Research Act, I gained approval from Gardner-Webb's Institutional Review Board and my principal, as well as obtain informed consent from all my participants and their guardians in the data collection process. After receiving IRB approval, I began my research by gaining informed consent from my students and parents the last week in January, which was also the first week of the second semester at school. I began teaching my unit on *The Great Gatsby* in early February and began collecting data on February 13, 2018. In order to address my research question, I had six points of data collection: the fan fiction initial survey and discussion, the two-fan fiction writing assignments, videos of my students engaging in the two fan fiction writing assignments, and the closing survey. My students were divided into seven groups—five groups of three, two groups of four. When I began to transcribe my students' conversations, I realized I was facing an overwhelming amount of data, as each group submitted two videos both ranging in length from 30 to 55 minutes. I decided to focus on one group in order to effectively manage the data collection and analysis process. The group I choose consisted of three girls. In the words of Helen Dale (1997), "I did not assign roles such as recorder or leader because I wanted to describe student discourse as it occurred naturally while coauthors negotiated responsibility and established their own ways of working and writing together" (p. 5). I was truly interested

in simply seeing "what happens…" as defined by my initial research questions. This group

particularly interested me because one of the members had struggled all year with doing any

work outside of class. I had been striving to create work that interested her enough to engage

her. She, along with the other two members of the group, are incredibly quiet in class. I saw

zooming in on them as a chance to know them better and perhaps grow to serve them better in

the classroom.

Surveys

In his 2010 work, "Qualitative Interview Design: A Practical Guide for Novice

Investigators," Daniel Turner points out the value of open-ended questions lies in the fact that

they "allow the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it

also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up" (p. 756). I chose

to introduce and conclude my research with open-ended survey questions for my students (see

Appendices A and B). The surveys had student names attached through our online learning

platform so I was about to pull out the survey answers for the group I intended to focus on. I

began my data collection with an opening survey. My students answered three questions about

literary ownership and their own fan fiction experience (or lack of experience). They then

posted their answers to a discussion board and responded to one another. I transcribed their

original responses as well as the whole class discussion into an iPages document. The final

point of data collection came in the form of the Fan Fiction Closing Survey. I asked the

question, "What impact (if any) do you feel the collaborative creation of fan fiction had on

your learning throughout our *The Great Gatsby* unit?" I transcribed all answers to an iPages

document. After I chose my focus group, I returned to the survey and pulled out those

responses, again looking for patterns.

Student artifacts

Before beginning collection for the first fan fiction assignment, I divided students into small groups. While this is an Honors and Advanced Placement class, there are many students who struggle with higher level reading and writing. A week before the first planned fan fiction assignment, I asked students to submit two names of classmates they felt they worked best with. While I did not match them precisely as they wished, I took their choices into consideration as I created the cooperative learning groups. I attempted to form groups that would work most efficiently together by taking both learning styles and abilities into consideration. Once the groups were in place, they undertook their first fan fiction assignment. I chose to have them rewrite a scene from the text (Appendix C). I scheduled this assignment to come at the end of chapter four of *The Great Gatsby*, where the reader has just learned about the character Jay Gatsby's past with the entitled Daisy Buchanan and the lengths he has gone to win her love. I had students think back to the end of chapter one when the narrator sees his mysterious neighbor, Jay Gatsby, staring across the bay at a green light. I had the students rewrite that scene from Gatsby's point of view. This assignment was inspired by a blogpost discussing the possibility of using fan fiction in the classroom. The blogger, only identified by the username themeg09, speculated, "A fanfiction rewriting of this scene from Gatsby's point of view and his thoughts upon what that green light means to him might make it easier for students to write an essay about that same green light later without" (2013). My purpose in using this assignment was two-fold as the it both allowed students to begin with a fan fiction assignment of a smaller caliber and consider the symbolism of the green

light, an important aspect of the narrative. I had students video themselves as they planned

and created their collaborative fan fiction using QuickTime as well as submit their fan fiction

writing assignment, which I named the Green Light Rewrite.

At the conclusion of the novel, I repeated the process with a more in-depth writing

assignment. I had students rewrite the ending of *The Great Gatsby* with the partners they used

for the Green Light Rewrite. I again had students film themselves throughout the entire

process and email their videos to me. I then watched the videos while taking notes in my

daybook. Once I chose the group I wanted to focus on, I began coding their transcriptions for

patterns and themes.

Student videos

I had students video their discussions as they planned their fan fiction writings. My

students all have school provided Macbook computers and used Quicktime to record. They

emailed the recordings to me at the end of each session. Viewing and listening to their

discussion offered a chance to access their understanding of the text, as well as informed

instruction by allowing me to see any gaps in their comprehension of the text. I faced a

logistical challenge in the fact that my Mac computer has 128 gigabytes of storage total. I did

not have enough space on my hard drive to back up more than one video. While I had a flash

drive with a large story capacity, I lived in fear that it would go missing or meet some

catastrophic end conjured up by my own vivid imagination. I solved that problem by

uploading the videos, set to private so only I could view, to my YouTube channel. YouTube

allowed me to caption the videos more easily as, when using the caption feature, videos

automatically pause when typing begins. I learned immediately the unreliability of YouTube's automatic captions and completely disregarded that option. Instead, I typed the captions myself, which required me to watch snippets of conversation multiple times to accurately type every verbal exchange among students.

Preparing for data analysis

I chose to focus on a group of three young women: Kay, Jae, and Kara. Each of these young women is extremely quiet and withdrawn in the classroom. Jae and Kara are both solid A/B students. Kay, on the other hand, displays an extreme lack of engagement, often missing a dozen assignments in any six-week period causing her grades to fall in the low D range. I had concerns that her lack of participation would impact both her performance on assessments and her overall learning experience.

