

# Navigating and Hybridizing Interpretive Claim-Making Across Discursive Communities

## **Abstract:**

In order to better understand how the full range of students' semiotic resources may be marshalled for learning, we analyze the role of interpretive claim-making across fandom and disciplinary communities. Using a framework of syncretic literacies with a focus on navigation, we analyze data from a series of writing conferences in a U.S.-based, fandoms-themed English course serving diverse high school students. Our analysis attends to shifts in convergent and divergent intersubjectivity to trace students' navigation of interpretive practices as they talked with their peers and their instructor. Discursive claims emerged as an important tool functioning differently across these interactions. Specifically, the claim-making practices of one focal student demonstrate an emerging understanding of the distinctly different functions that claims serve as tools for navigating between, and hybridizing, discursive communities. Our findings highlight the importance of using discourse to analyze the presence of multiple or conflicting discursive practices, and designing learning environments in ways that support students' use of hybrid discursive tools.

## **Keywords:**

boundary objects, disciplinary communities, literacies, writing conferences, intersubjectivity

## **Body:**

Both fandoms and literary communities study texts together. In fandom affinity spaces, readers identify favorite characters and share affective reactions, discuss predictions, and argue about what should have happened in a story. In literary conversations, scholars synthesize contexts, trace patterns, and formulate original interpretations exploring form and function. Although these communities share the goal of making meaning from texts, educators tend to see disciplinary interpretations of literary novels as distinctly different from everyday critiques of

popular movies, TV shows, and comics. However, recent interpretive work shows the potential of hybridizing these communities' texts, tools, and practices, such as Thomas's (2019) analysis of race across texts and paratexts relating to *Harry Potter*, *The Vampire Diaries*, and *The Hunger Games*.

When classrooms only value engagement with literary communities, youth may be positioned as lacking knowledge about textual interpretation. However, from a social justice perspective we recognize the importance of supporting syncretic literacies, hybrid languaging practices that develop as youth move across "virtual and geographical boundaries" (Gutiérrez, 2014, p. 50). Educators are starting to value and intentionally address the sensemaking practices that youth learn through fandom discourse (Lammers et al., 2022). For example, discourse analysis of youth conversation about fan texts has shown how youth construct hybrid interpretive communities that merge literary and fandom-based sensemaking (Storm et al., 2022), but there is a need to extend such classroom-based research to show how instructional routines can be leveraged to explicitly support youth navigation in formal learning spaces. This is particularly important for the learning of historically marginalized Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth whose hybrid practices are often seen through deficit lenses (Gutiérrez, 2014).

As teacher educators and former high school English teachers with experiences in demographically diverse U.S. schools, we ask: how can interpretive claims between fandom and disciplinary communities help us understand students' movement across interpretive communities in teaching and learning contexts? The purpose of this paper is to trace how learners take up a certain kind of semiotic tool—the interpretive claim—as they move across communities explicitly put in conversation by hybrid classroom activities. In doing so, we expand on Moje's (2008) characterization of navigation in the practice of disciplinary literacy

and use this concept to theorize connections between process and product in the practice of syncretic literacies.

## Literature Review

### Interpretive Claim-Making as a Boundary Object

In light of calls to discard dichotomies in literacies research and instead “grapple” with boundaries between various spaces youth move across (Low & Rapp, 2021), we are interested in the tools that enable such boundary crossing, and how those tools can be “potential resources for learning” (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 1523). A boundary object is something that emerges in a shared space between groups (Leigh Star, 2010). Given the literary goals of the two communities we study, we are specifically interested in the concept of *interpretive claim-making* as boundary object, sitting at the intersection of literary and fandom communities.

Our focus on interpretive claim making is supported by research on disciplinary literacy that illustrates how different discourse communities subscribe to different norms and conventions of reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Moje, 2008). One disciplinary norm involves conventions for interpreters’ *making a claim* (Rainey, 2017), or forming an assertion about a text that is supported with evidence. Conventions for making a claim vary, with literary claims typically focusing on how a specific type of close analysis yields a different meaning than a surface analysis, or on interpreting relations between form and meaning. To help scaffold students’ claim-making processes, teachers may encourage certain lines of questioning to help students take up a disciplinary lens on the task or text at hand (Beck et al., 2020). Knowing what questions to ask of a text is an important part of disciplinary thinking.

Claim-making extends beyond academic disciplines to include fandom communities (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002; Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). Fan communities form around many types of central texts, including books, movies, TV shows, music albums, webcomics, YouTube channels, etc. Additionally, fans create and engage with what Gray (2010) calls *media paratexts*—e.g. discussion boards, fanfiction, social media posts, vlogs—to discuss and interpret these central texts. Though various platforms and modalities shape such discussions, fandom communities typically engage with texts by focusing on their aesthetic or emotional response to the central text while treating fictional characters as if they are real people and making claims about characters' judgements or actions (Storm et al., 2022). Though fandom texts are amenable to literary interpretation, the kinds of claims that fan interpreters make are necessarily different, aligned with fandoms' distinct conventions for engagement (Jenkins & Kelley, 2013).

