SCHOOLING THE DIRECTIONERS:
Connected Learning and Identity-Making in the One Direction Fandom

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INTRODUCTION

> Why I am on Wattpad? Good question. It's funny. I wasn't even a *Directioner* when I found it, and it's not like I fangirl all the time. I have always liked their music and reading and it combines both of those things for me. … I didn't know that such a thing existed. … The main thing about the *Directioners* is that we're like a family here. — Nikki, 17[1]

Nikki, a 17-year-old girl living in the northeastern United States, is an active member of Wattpad.com, an interactive online community of readers and writers where members write, share, market, and exchange feedback on self-produced fiction and nonfiction writing. "Fangirl" for Nikki and fellow fans has taken on a meaning as an identity category and a verb that refers to engaging deeply and emotionally with the object of a fandom, including involuntarily voicing excitement when a particular song comes on or feeling compelled to write, discuss, and create for the sake of being a fan. Like thousands of other Wattpad members, Nikki is a producer and consumer of a genre of writing known as fanfiction—she reads and writes stories about things she is a fan of—in this case, members of the British-Irish boyband One Direction (1D). "*Directioners*," as Nikki and other fans of the band affectionately refer to their fandom (or, a community of fans), hail from around the globe yet are united by their common interest in One Direction. As Nikki points out, the *Directioners* on Wattpad belong to a family-like community within which they indulge their fandom through writing, discussing, and critiquing fan narratives.

Nikki recognizes that Wattpad allows for an opportune marriage of seemingly disparate interests: One Direction's music and fiction. However, a closer examination of the literate and social practices in the *Directioners*' fandom on Wattpad reveals a confluence of many forces that together provide fertile ground for connected learning—socially embedded and interest-driven learning oriented toward

Directioner fan art.
Image courtesy of Nikki.

educational, economic, or political opportunity (Ito et al. 2013). Whereas peer culture, personal interests, and academic content are traditionally conceived as independent domains often "at war with each other in young people's lives" (Ito et al. 2013:63), connected learning occurs at the intersection of these three spheres, promising to link learning and interest to academic achievement, career success, and civic engagement.

The study presented here is one of several case studies from the Connected Learning Research Network (CLRN) that highlights interest-based digitally mediated spaces for learning and affinity formation. Like other case studies in this series, this mixed-methods research delves into a particular community, members of which are connected to each other in two ways: (1) with an online forum and other media outlets and (2) through

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[1] To protect community members' anonymity, all participant names are pseudonyms.

a common interest. Using content analysis, ethnographic observations, surveys, and interviews, I explore the dynamics related to learning, literacy, and identity formation within a *Directioner* community on Wattpad. Tens of thousands of stories about the band have been published on Wattpad to date, and this study looks at the writers, readers, and commentators of these stories. Furthermore, attendant to the fanfiction stories were forum discussions, book covers, YouTube trailers marketing the stories, comments, profiles, and song remixes. I examined these media objects in tandem with the fanfiction stories in order to provide a more holistic picture of what connected learning looks like in this slice of a young but mighty teenage fandom.

This report is structured in several parts. First, I describe the purpose and scope of this study. I explain the methods I employed in the data collection and analysis. Next, I provide a brief background into the site and describe the context in which Wattpad and other fanfiction endeavors are situated. In the following section, I describe how the *Directioner* community on Wattpad integrates the three separate "spheres of learning" associated with connected learning theory: interest-powered, peer-supported, and academically oriented. The learning manifest on Wattpad is further characterized by the three core principles of connected learning, which I subsequently address: production-centered, openly networked, and shared purpose. Finally, the analysis shows how learning, socializing, and producing in the One Direction fandom both instantiates and complicates key principles of the connected learning framework. I examine and reflect upon a case-specific set of dynamics focusing on the literate practices of One Direction fans. Drawing on literature from New Literacy Studies and participatory media culture studies, this section explores the interrelationship between new literacies (such as web-based and new media literacies, transmedia production, and remixing) and the creation and performance of multiple identities.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate learning and networking in a teenage, female-dominated fandom. This study examines narratives from fans of the popular British-Irish boyband, One Direction, in the context of a fanfiction community on Wattpad.com. These fans share many characteristics with other connected learning environments, such as ethics of peer-to-peer sharing, online participation, and remix culture. The high-value currency in this fan community is the stories, connections, and artifacts based on the object of the fans' affection, all of which provide opportunity for the exploration of connected learning. In addition, this community allows us to examine the dynamics of identity expression unique to a boyband fandom, as will be explored further in this report.

I was particularly interested in print, media, and digital literacy practices of the users for two reasons. First, my academic interests encompass media and literacy studies. Second, One Direction fanfiction braids together popular culture pursuits and literate work for a group of adolescents. Wattpad has a rating system that shows the number of reads and "likes" of a given story, in addition to advertising relevant forum pages. I conducted interviews with those who had high levels of popularity (reads and "likes") and new members in order to capture diverse experience with site participants. Likewise, participants with diverse roles in the community were highlighted; thus, this study includes not only fanfic writers, but also those who only read and comment on the works and those who provide illustrations or book covers for those who write stories.

METHODS

I investigated the *Directioner* community on Wattpad over a nine-month period. In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 participants, the protocols for which were semistructured and designed to elicit discussion regarding the participants' experiences with fanfiction production, critique and comment structures on the website, involvement in fan communities, school experiences, home and family environments, and the relationships between those contexts. The open-ended protocols built on themes shared with other case studies in the CLRN, such as interests, learning, peer culture, and reputation, and were also informed by topics and features important to Wattpad users as gleaned from biweekly visits to the fanfiction page of Wattpad.com. Interviewees were sampled from writers who enjoyed popularity, or "hotness" in the Wattpad parlance, and those who did not. Nonwriter interviews were recruited from the forums. From those interviews, I followed up on topics, organizations, and websites mentioned by the participants, such as social networking groups, school clubs, videos, and jokes that were important to them and circulated in their respective fan communities. These follow-ups are meant to give a more holistic picture of fan writing and media production practices, literate histories, and involvement in their fanfiction communities.

I also analyzed artifacts created by study participants, focusing on media objects such as the stories posted by participants, forum postings, book covers, trailers, .gif files, and participants' profiles. I studied background surveys, interviews, and objects created by participants across and alongside each other in order to look for differences and similarities in the experiences of study participants.

To analyze the interviews, forum conversations, and literacy artifacts, this study uses in-depth content and discourse analysis (Gee 1999; Miles and Huberman 1994). In coding the data, I used iterative open-ended, thematic, and theory-driven coding techniques (Saldaña 2009). This means that I took several "passes" at the data: The first pass was to see what kind of recurring or divergent topics emerged, and the following passes were performed to trace themes identified in the data and in the literature. I used the mixed-methods software Dedoose to follow and derive overarching thematic categories that emerge with regularity across the different data sources. I generated codes to look at key characteristics that spanned all of the studied interest-driven communities, such as technology, resources, supports and barriers, and recognition-management systems within those communities. Case-specific codes came to life from the interviews themselves.

For instance, I noticed that my participants would often recount their activities with the umbrella gerund "fangirling"—meaning different things to different people (e.g., fawning over a picture of a boyband member, reblogging band-related media, commenting on blog posts about new tour date announcements, or even getting into a "writing frenzy"). Fangirling became a key construct because it nicely illustrated the way literate activities (taking photos, writing stories, commenting on status updates) are tightly braided with identity work (figuring out if one is a fangirl, drawing boundaries between fangirls, fans, and nonfans, taking on activities in order to be recognized as a fangirl). This code then gave birth to several subcodes as this construct came up in different contexts and was used with different connotations ("Don't call me a fangirl, but …" or "I saw her story and was fangirling out when …"). To make sense of the meanings participants attached to their words, I probed further and often specifically asked them to define the constructs of interest. Interview excerpts relevant to each construct were read in the contexts of background surveys and cultural/fan artifacts mentioned by the fans.

BACKGROUND: DESCRIPTION OF WATTPAD

Wattpad, a free online writing community, describes itself as the "world's largest community for discovering and sharing stories" (Wattpad, N.d.). Boasting a monthly audience of more than 10 million readers, it claims to connect more than 10,000 readers to stories each minute. Although all the story writing is in English (forum discussions had more language variance), readership of Wattpad spans the globe.

COUNTRY	VISITORS (%)
United States	19.5%
India	16.1%
Philippines	9.2%
United Kingdom	3.6%
Canada	3.5%
Indonesia	3.3%
Pakistan	3.1%
South Korea	3.1%
Turkey	2.8%
Argentina	2.7%

Table 1. Wattpad Readership by Country, from Alexa, N.d.

Content is user generated, allowing all members to contribute to its library of stories, poems, and nonfiction articles. Writing on Wattpad is categorized by genre (e.g., romance, science fiction, fantasy, humor), and readers are also able to browse by characteristics such as popularity ("hotness"), number of comments, obscurity ("undiscovered gems"), and so on.

