

[Insert Character Here] Creating a Culture of Participatory Writing and Independent Reading Using Fan-fiction

By

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## Abstract

This study focuses on enhancing language skills in the areas of reading and writing through the implementation of fan-fiction in a group of higher education students from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez campus. To assess participants' already existing habits and their consideration on how effective those habits were in the development of reading and writing skills a pre and post questionnaire was administered. Whether or not participants found the use of fan-fiction to be a constituent in how they practice reading and writing would be determined by their performance in three research units designed for them to explore the possibilities of fan-fiction as a genre for language learning.

## Resumen

Este estudio tiene como enfoque el desarrollo de destrezas de lenguaje en las área de leer y escribir a través de la implementación de “fan-fiction” en un grupo de estudiantes de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, recinto de Mayagüez. Para evaluar los hábitos pre-existentes en los participantes y como ellos consideran la efectividad de esos hábitos en el desarrollo de destrezas en las áreas de énfasis, se administro un pre y pos cuestionario. Si los participantes encontraron o no que el uso de “fan-fiction” es un factor en como practican leer y escribir dependería de su desempeño en tres unidades de investigación diseñadas para explorar las posibilidades que “fan-fiction” provee como genero para el aprendizaje de lenguaje.

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Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis and express a world of thank you(s) to the group of woman who first introduced me to “fan-fiction” and who changed my life when they did not even realize they were doing so. My high-school family: Kat, Lilly, Yaha, Stephanie, Dalitza and Izamar. The memories of those years of us writing and sharing our stories have profoundly shaped me and are without a doubt the foundation of this thesis. Thank you.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

According to Bronwen Thomas, “The term fan-fiction (sometimes abbreviated as *fanfic*) refers to stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a “canon” of works; these fan-created narratives often take the pre-existing story world in a new, sometimes bizarre, direction” (Thomas, 1). Fanfic assumes many forms. It is essentially a fan’s dissemination of their insightful knowledge for a fictional world, though there are those who choose to keep their work private. Online communities are available for the publishing and storing of fan contributions. Many fandom-based websites dedicated to a specific universe also provide a forum for followers to upload their fanfic, like fanfiction.net. Fan-fiction dates back to mythic and oral traditions. However, “fan-fiction remained a fairly underground and marginalized activity until the advent of digital technologies and the World Wide Web” (Thomas, 1). Thomas explores the more contemporary effects of fan-fiction even though continuations, sequels and prequels have been written and explored similarly to fan-fiction by authors of literature for centuries.

The first time I heard the word *fanfic* was in sophomore year of High School. I was new in school and had a difficult time transitioning from bilingual school predominantly English to one where English was just a subject matter. During the first few months, I noticed a lack of commitment from teachers to help us improve our writing and reading skills as dual language learners. Luckily, I made friends with a group of young women who were passionate about reading and writing outside the school curriculum. Though both activities were not new to me; I had never been surrounded by people who were so passionate about what they were reading that it made them express



their artistic abilities in levels of creativity unknown to me. They welcomed me into their world outside the curriculum (an endeavor that usually occurred during break hours) and soon enough I was looking for *fanfics* online and writing my own whenever I had the chance.

My personal experience with fan-fiction returned to me years after High School, while I was working as an English instructor at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayaguez. In Puerto Rico, many students arrive at college with little or no reading and writing skills. This lack of proficiency has many variables. Some students simply do not care about reading unless they are required to do it, and writing is something that only rarely occurs independent of coursework. There is also the issue of the appropriateness of texts. Many academic curricula are designed in such a way that relevancy between texts and students is almost completely nonexistent. Sure, contextualized narratives about growing up in the Caribbean – or simply growing up Puerto Rican – or fictional and non-fictional chronicles about historical events are to a certain degree relevant to students. However, this connection is primarily based on notions of relevance that disregard the individual interests of students.

This investigative research is designed to enhance and/or create reading and writing skills in a group of first year students at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus, by focusing on students' knowledge and significant interests. Using fan-fiction, I intend to open a whole new space for dialogue, critical thinking and creative writing through the practice and understanding of three literary genres, which make up the three units of the investigation. The idea is to expose students to a variety of texts to explore, analyze and deconstruct, while promoting the unique genre of fan-fiction. Though many

would consider fan-fiction to be incongruous with academia, it is hard to deny the lure of fandom and how pertinent it is to students who are essentially freethinking individuals. As a non-traditional genre, fan-fiction can be used as a small practice in classrooms to compliment traditional commands. Through the careful exploration of worlds and characters from their favorite TV shows, book series, movies or video games, students will be able to make predictions and analyses and produce written material demonstrating their understanding of characters as well as different literary genres – and their elements.

### *Justification*

Fan-fiction has been an escape for many people. Tracey Kell's study revealed fan-fiction to be "a way to have fun, avoid boredom, and develop online friendships" (Kell, 32). Though most fan-fiction activities take place independently from curricula or academia in general, there is a noticeable educational component to it. "Fan fiction provides a participatory culture that fosters an excellent learning environment" (Kell, 33). Constant follower feedback provides writers with opportunities for language and linguistic improvement. Exchanges between writers and followers also open up the possibility of enhancing language proficiency, especially an exchange between a native speaker of a given language, and an L2 learner of the same language. As Kell explains, fan-fiction communities are "informal learning cultures," which are created by fans sharing similar interests and skills. In creating a lesson around fan-fiction for her class, Kell established three goals which easily sum up the idea underlining fanfic itself: establish an open space for creative writing, cohesive storytelling and peer review with constructive feedback.

Aside from being an escapist pursuit, fan-fiction writers compose fan-fiction as a way to deal with emotional distress. Chelsea Philpot comments on how many fanfic writers relied on fan-fiction to get through tough times in elementary and middle school. Interestingly enough, many writers who initially seek these communities for solace or reprieve end up completely immersed in them. Philpot also points out writer commitment. In an interview with Summer Sells, a teenager from Massachusetts who became popular within her online fan-fiction community for writing a James and Lily Potter fanfic, Philpot discovered followers' commitment to writers to be equal to writers' commitment to their story. She quotes Sells saying: "The people who write fan fiction commit to it and finish their fan fiction – they're authors to me." Philpot describes fanfic communities as offering "young writers a place to share work without fear of judgment" (Philpot, 20). Full immersion and a safe environment are two important elements to consider when creating the optimal learning space, especially when dealing with writing. As Philpot explains, fan-fiction allows for enthusiastic and critical dialogues between writers, which could easily transfer from online to the classroom.

Rebecca Black refers to online fan-fiction communities as "affinity spaces" in her article, "Fanfiction Writing and the Construction of Space." These spaces differ from classroom in that students flock to them during leisure time. This means students are producing meaningful relationships within a culture of writing and developing writing and literacy skills more successfully than they are in a traditional classroom setting.

Interaction in this space primarily resolves around composing fanfictions, reading and posting reviews of an/or feedback on texts, socializing, writing

collaboratively, and discussing Fanfiction writing and the various media canons more broadly.

This study's goal is to bring this spatial-based ideology into the classroom, scaffolding a community for students to excel as writers and critical readers.

## *Research Questions*

1. How can fan-fiction improve language proficiency in the English classroom?
  - a. How does fan-fiction facilitate writing?
    - i. What writing skills do fan-fiction target?
    - ii. How does fan-fiction help improve these skills?
  - b. How does engaging in fan-fiction promote reading?
    - i. Can the relevancy of fan-fiction enhance critical thinking skills?
  - c. Can fan-fiction encourage student participation?
    - i. How can fan-fiction be used to create a dialog between students?

The following chapter explores what fan-fiction is, how it can be used in the classroom and the question of relevant content. Furthermore, the review of literature presents vital elements used in determining the course of this investigation; all of which are employed as features in the methodology (chapter 3) in an attempt to answer the aforementioned research questions above.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

### *Introduction*

The following is a compilation of relevant sources that complement the various aspects of this investigation. Exploring fan-fiction in the English classroom is an endeavor yet to be thoroughly explored and little comprehensive data about its effectiveness. However, research on fan-fiction's effect on language and communication does exist and its results are a fundamental part of this study. The rest of the content available in this chapter justifies the purpose of this study by exploring the theoretical features that substantiate it.

### *Character*

The word character represents the uniqueness with which a particular individual is recognized. Deriving from a Greek word, a character once referred to a stamping tool that left a distinct mark. It is not hard to surmise why the word came to describe an individual's personality. In *How to Read Literature*, Terry Eagleton explains how each person experiences life differently, becoming exposed to situations and experiences similar to those around them, but is distinguished by one or more unique personality traits.

Social standards usually define those characteristics that make a character standout. Eagleton points out that what is typically categorized as good is a direct representation of how society defines good and bad. Interestingly enough, there is a higher demand for characters that break away from standards of normality. Since these characters are designed to undo conventions and defy social standards, they acquire an appeal based on their eccentricities. "What counts as eccentric depends on what is taken

as standard behavior” (Eagleton, 50). Freakish or outlandish characters – such as the supernatural and demoralized – generate more public interest due to their unusual nature, yet they are not as easy to understand or predict as characters that are confined within the socially acceptable. Herein also lies that fascination with fictional characters. An unpredictable character that is not limited by patterns of behavior determined by social and cultural traditions reflects a deep-seated desire within the spectator. This desire is in itself the longing to break away from the norm, and it is why many people occupy themselves with worlds and characters that represent an alternate reality.

Character interest can also come from lack of information. Characters exist because their stories are told. However, some characters, as Eagleton explains, arrive in a story with little to no information about who and where they were before involving themselves in the storyline. Eagleton states that when the character is not present, he does not exist. After their participation in a given narrative terminates, characters’ existence remains limited to what was disclosed within the narrative. The reader or viewer has no confirmation of what such characters are doing when they are not present. Making sense of these gaps becomes a process of speculating on the character (relying on the information available), analyzing his significance even when they are not present and making predictions about their nature, reintroduction and history.

### *Pop Culture*

Making sense of pop culture in the classroom is not an impossible task. Mass media has revolutionized in a way that it is hard for teachers to discredit its influence on students. In fact, students are more likely to participate in a conversation if the topic is related or rooted in pop culture. Life, in many ways, is explained to children and young

adults through television, books and movies. The characters they watch or read about are echoes of their own experiences, desires, fears or ideas. It is easier to talk to a kid about a cartoon or video game character than it is to talk to him or her about solving a mathematical equation. Patricia A. Duff explains, “Children (and adults) who have grown up with the same narratives draw freely on them in their interactions with others as a means of establishing in-group membership” (Duff). In-group membership is what has made fan-fiction so popular. The simple notion of having spaces where conversations and other types of interactions – feedback, for instance – occur within a world of knowledge pertinent to personal interest, creates a sense of comfort in which young people can dare to explore beyond what they believe to be capable of for the sake of keeping these interactions and their membership active. Pop culture, in this context, then becomes the main resource for inclusion in these communities; and when considered as a feature of this investigation, this membership theory is what will accommodate students in the position of feeling comfortable and knowledgeable about what they are writing.