Even when these two communities engage with the very same texts, fandom and disciplinary discourse is often distinguishable. For example, Jenkins and Kelley (2013) distinguish how different communities engage the text *Moby Dick*, with literary scholars considering historical contexts for interpretation while fans consider character perspectives and ways the narrative or genre might be changed or remixed. Research on the emergence of a Tumblr community reading *Dracula* online in 2022 found that the most popular fandom paratexts prioritized collective emotional responses to characters, play across popular culture texts, and ironic or satirical responses through memes (Jones et al., 2023). These practices differ from those of literary scholars writing about *Dracula*, as scholars more strongly prioritize historical contexts for meaning-making (Schaffer, 1994). However, though methods for teaching interpretation

often focus exclusively on literary scholars' dispassionate practices, affect-based strategies have been shown to help youth make stronger literary interpretations (Levine, 2014).

Adolescent learners are expected to practice navigation (Moje, 2008) across different discourse communities. We use this metaphor of navigation to further theorize the concept of syncretic literacies as those that “put everyday (from the home and community) and disciplinary literacy practices (from school and institutions) in relation to one another” (Lizárraga & Gutiérrez, 2018, p. 39). Particularly, we are interested in how BIPOC youth hybridize practices between fandom communities and those of disciplinary literary scholarship. In many high school classes, fandom practices might be marginalized or relegated to extracurricular status; however, our research looks at a context for learning interpretation that takes a hybrid (Gutiérrez, 2014) approach centering navigation (Moje, 2008)—meaning that the course was designed to include fandom literacies and literary disciplinary literacies, and to support students in hybridizing practices as they navigated across these communities.

### Writing Conferences as Sites for Boundary-Crossing

Writing conferences can be a productive site for in-depth exploration of engagement across communities. We are specifically interested in the approach of dialogic writing assessment (Beck, 2018) which focuses on processes of writing instead of products. In this approach, students engage in live composing while they confer with a teacher or a peer, foregrounding their thinking process (which includes the formulation of claims) and enabling the teacher or peer to support the writer through that process in ways that support their own goals for writing (Beck & Jones, 2023). Dialogic assessment is an appropriate context for studying students' navigation across interpretive communities because 1) writing tasks in this course intentionally spanned fandom and academic contexts, and 2) the presence of multiple

participants engaging in dynamically shifting configurations allowed many opportunities for the creation of boundary objects through which youth hybridize literacy practices. A perspective on writing conferences grounded in syncretic literacies (Gutiérrez, 2014) enables us to explore the intersubjective nature of this remixing as well as theorize how feedback on writing might contribute to learning. In doing so, we build on the idea that intersubjective understanding of literacy conventions between teacher and students can shape students' uptake of those conventions (Beck, 2006). Drawing on Lee's (2014) call for feedback practices that promote student agency, we consider how conference-based writing feedback creates opportunities for navigation across interpretive communities that results in the emergence of students' interpretive authority, evidenced by the articulation of an original interpretive claim and the means to identify evidence to support that claim.

## Methodology

### Context

This study took place in a twelfth-grade English literature class in a large urban district in the Northeastern United States. In this course, youth and teachers iteratively co-designed a curriculum focused on supporting youth navigation across fandom discourses. The designers (Scott and Karis) conceptualized the discipline of literary study as a type of fandom, thereby placing it on the same level as youth-selected fandoms. At the time of data collection approximately 75% of students in the school qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, 30% received special education services, and the school was racially diverse, with demographics of approximately 45% Latinx, 25% Black, 20% white, and 10% Asian. In this class, students from all ability levels were taught within the same classroom. In order to address research questions

about educational equity, BIPOC focal youth were selected for identifying as passionate fans and requesting additional writing support throughout the course, particularly with the capstone assignment. The course was co-taught by a special education teacher and Scott. Karis was present as a teacher-researcher.

Two of the projects assigned in this class are present in the data excerpts below. The first was the “capstone” paper, an original literary analysis that students were required to present in an oral defense to a panel of examiners in order to graduate. All the students in Scott’s class were writing their papers about Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which was presented as a text with a passionate literary “fandom.” Students learned about how this text became popular and juxtaposed conventions of “fans” writing literary scholarship about this text versus fans writing fanfiction. For their capstone papers, students were expected to develop their own questions to explore, guided by their individual passions and interest – an important contrast to teacher-assigned prompts more typical of literary analysis essays. Secondly, students worked on “Fandom Transformation” projects, requiring students to select a fandom with some kind of problematic or toxic discourse to address. Students then were asked to 1) surface the problem by applying critical disciplinary tools to fandom discourse and 2) make an artifact that addressed the problem and moved the fandom toward more socially just ends.