As I worked through the data, I coded with an eye towards patterns of ideas and statements consistent among my students. I began by pulling out the initial survey responses for the members of this case study and putting them on a document separate from the rest of the class. Second, I watched the videos of the group creating their fan fiction assignments, transcribing all dialogue as I did so. Later, I reread the transcriptions, annotating heavily. Additionally, I read the fan fiction assignments created collaboratively, taking note of which ideas I heard on the videos that made it into the writing and which had been discarded. Finally, I read the closing survey responses from the students, noting their personal reflections of how the unit had impacted or failed to impact, their learning. I have worked to analyze my findings and work towards conclusions based on the gathered data. As I reviewed my data, I began to notice some recurring patterns and themes. The preeminent theme was the theme of

collaboration. Researcher Pierre Dillenbourg (1999) points out the broadest definition for collaborative learning is "a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together." (p. 2). While I believe my students did learn together, I saw other patterns of behavior within that collaboration. Patterns reflecting authorial ownership, positive and negative social interdependence, impact on student learning, and effective collaboration began to emerge. In the category of authorial ownership, I discuss students' statements in their initial survey and later actions in creating fan fiction assignments that address their opinions about the controlling rights of authors as the sole owners of the content they have created. According to Johnson and Johnson (2009) positive social interdependence exists when "individuals perceive that they can attain their goals if and only if the other individuals with whom they are cooperatively linked attain their goals." (p. 366). Negative social interdependence, on the other hand, occurs "when there is a negative correlation among individuals' goal achievements" (Johnson and Johnson 2009 p. 366). Within my data, I observed both evidence of positive social interdependence and negative social interdependence among the three students who comprised my case study. Finally, I examine the impact of collaborative learning on my students and consider whether or not effective collaboration occurred in my classroom.

DATA ANALYSIS

In my analysis, I share the data that addresses my research questions: What happens, if anything, when students collectively write fan fiction while reading *The Great Gatsby*? What happens, if anything, when students read and write collectively? What happens, if anything, to students' level of reading comprehension when fan fiction is used? As discussed in the methodology section, I examined the student surveys, videos, and fan fiction writing assignments, noting the overarching theme of collaboration. Within that theme I noted patterns relating to authorial ownership, positive and negative social interdependence, and effective collaboration. I then worked to analyze these themes in relation to my research questions. Although I have overlapping data, I have divided it into the patterns I have previously identified for clarity.

Authorial ownership

I introduced our unit on fan fiction with a survey asking the following:

You have read several pieces of fiction in this classroom. Once a piece of writing is completed who owns it?

Tell me what you think about changing or rewriting an author's words, ideas, or story.

What (if any) experiences do you have with fan fiction?

All students posted their responses in our online learning platform, in both an assignment dropbox and a class discussion board. The discussion board was set so that students had to post their responses before they could view those of their peers. According to their responses, Kay, Jae, and Kara had similar, if not identical, views about authorial ownership. In response to the question, "Once a piece of writing is completed who owns it?" Kay replied, "The

person who wrote it should have all rights of ownership to the piece." Jae answered, "The

writer, the creator of it." Kara asserted, "I think that the piece of writing belongs to the author

no matter what." Their strong assertions that the writer owns a piece of work "no matter

what" initially caused me to have concerns that they would not be open to the concept of

creating fan fiction due to the fact that fan fiction asks its creators to work with root settings

and characters to create new content. To the second question, "Tell me what you think about

changing or rewriting an author's words, ideas, or story," Kay answered, "It depends on the

extent of how far you go. If you just paraphrase to get the same idea across and don't try to

make it look like it was all you then I see no problem with it. However; if someone

paraphrases someone else's work and then claims all rights of ownership to it then I have an

issue with it." Kay's use of "paraphrases" and "claims all rights of ownership" suggests she

seems to have informational texts in mind, such as writing about an article for a research

paper, rather than fiction, which was the focus of our unit. Jae appeared to have read the

question as a request for a definition of what changing the author's words consists of. She

stated, "I believe that changing or rewriting [an] author's words, ideas, or story is taking

someone's ideas and mixing them with your ideas…" From this statement, I suspected Jae

may have been thinking similarly to Kay in likening the question concerning authorial

ownership to informational texts used for a researched argument. In my survey, I prefaced the

question with the statement, "You have read several pieces of fiction in this classroom." I

erroneously assumed that statement, coupled with the fact that we were reading *The Great

Gatsby* would lead my students to only consider the question in relation to fictional works. In

her response to the second question, Kara stated, "I think that fan-fiction is a good thing, but

only if you either have consent or at least say, when [you're] writing it, that anything that you

used from the story does not belong to you." While claiming a support of fan fiction, Kara

stressed the importance of the consent or acknowledgement of the author. Her firm notions of

ownership of the original work are clearly evident by the language of her responses. As

opposed to her fellow group members, however, her choice of wording indicated that she

perhaps was considering the writing from a creative writing standpoint, rather than an

informational one. Interestingly, Kara stated, "I have had some experience writing it, and

reading it" in response to the last survey question, "What (if any) experiences do you have

with fan fiction?" It is highly probable that her personal experiences in reading and writing

fan fiction allowed Kara to approach the survey questions as I had assumed: with fiction texts

in mind. Relative to my research, I have questioned the connection between Jae and Kay's

likening of my question to informational texts rather than fiction and their firm statuses

concerning authorial ownership.

Surprisingly, throughout the creation of their fan fiction, not a single member of the

case study mentioned author's ownership, creative rights, or any other issue related to the

topic. Instead, they spent the time during the creation of the fan fiction appearing to relish the

opportunity to make changes to the narrative with comments such as, "Let's kill off all the

people I don't care about…" and "We're torching this place!" In the second video, Kay is

frantically typing and Jae is so excited she burst out, "Y'all I'm shaking in this chair!" Their

overt enthusiasm signals either a shift in thinking or a total disregard for authorial ownership,

despite their early claims that authors should have controlling rights to their content.