Pop culture brings relevancy into the classroom. Most Puerto Rican students are only exposed to either local media or North American media. This means that most of what they are reading and watching is already part of pop culture in a substantial way. Discussions focusing on narratives which students are familiar with and which pertain to their interests might enhance the learning process in the classroom when the target skills are language speaking, reading and writing. Pop culture should not overwhelm the process of language acquisition seeing that dialogical activities about it would allow for students to critically analyze what is relevant to them and communicate their theories, hypotheses and conclusions in the learning language. Also, as explained by Jeffrey



Nealon and Susa Searls Giroux in their book *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences*, “one of the most crucial reasons to study popular culture is not so much to *learn* from it but to examine how it *teaches* us certain things” (68). This pertains to students’ knowledge and exposure to popular culture – mainly through constant access to it – and to how pop culture offers teachers significant opportunities to assess students’ knowledge as well as understand what is relevant to them.

### *Identification*

Identification with fictional characters is a complex process. There are many reasons why a person is attracted to a character: physical appearance, circumstance, personality and/or environment. Identification, as Jonathan Cohen explains, is a deeper concept that can be described as a person’s ability to empathize with the character – emotionally and cognitively – while also feeling like both person and character are one. Through empirical evidence, Cohen sets out to illustrate the consequences of identification in the development of an individual’s own identity and ways in which they manifest socially.

Identification is essentially the internalization of perspectives. Freud understood identification to be the result of psychological pressures, meaning that identification occurred as a means of compensation for powerlessness. Attempting to delve deeper into its meaning, Cohen states, “a comprehensive definition should include a sense of identification as an experience – as a state in which one adopts the goals and identity of a character” (Cohen, 250). Combining both descriptions of identification – compensation and experience – allows for a clearer understanding of the internalization process. This is a process that effectively starts from a psychological standpoint conditioned by a person’s

exclusive experiences, as suggested by Freud, which develops into a more intricate cognitive relationship between person and character. Once identification occurs, the experiences of the character provoke an imaginative reaction in the reader, which develops as they predict possible outcomes based on the qualities in the character they identified with and their understanding of the character's perspectives.

The process of writing fan-fiction relies heavily on identification. "Identification is a process that culminates in a cognitive and emotional state in which the audience member is aware not of him – or herself as an audience member, but rather imagines being one of the characters in the text" (Cohen, 252). Before explaining how identification culminates – and its relevance to fan-fiction writing – it is important to highlight specific critical factors Cohen explored to determine the cause of identification. To measure an audience member's degree of identification, Cohen identified four central dimensions: empathy, sharing of perspectives, understanding character's motivation and absorption. The first three of these dimensions make up the pre-creative aspect of fan-fiction writing. The fourth dimension – absorption, or imagining oneself as part of the narrative – is fundamentally the act of fan-fiction, considered as a physical manifestation of cognitive activity.

Sheila T. Murphy, Lauren B. Frank, Meghan B. Moran and Paula Patnoe-Woodley explore Cohen's fourth dimension even further in their article "Involved, Transported, or Emotional?: Exploring the Determinants of Change in Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behavior in Entertainment-Education." They explore involvement with narrative and how it offers occasions in which audience members are transported into the stories they read, view or hear. Much as Cohen explains, they found that transportation

occurs primarily through the loss of awareness of what immediately surrounds an audience member and by connecting cognitively with the mediated world. “A transported viewer is so completely immersed in the media world that his or her responses to narrative events are strong, as though they were actually experiencing those events” (Murphy, Frank et al., 411). This profound immersion can result in the audience member becoming so engrossed with the story or a character that he or she may not accept the message being conveyed as intended. The act of writing within the fan-fiction genre requires this immersion for it to exist. Negotiation, counterarguments and critical assessment – initial stages of immersion or abortion – assist audiences in constructing the meaning behind the narrative, while fan-fiction allows them to reconstruct that meaning in a more concrete and definitive way.

Fan-fiction is an open source that welcomes creative work from fans of any genre within the agencies of visual arts and literature. The very own structure of literature lends itself for profound explorations that can be easily related to what fan-fiction is and what it does. Aside from being a starting point for many fan-fiction writers, – in that many based their fan-fiction on books rather than from film, video games or television – there is an underlying power that begins with the act of reading the original narrative that carries over to the appropriation of its various elements for the purpose of writing fan-fiction. This power can also be classified as identification, but its configuration proposes a more intricate dynamic between the reader and the text. Louise M. Rosenblatt explores this idea in her book *Literature as Exploration*, and she explains:

The ability to understand and sympathize with others reflects the multiple nature of human being, his potentialities for many more selves and kinds of experience

than any one being could express. This may be one of the things that enable us to seek through literature an enlargement of our experience. (40)

Rosenblatt examines the notion of reader involvement in the life of the character as a means to explore realities beyond their own and experience identities in an almost congenial way. This can only happen after the reader identifies what aspects of the character's reality he can relate to or experience as a separate process from his or her own reality. This effect can easily be evaluated in the practice of writing fan-fiction, but more so than that, it motivates a more objective observation of the narrative.

### *Adapting Online Communications into the English Classroom*

Fan-fiction has existed predominantly as online forums open for social connections and creative opportunities. It is because of the Internet that this medium has flourished and networked the relationships of many people, especially young sectors. In determining the basis of my investigation, I focused on the effects of fan-fiction online forums on language and communication and translated them into potential advantages for the English classroom. "Online Fan Fiction, Global Identities, and Imagination" is a study by Rebecca W. Black that examines how the influence of technology and media constitute the usage of imagination and inspire participation in activities that represent identity and creative experimentation.

Two significant features Black emphasized in her investigation were identity and language. Black discovered that online fan-fiction writers created identities that were reflected through their texts. These identities had a lot to do with their relationship with the canon they were writing about, but also with their personal and cultural identities as separate individuals. By accentuating their identities in tandem with the characters or

world they were writing about, Black discovered that her subjects were also constructing an online identity that also emphasized the limitations of their language and writing capacities. These online forums – fanfiction.net, specifically – contain an option for fans to submit their work under categories that range between novice and expert. Considering that her subjects were not native English speakers, Black found it interesting that most of them categorized themselves as novices. “By representing themselves as novices, the authors were implicitly positioning readers as experts who might notice errors in their texts and as responsive audience members who would provide feedback” (Black). Not only was this discovery pertinent to my study as far as identity was concerned, but also to the practice of writing in a non-native language. The concerns established by Black – errors and feedback – were pivotal in the development of my investigation seeing that my students are second language learners in English who would benefit from a setting more concerned with the development of skills in a second language rather than its restrictions.

Another important revelation in Black’s study was that of meaning. One of the most essential features of academic writing is the communication of messages. Through these messages students convey their understanding of the world as well as give meaning to their ideas. Black states:

The misalignment or inconsistency between the ways of interacting (genres), representing (discourse), and being (style) (Rogers, 2004) across the participants’ texts suggest that while they implicitly referenced an assumed, academically-oriented discourse related to conventions and correctness in writing, through their genres and styles of writing, they actually were presenting a challenge to this notion by asking readers to judge their texts based primarily on meaning.

This connects to the concern on feedback as well as to the appropriateness of implementing fan-fiction as a writing genre in the English classroom. Students often encounter false notions about academic writing conventions. What they believe in writing is to write without grammatical errors and according to rubrics or standards of whatever genre they are asked to write. Online fan-fiction communities dispel these notions by creating an environment in which each participant is welcomed based on the common interest that brought the reader to them in the first place. This means that if successfully implemented in an English learning scenario, students would know that their writing will be evaluated more on meaning than writing conventions, which would motivate them to write outside any specific genre or academic standard and as a result of doing so improve those conventions.

#### *Rewriting Endings and Fillings Gaps*

A character's first appearance in a narrative is considered to be his birth. From here on, the character is but a particular feature, a pawn in a game of fiction. Unfortunately, characters run out of thread or space to move around after a while, some characters – secondary characters, specifically – even disappear from the narrative and are never heard of again. Terry Eagleton believed the minute a character left the narrative it was as if that character had met his end, or his/her death.

In the *Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue*, Frank Kermode makes a point about predicting the end based on information available in the beginning and middle, and as well as accessible information. He attempts to make sense of apocalypse or unveiling in fiction, for instance, by saying: “Apocalypse depends on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future, on behalf

of us, who remain ‘in the midst’” (Kermode, 8). Regarding the apocalypse, Kermode states that as humans we try to make sense of the figurative elements associated with it in an attempt to make predictions about its imminence.

Kermode also refers to stories as being limited by the perception of the narrator, implying a sensation of dissatisfaction from its audience. “The story ends where it began,” Kermode explains. “It is always *not* doing things which we unreasonably assume novels ought to do: connect, diversify, explain, make concords, facilitate extrapolations” (Kermode, 21). In this sense, the audience of a given narrative is left expecting more, but the foundation of storytelling in itself does not allow for these experiences given that a story has to have a beginning and an end. It is the audience’s “unreasonable” desire to know more which creates dialogues about the succession of events after the story’s conflict is resolved as well as predictions of all possible connections between the beginning and events prior to it.

Part of this investigation will require students to theorize about their character’s past and future to make sense of the transaction of restricted information between them and the author(s). They will be asked to rewrite the ending of their character’s original narrative in way that reflects an insightful understanding of the character as well as the nature of certain situations and the sense they make of them. This will correspond to Kermode’s theory of continuity, which will essentially be a concord between the student and the text’s original author. This agreement will be founded in student’s theories about the character from their unique perspective, which involves an outlook of the character’s situation and other possible resolutions. In other words, rewriting the ending would be a

form of negotiation between student and author in which the first attempts to make sense of the latter.

*Writing and Reading in the English Classroom*

Teaching composition, as Vivian Zimel explains in her article “Teaching Composition in the English Classroom: What We Can Learn from Research in the Teaching of English” is a practice often initiated by teachers based on their teaching theories and philosophies and their experiences. Zimel explains how most of the teaching on writing or composition being done in English classrooms seems to be solely occupied with “orthographic translations of oral pattern practice or substitution drills.” She points out an almost to non-existent approach to the teaching of composition concerned with the creative process of writing. Instead, there seems to be a focused set of approaches that prioritize other language skills and reject writing as a tool to learn how to write.

Zimel highlights the importance of exercises aimed at improving reading, listening and speaking language skills, but disagrees with the notion that emphasis on these skills alone will lead to students writing expressively or creatively:

While I do not argue with these approaches in terms of the kind of preparation ESL students need, I take issue with the fact that the exercises described are identified with the skills of composing. Teachers are aware that their students must have a basic linguistic competence in order to write creatively. Advising them to provide interesting and meaningful topics during the “last stage,” that of free writing, is of little value. (Zimel)

The problem with lack of small practices focused on allowing students to write freely is that they become more concerned with a kind of control that is specifically taught rather



than writing in a way in which they are in control of their own thoughts. Most students find it difficult to examine their own writing as meeting genre requirements and grammatical conventionalities when they are not exposed to writing activities that explore their critical thinking responses. Free and creative writing should cultivate writing skills, as a means to develop the necessary skills that concentrated academic composition requires. Writing should occur in a way that motivates students to write through free forms of expression rather than in a way that constricts how they write.

### *Cognitive Theory and Bloom's Taxonomy*

*Small Teachings: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* by James M.