### Participants and Data Sources

Our exploration of youth navigation takes place across a series of multi-participant writing conferences in which one of the co-authors (Karis) was acting in the teacher role, both engaging in 1-1 dialogic assessment conversations with students and giving them space to carry on such conversations with one another. On writing conference days, the classroom was a flurry of activity with students typing, talking with peers about their literary analyses, or having one-

on-one writing conferences with their teachers. Karis often worked with Clark, Alex, Jewel, and Esmaily on various papers, with conversations often changing focus quickly as students switched between writing, talking with the teacher, talking with a peer, reading/reading out loud, and thinking or taking notes.

Two Latinx students are of particular interest for this analysis. The first student was Jewel, who needed to complete her capstone to graduate as well as her fandom transformation project to pass the class. Esmaily had completed her capstone paper and oral exam in the previous year but still had to complete a literary analysis and fandom transformation project. These young women were friends and also fans of the TV series *Lucifer*.

Data sources for our analysis included the audio recording and transcript of dialogic assessment sessions as well as the writing that students produced both on the computer and in their notebooks. Because each edit to their writing on the computer was timestamped, we were able to match the writing to the audio recordings to determine the exact moments during the session that students wrote particular words on the computer. Additionally, ethnographic fieldnotes from the larger year-long project and audio-recordings and writing from all other class sessions were used to substantiate our interpretations.

### Analytic Method: Tracing Learning as Horizontal Movement Across Systems of Meaning Making

To trace focal students' learning, we iteratively re-read transcripts of the two conference sessions that Karis held with these students. We used an analytic matrix from Bomer and Laman's (2004) work on positionality in writing conferences to closely examine self- and other-positioning. Though Bomer and Laman (2004)'s data focuses on youths' positionality as student-writers, our data also surfaced youth positionalities as fans (see Table 1). We analyzed these shifts in positionings through a series of analytic memos around evidence of convergent or



divergent intersubjectivity across moments in the dialogic assessments. We noticed a pattern: moments of divergent intersubjectivity often happened specifically around claim-making, which led us to the analytic concept of claims as boundary objects.

Agent	Utterance	Self-Positioning	Other-Positioning
Jewel	I started watching Lucifer, it's really good	Newcomer to fandom	Oldtimer in fandom
Esmaily	Oh my god girl, you are going to love him	Oldtimer in fandom	Newcomer to fandom
Jewel	No it's getting me mad!	Fan	Fellow fan
Esmaily	It's gonna get you ((laughs))	Oldtimer in fandom	Newcomer to fandom
Jewel	Yo, Malcolm. Come on, first season, I must be on two, like I literally started this two days ago, and I've gotta be on season two, and they're getting me mad, like Dan, I was like, yo I already know she already shot Malcolm, I already knew it for a fact	Skilled foreshadower	Fan who has already seen the show & knows what happens
Jewel	And then Lucifer knew, and then Lucifer is like ego pride, and like his -- yo	Fan of Lucifer	Fellow fan of Lucifer
Jewel	The only thing that gets mad though is his brother, Maml, Amal, Amalita-	Newcomer fan	Oldtimer fan
Esmaily	Amedadeliah.	Oldtimer fan	Newcomer fan
Jewel	Yeah, he's getting me tight!	Fan	Fellow fan
Esmaily	He's so boring y'all.	Fan	Fellow fan

Jewel	He is, but I just hate how he's the only dark skin there. Like he stands out.	Critical race scholar	Fellow scholar
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Our focus on intersubjectivity draws on two sources, first, the idea that "learning occurs whenever a novel practice, artifact, tool or division of labor ... constitutes a new possibility for others" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 205). Second, we understand "division of labor" as the expression of "convergent or divergent intersubjectivity," drawing on Matusov's (1996) participatory view of intersubjectivity. This more recent conception of intersubjectivity has been productively employed in mathematics education to illustrate how disagreement can enable students to "articulate their disparate positions in more sophisticated ways" (Nathan et al., 2007, p. 554).

Tracing moments of convergent or divergent intersubjectivity also allowed us to empirically point to moments of boundary-crossing, with boundaries defined as "sociocultural differences leading to discontinuities in action and interaction" (Akkerman & Baker, 2011, p. 152) instead of *a priori* categories. Specifically, we looked for discontinuities in our focal student Jewel's practices using claims across disciplinary and fandom systems articulated by the design, as well as moments when such boundaries were positioned as more "malleable and dynamic" (p.152).

## Findings

In this section, we describe how our focal student, Jewel, engaged in the practice of making claims across these two discursive communities. We use the notions of *convergent* and *divergent intersubjectivity* to characterize the nature of her engagement in these practices as well as the support for this engagement that other participants in the activity offer.

### Reflection on Claims from a Disciplinary Perspective

During a dialogic assessment session focused on her capstone paper, Jewel expresses a need for clarification of the norms of the literary community with respect to claim making:

“What am I really supposed to be writing about? Am I supposed to write an argument? I don’t know.” We see her conversation clarifying her understanding of disciplinary claim-making as a process of *perspective making* (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011), where learners differentiate between different practices. After Jewel sums up what actions she has taken so far toward writing her paper, Karis offers support by setting a short-term goal: “Can you come up with a question that you want to write about?” The “question” prompt serves as a discursive instantiation of the literary community practice of investigating interpretive puzzles. Jewel hesitates, and in another moment of intersubjective understanding, Karis asks her if she is uncertain about what makes a good question:

Jewel: That’s the thing though. I don’t like...Okay, can you give me -

Karis: You don’t know what to do with the question -

Jewel: - an example? What’s his question?