Community is fostered on Wattpad in several ways. Members, who are typically known by a member name rather than formal name, can "follow" and be "followed" by each other, allowing them to keep track of each other's activity. All writing is open to discussion, and comments are welcome and encouraged. Members can also show their appreciation for writing on Wattpad by voting for their favorite works. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Wattpad allows members to join smaller communities within the larger site; these smaller communities are called "clubs," where "discussions" are held. Club topics include "Improve Your Writing," where members share tips and feedback with each other, or "Multimedia Designs," where members can promote and develop their skills as visual artists. Most pertinent to this study are the clubs that are organized around genre. "Fan Fiction" is a club all its own and comprises more than 30,300 members to date. The most popular fanfiction topic (in terms of views, comments, and publication) on this site is the popular young boyband, One Direction, a trendy pop group of young male singers, each member typically cultivating an image so as to appeal to a preteen or teen audience. At the time of the study, 9 of the top 15 most recent discussions in this club had been about this band.

I chose Wattpad as a launchpad into my inquiry on connected learning dynamics for several reasons. First, studies of literacy (etymologically, "literacy" is related to the word "literature" [Williams 1983]) have been traditionally concerned with "highbrow" literary concerns and only recently have scholars of literacy ventured into the more everyday and commonplace engagements with words. Second, unlike other sites circulating fan stories and fanfiction in particular, Wattpad.com provided important links and ruptures to the ways fan writing has been commonly conceived. It is important that the most active

members of the site were adolescent females who were involved with equally young fandoms, including contemporary bands and teen fiction. These fans were also less likely to be aware of the moral and historical lineages put forth by more established and studied fanfiction sites such as Fanfiction.net. For example, interviewees were not aware of traditional fanfiction terminology such as "slash" (often: writings that imagine same-sex pairings) or discussions of the morality of writing about living characters or copyrighted materials. Because of this, the cultural and literary commitments of fans on Wattpad could be conceptualized as a younger, next-generation fanfiction community. Thus, the website captured my interest because its layout, corporate backing, marketing, user rules, and general media ecology differed in important ways from other popular fan work sites.

Particularly unusual was the depth of mobile integration provided by the site—unlike previously researched sites of fanfiction writing and circulation (e.g., Busse 2006), Wattpad capitalizes on mobile technologies and most fans use mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets to read and disseminate their writing. Mobile integration has become a key issue in debates connected to digital and participation divides, as researchers have posited that mobile technology has the potential to become a game changer in this social dynamic (Hargittai and Walejko 2008; Lenhart 2009; Lenhart and Madden 2007). These researchers have held that although technological participation almost always follows the already-existing cleavages of the haves and have-nots (thus the "divide" rhetoric), mobile innovations might serve as a break from this pattern. Consequently, media content production and consumption provide fodder for research and debate.

BOYBAND FANFICTION IN CONTEXT

> The band notches up a collective Twitter following of over 30 million and one devotee recently claimed "I'm part of a fandom that can kill you if they wanted" in a Channel 4 documentary that detailed the antics of the most die-hard *Directioners*. But is this new breed of superfan really any more obsessive, territorial or hysterical than the high-pitched, hormonal teens that fawned over boybands in years gone by? (Russell 2013)

So begins a recent Irish Independent review of a documentary project about the band's rise to success. The tone and rhetoric of that piece were echoed throughout the newspaper circuit, with a Mirror article assuring its readers that no, the zombie apocalypse did not occur; it's only that the boyband is planning a new concert tour (Robertson and Ellwood 2013). The term "boyband" was popularized in the 1980s pointing to popular producer-manufactured all-male ensembles that harmonized and moved with smart, impeccably choreographed moves. The term indexed pop music acts such as New Kids on the Block, BoyzIIMen, and Menudo. The image of the hormone-driven female fan taps into historical perceptions of adolescent girl fans from Beatlemania and the like (Driscoll 2002; Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacobs 1992) and even

the fainting and garment-throwing aficionados of Hungarian composer Franz Lizst in the 1800s (Russell 2013).

Despite these potential lineages, commentators are right in noticing something new happening with the One Direction fandom. Members of this fandom are particularly visible because of the rising consumer power of younger generations and the highly generative "prosumer" practices of these fans. "Prosumer"—a portmanteau of "producer" and "consumer" coined by media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1972:63)—highlights the way modern media ecologies enable simultaneous production and consumption within popular cultures. Looking at fandoms as *participatory* nicely captures new possibilities for engagement with media, where fans are consuming media content (e.g., songs) and at the same time customizing, opining on, circulating, and remixing it. When One Direction fans recall the moment they became enchanted with the band, they often call on a narrative of participation. In this case, the emphasis on participation is quite literal.

One Direction was born out of a British reality singing competition TV show, the *X-Factor*. Although the musical acts are put together and critiqued by celebrity judges, the success of the acts depends on the quantity of fan votes, amassed via phone calls and social media sites such as Facebook. Formative experiences for early 1D fans included incessantly calling, organizing fan Facebook groups, and tweeting out reminders for fellow fans to vote. Although the band did not win the competition that season, it was quickly signed by Simon Cowell, the show's creator and infamous television personality. Nessa, a 16-year-old fan from America, tells me that the fact that the "boys" did not win did not put a damper on the fandom. It only humanized them. To Nessa, they always remained "one of us," as they consistently mobilized social networking and fan sites to thank the fans and to remind them that the band and the fans are part of one whole. Engaged in this participatory fandom, fans continue to compose tweets, make websites, put up fan videos on YouTube, draw posters, and even write fan stories.

Fanfiction, "fiction written by fans about preexisting plots, characters, and/or settings from their favorite media" (Black 2008:10), enjoys a history almost as long as literature itself (Derecho 2006). In fact, literacy scholars sometimes cite John Lydgate's 1421 extension of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, in which the monk-poet author positions himself in the Middle English classic as one of the pilgrims on the voyage back to London from Canterbury, as one of the first examples of fan fiction (Segall 2008). Furthermore, Jenkins (1992) notes that celebrity fandom in particular may be the oldest form of fandom, as the earliest usages of the word "fan" described theater enthusiasts who admired the actors rather than the play. Coppa (2006) argues that because musical and celebrity fandoms are so mainstream, they were never marked by the taboo associated with other fandoms and thus "never had much of an organized subcultural presence" before widespread adoption of the Internet (p. 56). Yet surprisingly, fanfiction based on celebrities (e.g., actors)

rather than fictional characters (e.g., the roles they inhabit) has endured a remarkably controversial history. For some reason, as the aforementioned definition of fanfiction suggests, shared narratives are what many considered acceptable forms of the genre, whereas the actions of creating and sharing fictional works based on real people were long regarded as scandalous. Whether on legal (i.e., libelous) grounds or for concern for the celebrities' feelings (e.g., Bacon-Smith 1992), openly fantasizing about known celebrities was considered distasteful at best and "morally dubious" at worst (Thrupkaew 2003). Celebrity fanfiction became explicitly prohibited on major fanfiction sites, and in 2002, completely removed from the archives of www.fanfiction.net, the largest fanfiction archive at the time (Busse 2006).

Much has changed in the past decade, owing largely to the collision of multiple fandoms and the introduction of new media technologies (Coppa 2006). Things changed in the early 2000s with fandom's expansion into the blogsphere, observe Hellekson and Busse (2006). Boyband fiction began to proliferate, paving the way for Lord of the Rings actors' fiction and other "mediafic" of performers, athletes, and politicians (Coppa 2006). Within a few short years, thousands of stories featuring members of the boyband *NSYNC found niches in cyberspace (Busse 2006). Webrings, or collections of websites linked in a circular structure, dedicated to celebrity fanfiction began to appear, and the LiveJournal blogsphere, which allowed users to move away from the restrictions of moderated mailing lists, allowed readers and writers to find each other. Still, "even after [fiction based on celebrities] gained wide acceptance in the late 2000s, many fans remained strongly opposed to its existence" (Fanlore, N.d., para. 35). Despite much more widespread visibility, perception of fanfiction, and fanfiction based on real people in particular, or real people fiction (RPF), remains ethically questionable for members of the community.

Fans, as well documented in studies of fandom, media, and new literacies, have complex relationships with pop culture and commercial media, as shown both in the attachment to original "texts" and the desire to rewrite those texts. "Fangirling" and fanfiction-writing practices have histories that tie back to handmade zines, analog remixes, and early rewritings of television shows such as Star Trek (Coppa 2006).

Interestingly, this study's sampling of girls who write and read fanfiction about 1D were mostly unencumbered with the thorny history of RPF, such as stories about celebrities. Unfamiliar with the moral questions connected to writing about real personalities on other sites, most of the participants expressed surprise at their discovery that something such as "boyband fanfic even exists!" (Nicole, 17, from India). Although two of my interviewees migrated to Wattpad from other fanfiction sites, the majority either discovered boyband fanfiction by randomly skimming the "most popular" section of the Wattpad or by being linked to specific stories from 1D fan sites and fan groups. Just who were these boyband fanfiction writers?