Lang starts with a connection to psychologist Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy:

The taxonomy that Bloom created contains six major categories: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. A quick glance over the six categories would suggest that they follow a progression from lower to higher orders of complexity, from a static possession of knowledge to more creative forms of thinking in categories the of synthesis and evaluation. (13)

Visually, Bloom's Taxonomy is a pyramid. Each category forms a level in the pyramid that students should effectively exercise before to being introduced to activities at the higher level of the pyramid. Lang proposes that knowledge – Bloom's first category – is “foundational.” He believes that throughout their lives students (and people in general) acquire information that is stored in memory. This information then becomes a series of facts from which students can use to progress to the higher levels of Bloom's pyramid. What my investigation sought to do was begin with from this concept of students'

individual knowledge – in the case their knowledge about the characters they chose – to help them reach higher levels of critical thinking, problem solving and application.

Factual knowledge is often a transitional routine most teachers practice to evaluate students throughout a course of time. Prior to reaching college standards, education is extremely controlled and centered on a determined curriculum with the objective of embedding certain knowledge and skills in students. According to Lang, “factual material” is needed if we want to survey cognitive skills in the classroom. He also points the dangers of supposing students to be capable of acquiring knowledge on a foreign subject independently:

We also cannot assume that students are perfectly capable of memorizing such information on their own. In fact, research on student learning strategies suggests that students typically make poor choices when they attempt to learn new information – and they make those choices even when they know better. (16)

When considering the design of college courses, which are limited to the time period of a semester, it is easier – and more effective – to work towards improving or establishing certain skills by challenging students to operate with pre-existing factual knowledge. This approach reduces the risk of poor choice making and allows for a more accurate assessment on how to efficiently acquire, evaluate and utilize knowledge. One of the reasons cognitive strategies work is because of memory. Teaching models are more often than not rooted in the fundamental notion of memory. Test taking is essentially a practice of remembering information. Lang asserts, “if the research suggests that memory exercises improve our memories, that should mean that tests have the potential not just to measure learning but to also improve it” (21). According to Lang, traditional test taking

can help students increase their levels of learning. However, this idea has to be translated and reconstructed to a setting in which test taking is not an option for improving knowledge or advancing from one category of Bloom's pyramid to another. Much like relying on the prospect that students are capable of seeking out new information without poor decision making, testing forces an unnatural means of learning. They both imply a disinterest between student and content. Therefore, memory – much like factual knowledge – remains a fundamental element of Bloom's first category of cognitive learning. Moreover, from this assertion is where Lang begins his experimentation on small practices that help students climb up that pyramid with the proper usage of memory and pre-existing facts. These practices include: predicting, practicing and motivating.

### *Predicting*

As covered in this chapter, a large part of my investigation is to have students make predictions about their character's behavior as well as rewrite parts of their character's narrative based mostly on analysis and interpretation but also on predictions they could have made throughout the narrative that were not realized by the original author. Prediction comes from paying close attention to information. Everything that Lang has proposed so far – the aspects of memory and facts – play a pivotal part in predicting. Making predictions is also a feature in one of Bloom's higher categories. Having students discuss information that already exists in their memory is the next step in towards achieving fully realized conjectures in the form of creative work. And making predictions is a way to better understand a subject.

There are two aspects of Lang's discoveries on predictive activities that apply to my investigation. First, there is that of searching. The final unit of this investigation will

ask students to make predictions about their character's behavior in situations in which they are forced to interact with worlds and characters outside of their own. To successfully do so, students will have to search or ask questions about those other characters and situations to make plausible predictions about their own character: "That search activates prior knowledge you have about the subject matter and prepares your brain to slot the answer, when you receive it, into a more richly connected network of facts" (49). Secondly, there is that of filling gaps. As stated previously in this chapter, filling out narrative gaps will be a part of my investigation. Though I mentioned that this process would entail students looking at the narrative and then surmising about missing information, there is also another fact to consider. The knowledge students will already have about their character is whatever evidence exists within the narrative. This means that the gaps students will be asked to fill the very gaps that can be found in their knowledge of the subject. Students who make predictions "are forced to confront the depth of their knowledge, and that confrontation – when it reveals gaps or weaknesses – might spur them to better or more determined learning" (Lang, page number). Both these strategies, as Lang suggests, are intended to motivate students to interpret situations and solve problems in a way that ensures a deep fluency in their subject matter.

In closing his remarks about implementing predictive activities in the classroom, Lang mentions the importance of induced reflection. "Prediction provides an excellent spur for thought, in that you can ask students to think about why they made their predictions, what actually happened (if the prediction leads to direct observation), and why their prediction was wrong or right" (59). Part of what students will be asked to do in my research is to reflect and analyze the predictions they made about their characters

in their fan-fiction. Inducing a reflective analysis broadens the cognitive practice of learning by granting students an opportunity to examine their reasoning and the configuration of information stored in their memory and research that guided them through the process.

### *Practicing*

Lang's theories about practice cover both aspects I intend to study through my research: reading and writing. It is common knowledge that students cannot be expected to succeed at performing a specific task if they do not practice it first. There is a possibility that most students will not be familiar with the genre of writing fan-fiction or the academic writing genres that will be used to supplement their creative writing. The purpose of practice – in both my investigation and Lang's research – is to cultivate the necessary mental facilities that students will need for target assignments. For instance, students who are not familiar with fan-fiction will benefit from reading and deconstructing it. Students who have never written poetry will receive the input they need through reading poetry and identifying – as well as creating in isolated activities – poetic and literary texts. Combining whatever new information is brought to them with the information they already have stored in their memory through practice will improve their cognitive functions and possibly automatized the skills they will use to execute required tasks.

Making time for in-class practice is one of Lang's principles for practicing. This has many benefits, including one previously mentioned when discussing Rebecca Black's study on online communities: feedback. "Practice that takes place away from the presence of an instructor can become a breeding ground for overlearning, mindless

repetition, and the development of poor habits” (133). Though my investigation is inclined more to studying the effects of fan-fiction in writing and readings skills, it is important to remember that this will be done in an academic setting. Students will be asked to carry out certain tasks that require a level of preparation and will be subjected to assessment. With that in consideration, it is important for these tasks to be practiced in the classroom, especially if the student will optimize his understanding of the task by receiving feedback from his or her peers and me. “Practice that takes place with the benefit of your presence and feedback has the potential to create more powerful learning” (133). Not only will making time for in-class practices lead to more powerful learning, but it will also ensure mindful learning, a type of learning that will assist students as they navigate from one task to the other and move closer to the top categories of Bloom’s taxonomy.

### *Motivating*

In his study “Motivating Students to Write,” John Elliott found that some students feel that many believe that writing at the college level is something students cannot do. “If nothing else, this comment must inevitably force us teachers to question our own motives and raises a very vexed question: can it be that all too often we ourselves are the source of the apparent lack of motivation which served as the spur for the writing of this paper?” (Elliott, 63). Notions of students’ abilities to write at the higher learning level are often the motivation behind many educators’ search and creation of practices that seek to eradicate such notions. Elliott’s study also revealed that students do enjoy writing, but their enjoyment is usually short-lived due to the attitudes certain educators assume about writing. In accordance to Elliott, Lang suggests it is the educator’s responsibility to

motivate students and some approaches to this include: acknowledging students' emotions and exploring opportunities for collaborative learning.

When determining what elements of teaching I wanted to focus on, I realized that before I could ask my students to complete a specific standard, I would have to appeal to purpose. The idea behind the implementation fan-fiction is that whatever students produce has an emotional urgency to it. In other words, outside of the academic and cognitive demands, students would be experiencing a type of learning centered on positive possibilities that would ultimately culminate in the inculcation of target skills. "Students need regular invocations of the larger purpose of individual exercises, class periods, and course units" (185). This means that invoking knowledge, practice activities and the execution of course requirements have to all be done with the acknowledgment that cognitive strategies will require students' understanding its purpose and a disposition from the educator to remind them with activities that appeal answer to their emotions.

Collaborative work creates an advantage to the acknowledgement of emotion that is often overlooked. Lang explains that emotions are contagious and collaborative work should not just be exclusively amongst students. Lectures regarding class material are inevitable, but the truth is they can distract students from their purpose. Making sure that students have input in class discussions make the experience of learning a social endeavor. However, there is an undeniably positive effect on students working together before to engaging in discussions with the entire class and the educator. "Give students who are working in groups the opportunity to tackle shared challenges that force them to rely on one another and cooperate like the social animals they are" (190). Certain texts may inspire certain emotions, and sometimes it is better to let students exchange thoughts

and opinions amongst themselves before exploring the text more critically. The collaborative and social process is essential because it challenges students to talk about their experiences and demonstrate their understanding, which again corresponds to Bloom's order of learning.



## Chapter Three: Methodology

### *Introduction*

This research is divided into three units; each designed to guide participants towards applying their creativity and insightful knowledge of the characters they chose into three different literary genres. The intent behind this was to enhance participants reading and writing abilities through analytical and creative endeavors. The three literary units that comprise this study are short stories, poetry and drama. Each unit is accompanied by an introduction of the genre and its elements followed by examples in the form of fan-fiction. Participants also had to create an online portfolio containing all the work done throughout the research units at the end of unit three.

Previous to the start of the first unit, participants answered a questionnaire, which is the basis for this study, in which they revealed their knowledge, understanding and whether or not they practiced the target areas of this investigation: fan-fiction, writing and reading. The three units abovementioned would provide the tools and opportunities for students to improve their knowledge and practices through the use of fan-fiction. Whether or not they did would be revealed when they answered the questionnaire again as a post measure. It is important to point out that this questionnaire contained questions that corresponded to the purpose of this study. Each question attempted to answer the research questions in the introduction chapter and participants' answers from pre to post-questionnaire would vary depending on the effect the research units had on the target areas.

This chapter will give a detailed account of the procedures that were followed in realizing this study. Before elaborating on the elements and activities that make up each

unit, this chapter will provide a brief overview of the necessary steps that had to be taken before conducting the study in the classroom with the participants. The first step being writing a proposal that would justify the study and determine the areas of research. The second step was complying with the requirements established by the University of Puerto Rico's Office of Graduate Studies (OGS). Step three was administering the questionnaire. This step would be repeated at the end of the three research units as a post-study step. And finally, the introductory steps that would acquaint participants with fan-fiction through discussions on pop-culture and the elaboration of activities that would orientate the entire classroom on the character that each participant chose to work with.

*Step one: Proposal and Graduate Department Requirements*

Designing a three-unit investigation was contingent on complying with a series of requirements set by the University of Puerto Rico's Office of Graduate Studies (OGS). Once a concrete idea of what was going to be explored in this thesis project was formalized, a detailed proposal was written containing the methodology, research questions and multiple sources in the review of literature that supported the main objective. The proposal was written over the course of one semester with the purpose of ensuring an understanding of how to go about researching in an English classroom, as well as a comprehensive review of available sources which sustained my claims and guided the ideas. After completing the proposal, the thesis committee provided feedback and editing: after all changes proposed by the committee were affected, the proposal was submitted to OGS.