Jewel adeptly turns to another available resource: her peer, Clark, steadily working on his laptop on the other side of Karis. Clark answers (not in the form of a question) that he is looking at Tea Cake and Janie’s “relationship slash love. And how the author uses lit devices to tell the narrative of love.” Karis, observing Jewel’s interest in this puzzle, offers topics that several other students are working on:

I think that Elijah is looking at the hero's journey. Ignatio's talking about how the story is ahead of its time and its situation in the historical context. I think that Alex wants to argue that actually Tea Cake and Janie are not a good relationship. She's arguing that it's kind of an abusive relationship, which is in contrast to what a lot of the criticism says.

Sharing these examples shows how other participants work towards the object of claim-making. Also, it illustrates several conventions for claim-making: the use of conventional themes like “hero’s journey,” the use of “historical context” as a focus for interpretation, and the positioning arguments in relation to published scholarship. Karis prompts Jewel to work on her own, using these examples as a guide, and turns to work with another student.

Later in the discussion, after Jewel has engaged with some literary scholarship relating to Janie’s identity, she shares a few thoughts about her interpretation of the novel: “I feel like Janie had a struggle looking for herself in the beginning. And toward the end like it started to like go in deeper and she started finding herself, and what’s going on between the relationship, between her life, nanny, and everything was going around, and the way the story was told in the book and the way the author wrote it.” After Jewel identifies a related passage that she wants to analyze, Karis guides Jewel through a reading of a passage from the novel with a focus on identifying important imagery that relates to the theme of identity. They discuss several examples until Jewel says that she has enough to work with. However, she still seeks guidance in how to organize these examples around a claim, asking, “What would be the question for this whole thing together?” She understands that a question is a tool that can help a literary scholar arrive at a claim. She reiterates what she does understand – that “it’s like about identity and like how the author like shapes” the text.

Noticing Jewel’s repetition of the concept of “identity” and her interest in how the author shapes this concept, Karis recasts what Jewel has said into a question: “Seems to me right now, your question is how does Zora Neale Hurston develop Janie’s search for identity? I mean that’s what you said.” Karis’s recast of Jewel’s ideas reflect the norms for an interpretive question preceding a claim within the disciplinary discourse-of literary analysis. Karis uses the verb

“develop” to demonstrate that Hurston is actively constructing the themes throughout the novel. Karis rephrases Jewel’s idea of “identity and like how the author shapes” the text to use an active voice construction *Hurston develops identity*. This helps Jewel see how these two ideas (the concept of identity and how the author writes the text) as connected. Essential for supporting Jewel in this development are Karis’s deliberate efforts to achieve convergent intersubjectivity, strikingly illustrated in the statement, “I’m just saying what you said.” As another student Esmaily joins the group, Karis celebrates Jewel’s progress aloud, saying: “Jewel just found an awesome guiding question. I think it was really, really good.” This recollection acts affirms their convergent intersubjectivity around Jewel’s choice of question.

#### Implicit Claims from a Fandom Perspective

When cultural models are not explicitly recognized, boundary objects often remain unleveraged (Buxton et al., 2005). In this section, we show that the connection between fandom and literary claims remains momentarily unrecognized. We argue that this is because the practices of claim-making in fandoms and disciplinary contexts are socioculturally distinguished to the point where even when they are juxtaposed, they are unrecognizable to participants as similar practices, making it difficult for participants to deliberately navigate across them.

When Esmaily joins the writing conversation, Karis spends a moment in conversation with Esmaily about the television show, *Lucifer* which she wants study for her Fandom Transformation project. As Karis turns to work with someone else, Jewel and Esmaily strike up their own conversation about this show. This moment of peer-to-peer intersubjectivity, afforded by the class’s unique commitment to connecting to larger fandom spaces, shows a contrast in the norms and conventions surrounding claim-making when these youth are indexing fandom communities in contrast to literary communities.

Jewel: I started watching *Lucifer*, it's really good

Esmaily: Oh my god girl, you are going to love him

Jewel: No it's getting me mad!

Esmaily: It's gonna get you ((laughs))

Jewel: Yo, Malcolm. Come on, first season, I must be on two, like I literally started this two days ago, and I've gotta be on season two, and they're getting me mad, like Dan, I was like, yo I already know she already shot Malcolm, I already knew it for a fact. And then Lucifer knew, and then Lucifer is like ego pride, and like his – yo! The only thing that gets mad though is his brother, Maml, Amal, Amalita-

Esmaily: Amenadiel

Jewel: Yeah, he's getting me tight

Esmaily: He's so boring.