After completing the unit on fan fiction, the students all claimed to have highly enjoyed

or benefitted from the experience. At the end of the unit, students answered the survey

consisting of one question, "What impact (if any) do you feel the collaborative creation of fan

fiction had on your learning throughout our unit on *The Great Gatsby*?" In her response to the

closing survey, Kara stated, "…I especially liked the fan-fiction assignment that we did where

we had to write an alternate-ending…I hope that we can do more assignments like this." The

hope that we will do more fan fiction assignments suggests that Kara is not at all

uncomfortable with using an author's characters or setting. Kay wrote, "…It [writing the

collaborative fan fiction] gave me a chance to explore new ideas about characters' personal

thoughts and feelings..." Jae stated, "I think that collaborative creative was a great way for

many people to come together, each bringing something to the table, and it had a big impact

on my thoughts." Jae's use of the word "creative" as well as Kay's mention of "characters'

personal thoughts and feelings" indicated their thinking in relation to "changing or rewriting

an author's words, ideas, or story" had undergone a shift. While they may have viewed the

author as the true owner, they did not hesitate to "explore new ideas about characters'

personal thought and feelings" as well as change the ending entirely in the alternate ending

assignment referenced by Kara.

Collaboration: Positive social interdependence

The students filmed themselves as they prepared for and completed their Green Light Rewrite. I viewed the recordings that evening with great interest. It is in the conversation

Figure 1: Green Light Rewrite Assignment

preparing to create their Green Light Rewrite that I began to see what happens when students

create fan fiction in collaborative groups. The Green Light Rewrite served as the first of the two

fan fiction writing assignments my students did and took place halfway through the book. In

this planned group of three, Kara was a student I intended to act as a bridge between Jae and

Kay, as the latter are part of two completely different peer groups and I had never seen them

speak to each other. Both girls requested Kara as someone they wanted to work with, neither

requested each other. However, Kara fell terribly ill and was absent for over a week, forcing

these girls to work together without her. In other groups in the classroom, I observed short

periods spent socializing as they set up their computers and prepared to delve into the

assignment. Perhaps because there was no social relationship between them, these girls jumped

right into planning their first fan fiction assignment, the Green Light Rewrite. While Kay began

their conversation with the positive assertion, "We got this," their language indicated an initial

nervousness. The conversation began with:

> Kay: We got this.
>
> Jae: Where did that thing go [retrieves assignment instructions]? Okay. Think back to
>
> the first time Nick in the beginning of the book sees Gatsby standing outside staring at
>
> the green line over the water [reading the assignment from computer]. It's like he
>
> worked his whole life to get where he's at today.
>
> Kay: When I think about it um…It's like…we talked about it in class…You know, like
>
> when you see green you think "go" and when I thought about that…I was thinking like
>
> go for your dreams like all he ever wanted was to be with Daisy…So, he's when he sees
>
> that he's like okay. I'm going to go for it, and he's planned this whole reunion so…

[sneezes] Excuse me. So, she'll know that he like still loves her and he wants to be with her and he's worked hard to get the money and the life that she deserves. So, like yeah…So, like when he sees that green light across the water. He's like this is following my chance like I finally worked up enough money and I worked up to where I am, and I can go and…

Jae: Try to get her back

Kay: Yeah! Okay, I'm gonna say green green means go.

Jae: Also, you can say it represents money. The main thing was like, you ain't got, I didn't have enough money. When he finally got her needs and it was he could go on.

Kay: Sorry, I've gotta put my name on it.

Jae: And mine!

Kay: So, also, when you like are playing the scene your head when you're reading what do you think Gatsby is feeling? Or just like thinking about anything? For me, I would say he's like, like you said like this is my chance, so he's got this whole reunion planned and he has been waiting for this day and so I think that going out there and seeing the green light is kind of a reminder to him like you're ready for this. Just do it, and she'll love you because she's always loved you. She'll choose you.

Jae: And maybe he's a little nervous. Yeah, it has been so long since they last even spoke or show each other. He doesn't know how she's really gonna react it means she hopes that he hopes that she will love him, be with him.

There were eight pauses as indicated by ellipses, thirteen uses of the word "like" and one

usage of the phrase "you know?" Throughout their conversation, I noticed multiple examples

of hesitant language in the recording, perhaps indicating they were out of their comfort zones.

However, despite the obvious struggles in articulation, Kay, who was missing fourteen

assignments the previous marking period, took a leadership role immediately. She made the

first effort to connect with Jae by offering the positive encouragement, "We got this!" and the

next time she spoke, she asked, "So, when you are, like, playing this in your head when

you're reading what do you think Gatsby is feeling or just, like, thinking about?" The manner

in which she phrased this question struck me for several reasons. By the preparedness she

displayed I can discern that Kay is up-to-date on her reading. She is completely ready to

discuss the text and any answer Jae might offer. This is an unprecedented behavior for her. I

have considered the potential causes of this behavioral change. Researchers Brecke and

Jenson (2007) postulate, "cooperative learning through group projects may also provoke

students to strive" (p. 57) simply because students feel an obligation to their peers in

cooperative learning situations. It is likely that Kay felt the burden of her group's expectation

and prepared herself so that she could be a contributing member. This moment marked the

first time I had seen Kay take an active role in her own learning experience. In my literature

review, I referenced Slavin (2014) who points out that some students will participate and

excel within the collaborative learning setting simply because they want their own success

and the grades that reflect that success. Dependable and hardworking, Jae is such a student.

This is commonly known among her peers. Kay would have known she could expect Jae to be

prepared. Johnson and Johnson (2009) point out that knowing one's successes or failures

contribute to the successes or failures of their peers can lead to positive or negative social interdependence. In this case, Kay chose to rise to Jae's level of preparedness, which allowed her to be a strong partner for Jae, rather than a hindrance.

Researchers Abrami and Chambers (1994) posit, **"Positive interdependence exists among students when they cooperate and perceive that their chances of success are increased by other students' success."** As I watched the video of these students working together to create their Green Light Rewrite, I noticed sustained and high levels of cooperative behavior between the two students. They seemed to grow more comfortable with each other and confident just over the first ten minutes of video as it became evident that each was prepared to do her part to help the group successfully complete the assignment. As evident from the excerpt from their conversation above, the pauses between words rapidly switched to a flood of words as each girl spewed her ideas to the other. The behavior they took on, particularly Kay, was quite different from any they have displayed in my classroom, where both are extremely quiet. The discussion and completion of their Green Light Rewrite lasted fifty-two minutes. During that time, there was no digression from the writing task. As they wrote, they almost took on the character of Gatsby, explaining the situation from his perspective in first-person point of view. For instance:

> Kay: Yeah, because I seemed so close like I worked so hard like I'm finally to the point where I can take her.
>
> Jay: It's so close, yet so far. Yeah, I'll take that one final step and show Daisy what I have.