STUDY PARTICIPANTS: CONTEXT AND DEMOGRAPHICS

On Wattpad, forum postings, site profiles, and interviews reveal that the site members popularizing 1D were mostly teenage girls living in the United States, the UK, and Australia.

Twenty-four youth and one parent participated in the one-on-one interviews. In addition to posting on relevant forums to cast a wider net for participation, I sent invitations to particularly high-ranking or "popular" members and to those who were new and did not yet enjoy a larger readership. Invitees sometimes could not participate because they were too young or were not given parental permission. More often, invitees expressed that either their interests had shifted or that they were not comfortable telling their parents about their specific pastimes.

A book cover of a fanfiction that was a mix of a biographical genre and real person fanfiction, pointing out a theory of what it means to be a 1D fanfic writer. Image courtesy of Rebecca.

Family members usually knew aspects of the story: Some knew their children enjoyed writing, and others had heard of Wattpad at the dinner table. Within this sample, all but three participants (92 percent) were female (one male participant was not "out" as a *Directioner* to anyone in the "real world" and another admitted to posting fanfic only ironically). Thus, although the 1D fan community was often seen as stereotypically female or even populated with "crazed fangirls," two of the focal storytellers in this study identify as boys. The "ironic" fanfic writer did see his gender identity as salient and problematic in his participation, but because of the genre of his participation—witticisms, haikus, and parodies—this fanfiction site made particular sense to join. In contrast, another male interviewee, who participates in the site under an androgynous anime-sourced username, writes for several music- and anime-based fandoms on the Internet, telling me gender is only incidental to who he is and he almost never reveals it.

All but one of the participants were engaged in some sort of formal schooling. Three-quarters of the participants were between the ages of 13 and 18 and still lived at home with their parents. Most attended either middle or high school; three were in college.

About half of the study participants identified as white, and the rest were evenly split among other Census categories—12.5 percent Asian, Hispanic, Black, and Mixed. As always, these sorts of statistics tell a very partial story. Although the participants almost entirely wrote stories in English, most came from highly diverse, multicultural, and multilingual environments. For example, two of my interviewees grew up learning three languages at once—a native dialect, the country's official language (e.g., Hindi), and English (the language of schooling and sometimes, religion). These cases complicate

categories such as "English language learners" and "native speakers." About half of survey respondents said that they did not live in the country they were born in and 75 percent noted that their parents did not live in the country they were born.

The above demographics are meant as heuristics to point out the contours of a diverse group with each member representing a lived experience. For instance, although the 1D fandom as a whole was stereotyped as being made by Western girls, for Western girls, many of my participants were neither. Additionally, some spoke of complex multinational, plurilingual households and others offered variegated explanations of girlhood, fangirling, and the meanings those categories held for them. A handful of participants occupied identities on the site that were quite different from the story they represented to me, on their "actual email" or via phone. Figuring a new identity, of course, was an option because the fans knew each other through the online site and sometimes other anonymous social networks, writing sites, and their fan Tumblr (Tumblr is a microblogging platform and social networking website often used by fans). One member told me that sharing her real Tumblr would be "next level," reserved for deep friendships she would make on the site.

ABIGAIL AND HER FAMILY

Abigail, 13, and her mother, in separate interviews, both describe themselves as bookworms. Abigail, who is a high school freshman in Canada, remembers getting caught in fictional worlds ever since she was able to read. Her mother, Margaret, conversely, explains that she was able to pass on her literary dispositions to her daughter. Either way, by the time Abigail went to middle school, she saw herself as a "serious Potterhead," or a fan of the Harry Potter series. Around the same time, Margaret bought her two children a mobile phone and a gaming system to share in their free time. That mobile phone served as a pivot in Abigail's literary life. The device opened her up to a world of reading and writing proliferating on the Internet. After downloading several e-reading platforms, including Wattpad, she realized that texts were being produced beyond and around her beloved Harry Potter books and other canons she enjoyed, such as vampire-based television series and boybands.

After reading and commenting on stories for several months, Abigail "graduated" to writing her own story. She had not dabbled in creative writing before this, and she was experiencing performance anxiety: "I was nervous. I was afraid people would judge me and post hate comments and I would have to defend my own work. It was the exact opposite! People loved my work and they were supportive."

The supportiveness expressed by fellow readers and writers on Wattpad was very motivating for Abigail: "People were very nice and sociable! I made a bunch of friends and people asked me to cowrite with them and said nice things on their profile about me!"

Through participating in collab accounts, Abigail was able to rehearse and polish her writing skills. Although she had a vast knowledge of the canons, by collaborating with more senior Wattpad writers, she was able to learn the ins-and-outs of fanfiction writing as a genre. Working with other people also allowed her to structure her writing time and become a more disciplined, efficacious, and audience-aware writer. As Abigail gained followers and standing within the fanfiction community, her online practices began to spill over into her school and her personal lives. She explains that whenever they had free-form writing time in middle school, her Wattpad experiences helped her "think of ideas and

helped them flow better and write better than [she] could have before." In addition to writing skills scaffolded by her cowriting partners on Wattpad, Abigail points out changes in attitude toward writing that happened because of her writing and publishing practices online. She no longer has trouble with "shyness" or fear of critique, now that she is a practiced writer. She has developed a feel for creating stories and filling in plot holes; storytelling has become second nature.

All of Abigail's creative writing is still done on Wattpad and most of it via her old mobile phone. However, when she has to meet deadlines for her cowriters and needs to type quickly, she will ask to borrow her mother's laptop. This does not cause any problems in the family. As Abigail's mom explains, the family shares the laptop and implicitly understands the division of labor that comes along with the sharing. Margaret, as the breadwinner of the family, has first dibs on the machine. Abigail, as an aspiring writer, can use it when "mom is done with work." Abigail's little brother can do his homework or play games on the laptop when the other two members of the family are done. Commitments of the family members—of Margaret to her work, of Abigail to her fandom and her followers—are respected and taken seriously.

Inspired by her popularity on Wattpad and bolstered by support at home, Abigail recently applied and got in to a selective creative writing program at a magnet school. Her mother tells me this is no small feat: The magnet school is quite far from their house, is traditionally male dominated, and most of Abigail's childhood friends are going to the local public school. Abigail remains unafraid: "Wattpad [writing] encouraged me to expand on my talents. I would actually like to be a writer now! It has made me more optimistic in a way! Reading all these stories makes me feel better that bad things will come to an end." In a way, the content worlds of Abigail's fandoms interweave with her real-world competencies. The very nature of the stories she writes and reads on Wattpad enable her to imagine possible futures for herself in a positive light. With the help of peer support, a production-centered hobby, and understanding at home, Abigail was able to connect the dots between her passion for specific content worlds and concrete academic and professional opportunities.

ANALYSIS: CONNECTED LEARNING IN THE 1D FANDOM

Daily learning occurs within multiple spheres, including personal interests, peer culture, and academic content. As its name implies, connected learning occurs at the nexus of these three spheres. The learning manifest at this juncture has the potential to strengthen that which occurs in each simultaneously, and it is often characterized by three core properties: shared purpose across boundaries (such as cleavages between fans and their roles within the community), opportunities for media and literary production, and an openly networked environment allowing for sharing and publicity across settings (Ito et al. 2013).

In this section, I will demonstrate how in the space of *Directioners*' fanfiction on Wattpad, connected learning is actively taking place. First, I will describe how each connected learning principle gains traction within the Wattpad community, through the participants' accounts. I will then show how the *Directioners*' learning in each sphere informs and is connected to the others. I conclude by discussing how each core property characterizes the *Directioners*' experiences on the site.
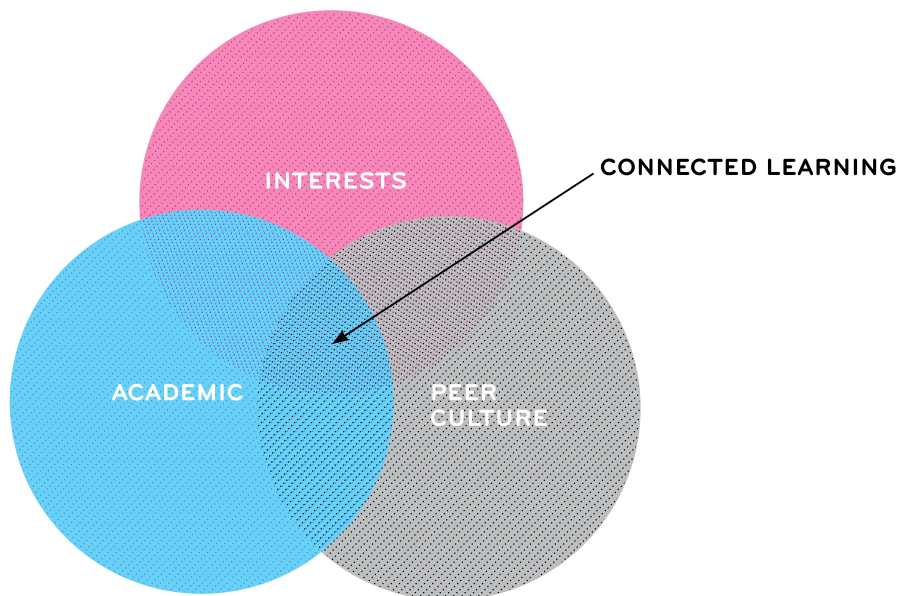

CONNECTED LEARNING

INTERESTS

ACADEMIC

PEER CULTURE

Figure 1
Connecting the Spheres of Learning, from Ito et al. 2013

CONNECTED LEARNING PRINCIPLES

INTEREST-POWERED

The connected learning approach posits that personal interests promote learning through igniting the drive to gain knowledge and expertise. When the learner finds the given material interesting, he or she is able to achieve much higher-order learning outcomes. Indeed, research has long recognized the relationship between student interest, effort, and persistence (Dewey 1913; Renninger, Hidi, and Krapp 1992; Schiefele 1991), mastery goal orientation (Schiefele 1991), and richer, strongly connected knowledge (Renninger 2000).