Jewel: He is, but I hate how he's the only dark skin there. Like, he stands out.

Esmaily: Yeah

Jewel: Besides Maze, it's him.

Esmaily: It's him, yep.

Jewel: But Lucifer, bro, he's so like

Esmaily: hilarious

Jewel: Funny.

Esmaily: He's hilarious.

Jewel begins the conversation by telling Esmaily both that she has started watching the TV show *Lucifer* and that she enjoys it. In this moment from lines 1-4, we see convergent intersubjectivity between the two participants, with Esmaily pivoting to align with Jewel, first to affirm that the show is good and then to immediately agree that parts of the show are frustrating. This interaction positions Esmaily as an insider fan in this community and Jewel as someone who is in the process of learning about the community, with her learning evident in the articulation of claims that are based on affective responses (“love”, “mad”), in contrast to the literary claim-making illustrated in the previous section.

As Jewel continues to explain her reactions to the characters, such as her annoyance about the character Amenadiel, Esmaily immediately agrees. Here we again see the two converging around their reactions to the character Amenadiel as frustrating and boring. Notice here that Amenadiel as a character is taken up differently than Janie was in the previous excerpt. At no point do Karis or Jewel share their emotional responses to Janie. But here Jewel seems to expect Esmaily to resonate with her appraisal of the show and its characters, repeating several times how mad she is feeling about aspects of the show and making authoritative claims such as, “I already knew it for a fact” (5). When Esmaily agrees with Jewel’s frustration by adding how she finds the character boring, Jewel immediately takes up Esmaily’s more specific appraisal of the character as boring by saying “He is” (9). Their back and forth and overlapping talk (lines 6-14, above) extends the sense of a shared affective response—a convergent intersubjectivity around an affective claim.

Shifting from analyzing the show to critiquing the casting, Jewel uses a critical race framework to comment on the race of the actor playing Amenadiel, adding, “but I just hate how he's the only dark skin there. Like he stands out” (9). Esmaily again agrees, “Yeah,” to which

Jewel adds, “Besides Maze, it’s him” (11). Esmaily converges again, “It’s him yep” (12). Jewel takes up the tool of critical race theory—a literary disciplinary tool taught in the literature course to examine the role of race and how race and power intertwine in the construction of texts—and synthesizes it with an affective evaluation of a fandom claim.

Finally, Jewel pivots to praising the main character, saying, “But Lucifer bro? He’s so, like, funny” (13-14) with Esmaily overlapping and saying at the same time, “He’s hilarious” (14). This passage evidences a convergent intersubjectivity, as each learner immediately orients to the affective charge of the other’s assertion, to the point where their opinions literally converge as they talk over each other to affirm that they both see Lucifer as funny. The fluidity with which Jewel and Esmaily collaboratively pivot from praise to critique to praise throughout this conversation points to a shared understanding of the conventions for claim-making in fandom interpretive communities.

### Confrontation Distinguishing Disciplinary and Fandom Claims

Akkerman and Bakker (2011) describe how processes of confrontation are necessary for transformative boundary work as conflicts cause participants to “seriously reconsider their current practices and the interrelations” (p. 146). We suggest that in this case, conflicting practices of claim-making emerge as obstacles to learning across boundaries, requiring learners to recognize differences and navigate across practices. In this next section, we show how Jewel’s initial reflective practices establishing literary claims as a particular type of practice leads to a moment of divergent intersubjectivity between the young women that distinguishes this interaction from the interaction around *Lucifer*, even though Esmaily takes up similar discursive moves as the conversation in the previous section.



As they finish up their discussion about *Lucifer*, Esmaily and Jewel pivot to talking about their papers for *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. We see a switch in the conversational dynamic as Jewel draws from the rules of the literary discourse communities that she had established with Karis, leading to a moment of divergent intersubjectivity in this peer-to-peer conversation.

Jewel: How does Zora Neale Hurston develop Janie's search for identity?

Esmaily: Okay

Jewel: How does Zora (.) Neal (.) Hurston (.) develop Janie's (.) search for identity?

That's my question!

Esmaily: What was your question? How does—

Jewel: How does Zora Neal Hurston develop Janie's search for identity?

Esmaily: Oh wow, that's exactly what I'm doing.

Jewel: [part of transcript omitted where Esmaily tries to get Karis's attention.]

Jewel: I could go deeper.

Jewel: I'd like to step on, so what I dos, I got to, I started to do behaviors and everything, so I really wanted to do something with Janie and [inaudible] others, like the book and everything and how they're like, and how she develops her identity throughout the novel and how it increases her relationships with herself

Esmaily: That's like

Esmaily: I said how the three marriages represent growth.

Jewel: But you're

Esmaily: and an increase in self awareness, yeah that's basically

Jewel: The difference between me is I'm focusing on Janie and her identity, you're focusing on the marriages and all that, within the marriage, me

Esmaily: I mean, like, it's kind of, I'm kind of connected, so I just like, hmm

Jewel: Listen!