The proposal is an essential component in completing the necessary paper work and procedures which preceded this study. Considering this research investigation would

involve human subjects, coursework was required for the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) as well as approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process consisted of filling out a form describing how participants in this research study would be affected by the investigation. The objectives - which were expressed in the form – were to analyze participants’ reading and writing habits and submit them to an alternative form of reading and writing that would not be physically harmful to their well being. The research questions were understood as not being conducive to anything other than those above. It was submitted and confirmation of approval from IRB received.

*Step two: Questionnaire*

Before introducing participants to the various concepts to be discussed and explored throughout the research process, a questionnaire was administered to examine participants’ knowledge on fan-fiction and learn about their reading and writing habits. The questions asked if they were familiar with fan-fiction, could they provide examples, and if they knew what it was, would they say writing fan-fiction helped in improving their writing and literacy skills. The questions also inquired about the regularity with which they participated in writing and reading activities, and if there were specific genres they preferred. The same survey was administered at the end of the third and final unit.

*Step three: What is Pop Culture?*

One of the many reasons fan-fiction has become so popular over the last decade is pop culture. Most fan-fiction forums are opened to virtually all mediums and every genre within it. When it comes to movies, you can find fan-fiction on blockbuster hits, classics, cult favorites and even not so popular movies that have somehow managed to cultivate a strong enough following. The same applies to television. Even reality T.V. has found

traction amongst fans that also enjoy dabbling in creative writing. Exposure to mass media – a daily occurrence that has redefined the terms and standards of popular culture – has fostered a channel through which audiences can easily relate to or dismiss any information or personality; and in a given context – such as an English classroom – this exposure is what initiates discussions pertaining to both an individual’s specific interests and their reasoning for dismissing certain sources. For instance, social networks have opened spaces in which subscribers can participate of conversations about politics, celebrities or current world news. These conversations can be used as topics in the classroom to spark discussion and determine relevant content.

The first step of this investigation was ensuring participants understood what pop culture is and how it influenced their daily lives. Participants had to define pop culture without any prior research on the topic. Their definition was determined by their experiences and unique perspective. Each definition was addressed in class and every participant was offered an opportunity to comment and add to the overall discussion of each description.

A critical consideration of pop culture as a precursor to analyzing characters and writing fan-fiction opened the classroom space to discussions about immediate resources and the information they communicate through both implicit and explicit means. Improving awareness of social messages suggested by popular culture and mass media capacitated participants to deconstruct their characters’ narratives and probe with deeper questioning the factors reducing their development to the needs and demands of popular properties. Careful examination of agencies within popular culture also lead to a critical

survey regarding the logic of limiting the exploration of characters and their accounts to an official conclusion.

*Step four: Introduction to Fan-fiction*

The first unit began with an introduction to fan-fiction. Chelsea Philpot's article "Fan Fiction Takes Flight" was assigned and participants were asked to analyze the article's cover illustration by Michael Byers. The article was used to discuss how fan-fiction creates spaces for self-exploration and identification. The purpose of this was for participants to see fan-fiction for its effects rather than just its definition. Since part of the investigation would consider potential long-term effects reading and writing fan-fiction would have on students, Philpot's commentaries on fan-fiction forums were utilized as milieus to instill awareness of the positive outcomes identified with association to fan-fiction.

Chelsea Philpot's article also supplied multiple online resources which participants were asked to explore on their own, such as: [fanfiction.net](http://fanfiction.net), [figment.com](http://figment.com) and [fictionalley.org](http://fictionalley.org). Another important site referenced by Philpot was [chillingeffets.org](http://chillingeffets.org) ([lumendatabase.org](http://lumendatabase.org)). This database is an operational source for legal complaints urging the removal of online material. Considering that borrowing of pre-existing fictional worlds is the overall intention of fanfic writing, participants had to be made aware of the complicated issues regarding trademark and copyright, something that aligned itself with academic integrity. The purpose of this section in Philpot's article was to highlight the divide between certain authors who appreciate and welcome fan-fiction from those who would rather audiences create their own characters and stories. The objectives were to clarify the academic intent behind the use of fan-fiction in the classroom, which included

a conversation about plagiarism, and to expose the limitations fan-fiction has presented and the measures its writers have had to take to protect their creative endeavors.

Michael Byer's illustration was used to demonstrate a graphic definition of fan-fiction. The illustration shows a man dressed as Harry Potter wearing Batman's mask and cape, signing autographs for his book *Harry Potter is Batman*. The image was analyzed and used to contemplate one of the numerous functionalities of fan-fiction writing: crossover narratives, which would be explored more thoroughly in the third unit.

Finally, participants had to read three sketches from a *The Hunger Games* fan-fiction supplier (fanfiction.net): "From Tribute to Victor" by Kiha, "The Games of Annie" by Kiha and "Rue's Goodbye" by Northendownpour1231. Questions about characters and plots were asked to assess their understanding of storytelling before going into the elements of story discourse. Comments were exchanged about each one of the sketches, and then each short narrative critically analyzed, and methodically studied as a fanfic.

#### *Step five: Character Presentation*

The three research units of this investigation focused on character development. Students were asked to pick a character from popular culture (movies, television shows, video games, or books), one whose timeline with which they were familiar with. They created a brief profile of the character and presented it to the rest of the class; focusing on the character's personality as well as the conflicts he or she has experienced in their development.

Writing workshops took place in the classroom for participants to develop analytical and reflective pieces exhibiting an insightful understanding of who their

character is. One workshop focused on the character's interpersonal relationships in which participants detailed meaningful interactions between the character and other characters in their world. Another workshop focused on character conflicts. Since one character can often be exposed to various conflicts in one singular narrative, participants emphasized the significant problems that have developed in their character's storyline and examine how each problem was resolved or, if applicable, how their character failed to achieve a resolution. The last workshop had participants write a compare and contrast paper – founded on Jonathan Cohen's theories on identification – in which they compared themselves to their character: physical characteristics, experiences and personality traits.

### *Research Units*

In unit one (short story) of the investigation, participants worked with “ the ending.” Considering some of these characters had an ongoing narrative – franchise characters – participants worked with the conclusion, which in this case can be considered as the resolution to a specific plot line, of a particular conflict in the life of the character and rewrote it. The second unit (poetry) focused on the character's life before being introduced to the narrative and on making sense of gaps within the character's narrative, theorizing about what the characters could have been doing when they were not present in the storyline. Here is where participants had to make inferences based on the information afforded to them by the original author. And finally, the final unit (drama) worked with exploring interpersonal relationships with characters outside of their world.

<b>Unit 1: Short Story</b>	<b>Unit 2: Poetry</b>	<b>Unit 3: Drama</b>
<p>Students work individually:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Elements of the story</li> <li>2) Rewrite the ending</li> <li>3) Analytical paper justifying reasons for new ending</li> </ol>	<p>Students work individually:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Make inferences about missing information in character's narrative</li> <li>2) Write poem exploring gaps in character's story</li> <li>3) Explicatory essay explaining poem and poetic devices</li> </ol>	<p>Students work in groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Explore character interpersonal relationships in groups</li> <li>2) Write short drama piece (play) crossing over characters from different worlds</li> <li>3) Perform play</li> </ol>

Figure 1: Research Units Overview



### *Unit one: Character Analysis and Rewriting the Ending*

Analysis was a major factor in this study. Direct and close observation of characters and their storylines served as the main tool in the process of writing meaningful fan-fiction. Though it was understood that participants would select and examine characters based on a pre-existing relationship between the two; analysis encouraged a more thorough study of who these characters are and their significance. Familiarity with their narrative as well as their origin (both within their storyline and prior to their existence) was key. Participants were asked to introduce their character in a profile presentation containing information, such as: medium in which character is presented, species (human, animal, mythical creature, etc.), relevant personality traits and character conflict.

Making connections was also a fundamental part of the analytical process. Participants would most likely pick a character that reflects either a quality within themselves or a significant experience. Justifying their selection would not only provide context for a general understanding of their creative decisions, but also facilitate a defense for why they chose their character.

Following character profiles, participants were asked to write a different ending to one of their character's plotlines. In doing this, students had to consider every factor available in the text that determined the events leading to the end. It was important that participants understood that these events could not be altered. Instead, they would have to analyze them in terms of cause and effect and theorize a new conclusion that would fit into the sequence and could be justified by the character's previous course of action.

Doing this required a separation of singular preference from academic priority that would result in a studious manifestation of critical reconfiguration.

Realizing the analytical process would take time; a few sessions were allotted to introduce participants to the elements of the short story, considering their ending rewrite would be in the form of such. Since the element of character had already been in discussion, and it was the driving force of this and all units, character conflict (man vs. man, man vs. nature and man vs. himself) was reviewed and it was explained to participants that in rewriting the ending they would not be reintroducing conflict, but instead, they would propose a different solution. Plot was discussed, and many participants expressed confusion about how to differentiate between the plot of the existing narrative and their rewrite. It was clarified that their rewrite would be a separate story and therefore required a thread of events that viewed independently from the main source would interconnect into a singular narrative. Participants were also reminded that in rewriting the ending they would have to reference the character's situation and move towards a new resolution, so the content in between – whatever new events they decided to postulate leading to their conclusion – would essentially be the plot of their rewrite.

Accompanying their ending rewrite, participants had to write an analytical paper in which they justified the questions and observations that led to them determining what ending was more appropriate for their character. The essay had to be a five-paragraph paper (1 paragraph for introduction, 3 for body and 1 for conclusion, minimum) in which participants examined the pre-existing parts of their subject (character) and justified their creative work (short story). They were asked to look at all the information they had

gathered on their character, consider the significant causes that lead the original author to their decisions and explain their reinterpretation.

### *Unit two: Filling Gaps and Explanation*

Unit two consisted of an even a more explorative analysis of the character. The concept of “filling gaps” was introduced as an investigative tool. Participants were asked to review their character’s narrative, from the moment they were first presented, to every subsequent event connecting their beginning and end within the text. They would deconstruct the character’s storyline, searching for information that could better explain reasoning, course of action and emotional or psychological stamina. If this information did not appear, students then had to make inferences about certain decisions and experiences.

A reasonable period of time was assigned for character in-depth analysis. In the meantime, poetic devices were introduced to participants along with a lesson on how to utilize them in writing poetry. The process consisted of various levels: 1) introducing simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole and alliteration 2) reading, discussing and analyzing the usage of these devices in a selection of poems 3) applying understanding of devices. Two types of poetry were discussed: 4 verse with rhyme and free verse. “Lucy Gray” by William Wordsworth was used for 4 verse with rhyme and “After the Sea-Ship” by Walt Whitman, “Washed Away” by Katherine Foreman and “Disappointments” by Vivian Gilbert Zabel for free verse and poetic devices. It would have been ideal to use fan-fiction poetry to exemplify these devices, but there were not many options available that employed these tools. Fan-fiction poetry was instead used in the next phase.

Finding fan-fiction poetry online was as easy as finding short stories, chapter stories, vignettes and complete fan created novels. Participants were shown once again how easy it was for them to use any search engine to find pages such as fanfiction.net, which offered works in all genres of literary writing. As done in the previous unit, various poems were read and scrutinized in class, focusing on how each writer used poetry to explore their character or universe with a more insightful approach than allowed by the original source material. Participants were also asked to consider if the poetic devices discussed in class were used.