A diverse group of girls who call themselves *Directioners* are united on Wattpad through their devotion to the band One Direction. This shared interest is the lifeblood of 1D fandom and the online communities with which it organizes itself. One way to appreciate the depth of interest in One Direction represented by 1D fandom is to consider fangirling. A "fangirl" is any girl who understands herself to be a particularly enthusiastic fan of something, and who further identifies herself as a "fan." Similar to the difference between a person who skateboards and a skater, a fangirl is more than just a girl who likes One Direction; she is a girl who's identity is tied to One Direction. As with other subcultures, this distinction may be difficult to recognize for outsiders of the culture. Seema, a 16-year-old girl from India who does not consider herself a Directioner, defines "fangirling" behaviorally: "Fangirling is … uh … like going crazy blushing and jumping around on the mention of one's object of desire … One Direction." But Maya, an insider, interprets her fandom differently:

> Liking a band happens when you think their music is good and they might be attractive. That's it! Being a Directioner gives it a whole new meaning. It connects us more to those boys. We know a lot about them, and we are inspired by them. And we would support them through thick and thin. That's what being a *Directioner* is all about.

Their devotion to One Direction and its associated fanfiction sets *Directioners* apart from others in their communities. Many of the girls described being the only *Directioner* at their respective schools, and of appreciating the ability to share these interests, which are too often an object of ridicule. They speak of not being able to share their writing with their teachers, who are "too old" to understand (Sandra, 15, from Australia and Malaysia), or parents who "would think that I am childish" (Ayush, 19, from India). On Wattpad, the common interest of *Directioner* fanfiction serves as a uniting and transformative force:

> Being a *Directioner* here ha[s] opened me up to the world. I have come out of the rock I was living under. Being a *Directioner* ha[s] made me so so many like-minded friends, national and international. I have become a part of a big family. … I have learnt interacting with people. [At school] I was bullied before because I was nerdy and am bullied now because I am a Directioner, but I don't really care what they say about me right now. (Maya, 16)

One quote that features prominently on Maya's profile page, pointing out the nuances between being simply a fan and a true lover of the band, is a quote that reads: "I'm not just a fan. I'm a Directioner."

Not only has the *Directioner* community on Wattpad allowed her a space to which she can escape from the bullying, but by joining this "family" of "like-minded friends," Maya has learned to "not really care" about the suffering she endures elsewhere.

She explained to me that the support she has received on the site has made her more resilient. The other *Directioners* teach her that "haters gonna hate" and remind her that her fandom of One Direction gives her a space to belong somewhere. These stories, told by fans, provide a glimpse into ways in which fandoms can become sites of skill development, literacy learning, and identity development.

Like many others, Maya was drawn to Wattpad specifically because of her interest in One Direction. A 16-year-old girl from Mumbai, India, she describes explicitly searching out communities such as that on Wattpad: "I became a *Directioner* and on Facebook I started 'liking' a lot of One Direction related fan pages. There, the admins posted some fanfiction kind of thing and once I read a few of them, I wanted to read more. So I Googled up fanfictions and discovered [Wattpad]."

Rather than innate characteristics, interests are "discovered and cultivated within particular social and cultural contexts" (Ito et al. 2013). Accordingly, not all the *Directioners* on Wattpad espoused an interest in One Direction before their involvement with Wattpad. Katie, a 14-year-old girl from Australia, demonstrates how an interest in reading led her to Wattpad, where other interests were fostered and nurtured:

> When I first joined [Wattpad], I wasn't in love with 1D and wasn't expecting all the fan fictions and things, but when I joined, I was sucked in and I love it. [I expected] just like normal stories just like Twilight, Divergent, Harry Potter, like books that I loved except made by people just like me! Original stories that I haven't read before and I just love reading and writing.

When asked how long she had been writing for fun, Katie responded:

> Um, ever since I joined Wattpad, really. I saw people who have been writing their own stories and they were people who were like me. So they all inspired me to write. … [Before Wattpad] I really just wrote when it was needed like in essays or things for English. I did a lot more reading than writing.

As Katie's narrative demonstrates, there are many entry points to Wattpadding and, more generally, learning and writing in online communities. Our focus on interests does not imply that we should focus only on interests that young people already have. To the contrary, the connected learning framework views interests as pathways to learning that can be fostered organically, creating new interests that reflect the identity of each individual learner.

PEER-SUPPORTED

When young people learn through interacting with their peers, they become more engaged in their own learning and their critical thinking is enhanced (Blumenfeld et al.

1996). Young people who learn with their peers tend to contribute, share, and provide feedback to one another more readily than in more traditional pedagogical settings. Though young people who learn in peer groups often occupy different roles based on age or knowledge, in supportive learning environments each peer is able to share her point of view. For these reasons, peer support is critical to a connected learning framework.

Consider the case of Abigail, a 13-year-old girl from Canada. Abigail participates in 1D fandom by writing fanfiction about her favorite band. I learned from Abigail and others that 1D fandom is mostly female and mostly young. Participation in 1D fandom permitted Abigail to form online relationships with a large network of peers who would read, evaluate, and praise Abigail's creative work as a fanfiction author. Drawing on the support that the 1D fandom community provided to her, Abigail was able to summon the courage to apply to a well-off, and predominantly male, private school. Abigail shared that without the support she felt from her 1D fandom peers, she would not have felt comfortable enough to apply. In this way, the peer support Abigail attributed to 1D fandom was a direct influence in an educational outcome for Abigail. That support provided an opportunity for Abigail to seek out higher-quality instruction; without it, Abigail might not have tried.

The peer culture on Wattpad provides the girls with a platform to express themselves, but it also opens them up to critique. Often, the boundaries of appropriate "friend behavior" and "helpful critique" seem to get muddled, although both genres of communication are used to promote peer support. Madeleine, a 13-year-old girl from Canada, explains that "if you aren't nice to people, no one will stick up for you if you are insulted." These "insults" can take the form of personal attacks ("You should just get off Wattpad") or feedback to stories. Madeleine struggles with feedback, because she wants to be "liked" and does not "want to hurt feelings," and so her feedback on writing is circumscribed to the superficial:

> As an example, if I read someone's work and there were a few mistakes, I would say, "Great job, I'm really looking forward to the next Chapter! You're a great writer! Just be sure to fix the … But other than that it is perfect!" Or something of that sort. … If someone asked me to follow back because they like my writing, I would definitely, even if I didn't like theirs.

To Madeleine, it seems that maintaining a pleasant community of peers is more important than improving one's craft.

Many others articulated this tension between using feedback to improve one's work and trying to reinforce the atmosphere of a shared peer culture on Wattpad. Ayush, 19, from India and a college freshman in the United States, described being annoyed at the comments proliferating his stories that were just "fluff": "Mostly it's just 'I like the story' or 'I wanna know what happens.'" Nicole, age 17, was even more cynical and attributed some people's invitations for feedback as merely a way to get people to write

anything on their stories, which would increase the story's visibility and popularity in rankings such as the annual Watty awards. The Watty awards are a site-based recognition system that is meant to recognize the best contributions written by fellow readers on Wattpad. Because the methodology is not made explicit, some interviewees voiced fear that their stories might get overlooked because they are not being hyped, simply because the writers are not focusing on self-marketing and gaining followers on the site. Relevantly, Ito and colleagues (2013) observe that "common denominators of much of young people's peer culture are status negotiations over popularity" (p. 64) and it appears that the peer culture on Wattpad is no different. The majority of the teens seek recognition and to be liked and respected by others, sometimes resorting to what interviewees referred to as "unethical" behavior such as "vote trading" and false praise.

An image from a forum discussion on whether or not the sitewide award system is a valid one. In response to this thread, multiple users have decided to organize their own annual awards, including a section for 1D fanfic only. Image courtesy of Aaron, Wattpad user and blogger at egoant.com.