Esmaily: But I was like, you know at first she didn't know what she wanted in life, she had an idea of what it could be

Jewel: Yeah me and Karis went deeper right, and it was in chapter 2 right, and then we read how

Esmaily: The peach tree?

Jewel: mmhmm, listen, but I never knew this until me and Karis spoke about it, so basically

Jewel: ((reading to Esmaily the pear tree passage from the book))

Jewel begins this sequence by repeating the question from Karis and taking up as her own, explaining that she is interested in, "How does Zora Neale Hurston develop Janie's search for identity?" (1) Jewel then exclaims, "That's my question!" (3). Here Jewel takes ownership of the question, which Karis had recast in a form aligned with the literary interpretive community. As their interaction progresses, Jewel furthers her participation in the literary community by reacting to Esmaily's assertion that they have analogous claims (6). In the literary discipline, having the same claim as someone else is not as valued as having a different claim. So, when Esmaily presents an interpretation that the marriages represent growth and an increase in self-awareness,

Jewel interrupts to highlight the differences: “the difference between me is I’m focusing on Janie and her identity, you’re focusing on the marriages and all that” (12). We see this as a navigational moment, in that the boundaries between the systems are established as salient to the interaction. By asserting the differences between their thematic focuses—identity versus marriage—Jewel moves from convergent to divergent intersubjectivity with Esmaily and in doing so draws on the literary community’s norm of creating unique contributions through “different perspectives.”

Seemingly still operating under the fandom interpretive community where convergence is valued, Esmaily responds, “I mean, like, it’s kind of, I’m kind of connected, so I just like—” (13). Here she is trying to find connections between their ideas, like they had done in the previous interaction. However, Jewel has a strong reaction, interrupting and exclaiming, “Listen!” (14). We interpret this exclamation as Jewel’s creation and enforcement of a boundary between different practices of claim-making for a fandom and claim-making for a literary community.

This moment contrasts clearly with the previous interaction. Earlier, both young women are interested in discussing the characters as people, and Jewel does not engage with Esmaily’s comment that treats Janie like a person instead of a character (15). While Esmaily may be pulling from everyday interpretive practices to support her literary interpretations (Levine, 2014), Jewel is at this point focused on distinguishing practices instead of synthesizing them, leading to the discontinuity between them.

### Hybridizing Claims across Interpretive Communities

A valued outcome in the fandom course was the learning process of hybridization, which occurs when “practices that are able to cross their boundaries engage in a creative process in

which something hybrid—that is, a new cultural form—emerges” (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 148). The course’s final performance assessment, the Fandom Transformation project, required students to apply critical disciplinary lenses to a fandom and was intentionally designed to support such kinds of hybridizing learning processes as a result of navigating between spaces. This next section will show how fandom-based claim-making practices around *Lucifer*, previously distinguished from disciplinary work in the peer-to-peer conversation, were made visible in a way that was consequential to Jewel’s processes of claim-making.

As Jewel started working on her Fandom Transformation project in a dialogic assessment session the following week, she was asked to consider how she might analyze problematic elements of a fandom she loves. In this conversation, Jewel brings up and develops her evaluation of the diversity of *Lucifer*’s casting, discussed with Esmaily during the previous dialogic assessment activity.

Karis: So, like in the fandom. So, when people talk about the show, if they’re discussing the show or even things that happen in the show –

Jewel: ((laughs)) What hasn’t happened in the show?

Karis: ((laughs)) What hasn’t happened in the show. So, Scott said that you can use a feminist lens, and you can look for gender stereotypes, you can look at race or class. Are they killing off characters of color or marginalizing them?

Jewel: No, now that I’m watching the show more on, I feel like it’s diverse.

Karis: Yeah?

Jewel: At first, I think it was the first season, Amenadiel, I think his name is?

Esmaily: Yeah, Amenadiel.

Jewel: He's an angel, okay, whatever, enough about him, he's an- [brief interruption]  
He's an angel, and he's the only color guy. But that was the first season. And as it goes on, it got-

Karis: They got more and more diverse?

Jewel: Okay, yeah. He was the only one. And then it's like Lucifer is white and their brothers and it was just, wow.

Karis: It's good, it's good.

Similar to the discussion about the capstone project, the interaction begins with a clarification of the purpose of the assignment. However, here we see the presence of more hybridized interactions than in the capstone discussion. For example, Jewel interrupts Karis's summary of the prompt with a joke, “((laughs)) What hasn't happened in the show?” By responding to Karis's general prompt with a specific joke about her fandom, Jewel positions herself as a fan with extensive knowledge of the show. In a moment of intersubjective understanding around Jewel's positionality as a fan and norms of fandom interactions, Karis also interrupts herself, laughing and repeating Jewel's joke.