The students showed through their discussion that they valued the contributions of one another. Their tone was always encouraging along with comments such as, "so that's good" and "We got this!" While Kay took more of a leadership role, the high level of mutuality and reciprocity kept the relationship collaborative rather than dominative. I noted instances of positive negotiation as each time one student spoke, another would build on what she had said which seemed to strengthen the group as a whole:

> Jae: Shining a pathway towards Daisy, Now, does that make sense?
>
> Kay: Yeah, I mean, I think that makes sense. It was like it was a beacon.
>
> Jae: Yes, the beacon for Daisy's love… [pauses, obviously considering] for Daisy's life?
>
> Kay: Because I feel like, you know when he sees this green light it is sort of a beacon, like it's drawing him in like towards her.
>
> Jae: That's it, drawing. That's good! Can we put it towards her Daisy?
>
> Kay: You mean like … [typing]? I think that works!

As they structured their narrative, they constantly checked in with one another regarding both their own authorial choices and grammar. No suggestion made by either student was rejected, displaying a mutual respect for one another as they worked towards a shared goal, which was the ultimate success of the group. The following is the Greenlight Rewrite completed and submitted by Jae and Kay while Kara was absent:

> There it was. The green light that had taunted me for so long. So close, yet so far. It stood, a beacon, shining the way, drawing me in towards her; Daisy. A million thoughts

rush through my mind. *You've got this. You've worked so hard. You're ready*, but how will she react? I tell myself, *you've already won her love. You worked hard for the money to give her the life she deserves*. My arm reaches out, almost involuntarily, pulling me towards Daisy as if our love was a tether. I notice my hand, shaking uncontrollably, as *Will it be enough?* races through my mind. Feelings of fear enter my thoughts. *Can our love save me?* I focus my thoughts back to the green light. It is almost a reminder to me to go after my dreams; to go after Daisy. I stand frozen in a trance imagining what it will be like. Seeing her again. Touching her. Holding her hand. Seeing her smile, her laugh. Imagining what it would be like to be the person who put the smile on her face, but then I think back to wondering if what I have is good enough. She already has the money. She has Tom, though she may not love him, and her child. She has made a life for herself. Would she be willing to give that all up for me? I feel hope that I will see her again, yet I also feel my anxiety rising above all hope. I'm nervous to see how she will react, but also overwhelmed with the joy of hopefully having my dream of Daisy come true. Ultimately, I turn away, leaving it be for now, in hopes that tomorrow will lead me one step closer to her.

In reading this piece of writing alongside the full transcription of their discussion, I can see that each member of the group contributed equally to the assignment. No suggestion by either student was overruled or omitted. This piece of writing combined with the conversation between the two students demonstrates a strong understanding of the symbolism of the green light for the character of Jay Gatsby. Their discussion is peppered with comments such as,

"when you see green you think go . . . go for your dreams…all he ever wanted was to be with Daisy… it represents money…it's kind of a reminder to him… seeing that green light kind of gives him hope." All of these statements concerning the symbolism of the green light could be considered correct. In their fan fiction, they worked to communicate that in language more similar to the poignant tone used in the novel. The opening lines, "There it was. The green light that had taunted me for so long. So close, yet so far. It stood, a beacon, shining the way, drawing me in towards her: Daisy" showcase their comprehension of the green light as a potential symbol for Daisy as well as convey the longing felt by the Gatsby character. Additionally, the group does a credible job of capturing the possible musings of the character as he stares into the light. The lines, "My arm reaches out, almost involuntarily, pulling me towards Daisy as if our love was a tether. I notice my hand, shaking uncontrollably, as *Will it be enough?* races through my mind" clearly demonstrate the feelings of anxiety it is highly likely main character felt as he reflected on all he has done to situate himself physically and financially across from his lost love. The students delved deeply into what they imagined were the character's thoughts. The transcription of the discussion also reveals an embedded discussion of the social mores of the time in reference to divorce as well as the social divide between old and new money. The engagement in positive social dependence allowed the students to successfully complete the assignment as well as grow in their understanding and appreciation of the literature.

Collaboration: Negative social interdependence

According to Abrami and Chambers (1994) "negative interdependence exists when they compete with each other and perceive that their chances of success are decreased by other

students' success." When the group met again to create their alternate ending to the novel, I

began to notice the theme of negative social interdependence, with two group members

exercising the lion's share of control and assuming all creative rights within the group. This

interaction had the addition of Kara, who was back from her illness and I anticipated her

return would be welcomed by both the other group members as they are both very friendly

with her. Like Jae, Kara is the type of student Slavin (2014) describes who will do her part to

help the group succeed because she wants to do well herself. Additionally, Kara claimed in the

initial fan fiction survey that she had experience both reading and writing fan fiction. Already

encouraged by what I felt was a successful session the first time, I envisioned a superior

learning experience for all three members of my case study in the second collaborative

session. However, rather than the cooperation they demonstrated previously, Kay and Jae

seemed to be united in a competition against Kara. As soon as the group session began, Kay

and Jae took up leadership positions immediately, confidently jumping in with:

> Jae: My idea was we started it when he was like Nick would leave, he would like
>
> change into his bathing suit of something and save Gatsby.
>
> Kay: My idea was kinda like Gatsby's getting in the pool, Nick is leaving and he gets to
>
> his house and he's like I should be with him right now so he goes back and sees George
>
> and George is gonna kill Gatsby.
>
> Jae: George? You mean Wilson?
>
> Kay: His first name is George.
>
> Kara: Oh, I didn't realize that.
>
> Kay: He goes back and he, he tells George that Daisy actually killed Myrtle, so he goes

back and kills Daisy.

Jae: I'm fine with that. Like, I wanted to start at the pool scene.

Kay: Yeah, I'd like to start there. And then I'd like to have this really cool ending. I

really want Daisy dead so maybe if Daisy dies Tom moves away and marries some . . .

Kara: No, he just dies.