The second unit's final phase challenged participants to write either a 4 verse with rhyme or free verse poem with at least three poetic devices in which they filled in gaps in their character's narrative by conjecturing from what universal knowledge already existed on the character. Along with their poem, they had to turn in an explication essay explaining their inferences as well as their choices in poetic devices and how they exercised these.

### *Unit three: Crossover (Interpersonal Relationships)*

The final unit focused on participants' characters' interpersonal relationships. To carry out this unit, participants worked in groups. The collaborative process would not only allow them to continue expanding acquaintance with their characters, but it would also challenge them to determine how their character would maneuver situations characterized by features and people not pertinent to their story. In this unit, participants were asked to create a short play involving the characters each group member had been working on since unit one. This unit was inevitably shorter than the first two since it involved cooperative effort and required much less work from students individually.

The dividing of groups was done randomly. Each student was assigned a number from 1 to 4 and 4 groups were formed comprised of 4 to 5 participants. One class was designed to give participants a chance to share information about their characters and ask questions. The second class was for them to brainstorm ideas. They were asked to create a situation and have all their characters interact with one another within that particular set of circumstances. After that, participants worked from home at developing their storylines, writing their play and preparing to present it in class.

#### *Research Units Conclusion: Portfolio*

Most fan-fiction exists online. A very important part of this process was having participants understand how easily accessible fan-fiction can be if they were to further experiment with the genre on their own. It was also important for the researcher to have their work together in a place that was both simple to navigate and accommodating to the organization of their own collection of fan-fiction work. Having worked with the blog site Weebly, it was decided to have participants create their own account and create a blog that would serve as their electronic portfolio.

The portfolio would comprise all work done throughout all three units. Each participant had to create their own blog including the following categories: a brief bio, character information, character analysis and creative work. In character information students had to include their presentation on the character and any additional information they deemed necessary about their character. For the character analysis tab, participants had to include their analytical essays (analytical and explication). And on creative work, they had to upload their short story reimagining their character's ending, the poem filling character gaps and the collaborative drama piece.

## Chapter Four: Findings

### *Introduction*

This research explored the writing and reading dynamics of an English college level course at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus and the relevancy of fan-fiction in the practice of both. Most of the investigation challenged a group of ten students – 50% female and 50% male – to participate in actual writing and reading activities in the genre of fan-fiction. The results of these activities helped answer the research questions presented in the introduction chapter – which will be discussed in conclusions chapter. However, as detailed in the methodology chapter students were asked to answer a pre and post test of ten survey questions total before and after covering the three units of this investigation (short story, poetry and drama). This chapter will show participants’ answers to both questionnaires.

*Pre-questionnaire Question 1: Do you know what fan-fiction is? If yes, give an example.*

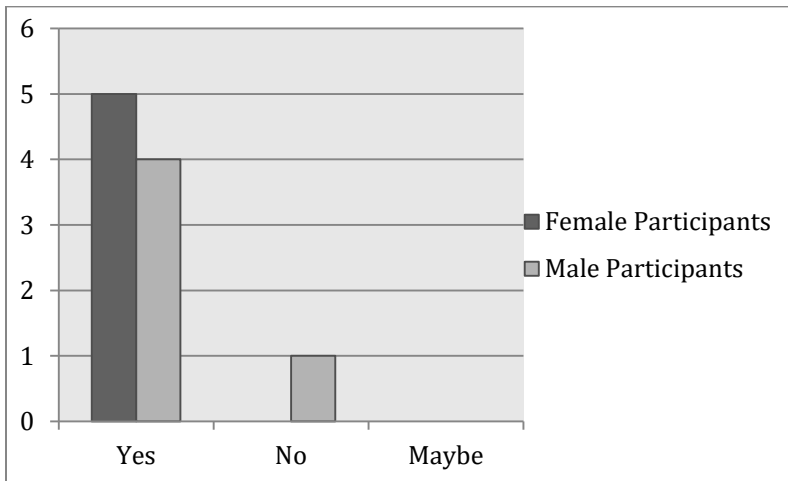


Figure 2: Question 1 (Pre-questionnaire)

Question 1 was intended to measure the possibility of pre-existing knowledge of fan-fiction. As demonstrated by Figure 1, 90% of participants were familiar with the research subject. Their answers displayed various degrees of comprehension, varying

between general definitions and specific examples. Some answers were analogous with chief components of research units 1 and 2 with 30% of participants explaining that fan-fiction was a way of continuing a story after it ended – assertion relevant to research unit 1. Their answers stated it was necessary for the “follower” to be acquainted with relevant details about the ending and the characters’ resolutions to properly develop his or her theories into a work of fan-fiction. Interestingly enough, this emphasis on the ending was not the only component of this research investigation present in participants’ answers. One participant also answered that fan-fiction was a tool for enthusiasts to elaborate on their inferences and predictions about a story or its characters.

Only 20% of participants – both females – were able to give examples. Their answer referenced *Fifty Shades of Grey* as an example. E.L. James New York Times Bestseller was originally a work of fan-fiction – “Master of the Universe – that evolved into a novel. Though not regarded as the best example of fan-fiction, James’ novel is inarguably the most successful and popular model of the extents fan-fiction can reach. Another interesting fact revealed by one participant was that James’ story was formerly a series of fan-made narratives inspired by Stephanie Meyer’s *Twilight*. It was no surprise that participants would be aware of this information considering that both *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Twilight* have become prevalent forces in current popular culture. One participant claimed to know what fan-fiction is but his example was vague and therefore did not corroborate whether he knew or not.

*Post-questionnaire Question 1: Do you know what fan-fiction is? If yes, give an example.*

After completing all research units, participants demonstrated a more definitive level of comprehension regarding fan-fiction.

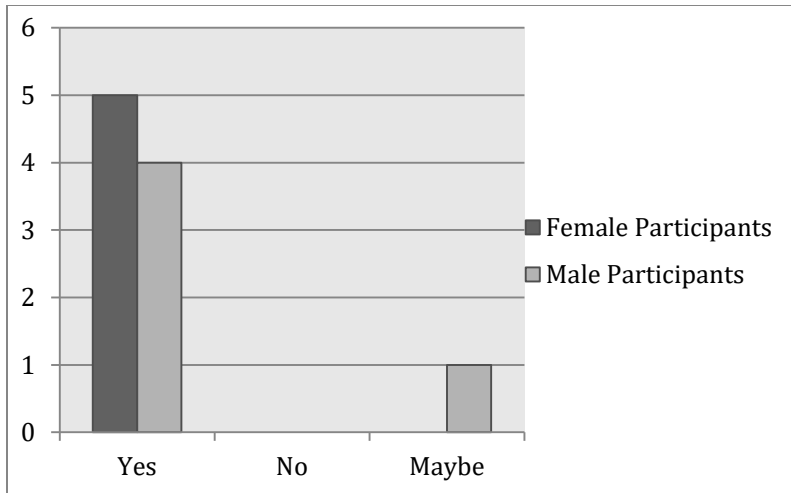


Figure 3: Question 1 (Post-questionnaire)

More participants were able to provide examples in the post-questionnaire than in the pre-questionnaire. Applying knowledge acquired through class discussions and independent research into their responses, with the majority defining fan-fiction as a story made by fans, participants were able to offer a more concrete answer. A 50% of participants explained that fan-fiction starts with a fan’s appreciation for a story and his or her desire to either extend the narrative from where it was concluded or return to an event within it and rewrite it. One participant prioritized the element of character, stating the importance of keeping the character’s personality intact even when altering their background or filling gaps in the master narrative; 30% of participants mentioned *Fifty Shades of Grey* as an example – a few even pointed out its connection to *Twilight* – while one participant named a fan-fiction story discovered independently, “The Beast Side of Me,” based on The CW’s *Beauty and the Beast*. Only one male participant failed to provide a substantial definition and example.



*Pre-questionnaire Question 2: Do you think fan-fiction can be used in the English classroom?*

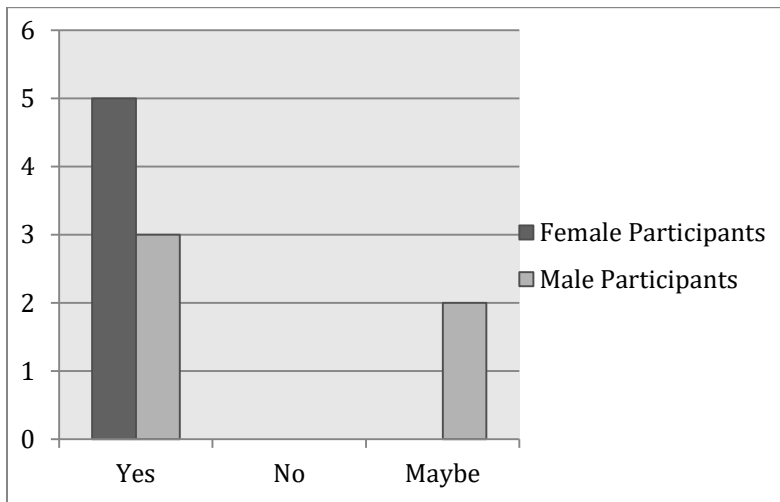


Figure 4: Question 2 (Pre-questionnaire)

Question 2 was an extension of question 1. It was designed to further assess participants' understanding of fan-fiction, specifically its potential in an English based course. Most participants (80%) answered "yes" with an emphasis on how fan-fiction would help them be creative and explore characters more thoroughly. One participant even considered it as an alternative practice to motivate students to read conventional narratives and explore them with fewer constraints. Aside from it being a creative procedure, participants also validated it as an initiative for improving writing skills, a few stating that fan-fiction could institute an auxiliary learning approach for them to practice writing while remaining interested in the content of their writing. Only 20% of participants gave a "maybe" answer. One established a need for a goal, incorporating an implied concern for academic standards and fan-fiction's ability to meet these. The second participant maintained that the use of fan-fiction should not be limited to characters students are already familiar with and follow, but rather to examine new ones.

*Post-questionnaire Question 2: Do you think fan-fiction can be used in the English classroom?*

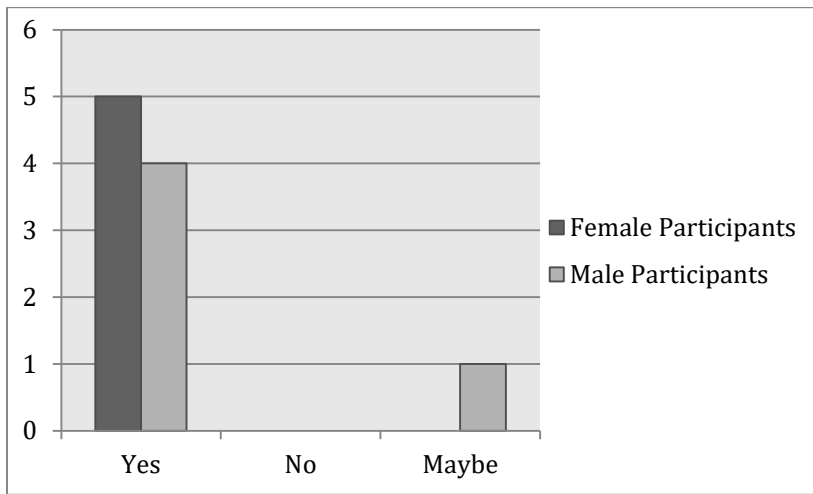


Figure 5: Question 2 (Post-questionnaire)

Post-questionnaire answers reaffirmed statements made by participants in pre-questionnaire. Participants sustained that the use of fan-fiction in the classroom was a relevant resource for them to deconstruct narratives and employ their creativity in class-related activities and discussions. Two concepts were mentioned to describe the effectiveness of fan-fiction in a classroom setting: perspective and point of view. Participants experienced opportunities to share their unique perspectives and consider their peers' point of view. They also felt more comfortable sharing ideas in a format that allowed for both their perspective and point of view to take precedent. Two participants (20%) reinstated the appropriateness of fan-fiction in the academic sense, asserting that fan-fiction did help improve writing skills and create conversations amongst students pertinent to course related materials. The one male participant that answered "maybe" believed fan-fiction could be used to make classroom dynamics more varied, but not overused.