Still, the Wattpad landscape is rife with opportunity for productive peer-assisted development. Members of the community exhibit a strong ethos of "helping" each other. Even those who leave minimal feedback on the stories they enjoy express a pressure to do more: "I don't [leave] much feedback. I know I should, though," says Maya, 16. And several writers discussed being able to give and receive authentic feedback with those with whom they had established a level of intimacy or trust beyond the already welcoming peer culture that characterizes the community. Ayush, 19, explains:

> I did a "critique for critique" thing with another writer. I critiqued her work honestly (not just I like your story or I like the way you write). So she critiqued my story well too. She told me how to make it better.

> [She wrote:] I really think you are gifted at writing dialogue - you express who your characters are by the way they interact with the other characters. Excellent! I felt like most of Link 2 was confusing - maybe due to not reading much Manga? I had a hard time keeping the characters straight and also with understanding what is happening to who. Maybe it was the frequent switching of scenes? I don't know. I just know the flow was a lot better in the first link. And the rules being explained about the 5 people in each group, etc. was excessive to put in one long speech. It weighed that section of the story down. Maybe instead show us bits of the selections with descriptions and explanations by char-

acters and the narrator. I think the descriptions in general were well thought
out and helped the story along. Good so far!

By offering an honest critique with the intention of being helpful, Ayush was rewarded
with a detailed critique that he would actually be able to incorporate in his writing.
The comment provided by his friend still maintains the friendly, positive warmth of
the less critical feedback, while including concrete steps on how he could improve.
He found this critique "helpful" and although he has not yet modified the draft, he
intends to "make it better" by using her comments carefully.

ACADEMICALLY ORIENTED

Important to the connected learning framework is that learning should be academically
oriented. Educational institutions are centered on the principle that intellectual growth
thrives when learning is directed toward academic achievement and excellence. The
connected learning framework recognizes the importance of academic success for
intellectual growth and as an avenue toward economic and political opportunity.
Peer culture and interest-driven activity need to be connected to academic subjects,
institutions, and credentials for diverse young people to realize these opportunities.
Effective connected learning environments are equipped to mine and translate
popular peer culture and community-based knowledge into academic relevance
(Connectedlearning.tv 2012).

Academic learning is often "guided by adults, and social relationships center on
adults who have the power to offer rewards and recognition" (Ito et al. 2013:65). As
noted earlier, the *Directioner* community is inhabited almost exclusively by young
girls who do not typically share their work with adults. However, many parents of
Directioners on Wattpad are, in fact, aware that their children are pursuing literary
activity on the site (even if they are not aware of the content), and those who are have
been supportive. Candy, 15, from America, says proudly, "Maybe my mom would
[share it with a teacher of mine] in like a teacher-parent meeting. To show I'm good
or something." And Abigail, 13, admits, "My English teacher and my drama teacher
both know and are very supportive, [though] none of my other teachers know." These
crucial adult supports have the power to confer legitimacy on the young learners'
Wattpad activities, and they are invaluable in supporting the academic orientation of
connected learning.

While nearly all of the participants interviewed expressed that their involvement
with Wattpad was divorced from their activity in school because almost none of their
teachers knew about their fanfiction pursuits, when asked if their academic writing
was affected in any way, they noted that it has only improved. "Wattpad certainly
helped me improve my writing in school," says Sandra, 15. "I now get good marks for
writing essays. Before Wattpad, my writing wasn't as good."

This is not to say that there is no difference between the kind of writing that occurs on Wattpad and the kind expected in school. Madeleine, 13, explains the difference:

> Professional [writing is] set in a certain format (essay = 5 paragraphs, intro, then three explaining then a conclusion). But on the internet, its easy to be myself and I can make a paragraph one sentence if I wanted, no one is going to stop me. Yes [professional writing is] very different. On the internet, I write about some lighter things and some darker than I would dare to in school.

Despite these differences, the skills associated with writing fanfiction are recognizably translatable to her academic work in school. "I think it helps me with my English work and creative writing and helps me come up with better ideas," she observes. Katie, 14, is more specific:

> [Fanfiction writing] is good for my creativity and imagination. Good for my vocabulary. It's good to be able to pick up on my mistakes and it helps in essays and assignments. It gets my mind thinking. In ways, [it has helped with school activities], yes. It helps in English or Drama because I can easily think up funky ways to make it better and stuff. Yes, I like to think of what I did in stories to make them better and then think what I can do to this to make it better.

This reflection demonstrates that even though for Katie, school and fanfiction writing are separate spheres of practice, there are many overlaps between the two, including content area (e.g., vocabulary), skill (e.g., creativity), and motivation to improve ("think what I can do to this to make it better").

Remixed image of an imaginary 1D High School, created by interviewee Katie. Image courtesy of Katie.

PRODUCTION-CENTERED

A core property of connected learning environments is the focus on production. Active creation of a wide variety of media, knowledge, and cultural content is enabled through digital tools, and accordingly, member-generated creative content is the currency of *Directioners* on Wattpad. Besides the mainstay of fanfiction stories (and their associated feedback critiques), *Directioners* are continually engaging each other and the site by expressing their fandom through production, which is subsequently shared, appreciated, and oftentimes adopted and reappropriated by the others. For example, a participant named Jasmine, 14, started a tag with an "ID card" or badge format that most of the friends in her Wattpad circles would eventually come to include in the "About me" section of their profiles. These badges, which must include your favorite 1D member, are a literal representation of identity and membership in the One Direction fandom.

The connected learning framework recognizes that the content of production need not be solely about creating "original" content, but as the wide proliferation of these ID cards demonstrates, may include curation, reframing, sampling, and remixing of existing content (Ito et al. 2013).

Directioner ID badge. Image courtesy of Jasmine.

Another way in which this principle is exemplified in 1D fandom is .gif-making. A .gif file is a looping animation image file with no sound, often distributed as a "meme" throughout the Internet. As a medium, .gifs are merely an image file type. In recent years, however, .gifs have become a currency of ideas, typically in the form of lighthearted, funny, or cute memes. Within the 1D fandom, .gif creators take as inspiration what they see on Tumblr and other social networking sites; 1D fans take clips from the band's interviews, videos, and confessionals. The 1D fans then "sample" these media to turn them into short loops, often adding captions, and transposing or juxtaposing other images to get the desired effect.

Candy, 15, describes her growing expertise in this endeavor and her delight as her creations are viewed, praised, and reshared by others:

> Yea it kind of was complicated in the beginning but I asked around and people helped me to learn how to make them [animated .gifs]. On the design forum of Wattpad, mostly. Some of the people on here are so nice, they showed me the websites to learn. Mostly you have to go on YouTube first and then get the clip you like or that people will think it's funny or that will get funny if you add a caption to it or something and then cut it exactly right. It takes so long sometimes. And then you cut it and add the words. I mostly look at 1D stuff, of course. And people on Wattpad reblog it on Tumblr and say it's good.

It is evident that Candy very literally learned to produce these artifacts from her peers, but what sustains the peer-supported learning for her is the invaluable feedback (praise) and reinforcement (reblogging) her peers make available to her.

The most common production practices in the 1D fanfic community are the composing and decomposing of cultural texts. Drawing from songs, genre-specific conventions, boyband members' lives, other fandoms (e.g., of the Hunger Games or popular TV shows), and previously written fanfics, writers compose chapter books, book covers, and trailers for their fiction novels. The novels themselves engage with different genres, varying from romance to biography to sci-fi. The arcs of the story lines are often influenced by the readers' comments and feedback. Moreover, the "meat" of the stories and often the characters within them are "crowdsourced" on the forums. Crowdsourcing usually refers to the digital practice of enlisting multiple people to obtain information or create content.

On Wattpad forums, participants sometimes challenged themselves to write stories and develop characters by including dozens of recommendations made within the forum. Writers often get their inspiration and fodder for writing from these forums, sometimes organizing contests to pick the new heroine/hero for their upcoming fanfiction novels.

For example, "Imagines" are a common genre for this fanfiction community. This kind of story or novel incorporates a particular person—usually a member of the community—and "imagines" what it would be like if the person got involved with the band, romantically or professionally. When it comes to well-established and popular writers in this community, being included in their "Imagines" can be quite a coveted privilege. One seasoned Imagine writer, 15-year-old Sandra, often uses forum crowdsourcing to find new heroines for her romantic stories. She titles her posts in all caps—"WIN A SPOT IN BRAND NEW IMAGINE WITH HARRY"—and puts forth specific rules for entry:

- You must be a true *Directioner* to apply
- You must describe the character in detail, including name, age, hair/eye color, and personality characteristics
- To provide a visual to go along with your proposed character, you may include pictures of celebrities they look like
- To give a glimpse into the style of your proposed character, you must include an outfit they might wear using a website like polyvore.com that lets you put together clothes, accessories, makeup items, perfume, and even items your character might be holding (books, flowers, an iPad) to give a more complete "feel" to the character.