Jae: He kills himself!

While Kara attempted to contribute, Jae and Kay dominated the conversation with comments

such as, "I'm fine with that. Like, I wanted to start at the pool scene," "I'd like to have this

really cool ending," "I really want Daisy dead," "Let's kill off all the people I don't care

about," and "I think he should go up there." Kara did not make any comments beginning with

"I". While she enjoys friendships with both girls, she seemed to struggle with asserting herself

in the group, as if the other girls already had a working relationship and she felt left out. Kay

and Jae came into the group session visibly relaxed and prepared. In negotiations among the

group, the two established members frequently overruled Kara. For instance:

Kay: I think it'd be cool to end the book with like Daisy dies, but you know Gatsby

loved Daisy. What would happen to him if he found out?

Kara: Then he'd want to kill himself.

Jae: Well, I don't think he would. He needs to realize he was living his life for Daisy.

Then maybe he'd live his own life.

And later in their discussion:

Kay: They'll have like a little self-moment when they're like, let's forget about it

because Daisy…

Kara: Should we put this first? They shook hands?

Kay: You should have told me that before I started typing!

Kara: Sorry!

While I anticipated Kara's return being a seamless transition, the other two students allowed her only limited agency. This is most heavily demonstrated when Kara ventured, "Should we put this first? They shook hands?" In the video, her voice and tone were soft and hesitant whiles Kay's were strong and assertive when she exclaimed in response, "You should have told me that before I started typing!" Her tone immediately leads Kara to retreat with a direct apology. Throughout the collaborative learning session, Kara spoke less than half the number of times the other students spoke and spoke so softly the video does not clearly capture one-hundred percent of her vocalizations. The recording of the group discussion and completion of the assignment lasted 58 minutes. Over the course of almost one hour, Kara spoke 26 times. Only once did she use more than one sentence and her group members almost completely disregarded her:

Kara: Nick finally tells him about Tom and Myrtle! What would he have thought about that?

Jae: Wait, did he not know?

Kara: Who? Gatsby?

Jae: Yeah, did Gatsby not know?

Kay: I feel like that's not gonna change anything.

Jae: Okay then this is the part where they're going to separate and Nicks gonna run into

Wilson.

Kara suggests an arguably interesting addition to the story they are writing when she says,

"Nick finally tells him about Tom and Myrtle! What would he [Gatsby] have thought about

that?" While she is able to hold Jae's attention for a moment, Kay cuts her off with, "I feel

like that's not gonna change anything." This acts as a signal for Jae to dismiss her too and she

immediately does with, "Okay, then…" effectively communicating to Kara that her

suggestions can be vetoed by Kay. Kara's other 25 responses were all single sentences or brief

phrases. Kay, on the other hand, spoke 59 separate times and was comfortable with longer

speech such as, "I feel like part of him was sad at the same time. Part of him knew she wasn't

gonna call. By talking to Nick, because we knew Nick was very skeptical of it maybe made

him feel a little skeptical of it." Jae even outspoke Kay, contributing 60 different times, often

in multiple sentences such as, "Gatsby didn't know Daisy was dead, but knew the dream of

her was dead. He soon realized he can never have her, that dream was dead. After a quick

conversation we decide to leave together. With a quick conversation, me and Gatsby decide to

leave this world behind" (speaking from the point of view of the narrator of the novel, Nick

Carraway). Jay and Kay seemed to share an unspoken agreement that they would create this

assignment, as if the group's norms were already established and Kara simply did not have a

voice in the group. Each of Kara's contributions was dismissed and she offered fewer and

fewer as the discussion continued, yielding her stake in the group and perhaps diminishing her

personal learning experience. It is apparent that there was a feeling among the all three of the

group members that Jae and Kay were the controlling members.

The following is the alternate ending submitted by Kay, Jae, and Kara:

We shook hands and I started away. Just before I reached the hedge I remembered something and turned around. "They're a rotten crowd," I shouted across the lawn, "You're worth the whole damn bunch put together." He smiled politely and nodded his head. I turned towards my house and took a few steps before I decided against my initial thought to leave Gatsby. "Jay!" I called back to him, "I've changed my mind; a quick swim never killed anyone!"

"Alright old sport! Come in and change!"

Gatsby's face showed a hint of a smile. We headed to the house. When we got inside Gatsby asked me to wait downstairs as he went to get extra swimwear for me. My eyes wandered aimlessly around looking for something that had an emotional connection to Gatsby. Everything seemed so dull. Nothing was of value anymore. It had all lost its significance. While looking, something caught my eye. It was George Wilson. I noticed something in his hand; and suddenly everything made sense. I looked in his eyes and could see the desperation as though it was seeping from his skin. "Gatsby. Gatsby. He did this! He killed her! The car. The necklace. It was all him! He did this to me. To Myrtle. Myrtle!" As the words escaped his mouth, I knew I had to do something quick. I rushed over to him trying to calm him down with soothing words, but when kept rambling I knew what I had to do. The truth. It was the only solution. "Wilson. Wilson! Listen to me! It wasn't Gatsby. It was Tom. It was Daisy. Daisy! She killed her! She was the one driving. Tom was the one who had an affair with your wife. Not Gatsby. It was

never Gatsby! Don't you see Wilson!" You could see the light escape from his eyes. It was as though a switch had flipped. With these words, he turned on his heels. Turning towards the direction of Daisy. A sigh of relief escaped my lips involuntarily. I turned and saw Gatsby and realized what I had just done. Daisy would die. There was no question about it. I had killed her, and I was okay with it. Gatsby could never know what I did. It would break him, but I was the only one he had left. He needed me now more than ever. The call never came, and I knew exactly why. Gatsby didn't know that Daisy was dead, but he realized that the dream of her was dead. One conversation led to a whole lifetime. Gatsby would start over. I would start over. We would be there for each other. Gatsby stood on the dock one last time. The green light across the bay finally diminished, never to shine again.