Continuing the discussion of the prompt, Karis refers to various critical disciplinary tools introduced by Scott—feminist lenses that reveal gender stereotypes as well as critical race tools to examine the marginalization of characters of color. In response to this question, Jewel returns to previously discussed ideas shared with Esmaily in the writing session five days earlier where she was interested in representation through diverse casting. This idea functions similarly to her claim from the capstone, in that she makes an evaluation about a concept (casting in the show)

using disciplinary tools (critical race lenses) by drawing on textual evidence (Season 2 of *Lucifer*). However, unlike her previous conversation with Karis, Jewel takes up more subjective evaluations of the text (“it was just, wow”) than she did in her more literary claim-making practices about Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Note that this subjective evaluation is taken up as consequential to the claim she is making – her positive evaluation of the show is connected with its use of more diverse cast members in later seasons (several of *Lucifer*’s siblings are played by actors of color), and that Karis intersubjectively ratifies this evaluation by saying, “It’s good, it’s good.” Indeed, as the pair continues to brainstorm a topic for her project, her claim about the productive use of race in the show causes them to move away from the topic of race in *Lucifer* as a candidate for critical evaluation.

Here student and instructor create hybrid social practices that combine elements of multiple interpretive communities. Such hybrid practices align with social justice pedagogies of navigational learning that foreground the importance of not merely reproducing disciplinary practices but transforming them: “the norms [of disciplinary communities] are constructed, practiced, and enforced by people; they are not a set of immutable rules that can be questioned or changed” (Moje, 2008, p. 29). Across this series of conversations, we see Jewel both explicitly soliciting disciplinary norms for literary claim-making and distinguishing them from fandom claim-making, as well as mixing the two practices. Creating new hybrid practices mattered to Jewel. Indeed, in a focus group conversation about the impact of the class, Jewel talked specifically about *Lucifer* and how the class changed the way she thought about watching TV shows in general. Instead of just watching a show “to see what happens,” she describes new hybrid practices where she watches a show to analyze it as well as to understand and participate in larger community discourses:

But in the class I felt like it changed on how I view things, like different fandoms. Basically, how do I word this, just don't watch it to watch, and pay attention. How deep it goes and stuff like that... I felt like it changed in the sense where I see things more deeper... Like when I was researching *Lucifer*, it was many different opinions and like little blogs about it and like I saw, I don't know... Just the way it's viewed. And what other people say about it and actually focus on what they're saying and then actually watch that show and see.

This comment represents a larger movement toward Jewel's *continuous joint work at the boundary* (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011), as she continues in a lasting way to distinguish and hybridize practices between the two interpretive communities.

## Discussion

Our analysis showed that interpretive claims functioned as boundary objects (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) that enable youth to navigate across interpretive communities. We found that in the process of formulating a claim, Jewel navigated tensions in conventions of claim-making. After receiving some explicit instruction in these conventions from an instructor (Karis) she then began to leverage conventions of claim-making within the larger literary discipline in conversations with a peer. This suggests that explicit dialogue about the rules of disciplinary communities is important for classroom instruction (Rainey, 2017). Teachers may see students struggling with literary analysis and assume that students need help with the assignment prompt or textual comprehension skills. However, sometimes it is an understanding of the community and its practices that students actually need help with and not just an individual assignment or text.

Our findings also suggest that the notions of convergent and divergent intersubjectivity was helpful for both identifying boundary objects in navigational learning and for learning

processes involving those boundary objects. Nathan, Eilam and Kim (2007) argue that both convergent and divergent intersubjectivity is important for learning, explaining how peer conversations in a mathematic classroom were valuable even when not everyone agreed. Informed by the participatory view of intersubjectivity (Matusov, 1996), Nathan et al. showed how intersubjectivity was involved in the establishment of a “common basis for communication even in the absence of a shared solution” (pp. 552-553). Analogously, in our context which is focused on the disciplinary activity of literary analysis, we see students using linguistic resources to refine their representations. We see that in Jewel’s conversation with Esmaily, Jewel was able to both identify that they were using claims in different ways and explain the differences to Esmaily on a metalinguistic level. Our analysis suggests that Jewel’s multiple explicit conversations with Karis about disciplinary rules were important to support her later divergence with Esmaily as she established her own unique claim. To be clear, we do not wish to position Esmaily as a less proficient claim-maker because she did not clearly distinguish between practices. Instead, we present this moment as an example of a productive divergent moment between youth that surfaced a boundary object being taken up in different ways.