*Pre-questionnaire Question 3: How often do you write?*

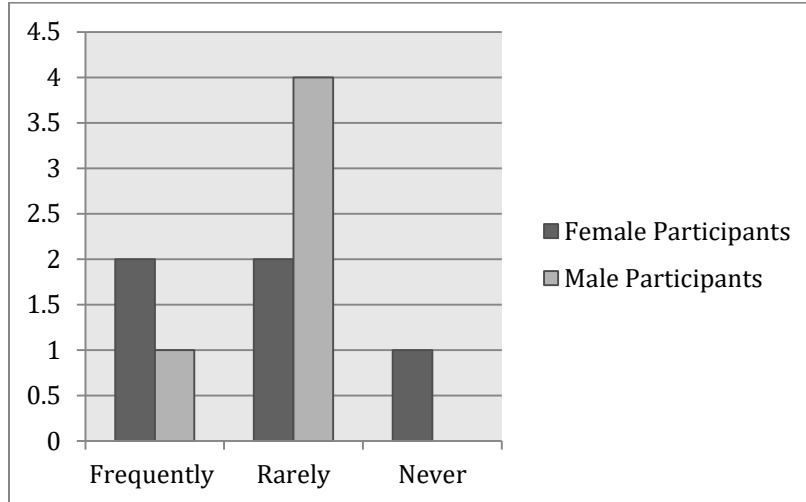


Figure 6: Question 3 (Pre-questionnaire)

Question 3 focused on the writing aspect of this investigation. Participants' answers varied but remained under one of the three following categories: academic writing, personal writing and social media writing. Pre-questionnaire Question 4 elaborates on these findings.

*Pre-questionnaire Question 4: Explain the reason or purpose why you write.*

Participants who answered within the “frequently” range (20%) categorized themselves as academic and personal writers. Their answers revealed writing to be a practice executed mostly as a form of expression. Answers that classified as “rarely” mostly fell under academic writing. In their answers, participants used words such as “forced to” and “assignments.” Only a 20% of participants in this range admitted to occasionally writing on a personal level to express their thoughts or challenge their creativity. One female participant admitted to not being an active writer but rather an active reader.

*Post-questionnaire Question 3: How often do you write?*

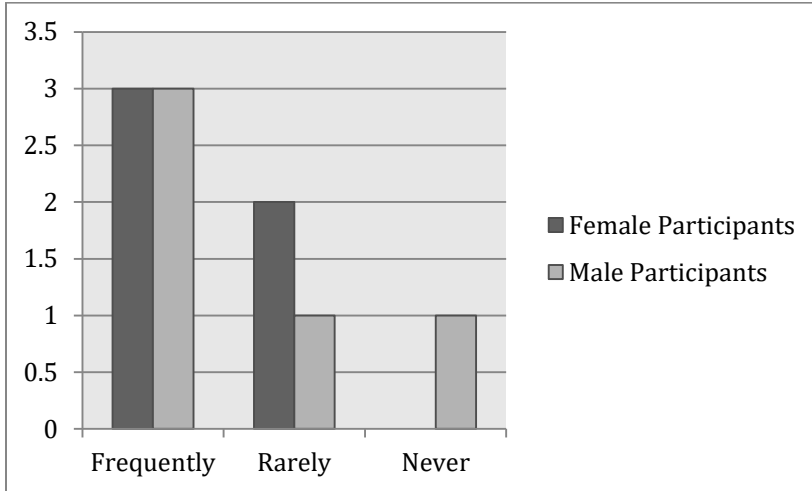


Figure 7: Question 3 (Post-questionnaire)

Comparing the pre and post questionnaire charts immediately reveals significant changes in participants' response. Regardless of doing so personally or academically, more participants were now acknowledging themselves as frequent writers. Participants who answered within the "rarely" range were able to identify purpose. Post-questionnaire Question 4 elaborates on these findings.

*Post-questionnaire Question 4: Explain the reason or purpose why you write.*

The percentage of participants who answered within the "frequently" range doubled compared to the pre-questionnaire – 60% from a 30%. This group was able to give a concrete answer that explained the purpose with which they wrote. Half of participants in this range (30%) stated personal reasons as their purpose. The other 30% explained their reasons to be personal as well but characterized them as being part of their involvement with social media rather than to express themselves. Participants who answered within the "rarely" range (30%) stated they either felt uncomfortable writing on a daily basis or only wrote for academic reasons. One male participant acknowledged he wrote more than he did at the beginning of the research investigation; however, he did not

consider himself to be a frequent writer. The one male participant who fell under the “never” range observed he only writes when he has to send a text message and never for any other purpose. Compared to other answers that acknowledged academic writing as a purpose, his established that despite the obvious pedagogical requirements in the area of writing he did not consider meeting said requirements to mean he was a frequent writer.

*Pre-questionnaire Question 5: Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?*

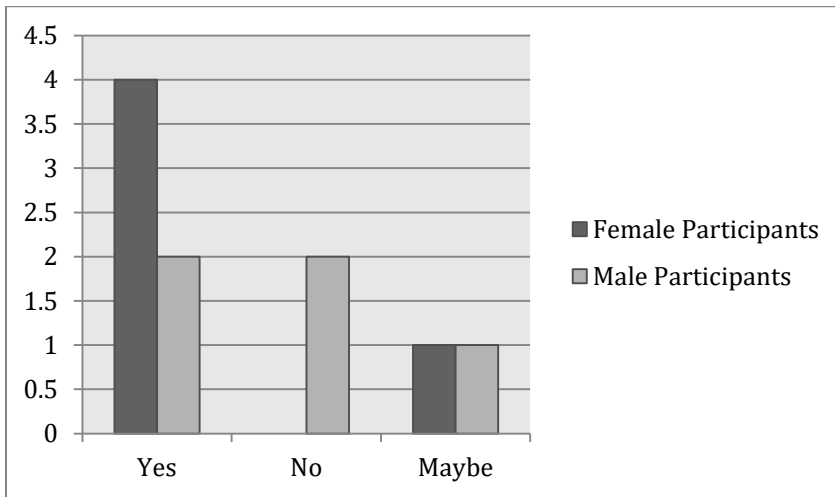


Figure 8: Question 5 (Pre-questionnaire)

Questions 3 and 4 intended to evaluate the frequency with which participants wrote as well as whether or not they actually did. Taking into consideration that participants would most likely attribute their writing to scholarly demands, question 5 was created to inquire about how students felt about writing as oppose to the reasons why they did or did not write. Three participants (30%) repeated that writing was a way for them to express themselves. Three (30%) said they enjoyed writing as long as they were either familiar with the subject and the language. Participants who answered “no” (20%) were straightforward with their answer and explained they did not enjoy writing but understood writing could be a good pass time and a resource to release as much

thoughtful content as possible. Two participants (20%) conveyed conditional responses. Both disclosed they only enjoyed writing when the content was of personal interest.

*Post-questionnaire Question 5: Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?*

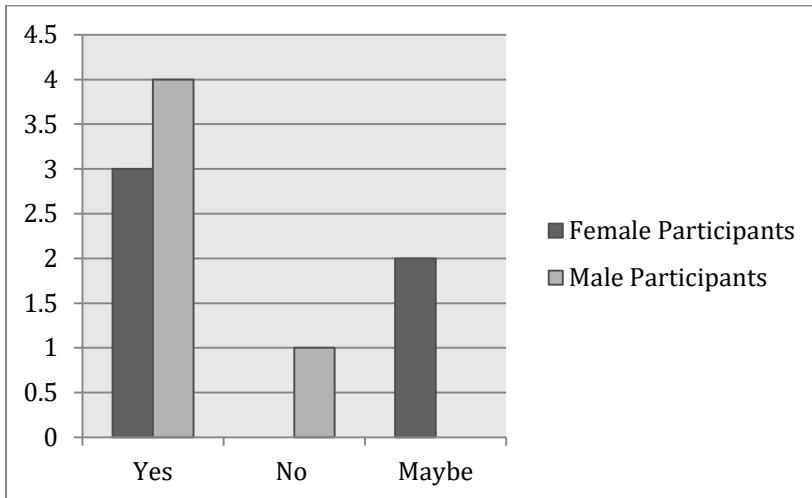


Figure 9: Question 5 (Post-questionnaire)

The difference in responses between the pre and post questionnaire is drastic. The percentage of male participants who answered “yes” doubled. They all characterized writing as a tool for self-expression. The percentage of female participants who answered “yes” dropped by 10% and they also agreed that they wrote to express feelings, thoughts and opinions. Participants who answered “maybe” (20%) once again stated that they enjoy writing when the subject is pertinent to their interests. The one participant who answered “no” asserted that writing has become saturated and that academic pursuits have removed passion from any writing intent.

*Pre-questionnaire Question 6: Do you think fan-fiction will help you improve your writing skills? How?*

Question 2 was designed to measure participants' thoughts on using fan-fiction in a language-learning environment. Question 6, on the other hand, gauged their thoughts on how fan-fiction could help them enhance their writing skills.

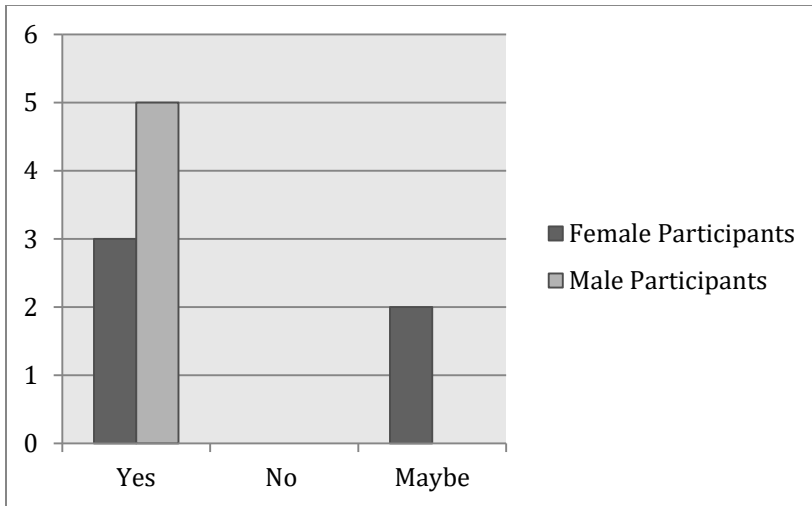


Figure 10: Question 6 (Pre-questionnaire)

Participants who answered “yes” (80%) elaborated on two main reasons: practicing writing conventionalities and creativity. Three of the participants who answered “yes” (30%) explained that fan-fiction would eventually help them control their English writing skills and learn how to properly develop these through storytelling. The other 50% considered fan-fiction to be a fun and creative way to put out ideas and consequently upgrade their capacities. The 20% that answered “maybe” thought fan-fiction as writing and therefore an inevitable way to improve pre-existing skills, yet they were uncertain or unable to provide a specific answer as to how.