Reading this submission alongside the transcription of the group's conversation as they created this assignment, I see that only one of Kara's suggestions made it into the finished product. In the transcription, as they type the last two lines, Kay says, "Gatsby stood on the dock." Jae immediate follows with, "the light diminished" and Kara softly adds, "never to shine again." In this case, however, Kara simply added her voice to the consensus that the other girls had already reached, which was Gatsby seeing the green light vanish forever. By watching the videos of their discussion and rereading its transcription, it is plain to me that Jae and Kay engaged in an in-depth sharing of ideas with each other, but they did more foisting ideas on Kara than collaborating with her.

An examining of this data required me to consider why Jae and Kay would treat Kara in

such a manner in a collaborative learning setting when they were so friendly with her in our regular class setting. Researchers Makewa, et al. (2014) postulate that humans crave self-expression. Collaborative learning, through its nature of requiring multiple people to come to one consensus, can be perceived as a threat to one's individuality. In group dynamics, this can drive some members to take control and other members find themselves alienated from the group. These feelings are not usually vocalized, yet create underlying tensions in a group. This, in turn, can lead the member who feels uncomfortable or ostracized to "psychologically or socially withdraw from the group to eliminate the tension" (p. 18). This could potentially explain the negative social interdependence displayed by Kay and Jae. They were obviously determined their voices would be heard and, perhaps unconsciously, determined to silence Kara's. Kara responded by speaking less often and then with hesitance.

Collaboration: Impact on student learning

I ended my unit on collaborative fan fiction with a closing survey question consisting only of one question: "What impact (if any) do you feel the collaborative creation of fan fiction had on your learning throughout our unit on *The Great Gatsby*?" I found Kara's response a bit telling:

> I really enjoyed reading *The Great Gatsby*. It was a really amazing book and
> movie. Getting to write the fan-fiction for the book really helped me to enjoyed it
> even more. I especially liked the fan-fiction assignment that we did where we had
> to write an alternate-ending. This assignment made me like the book and movie
> even more because it was just really fun getting to write it. I hope that we can do
> more assignments like this.

She was highly complementary of the assignment she participated in, but completely

sidestepped the question. Each and every sentence of her response told me how much she

enjoyed the unit, not how much her learning was impacted. There is the possibility that she is

equating enjoyment with academic growth and she did learn during the collaborative exercise

she participated in. Additionally, she could have gleaned knowledge of the characters or text

simply from listening to the discussion between Jae and Kay as they created their alternate

ending. However, I suspect she did not reap the full benefits of the assignment because she

was unable, or unwilling, to act as a fully contributing member of her own group. I am

curious as to how the group dynamic may have shifted had she insisted her suggestions be

considered.

     Kay's survey response reads quite differently:

     The fan-fiction helped me throughout the reading a lot actually. It gave me opportunities

     to see how others comprehended it and tell me what the book meant to them. It gave me

     a chance to explore new ideas about characters' personal thoughts and feelings. Writing

     in groups showed me how to combine ideas together to come up with something

     incredible. Overall, fan-fiction progressed my learning throughout the book by giving

     me chances to work with different people to see different points of view.

Kay had three clear and varying points of impact: the chance to see how others made meaning

from the novel, the chance to examine the characters' emotions, and the change to combine

ideas with peers to create "something incredible." Each sentence of her response directly

addressed the survey question with a different example of how she benefitted from the

activities. She began by stating bluntly that the fan fiction helped her "a lot actually."

Considering Kay's traditional lack of participation, the use of the word "actually" after admitting the fan fiction was beneficial to her makes me wonder if she was surprised that participating in the activities had a positive impact. One of the reasons I chose Kay's group to focus on was the hope that I could glean information about what sort of activities might motivate Kay to begin to take an active role in her own learning. There is the possibility that Kay has not taken part in assignments until this point because she did not believe they would be impactful on her learning. I feel strongly that the placement in the collaborative group, making her accountable to her peers rather than to me, helped motivate her to participate. Kay and Jae delved quite deeply into Gatsby's thoughts when they created their Green Light Rewrite and it obviously made an impression on her as she highlights "the chance to explore new ideas about characters' personal thoughts and feelings" as an impactful opportunity. Finally, Kay described the finished product she and her group members produced as "something incredible." This description leads me to understand the great pride she felt in her work. This is possibly a new emotion in my classroom for her. Because she typically does just enough to earn passing grades, this feeling of having completed a detailed assignment to the best of her ability may be novel.

Jae answered in a similar manner:

> I feel the collaborative creation of fan fiction had a big impact not only on my learning throughout *The Great Gatsby* unit but the ideas and themes throughout the book. By working in a group, we all had our own ideas and thoughts, but working together we gained other peoples' ideas and thoughts. Our each individual perception of the book

was like a piece to a puzzle and when we put all our ideas together we saw the bigger

picture and things that we never thought of own our own. If I hadn't worked in a group,

I would not have some of the thoughts I have on *The Great Gatsby* now. I think that

collaborative creative was a great way for many people to come together, each bringing

something to the table, and it had a big impact on my thoughts.

Jae, like Kay, had a strong argument that collaborative writing had a positive impact on

her learning. Of the three students, only Jae experienced these assignments as I had

anticipated. A consistent student, I knew she would be motivated by self-interest to help her

group succeed. I do, however, believe her enthusiasm was authentic based on the high levels

of engagement I observed during the collaborative assignments. During the second

collaborative assignment, she began to lapse into her version of the Long Island Lockjaw

accent of the upper echelon of East Egg while speaking from the characters' points of view.

She stressed that the exchange of thoughts and ideas was especially impactful to her. In the

transcription of their discussion, I can see Kay and Jae continuing to discuss and build upon

ideas as they had during the Green Light Rewrite:

> Kay: Let's talk about looking for something important, but it had all lost its significance.
>
> Jae: Something that had emotion value for Gatsby but he can't find it. Did it ever have
>
> any value?
>
> Kay: Well, in Gatsby's eyes it did.