After receiving dozens of entries, Sandra picks the heroine, using the criteria of originality and differentiation from her previous Imagines—"I already wrote one about a blonde," she tells me. The subject of her new story will be Ariana, a brunette with a classy but edgy style and personality:

To compose her series of "Imagines," Sandra draws on multiple skills and literacies that gain traction both in the fandom and in her schoolwork. Particularly interesting are ways in which she weaves together her interests in fashion, music, writing, online friendship networks, and online reputation. Multimodality, made available with new media and Internet-mediated technologies, let Sandra explore her interests in richer and more connected ways. In the end, her work is a pastiche of print and visual technologies, including collaboratively composed texts, Photoshopped book covers,

Ariana's Outfit in my fanfic

Polyvore outfit for a potential fanfiction character.
Image courtesy of Sandra.

and a long, 17-chapter story arc that is drawn from material she has encountered in her "research" on specific band members, her imagination, and personal experiences.

Many people in the *Directioner* community on Wattpad specialize in a particular skillset: story writing, commentary, or making book covers. Those who make book covers or trailers for stories advertise their services on the forums and often help others get basic Photoshop or iMovie skills. After deciding to take on a cover "job," illustrators read the story and try to emulate both the story genre and the style of the particular author in their covers or trailers, capitalizing on design thinking and audience awareness. Here are some book cover examples showcasing different genres within *Directioner* fanfiction (romance, fan history, fantasy, and science fiction).

Variations of book covers in One Direction fanfiction. Images courtesy of Maya, Abigail, and Emily.

Much of the literate work that happens on Wattpad and related sites (e.g., writing stories, storyboarding, getting and giving feedback, composing book covers and .gifs) dovetails with the identity work that goes on in fandom. Literate work was narrated by fans as connected to their reputation as a "good" fan and a "good" fanfiction writer (usually marked by positive comments and numbers of followers). Although the One Direction fandom was described as "ironclad" by several participants, the boundaries of the fandom were porous: The activities and the effects of the practices spilled over into other areas of the fans' lives. Interestingly, all of the fans narrated their activities on the fanfiction site and on other fan sites as consequential to their fan identity—writing popular fanfiction or designing funny .gifs also meant being recognized as a legitimate member of the fan community and for some, a member of the fan family. However, at times the activities are also narrated as consequential to participants' identities as learners, family members, and teenagers. This almost always happens through a mediator: For instance, Sandra filters out or changes the names of the boyband members when she has her mother read and comment on her stories as works of creative writing. She considers this a useful exercise and a bonding experience but would not want to explain to her mother what fanfiction is because of the negative "obsessive" teenage fangirl stereotype that it brings.

OPENLY NETWORKED

Connected learning environments are further characterized by a core property of being openly networked. Because Wattpad exists online, its resources are accessible and visible across diverse settings, connecting members across the geographical boundaries that would otherwise render such learning inaccessible. Moreover, Wattpad is free to join, allowing less financially privileged members to participate on equal footing with others.

Many of the *Directioners* described experiencing isolation in their One Direction fandom, highlighting the importance of the online platform in uniting like-minded learners. Maya, 16, describes establishing a friendship possible only through the Internet: "It was easy [to become friends with her]. Both of us were Indian *Directioners* and both of us were the only 1D loving people in their respective schools. It was a friendship with a common dilemma, and it happened. Through Wattpad."

Others are alienated for their interest in fanfiction composition. For example, when asked if his peers in school shared his interest in 1D fanfiction, Ayush responded:

> I don't have many friends in college so I don't know. Even if I had friends, I wouldn't ask them anyway. I think it's kind of embarrassing to still read [fanfiction] in college. Or read as much [fanfiction] as I have read in college. I don't know. I just feel like it might make me look childish.

For Ayush, the "lowbrow" stigma of fanfiction is so salient that he cannot even bring himself to verify for certain whether he is, in fact, alone in his interests. But Wattpad allows him entry to a community without the blow to his reputation he imagines a more public engagement would cost him.

Further, as mentioned above, a feature unique to Wattpad (when compared to other fanfiction sites) is the degree to which it exploits mobile technology. Not only does this allow a lower cost of entry to those who may not have access to a personal computer, but it affords members the opportunity to engage with the community even as they traverse the multiple settings of their day-to-day lives. Maya, 16, explains:

> Well, as I said, I have to travel 4 hours each day [to and from school]. And that along with homework takes a toll on my energy, so by the time I am free, I am [often] too lazy to write. But in case you are wondering, I have the Wattpad app on my phone so I read the stories while I am traveling.

The young women I was in touch with in the United States, Australia, India, and Indonesia talked of 1D as a real point of connection between their friendship networks and social media affiliations. These participants explained to me that they were mindful of what they shared and with whom. Fanfic was explicitly for Wattpad and their fan Twitter and Tumblr accounts that were kept separate from "real name" Twitter and Tumblr accounts.

On the other hand, general 1D-related talk informed Facebook chat and in-person conversation. In fact, the girls told me that most of their school lunch is spent pulling up memes spread via social media on their cell phones, laughing about them and modifying them. Members were judicious in calling upon different platforms and different institutions in managing reputation concerns. These self-reflexive practices stand as testament to the power of openly networked design that allows the learner to decide which institutions can collude for a specific cause and when. Wattpad members navigated and leveraged different media platforms, online and offline networks, and institutions in their love for the band.

Finally, Wattpad also enables members to bridge learning across domains (e.g., home, friends, school). Some discussed brainstorming plotlines for Wattpad stories with peers at school. Others describe sharing creations with particular teachers. And some have even found the support of family members helpful. For example, Nicole, 17, says:

> When I first started writing on Wattpad, I forced my best friends and immediate family to join and become readers! Wattpad doesn't need to advertise. Its members are promoting the site actively every second of their spare time. It's basic human behavior: you want to show off. You want to display your efforts and skills. … My mum and dad promote my stories to their friends.

Nicole here explains how her family, friend, and interest networks interface in the creation of a personalized learning environment. Notice, though, that school is not part of that network because of a deliberate choice of the learner. This dynamic highlights the importance of an autonomous learner-centered environment, where the learner is able to connect and disconnect networks in pursuit of her particular goals.

SHARED PURPOSE (SHARED CULTURE, SHARED IDENTITY)

Learning and connection thrive around common goals and interests, and accordingly, connected learning experiences are often marked by another core principle: shared purpose. Just as the common interest of One Direction fandom unites the *Directioners* on Wattpad, so too does the collective goal of producing meaningful and entertaining text. Although this goal may sometimes be manifested independently (i.e., on the individual level), it is nevertheless a shared devotion among all the members. By writing original stories for the sole readership of the community, and by providing feedback on the stories, members realize a shared vision of producing the best possible writing. Members routinely and actively solicit the feedback of others, imploring their readers to help with their stories. Those who are visually inclined may collaborate by creating book covers. Illustrations, multimedia, promotion, and a host of other activities also are often delegated to multiple parties.

Ayush describes how his enthusiasm in his work was bolstered by the collaboration with others:

I wrote an original story and posted it. Some people read it and liked it. So I asked one of them, who was good at drawing, to draw it for me. He drew up the first chapter and sent me his drawings last year. I saw it, got way too excited and wanted to post it somewhere so people can read it. … [Someone else] made me a book cover … in book cover club or something. I was thankful someone made me a book cover because I wouldn't have made one for myself. I don't know how to. I feel like I got a lot of reads because of that.

A user-made Wattpad advertisement for free book covers for Directioner writers. Image courtesy of Mikaela.

In Ayush's case, the ultimate endeavor used the production skills of at least three individuals, each of whom worked on a separate component of the result: writing, illustrating, and book cover design. As he reiterates in the above passage several times, however, the "reward" for this production is more reads and praise from the community at large, evidence of the power of communal vision.

Not all efforts toward the goal are exerted independently in this piecemeal fashion. I noticed from the discussion boards the phenomenon of "collabs," where writers themselves work together in creating stories in tandem with their subgroup's vision. Sandra, 15, described the process as follows:

These collab accounts are mainly made up of two or more people who write 1D fan-fics together. One person usually posts on a forum on the fan-fic section asking if anyone wants to join the collab account. Once the person's got enough, they'll usually send each other PMs [private messages, communication which is limited in viewership to the writer and the addressee] to discuss about the story they're going to write. … Then they just write together using Wattpad on [the] new collab account and use PMs to kind of critique and give

suggestions. [It sounds kind of complicated] but it's actually quite easy. Collab accounts give you the chance to make friends with other *Directioners*.

Describing the motivation to "collab" in this way as "fun," Sandra demonstrates another way in which members of the *Directioner* community on Wattpad achieve a collective goal.

Sometimes, connections between members would be otherwise unexpected in a traditional learning environment. Sandra shares how she befriended an older *Directioner* with whom she would not have otherwise connected, given that traditional educational settings are generally segregated by age: "Well, I made my first ever true friend like around two months ago. I was looking for someone to play the lead on my next story and she offered. From then on, we started to talk more and more. Although she's four years older than me, she's really nice." As noted in other studies of connected learning environments, affinity spaces such as Wattpad allow individuals to connect and collaborate on projects that are interesting to them. In turn, working on projects fueled by a shared passion may result in a sense of affiliation and group identity that would not have existed otherwise.