*Post-questionnaire Question 6: Do you think fan-fiction will help you improve your writing skills? How?*

As opposed to the pre-questionnaire, all 10 participants answered “yes” in the post-questionnaire. The reasons did not change: 60% answered that it was a way to practice writing in general and 40% answered it was a positive exercise in creativity. One participant explained that fan-fiction allowed for language-learning opportunities such as learning new vocabulary. Another participant stated that fan-fiction did improve his writing by opening up his thinking process to different point of views. A third participant described how fan-fiction required proofreading and editing which conversely allowed her to modify her writing practices.

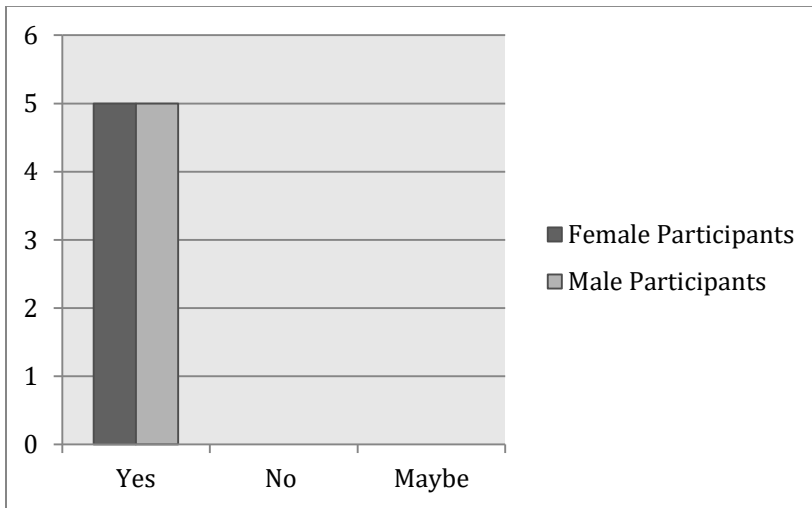


Figure 11: Question 6 (Post-questionnaire)



*Pre-questionnaire Question 7: How often do you read?*

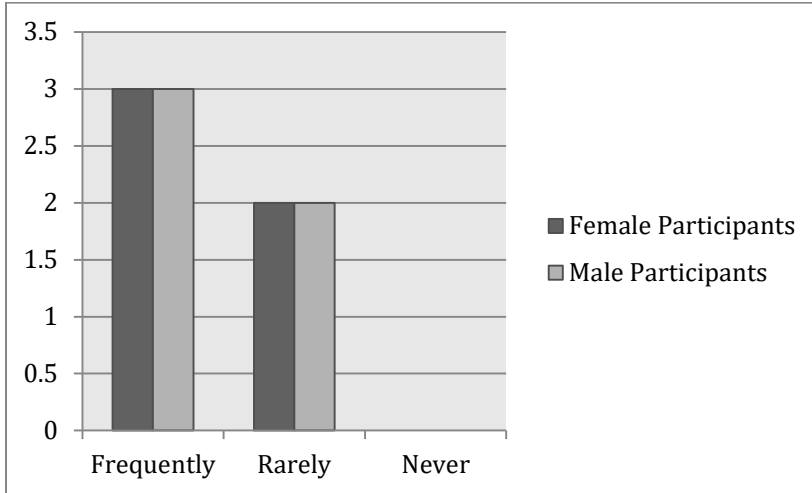


Figure 12: Question 7 (Pre-questionnaire)

The final four questions regarded the second aspect of this research investigation: reading. Question 7 measured the frequency with which participants read. Most of them (60%) answered within the “frequently” range. Specific answers about what materials participants read fluctuated between comic books, news articles and books. Some participants (20%) stated they read everyday but did not specify what exactly. One participant revealed a preference for reading in Spanish over English. Participants who answered within the “rarely” range mostly did not divulge specific reasons explaining their intermittent reading patterns. However, two participants did attribute occasional reading to academic requirements and relevancy of source material.

*Post-questionnaire Question 7: How often do you read?*

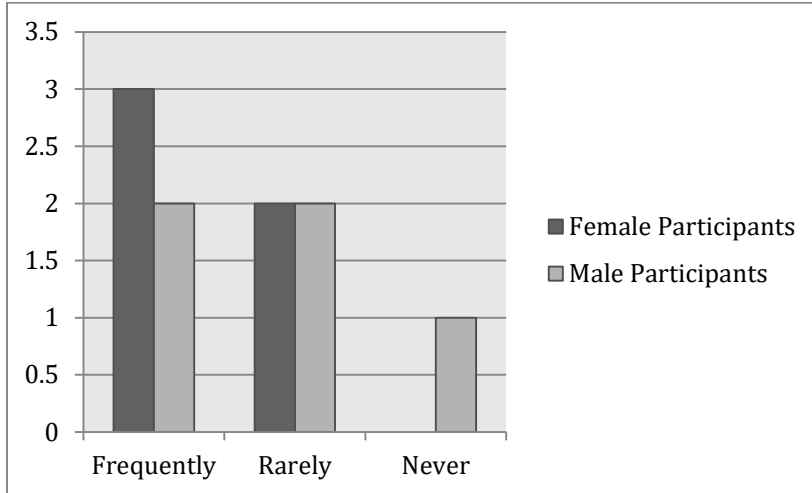


Figure 13: Question 7 (Post-questionnaire)

The percentage per range did not suffer a significant adjustment. However, the reasons stated by participants did change. In the pre-questionnaire participants who answered within the “frequently” range provided examples of the materials they read independently. The post-questionnaire showed that 30% of participants consider themselves frequent readers because of academia. One participant who had characterized herself as a frequent reader answered within the “rarely” range, stating that college work has limited the time available for self-directed reading. Two participants whose answers fell within “frequently” accredited their reading to social media and technological means of communication such as text messaging. Only one participant answered that he did not consider himself to be a reader at all unless it had to do with social media and texting.

*Pre-questionnaire Question 8: Do you have a particular genre you like to read?*

Question 8 had the purpose of creating awareness of participants’ individual inclinations. Their responses were diverse and unique with one participant mentioning fan-fiction as a genre of preference. Some were able to give a name to the actual genre of

their predilection, while others gave a description of what they enjoy to read rather than categorizing their likings into existing genres. Only one participant did not provide an answer, stating she did not favor a specific genre.

*Post-questionnaire Question 8: Do you have a particular genre you like to read?*

Answers between the pre and post questionnaire did not really change. Participants who described genres rather than mention them were able to classify their preferences under a given genre. The one participant who did not provide an answer supplied multiple genres as part of her response. And the only participant who had previously mentioned fan-fiction sustained the genre as part of his choices.

*Pre-questionnaire Question 9: What is your favorite book? Why?*

Reading is fundamentally – when it is not conditioned by academia – rooted on personalized selection. Participants' answers exhibited a diversified pool of explanations for defining what makes a book their favorite. Two participants explained how their favorite book contained good storytelling. One male participant said he appreciates a book that teaches the reader a lesson. Another pointed out character conflict and how his favorite book made it easy for him to relate to the character because of the corresponding conflict. Two female participants described their favorite books as accommodating to a combination of elements and genres that were both complicated and fun. Two participants said they did not have a favorite book.

*Post-questionnaire Question 9: What is your favorite book? Why?*

Answers did not vary between pre and post questionnaire. Two participants change their favorite book while only one of the two who had previously not offered one gave an answer. The reasons justifying their choices remained the same in general.

*Pre-questionnaire Question 10: Do you think fan-fiction will motivate you to read more?*

*Explain.*

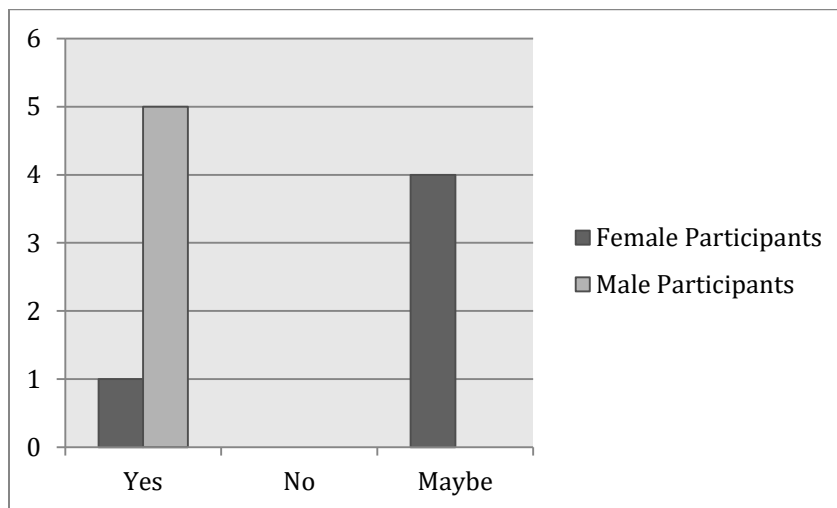


Figure 14: Question 10 (Pre-questionnaire)

Similarly to question 6, question 10 measured participants' knowledge of fan-fiction and whether or not it could help them acquire or enhance substantial reading habits. All male participants (50%) agreed fan-fiction could work as a motivator to read more. Amongst their reasons they explained that fan-fiction allowed for further involvement with a character, especially if the author illustrated such character correctly. Another aspect of fan-fiction once again mentioned was that of creative possibilities. One male participant stated that fan-fiction offered writers and readers a forum to explore creativity limitlessly. Female participants were a bit more tentative. Their concerns were supported by the repeated notion of personal interest. They did not give a "yes" or "no"

answer because reading to them happens if they find themselves interested in the content. One female participant stated she had been reading fan-fiction for a few years and agreed that it is a source for encouraging reading.