Reaching the conclusion that the green light is a symbol that never "had any value" outside of

Gatsby's perspective allowed Jae to come to a deeper understanding of the book. Insights such

as these within the collaborative setting are likely what she is referencing when she stated she

"gained other peoples' ideas and thoughts" and that helped her to discover "themes

throughout the book." Her comment, "Our each individual perception of the book was like a

piece to a puzzle and when we put all our ideas together we saw the bigger picture and things

that we never thought of own our own," embodied one of the preeminent goals of

collaboration not just in the classroom, but in any situation. A hallmark of any successful act

of collaboration is seeing the "bigger picture" through the mutual sharing of ideas and

information. For Jae, collaborative learning seems to have been a highly beneficial activity.

Collaboration: Effectiveness

As I examine my data, I cannot help but ask myself if what happened when students

collectively wrote fan fiction while reading *The Great Gatsby* included effective

collaboration. To allow my data to speak to this question, I consulted researchers Makewa, et

al. (2014) who cited Barkley, Cross, and Major's three features for effective collaborative

learning: intentional design, co-laboring, and meaningful learning.

In preparing for this assignment, I grouped students intentionally rather than

haphazardly (names drawn from a hat, students work with the person in the row beside them,

students choose partners) as I have done when I have attempted to use collaborative learning

in the past. Researchers Webb, Nemer, Chizhik, and Sugrue, (1998) postulate, "Classroom

studies of group composition and learning generally show that, when students actively

participate in group collaboration, low-ability students learn best in groups with high-ability

students, high-ability students perform well in any group composition, and medium-ability

students learn the most in relatively homogeneous group." (p. 612) In this particular

classroom, I did not have students who were considered "low ability" so I looked instead at work ethic. As this assignment did involve heavy personal interaction, I asked students to submit two names of students they felt they worked best with. As previously stated, both Jae and Kay put Kara, but not each other. Kara, however, put both of them. I grouped them because I saw Jae and Kay as such opposites. I do feel like it was an excellent pairing for the two of them. They worked together extremely productively, with Kay bringing a level of preparedness, determination, and engagement she had not demonstrated previously. Kara, interestingly, inspired the grouping by requesting both Kay and Jae as her group members. Perceiving them as very different students, I imagined Kara would have more of a leadership role. I initially wanted to make sure the group with Kay had two strong additional members so that if she, as I highly suspected she would, had not completed her reading and was unable to be a contributing member of the group, each remaining member would have one partner who had come prepared. In hindsight, I am not sure if this was not an ideal partnering for Kara or if the group simply established itself without her and continued the second session as if she had never joined.

In an effective collaboration, all group members labor together to the same end, be that solving a problem or creating a product. It is evident in both videos of the students creating the fan fiction that all three girls participated in the assigned reading and arrived ready to complete the collaborative writing assignments. For Kay and Jae, the labor during the Green Light Rewrite was practically perfectly distributed. When Kara was added to the mix, she was willing and able to co-labor with her group members. She simply was not allowed by her more assertive partners to do so. From reviewing the videos, it is obvious, however, that she

was paying attention to her groupmates throughout the creation of the fan fiction. She did add

the very last statement, "never to shine again" to the work, which indicates she was invested

until the end. I feel strongly that all three members of the case studying were involved in co-

labor as they completed the assignments.

The final feature of effective collaboration is meaningful learning. Meaningful learning

during a collaborative learning session occurs when students gain a deeper understanding or

new knowledge relating to the topic of group study, in this case *The Great Gatsby*. In

considering likelihood that meaningful learning had occurred, I reexamined the transcriptions

from the videos of my students, their submitted fan fiction assignments, and their closing

surveys. For Kay and Jae, I can say with confidence there is a strong probability that their

understanding of the literature deepened through their collaborative work. Jae stated frankly

in her closing survey, "If I hadn't worked in a group, I would not have some of the thoughts I

have on *The Great Gatsby* now." Kay claimed, "…fan fiction progressed my learning

throughout the book by giving me chances to work with different people to see different

points of view." Both students credited the collaborative work with helping advance their

learning experience, leading me to believe that meaningful learning did occur. In Kara's case,

I am left wondering if she engaged in meaningful learning. She does claim the collaborative

creation of fan fiction "was just really fun" and she hopes that "we can do more assignments

like this." Her response diverges greatly from her peers who are quite adamant that their

learning was advanced. I hope that Kara did indeed have a meaningful learning experience

through her enjoyment of the process.

CONCLUSIONS

When I embarked on this journey, a great concern of mine was that my students were unable or unwilling to engage in in-depth analysis of literature. They often remained quiet and stoic as I worked to create class discussions and their written work demonstrated only a surface level comprehension. I embarked on this research to discover if the use of collaborative fan fiction could affect my students' learning experience and understanding of higher level literature. As I reflect on the artifacts I have gathered, I feel like I have strong observations that address my research questions:

- What happens, if anything, when students collectively write fan fiction while reading *The Great Gatsby*?

- What happens when students write collectively?

- What happens, if anything, to students' level of reading comprehension when fan fiction is used?

To analyze how my data speaks to my research questions, I have divided this section by question to look closely at the appropriate findings for each.

What happens, if anything, when students collectively write fan fiction while reading The Great Gatsby?

While collectively writing fan fiction about *The Great Gatsby*, the students in my case study completely defied their original assertions about authorial ownership. At the onset of my research, all three students adamantly claimed to adhere to the mindset that the author alone possessed the controlling rights to the creative content with frank statements such as, "The person who wrote it should have all rights of ownership to the piece." However, in two

collaborative learning sessions, totaling 110 minutes, no student expressed any concern about using the author's characters, setting, etc. In their conversations, Jae and Kay were so involved in discussing the text that they repeatedly spoke of the characters in first-person point of view. As my data illustrated, the students instead were especially excited about the changes they were making to the ending of the novel with comments such as, "Let's kill off all the people I don't care about…" and "We're torching this place!" Additionally, Kara professed to highly enjoy the creation of the fan fiction while Jae and Kay asserted that the collaborative creation of fan fiction "had a big impact" and "progressed my learning." In this particular case study, when students collectively wrote fan fiction while reading *The Great Gatsby* their initial views of authorial ownership changed in the face of their interests and heavy engagement in the creation of the fan fiction.

What happens when students write collectively?