We suggest that in cases like these where there are productive opportunities to talk about boundary objects, clarifying typical practices of different communities and exploring ways to intentionally remix divergent practices could support various aims supports learning across multiple spaces. While Nathan et al. (2007)—situated in a more uniform, heterogeneous disciplinary math environment—found the role of the teacher in peer-to-peer discursive negotiations to be “catalytic rather than central,” (p. 554), we suggest that teachers may need to play a more central role, giving explicit guidance in a context where boundaries between communities are murky to students. As seen in this interaction, both designing spaces where



syncretic literacies are invited and explicitly making visible the rules of various communities can be helpful to support student creation of syncretic texts. Theorizing claim-making as a boundary object between communities (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) allows us to make sense of how practices are negotiated across boundaries in these dialogic interactions between Jewel, Esmaily and Karis. Our participants demonstrated ability to navigate both convergent and divergent intersubjectivity. Jewel showed that she can create claims within a literary disciplinary framework by focusing on divergence in constructing claims. When Jewel works under the norms of this community, she focuses on creating a unique claim that contributes to the conversation in the literary scholarship. Jewel even carefully tells Esmaily that their claims are different and demonstrates the nuances between them in terms of central topic and argument. However, she is just as capable at making interpretive claims for a fandom audience when she and Esmaily bond over their convergent claims about the worthiness of the TV show, *Lucifer*. In both instances, Jewel maintains the uniqueness of the intersecting practices even though she makes claims in both and is talking to the same peer.

Our close investigation of interpretive claims as boundary objects helps to illuminate how youth engage generatively in hybridization, where “new cultural form[s]” (p. 148) are created. One of the goals of the course was not only for youth to understand the metalinguistic differences in language use between two communities but to also critically consider ways to upend or remix linguistic structures in intentional ways to achieve hybrid goals. In the one moment during Esmaily and Jewel’s conversation where they discuss *Lucifer*, we see the two students not just navigating *between* practices but actually bringing the practices *together*. First, we see both youth comment on their negative evaluations of the character—with Jewel sharing that the character is “getting me tight” and Esmaily’s comment that he is “so boring y’all.” Then

we see a shift in how they evaluate the show. When talking about the casting of Lucifer, Jewel both shares her affective evaluation (“I just hate how...”) as well as a critical observation about the show’s casting choices (“He's the only dark skin there. Like he stands out... besides mains, it's him”). Sociopolitical critiques about racialized casting choices are an emerging trend in fandom spaces (Thomas, 2019). Jewel is using her fandom experience to construct an original claim in the fandom discourse, a highly valued literary interpretive activity. The bringing together of both personal evaluations and critical observations implies that there is something emotionally charged about both the character and the way the character is constructed – that she finds it problematic to have this boring and frustrating character as the only Black character in that season of the show. Here we argue that Jewel is using critical tools around race to think not just about reactions to content but to make a unique claim about the (literary) effect of the choices made by creators on the viewers. We posit that Jewel’s analysis was taking up critical race tools—tools that she had both developed from her experiences as a Latinx woman and that were also used many times in class to analyze the course text *Their Eyes Were Watching God*—to make a claim using hybrid discursive structures at the intersection of these different communities. In making this critical statement about the show, she is both converging with how Esmaily felt about the character, agreeing that he is boring and frustrating, while diverging to make her own unique statement about the show using a critical lens, pointing out how much she hates that this frustrating character is the only person of color on the show. Note that she also disrupts cultural disciplinary norms around claim-making, using cultural phrases like “getting me tight” instead of White Mainstream English (Baker-Bell, 2020) as well as including her passionate response to the literary effect. In this peer-to-peer conversation, Jewel plays with linguistic structures of claims, using cultural dialects to enact a hybrid disciplinary practice.

Then, in the assignment that more explicitly focused on synthesizing fandom and disciplinary practices, we see Jewel taking up these remixed practices not just in fandom-based conversations with her friend but in relation to her assignment. This allows her to leverage her extensive knowledge across interpretive communities—her positionality as a fan, her knowledge of the show, her understanding of claims and literary form, as well as her understanding of critical race tools—in a context that is visible to the teacher and consequential to her assignment. By mixing disciplinary claim-making practices with affectively-charged and colloquial fandom practices, Jewel blurs boundaries. We argue that typical educational spaces are unnecessarily bounded, whereas hybridizing practices is useful for participating across both spaces. This kind of navigational learning aligns with pedagogies of social justice that aim to coordinate “the tools for producing knowledge, expert subject-matter knowledge, and the knowledge that youth from a variety of backgrounds bring to their learning” (Moje, 2008, p. 33) for processes of learning that do not merely reproduce practices from various communities but transform them, leading to lifelong consequential types of navigation.

## Conclusion

As educators embrace expanded conceptions of learning and continue designing in ways that invite multiple interpretive communities into their classroom spaces, we must study how youth learn about and remix practices. Particularly, we find it important to study how instructional practices can surface and coordinate diverse youth’s expansive knowledge and experiences from everyday life, which are often overlooked in classrooms focused on disciplinary practices. This is a pressing concern as educational spaces recognize that supporting navigation across different cultural or discursive communities is an important social justice aim

(Moje, 2008) for underserved youth. This work highlights how the boundary object of *interpretive claims* emerged as a useful tool for BIPOC youth sense-making across fandom and literary communities. Future work around equitable designs to support syncretic literacies could include developing a repertoire of ways for teachers to 1) engage in reflective processes for surfacing and identifying boundary objects that are useful for youth navigation and 2) support youth in making sense of different practices across communities as well as hybridize them. Such teaching practices have the potential to be consequential not just for short-term goals like assignments but for youth's long-term navigational learning.

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