*Post-questionnaire Question 10: Do you think fan-fiction will motivate you to read more?*

*Explain.*

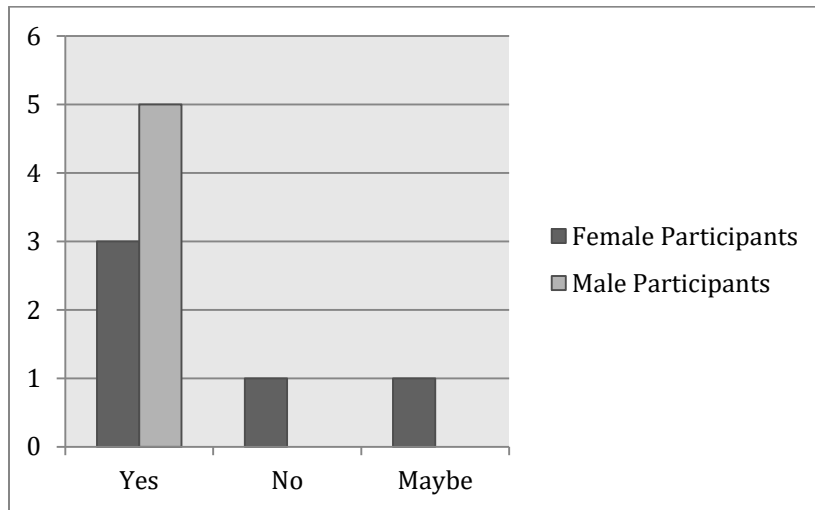


Figure 15: Question 10 (Post-questionnaire)

Male participants' responses remained the same. Female participants, however, produced more concrete answers based on their experience throughout the research investigation. Male participants sustained that fan-fiction was a way for them to continue a relationship with characters and worlds. One participant appreciated how reading fan-fiction gives fans license to expand their theories and expel them creatively. Two female participants agreed with this quality, one adding that it can also create the space for comparing such theories with the purpose of seeing if they agree or disagree with personal theories. Another male participant said fan-fiction was fun to read because there is a higher consideration for expression rather than structure. The one female participant who answered "maybe" did so under the condition that whatever she read, fan-fiction or

not, had to appeal to her first and foremost. Only one participant answered “no,” remarking that fan-fiction just did not interest her because she preferred reading characters as the original authors intended them to be.

## Chapter Five: Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to present an alternative learning method for students to develop their reading and writing skills. Through carefully conducted research and classroom practices, answers regarding the effectiveness of fan-fiction were compiled. This chapter will answer the research questions provided in the introduction chapter, limitations of the study, pedagogical implications and include areas for further research.

*Research Question 1: How can fan-fiction improve language proficiency in the English classroom?*

It is essential to restore the fact that all ten participants of this research investigation were students from the University of Puerto Rico and all speak Spanish as primary language. The implications of this factor are significant in constructing a legitimate answer to this research question. Many students expressed a preference for Spanish reading and writing activities over English. This implied a series of limitations that were not necessarily of a language deficiency nature but rather of a lack of practice in the target language and the areas pertinent to this study. The following research questions and answers explain how language proficiency was stimulated through this study.

*Research Question a: How does fan-fiction facilitate writing?*

Fan-fiction – unlike most academically standardized writing – invites creativity and a broadened sense of imagination. Both features involve a self-determining standard in which the author in charge of the story establishes rules and course of action. The reason this facet of fan-fiction appeals to students is simple: they can employ their

writing competence without intimidating boundaries. This in no way suggests that their work would not be supplemented with other educational strategies. As explained in the methodology chapter, each research unit was accompanied by specific lessons regarding academic writing. However, writing fan-fiction facilitated writing by not supposing expectations regarding comprehension. Participants wrote about what they already knew and felt comfortable expanding upon this knowledge first and then applying higher level learning strategies to critically assess their work.

The idea that fan-fiction could enable writing in a less oppressive manner was validated by participants' responses in the post-questionnaire. There were many skills this research investigation worked towards improving. Participants singled out three main skills: critical thinking, vocabulary learning and revision. Though positive, these answers were unexpected. Participants did not take into consideration composition details such as structure or syntax. They found that writing fan-fiction enhanced their analytical aptitude by encouraging them to study their point of view and fashioning a written reaction – in the form of fan-fiction – to their thinking process. In other words, participants were inspired to write because it was their theories and perspectives what they were writing about.

Vocabulary enhancement was a byproduct that one participant mentioned as being the skill she was able to improve. This particular participant had repeatedly indicated her concerns about writing and reading in English. Writing fan-fiction, as previously mentioned, provided students with creative opportunities that were directly linked to leisure pursuits; and because of this reinforcing resultants such vocabulary betterment were easier to obtained. The same can be said about revision. Excitement over sharing



ideas and points of views resulted in careful proofreading to ensure consistency as well as justifying original source.

*Research Question b: How does engaging in fan-fiction promote reading?*

In regards to reading, participants determined positive outcomes from reading fan-fiction. Though their answers did not determine whether or not they were motivated to read outside the genre, they did provide some fascinating confirmations of the effectiveness of reading fan-fiction. Participants found that reading fan-fiction was congruous with writing fan-fiction in terms of creativity and critical analysis. Fan-fiction's non-constricted nature appealed to participants because it proposed an alternative to explore imaginatively expressed theories and perspectives that connected to their own estimations about existing characters and worlds. It also provided multiple continuations to stories participants invested in and opened them up to analyzing decisions made in those narratives.

*Research Question c: Can fan-fiction encourage student participation?*

Dialogical activities were a predetermined part of this study that all participants were aware of prior to starting. Though none of the questions in the questionnaire asked about dialogue or participation directly, participants considered the practice of fan-fiction to be helpful in creating a space where they were comfortable sharing their ideas. In their answers they stated that in working with their characters and presenting them to the class they became curious about how other participants' ideas and encouraged to convey theirs. Given the fact the some of the reading material utilized in the classroom to exemplify fan-fiction was based on popular characters they were familiar with, participants found it easier to give their opinions and comment on the ideas presented in those narratives.

### *Limitations of Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between content relevancy and reading and writing proficiency. Participants were college level students who had already acquired an intermediate status as English speakers and completed an entire semester course on writing and reading in English prior to partaking in this investigation. Though the target areas were reading and writing, the proposed intention was not to build the foundation of these practices but rather enhance participants' pre-acquired faculties.

### *Pedagogical Implications*

As mentioned in the limitations of study, this research did not intend to establish elementary routines aimed at generating reading and writing skills. Participants had already acquired the basic information and abilities necessary to complete the processes created for the purpose this study. Nonetheless, results do show that despite possessing rudimentary experience and having been involved with more advanced practices in the target areas, participants lacked the motivation to participate in these practices outside or inside academia. The progress that resulted from the comparison of their answers to the pre and post questionnaire attests to the importance of implementing relevant content in order to achieve successful completion of persistent educational requisites. This does not imply that relevancy – or fan-fiction for that matter – should be the focal points of pedagogical instructions as opposed to traditional practices or educational approaches as established by government order. Instead, these findings suggest that exercising small practices that are relevant to students can help condition successful learning.

Furthermore, this was a data-driven investigation, adopting the contents of this study in a different context may yield different results. The pool of participants that partook in this study were not limited or specifically subscribed to any learning diagnosis. Their performance and the information they shared about their skills and practices helped determine progress within the purposive areas of this study and evaluate their effectiveness. Certain aspects of the results obtained in this investigation will undoubtedly vary due to inevitable discrepancies regarding sociocultural features and learning policies.

#### *Areas for Further Research*

The review of literature helped in guiding this study towards an applicable examination that was justified by the needs of the participants and their context. However, many of the concepts reviewed for the purpose of designing the three research units can in isolated form be developed into separate, more extensive research. The two main models that were translated for the purpose of this study and can be adjusted to fit a large or smaller scale investigation were online communities and identification.

Fan-fiction forums exist mostly as online communities. This notion was used to improve classroom dynamics and transfer the dialogical opportunities of online discourse into the classroom. Considered as an independent element and operated purposefully as the primary content of an investigation, creating an online community dedicated to fan-fiction with students would be another way to practice language skills and support students' unique points of view. In this case, the study would be divided into classroom activities involving reading and writing, instruction that includes theory and examples and the creation of an online community by and for the students, which they themselves

will be responsible for administrating and utilizing for the publication of their creative work.

Identification can also be effected into a more exhaustive study. Most writers of fan-fiction have a connection with the world and characters they wrote about. This is essentially the main reason why this study focused on fan-fiction as a means to create relevant discourse. However, identification can be independently studied with a more analytical approach. A critical assessment of identification could have been possible in this study had the purpose been to analyze the choices students made for their characters based on the internalization of their characters' experiences or focusing on the cognitive aspects behind their theories rather than on language skills.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

University of Puerto Rico  
Mayagüez Campus  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Department of English

REQUEST FOR CONSENT

My name is Nelson O. Nazario Toro and I am a student in the Masters program in English Education in the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. As part of my thesis investigation, I am interested in examining how the use of fan-fiction in the English classroom helps promote readings habits and create or enhance writing skills.

Participants of this study will be asked to answer a pre-test before producing any writing, and a post-test after all the work is completed. The study will require you to read various texts throughout the course and participate in both in-group and class discussions about the texts. You will also be asked to create original work in the form of fan-fiction which will be used for analysis in this investigation.

Partaking in this research will not put you at any risk beyond what is normal. None of the activities will involve the potential of physical harm. However, if you agree, you can rescind your agreement to participate at any time. This means your work will not be used as a part of my research, but you will still have to share your work in class. Not agreeing will not excuse anyone from doing the work considering the research will be done as part of a course. All students must comply with the work required for both the investigation and INGL 3104.

The study will start January 2016 and conclude May 2016. If you have any questions about how your work will be used, you can contact me via e-mail at [nelson.nazario@upr.edu](mailto:nelson.nazario@upr.edu) or at my phone number (787) 390-9813.

All the information which could be used for this research requires prior consent. Signing the Request for Consent means you are expressing full understanding of what this investigation entails and agree to participate by your own will.

Thank you,

Nelson O. Nazario Toro

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I agree to participate by my own will.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not agree to participate by my own will.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Pre-test/Post-test**

Answer the following questions carefully.

1. Do you know what fan-fiction is? If yes, give an example.

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2. Do you think fan-fiction can be used in the English classroom?

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3. How often do you write?

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4. Explain the reason or purpose why you write.

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5. Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?

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6. Do you think writing fan-fiction will help you improve your writing skills? How?



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7. How often do you read?

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8. Do you have a particular genre you like to read?

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9. What is your favorite book? Why?

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10. Do you think reading fan-fiction will motivate you to read more? Explain.

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Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter



**Institutional Review Board**  
**CPSHI/IRB 00002053**  
University of Puerto Rico – Mayagüez Campus  
Dean of Academic Affairs  
Call Box 9000  
Mayagüez, PR 00681-9000



December 7, 2015

Nelson Nazario Toro  
English Department  
RUM

Dear Mr. Nazario:

As a member of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Puerto Rico - Mayagüez Campus, I have considered the Review Application for your project titled *Creating a Culture of Participatory Writing and Independent Reading Using Fanfiction* (Protocol num. 20151205). After an evaluation of your protocol, I have determined that your research qualifies for an exempt approval according to Category 1 of 45.CFR.46.101(b).

Remember that any modifications or amendments to the approved protocol or its methodology must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before they are implemented. The IRB must be informed immediately if an adverse event or unexpected problem arises related to the risk to human subjects. The IRB must likewise be notified immediately if any breach of confidentiality occurs.

We appreciate your commitment to uphold the highest standards of human research protections and remain.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rafael A. Boglio Martínez  
President, Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
University of Puerto Rico,  
Mayagüez Campus  
Office: Celis 108  
Tel.: (787) 832-4040 Ext. 6277  
Web Page: <http://www.uprm.edu/cpschi/>