When students wrote collectively, I observed the heavy presence of both positive and negative social interdependence. In this case study, the initial group session was very productive. Jae behaved as I had anticipated, prepared and ready because of her personal motivation to do well on her assignments. Kay, however, approached this assignment in a manner drastically different from her usual approach. As previously referenced, Brecke and Jenson (2007) point out, "cooperative learning through group projects may also provoke students to strive" (p. 57). This is perhaps the situation with Kay. The initial group session that took place while Kara was absent personified cooperation. Krayer (1986) asserts, "The principles upon which team learning is based deeply implicate participative decision making" (p. 157). In transcribing the videoed conversations between Jae and Kay as they

completed the two fan fiction assignments I could see this participative decision making in

action. Johnson and Johnson (2009) stress that positive social interdependence "results in

promotive interaction," which consists of "individuals encouraging and facilitating each

other's efforts to complete tasks in order to reach the group's goals" (p. 366). The group

consisting of Jae and Kay was highly productive and successful with their collective writing

efforts. Within the group's second interaction, however, I observed more negative social

interdependence than positive. The group behaved as if they were an established group

consisting of two members and never fully accepted Kara as member upon her return to

school. Jae and Kay overlooked most of Kara's suggestions and spoke more than twice the

number of times she did. When I consider my research question, I consider part of the answer

to "What happens when students write collectively?" to be found in the reflective surveys

they completed at the end of the unit. For Kay and Jae, the reflections also demonstrated that

learning had occurred. Strong statements such as Jae's assertion, "I think that collaborative

creative was a great way for many people to come together, each bringing something to the

table, and it had a big impact on my thoughts" and Kay's claim, "Writing in groups showed

me how to combine ideas together to come up with something incredible" assured me that

those students felt that meaningful learning had occurred. Kara being overlooked by her

groupmates was not what I imagined happening when the students wrote collectively. I am

left wondering how Kara would have fit within the group had she been there for the first

assignment. Would the other two have overpowered her from the onset, or would they see her

as an equal contributor within the group?

What happens, if anything, to students' level of reading comprehension when fan fiction is

used?

My data indicates that fan fiction can potentially have a profound impact on students' reading comprehension. Both creating the fan fiction and collaborating with their groups allowed them to make meanings from the literature they read. Rather than depending on me to supply questions and answers as with our class discussions, in the videos the students asked questions of one another and shared their interactions with the text to develop a new understanding of the green light as a symbol, the characters, and the text itself. Statements from their concluding surveys testify that the students are confident that the fan fiction activities contributed to their understanding of the text. Kay stated, "The fan-fiction helped me throughout the reading a lot actually. It gave me opportunities to see how others comprehended it and tell me what the book meant to them. It gave me a chance to explore new ideas about characters' personal thoughts and feelings." Jae offered similar sentiments: "I feel the collaborative creation of fan fiction had a big impact not only on my learning throughout *The Great Gatsby* unit but the ideas and themes throughout the book." In reading and evaluating their discussions and submitted work, I have to agree that they did benefit strongly from the activities. Their discussion delved deeply into the motivations of the character Jay Gatsby. Lines from their fan fiction, "…The green light that had taunted me for so long…a beacon, shining the way, drawing me in towards her…," illustrated a comprehension of the green light as a symbol within the text.

Final conclusions

As I discussed in my literature review, we live in a participatory culture. As twenty-first century learners, my students can expect to be part of cooperative teams in college as well as

the workforce. While collaborative writing should not replace individual writing assignments, it does offer the benefits allowing students to exchange and improve upon ideas with their peers. Additionally, writing about literature in any form helps foster understanding and a creative collaborative effort, such as fan fiction writing, potentially serves to engage students with both the text and one another.

In light of my conclusions, I have been considering how I can structure future collaborative writing groups so that all students have an equal opportunity for growth within the framework of the group. Researcher Karl Krayer (1986) suggests, "Early in the course, the instructor must divide students into permanent work groups which will remain intact for the duration of the term" (p. 158). At the time I began this unit, my class, which is year-long, had been in session over six months. This led me to the wondering: If this group had been together for that long, would Kara have returned to the group after her illness as a fully functioning member? Perhaps if I had assigned permanent groups early in the first semester "what happens" would have been drastically different. Perfect attendance is never a guarantee, or even a likelihood, in the classroom and it is vital that illness and absence not deprive students from optimum learning upon their return to the classroom. I look forward to continuing to develop working collaborative practices within my classroom.

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Appendix A

Student Initial Survey

Fan Fiction is a specific type of writing where writers use characters and settings from established works to create new stories.

1. You have read several pieces of fiction in this classroom. Once a piece of writing is completed who owns it?
2. Tell me what you think about changing or rewriting an author's words, ideas, or story.
3. What (if any) experiences do you have with fan fiction?

Appendix B

Student Closing Survey

What impact (if any) do you feel the collaborative creation of fan fiction had on your learning

throughout our unit on *The Great Gatsby*?

Appendix C

The Great Gatsby Green Light Rewrite Assignment

First Gatsby Fan Fiction Assignment

- Prompt: Think back to the first time Nick (and the reader through Nick) sees Gatsby standing outside staring into the green light over the water. Now that you know Gatsby's history and purpose, rewrite the scene in first person point of view from Gatsby.

- Length - one to two pages.

Before We Write

- A hallmark of quality fan fiction is the maintenance of characterization, writing style, mood/tone of the piece. Take a few minutes and free write both what you imagine Gatsby is thinking in the initial scene and how you can maintain the integrity of the original work.

Appendix D

Rubrics for Both Fan Fiction Assignments

Fan Fiction Rubric (1)

You've already rated students with this rubric. Any major changes could affect their assessment results.

Criteria	Ratings		Pts
Authorial Voice *The students attempted to emulate the tone and/or style of the original author.*	25 pts Full Marks	15 pts Attempted	25 pts
Story Quality *Story is interesting, clever, and engaging.*	25 pts Full Marks	15 pts Attempted	25 pts
Effort *The story demonstrated a strong effort by the author(s).*	25 pts Full Marks	15 pts Attempted	25 pts
Mechanics *The reader is not distracted by errors in grammar or spelling.*	25 pts Full Marks	15 pts Attempted	25 pts

Total Points: 100