REFLECTION: SCHOOLING
THE DIRECTIONERS

The last three decades of research have seen a reinvigorated debate into the nature of literacy and what it means to be "literate," especially in the context of converging cultures and proliferating technologies. The sociocultural camp of literacy researchers has recommended that we conceptualize literacy as multiple, context dependent, and always tied to issues of power and identity (see Gee 2000; Street 2001). This conception of literacies is in synergy with the current view of connected learning. The connected learning model seeks to harness the power of new technologies to carve out new pathways in education that draw on diverse cultural funds of knowledge and learners' own interests and goals, and it connects people and institutions that may not otherwise have been connected.

All learning practices are multifaceted and any interest can be an entry point into this system. Moreover, learning and literacy practices are braided with identity-making practices. As Gee (1999) reminds us, literate practices (including writing, speaking, participating in a video game) almost always have to do with instantiating one's identity, or putting forth what kind of person one is. Illustrating this principle, literate practices on Wattpad went hand-in-hand with negotiation, contestation, and performance of fan identity. For example, writing "slash" fiction positioned you as a certain kind of fan and using specific phrases and affectations positioned you as a certain kind of girl and writer—for instance a "crazed" fangirl and a "serious" writer. How did Wattpad users negotiate all of these identity labels in service of the literate practices (e.g., writing, reading, critiquing, Photoshopping, producing, talking, making, designing) on the site?

In this section, I would like to further focus on the literate and identity-forming work that goes on in the 1D fandom, pointing out ways in which dynamics in this fandom enrich and complicate notions linked to the connected learning model.

Literate practices in this space, such as writing stories or producing video montages, were undertaken and understood vis-à-vis umbrella identity categories, such as being a good fan, behaving as an appropriate teenager, or asserting oneself as a writer. In explaining what it meant to be involved in this particular discourse community, participants lean on bifurcated categories such as true fan ("Directioner") versus dilettantes who might know a song or two ("Directionator"), teen versus adult, and writer versus someone who is just fooling around. Understanding narratives of involvement meant delving into the boundaries between the different categories. These categories defined the local contexts that gave shape to the participants' understandings of their involvement: Being a true fan or fangirl carried with it different connotations of what it meant to be an active community member, a good writer, and a girl. These identity categories, often working in layers and sometimes in contradiction with each other, were evoked by participants to mark insiders and outsiders and also to specify benchmarks by which to judge performances of their peers. In sometimes contradictory ways, boundaries served as enablers and constraints in the production of connected learning

environments. In the course of the study, I became interested in three different kinds of boundary-work (Gieryn 1983) (see Korobkova and Black, forthcoming): (1) real fans, fangirls, and dilettantes; (2) teen versus adult spaces; and (3) school versus fan literacies.

"I AM A FAN NOT A FANGIRL": GENDER AND INSIDER STATUS IN THE FANDOM

In this community, members routinely distinguish "true" fans from others, and one must quickly become literate in the rules and customs that govern this separation. During interviews, and as evinced through observations of discussions in the site's various club forums, participants discussed their identification as teenagers, millennials, students, women, and, commonly, fangirls. Although the word "fan" was not used in the interview protocol, almost all of the interviewees defined their fan identity in alignment with or opposition to the category "fangirl." Some embraced the term, using it as an important positive aspect of their self-identity. Others described themselves as specifically not fangirls, while some members used "fangirling" as an inoffensive activity, an umbrella term for the kinds of activities and acts that index cultural membership of the One Direction fandom. Activities associated with fangirling included writing/reading about the band, cataloging the band members' tweets and retweets, scrolling through pictures of the members, feeling one's heart stop when a 1D song comes on the radio, or translating a 1D song into one's home language (Korobkova 2013).

Understanding the differences between a layperson and a fangirl color and inform the way authors engage in literate practices on the site. Abigail, a 13-year-old girl from Canada who specializes in sci-fi–inspired 1D fanfiction (the main boyband heartthrob lives in an alternate universe in these stories), would describe herself "more as a FAN than a fanGIRL." In part, this is because her interests on Wattpad are quite literary and serious. She enjoys some 1D songs and fanfic-tion stories but would never "jump up and down" if a 1D song came on randomly (which she describes as a characteristic of fangirling). Abigail is also wary of being called names or perceived as immature by her peers or family members so she rarely admits to them that she is a fan. She talks about fangirling in inter-changeably lighthearted and critical tones, but she is glad that there exists a safe haven for that sort of thing on the Internet, "even if it's just a phase" (Korobkova 2013).

Proposed shirt design. Image courtesy of Nicole.

Nicole and Maya chatted to me about fangirling and various fan "stuff" they owned and Nicole proposed a shirt such as this one that played on fangirling, geeking out (signified by the glasses), and pride. Maya laughed in response and told Nicole and me that she would wear a shirt like that only ironically and only around fellow *Directioners* who were able to "understand." Otherwise, she would be stigmatized as a girl who was too hormonal. During the course of our conversations, we were not able to reach a consensus definition of "fangirl," but we all agreed that it is a set of practices at the very heart of the 1D fandom.

The identity categories of "fan" and "fangirl" consequently were negotiated with specific practices. To be a true fan or a Directioner, a participant had to leverage knowledge about the band and its past, memorize song lyrics, and write stories that gained traction with the rest of the fan community. Real fans were recognized by the ways they used words, texts, emotions, and language.

THE BATTLE OF THE AGES: NEGOTIATING A TEEN-ONLY SPACE

Another realm of making and remaking boundaries within the space was related to age. In the interviews, the *Directioner* community on Wattpad was often presented as an autonomous teen space. Although participants sometimes consulted individual adults on the Multimedia Club forums or even discussed the site with their parents, the 1D-related pages were implicitly understood as an adult-free zone. Interviewees often expressed that being involved in a fangirl-only space was one of the greatest pleasures they got from participation. Like gender, age became layered into the participants' definition of what it meant to be a good fan. In fact, many interviewees considered "fangirling" the band a developmental phase that all females go through. The discourse community of *Directioners* was touted in opposition to the adult-ordered "real-life" worlds of the participants, including their homes, clubs, and schools.

Both the content of the boyband fandom world and the practices connected to the "fangirling" and the fanfiction hobby were narrated as inaccessible to adults for the most part. The participants narrated this practice differently. Some highlight the positive aspects of carving out a space for themselves on the Internet and the inability of adults to truly "get" their passion. One informant specifically lauds Tumblr for having a logic to it that is harder for adults to crack and thus less likely to be invaded by adults, unlike Facebook. Others wish they could share the kind of recognition and expertise they enjoy on the site with the adults in their lives but cannot. The fear of being thought of as "crazy" and being misunderstood came up several times with the interviewees, especially those who write stories that have overtly romantic and sexual themes.

To illustrate, for 14-year-old Katie, the main affordance of participation in this fan space is affiliating with like-minded peers and fans, so the intervention of adults and

adult content worlds are not very welcome here. Here is her take on 1D fanfiction writing and the value of it in school terms:

> Katie: I mean the school don't encourage it. Not that they really know that 80% of the girls in our grade have Wattpad.
> Interviewer: Haha, so you don't even tell your teachers you write for fun?
> Katie: No. It's like a private thing between students and friends.
> Interviewer: Why do you think that is?
> Katie: Well probably because what we write about [1D] we don't really want the teachers to know
> Interviewer: Because they wouldn't "get" it or something else?
> Katie: They definitely wouldn't.
> Katie: Wouldn't get it plus they would ask questions

Katie conceives of Wattpad as a private world, the logic of which would escape her parents and teachers. She does not see practices within school as on the same plane as practices within Internet-mediated reading and writing communities. Her differentiation between adult-sanctioned and "fan" reading and writing sketch out the realm of the third kind of boundary work I noticed within interviews.

"IT'S NOT 'WRITING' WRITING": CONCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLED VERSUS FAN LITERACIES

Most participants do not see their literate activities on these sites as directly consequential to their schooled literacies (Street 2003). The few who do would not frame it that way because school and pop culture are viewed as domains that do not mix. For instance, Katie distinguishes fanfiction writing from "writing" writing—the kind you would do for school. School writing is something you do within a structured environment, with a given prompt, and an adult-led process and evaluation. For Katie, writing about One Direction and sharing stories on fan sites carries a different set of meanings; it is about passion, inspiration, and free-form expression.

This way of thinking complicates two popular narratives about youth hanging out online: that it is a waste of time or that it can be brought into the classroom with little modification. Although the skills Katie acquires as she "fangirls out" on Wattpad inform all of her reading and writing faculties, she strategically keeps the content world separate from her school identity and interactions with adults. To her, it is one of the last kids-only environments she has open to her. At play here are the reputation of the interest and the domain it belongs to. Her fanfiction writing and book cover designing live in the domain of interest and leisure, not in domains of adult mediation and institutionally sanctioned learning. Several of the interviewees connect the activity of writing to what is done in school, but not the topic of their writing. Consider this example differentiating writing

within the context of the fandom from what their parents or teachers might value:

> Interviewer: But your [1D fanfiction] writing; have they ever read it?
> Sandra: Nooooo omg. That'd be weird if they read fan fiction
> Interviewer: haha why!
> Sandra: Because it's my parents. They're so strict and if they ever read my fan fiction or any others, I'd probably be freaked out.
> Interviewer: ah, so they wouldn't understand?
> Sandra: Yes, exactly
> Interviewer: so they know you write, they just don't know what about?
> Sandra: No not really but they still support my writing
> Interviewer: even though they don't know the real reason that you write?
> Sandra: Hahahah yeah
> Interviewer: what would they think if you tried to explain?
> Sandra: They'd probably think I'm crazy or something

Most of the interview participants do connect their fan activities to their schooled identities but would not want to make that connection explicit to parents or teachers because of the reputation of the interest (1D fans do not enjoy a high status or strong cultural cachet at most of the students' schools). Additionally, this connection was mediated by the fact that the interest belongs in the fan sphere of identity-making and not in the adult-ordered institutional sphere. In other cases, the separation goes deeper than that: For both Sandra and Katie, school writing is something you do when you are provided a stimulus or a topic that is school sanctioned and teacher approved. Students' descriptions see schooled spaces as top-down, expert-centric authority; school writing is thus disciplined and regimented. Fanfiction writing, on the other hand, is something you do when you can "fangirl out" and use everyday language and expletives. It requires passion, love, and inspiration that could never be achieved in schooled literacy activities. For Ayush, similarly, school is the place where he was forced to speak English and perform on tests. In contrast, his creative writing took place in his home tongue, Malayam, and later had to do with his passions of manga and fanfiction. He specifically shields those activities from institutions and parents as they seem sacred and personal.

Again, study participants highlight the self-directedness and passion that animates their pursuits within the fandom in contrast to schooled spaces. Although participants acknowledge "writing" is something that happens both in school and in fan sites, their language within the interviews creates and maintains boundaries between the two kinds of writing practices.

CONNECTING SCHOOL-BASED AND FAN-BASED LITERACIES

As the experiences on Wattpad sometimes inform the participants' experiences at school, life at school and at home often seeps into the participants' creative process. Sofia, 14, who is from Lithuania and now living in Ireland, explains that in writing her latest 1D fanfiction story, while she "didn't exactly copy the scene," she draws "inspiration from things that happen in school." For others, the two domains of school writing and fanfiction writing have a more direct association. For Katie, possible mediation occurs through skills shared across settings: Although the content world of One Direction firmly belongs in an autonomous, teen-only space, the grammar, vocabulary, and writing efficacy she gains within the fan space seep into her schooling and inform her classroom literacy practices. For Ayush, the bridge is an affective one. The sense of self-efficacy he gains from participating on Wattpad has purchase in his schooling endeavors, especially in terms of language learning. When he was growing up, Malayam was the language of home, comfort, and fun, while English was the language of discipline. His interest in anime and fanfic rendered the boundary between the two languages more porous; English now also can be a language of comfort and fun. This way, although Ayush does not explicitly link his fan-literate practices to his school-literate practices, we can see that his disposition toward language itself has changed through fannish endeavors.

And finally, during the course of my interview with Manjit (18 and originally from India), he began to connect the dots between his fan and school literacies.

> Well, I won't say that I'm a writer. I'm basically interested in comedy/humor. So I write these silly stories that most people find funny. When I think of a writer, I imagine a serious guy or girl sitting on the desk, typing on a typewriter and drinking coffee to stay awake through the night. LOL … But in a way, I might qualify as one.

In this quote, Manjit considers what it means for someone to be labeled as a legitimate writer, showcasing ways in which the category of "writing," as a literate practice, is bound to particular behavior and affect. "Real" writing is something that is a serious endeavor that does not take place in casual spaces. In effect, his humorous and playful composition practices—Manjit writes "ironic" fanfiction—would not count as real writing. He begins the interview with the categorical statement of "I won't say that I'm a writer," but upon further reflection and probes from me, reconsiders this statement. This exchange points to the possibility of bridges or translation

Nicole, a 17-year-old girl living near Mumbai, India, explains that her interest in the One Direction fandom blossomed along with her adeptness in social media. She and her friends often stream American and British TV shows on the Internet, and contest-based singing and dancing shows are no exception. With a couple of her friends, Nicole started watching the UK-based singing contest show X-Factor, where she made acquaintance with her new favorite band. That is when she began really rooting for the underdog band—she found a way to vote for it every week via Facebook. In this way, the participatory nature of the 1D fandom was always a big draw for Nicole. From the start she felt as if there were blurred lines between the band and the fans, as her social media involvement was a direct link to the band's success. The band did not win the contest TV show but mobilized a large fan following via Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Nicole explains that it is participation on those sites—such as involvement on fan Facebook websites—that "converted" her into true fandom. However, no one from her friend group was "converted" along with her.

Because no one in her town is a true fan or a Directioner, as Nicole considers herself to be, she leverages different social media sites and networks in support of her love for the band. To get the most out of fan sites and affinity networks, Nicole polished her conversational English (and in her words, learned Internet-speak) and learned to make fan artifacts, such as witty one-liner Tweets and captioned pictures of the band. It was not long before one of her "Internet-friends" introduced her to Wattpad, a story-sharing platform in which the most popular subject happened to be One Direction.

Nicole had never heard of fanfiction before, but the idea of reading and writing about the band intrigued her. In composing stories of different subgenres on Wattpad, she was able to practice literacy skills and engage in creative endeavors. For example, in writing SongFics, or stories based on song lyrics, she made up a rich context for interpreting and building upon the songs she liked by writing fanfic. Also, by writing stories in the "Imagine" genre, Nicole imagined herself in the inner circle of the band members and was able to insert herself and her friends into the commonly shared narratives around boyband and celebrity lifestyles. Additionally, she engaged in collective writing practices and collaborated with her friends by forming "collab" accounts, open to several writers for the purposes of one story. In a way, Wattpad represented a synergy of her fan and literate interests.

Although Nicole tells me she has never been a motivated student—"especially not in English!"—her desire to fully participate on affinity sites such as fan websites and Wattpad facilitated her skill development and literacy learning. Specifically, she had learned new genres of writing, how to compose multimodal texts (stories peppered with pictures, links, and video files), and simply "how to write long things." For Nicole, English is a third language, which meant that writing and reading 1D fanfiction stories posed particular challenges, such as vocabulary and flow, but because skill development in this space was a "byproduct" of participating in a fandom, to her it never felt like work.

This year, Nicole hopes to enter the Watty awards—a site-based recognition feature through which site developers and authors recognize their favorite stories in each genre. She worries that these contests are like popularity contests, as the stories that are the most "liked" or have the most views capture the judges' attention. She hopes that her stories, because of the ways she weaves in her real-life experiences as an Indian teenager and her vast knowledge of the band's history, will stand up according to their own merit. Because of her networked participation on fan sites and friendly attitude, she does not have a shortage of proofreaders to help attain her goals. Nicole's story stands as testament to the depth and resilience of networking and learning that can happen in connected environments. Her fandom-based pursuits are tapped into young people's subcultural interests, new technologies, and creative production and composition skills. Her pursuits are at once professionally useful and personally satisfying.

CONCLUSION

mechanisms being built between teen fan worlds and schooled experiences. Participants in the *Directioner* fandom have a choice in how they conceptualize their everyday literate experiences, whether they choose to translate them into the academic sphere, or not.

As we know, multiple strands of literacy research show that children's writing development benefits from a permeable curriculum that allows popular culture to seep into the classroom (Buckingham 2003; Dyson 2006; Wohlwend 2011). However, this case study raises questions about ways in which educators link popular culture pursuits and institutional realms without infringing upon autonomous subcultures that see themselves as qualitatively distinct. The connected learning approach to this dynamic is to call upon the learners themselves to define to which of their cultural worlds it would be appropriate to build bridges, and what kind of bridges they can be.

This glimpse into the One Direction fandom enriches and complicates our current understandings of young people's engagement with media and everyday literacies. It also provides both support and challenges to the connected learning model. On the one hand, this fandom is filled with young people developing literacy practices, literate identities, and relationships to print, visual, and musical texts. Young people develop voice, learn writing and editing skills, expand vocabulary, multiply new media skills, and fortify positive attitudes toward print and media literacies. On the other hand, participants often saw their skills and practices within the fandom as unrelated and unrelatable to the world of school. They often did build bridges between the fan and school worlds (sometimes alongside the interview, in real time), pointing out that their vocabulary increased or that the quality of their essays got better. Still, they saw their pop culture pursuits as essentially different from school, visualizing boyband fanfiction as a Directioner-only or teen-only kind of realm. This finding supports the call for designers of connected learning environments to think deeply about building bridges to children's cultural worlds without dismissing their autonomy. It also reinvigorates the appeal to stay attuned to children's cultural funds of knowledge and providing learners with choices when it comes to leveraging those in school environments.

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