

Youth Literacy in Times of Transmedia Narrations¹

*Lectoescritura juvenil en tiempos de
narraciones transmedia*

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Within the framework of international research on digital literacy, the objective of this article is to analyze reading/writing practices and informal learning strategies of students in Colombian public schools related to transmedia narrations. Based on a qualitative approach and ethnographic methodology, the result is a descriptive study of the competences acquired by young readers through the appropriation of these narratives.

KEYWORDS: Transmedia storytelling; reading/writing practices; information literacy; fanfiction; youth.

En el marco de una investigación transnacional sobre alfabetismos digitales, el objetivo del presente artículo es analizar las prácticas de lectoescritura y estrategias de aprendizaje informal de estudiantes de colegios públicos colombianos en relación a las narraciones transmedia. Sostenido en un enfoque cualitativo y metodología etnográfica, el resultado es un estudio descriptivo sobre las competencias desarrolladas por los jóvenes a partir de la apropiación de estas narrativas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Narraciones transmedia; alfabetización informacional; jóvenes; lectoescritura; fanfiction.

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THE STUDY OF LITERACY IN CONVERGENT ENVIRONMENTS

Reading and writing are considered fundamental competences in current societies to acquire knowledge and participate on cultural life. Literacy is the compilation of practices related to different kinds of texts (books, newspapers, magazines, social media, and advertising). From school to mobile phones, people are constantly involved in multiple reading and writing activities that surpass formal learning environments and considerations. For García Canclini et al. (2015), these skills exceed individual capacities and enable a construction that reflects on society, and people's ability to engage and negotiate meaning in their daily lives.

As noted by Jenkins (2010), cultural environments are changing due to the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The current media ecosystem is a complex network of narratives and convergent media that is transforming the ways of consuming, interacting with, and producing written content. Convergence is not mere technological development but a flux of narrations, appropriations, representations, and interactions that develop on multiple platforms conveyed by audiences.

The insertion of transmedia storytelling in Colombia has been prompted by commercial and academic sectors. The commercial has introduced content of national and international production oriented to entertainment, marketing, advertising, and journalism, following trends set by the global market (Obando, 2015). Isolated initiatives – among which could be mentioned *Susana & Elvira* (Moreno & Peláez, 2008) or *Captain Buitrón: tales for bearded children* (Ríos, 2013)– have been successful but remain experimental enterprises.

A good part of the studies related to transmedia have focused on content analysis of popular media such as web series, films and *youtubers* (Buitrago Guzmán, Guzmán Ramírez, & Arredondo Londoño, 2015; Donoso Munita & Peñafiel Durty, 2017). Academic research has also inquired into the aesthetic and narrative possibilities of digital supports and formats (Rodríguez, López Peinado, & González-Gutiérrez, 2015). Other recurrent subjects have been the application of transmedia storytelling to journalistic genres (Arrojo, 2015), because – as Buitrago

et. al (2015) point out – Colombia has a generalized tendency toward social (ecology, ethnicity, infancy), cultural and scientific subjects on their transmedia narrations. There is a particular interest to understand and explore their possibilities as an educational resource in rural and urban communities (Cuartas-Restrepo, 2017; Obando, 2015), and within school. In this regard, the project of Amador-Baquiro (2018) explores the pedagogical strategies implemented by teachers of public schools in Bogotá; in this opinion transmedia storytelling promotes a form of interactive education that encourages creative learning. Several research papers consider the potential offered by transmedia narrations from diverse optics in the formation of participative users and the development of resulting skills.

This research, following the line of the project it was part of,² seeks to analyze “transmedia skills” – regarded as “a series of competences acquired through the consumption and production of interactive media” (Scolari, 2017, p. 10)– which encompass a wide array of practices and informal learning strategies (Conlon, 2004) that manifest inside and outside the school. This study is centered on the skills related to reading and writing practices.

METHODOLOGY

The research focused the observation of such strategies on high school students (14 to 18 years old) under a qualitative approach based on Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). This means that instead of using a pre-defined conceptual framework, the gathered data was allowed “to speak” for itself to elaborate a theoretical interpretation that focuses on the participant’s point of view. A short-term ethnography (Handwerker, 2001) was undertaken within this framework and

² This study is derived from a thesis to obtain a Master’s degree on Communication Sciences. The research was developed in the framework of the *Transmedia Literacy Project* (Colombia phase) conducted by the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana of Bogotá, under the direction of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra of Barcelona, as part of the Horizon 2020 objectives of the European Commission.

participative tools were designed to compensate for the restrictions present in field work with young people; these methods allowed for working with limited interventions that involved the participants from the beginning (García Canclini et al., 2015; Winocur, 2016; Wolcott, 1997).

Field work was conducted at two public schools in Bogotá over a period of approximately two months each. Both were located in districts with fast-growing populations and low-income households:³ their student populations reach the national average scores according to government tests;⁴ they offer elementary and high school education cycles; and ICT's are not part of their core pedagogical proposals. The observation was performed on three sequential phases and two complementary ones:

1. *Initial questionnaire*: 245 questionnaires were completed by the students within the framework of the *Transmedia Literacy Project*. The aim was to gather statistical data on the participants' demographics and media consumption (audiovisual, social media, videogames, etc.). Though the methodological approach was mainly qualitative, this component provided preliminary data on their narrative consumption and reading and writing practices, it also facilitated the identification of possible participants for the following phases. For this, questions were posed on book reading, comic books, blog and fanfiction writing, and participation on platforms such as Wattpad. It is important to remark that only 26.8%

³ There is a residential property stratification set from 1 to 6 according to the socio-economic levels in Colombia. It is used to charge public utilities and assign subsidies. The participants belong to low-income households (2 & 3) (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística [DANE], s.f.).

⁴ *Pruebas Saber* are a series of exams conducted by the Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education (ICFES) in terms of access to higher education; it is used to evaluate the levels of learning acquisition, and to implement plans of improvement (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2010).

of students admitted to reading books in their spare time and 24.8%, comic books. Therefore, there was a limited number of participants that answered positively to these items and were thusly selected for the next phase.

2. *Workshops*: two workshops were organized under the subject “Popular Narrations” with six students each (boys and girls) selected according to the results of the first phase. They were conducted in two sessions with participative activities aimed at gathering their perceptions on the role that books play in their lives, their tastes, and habits of digital reading and writing. The activities included mind maps, timelines on their reading habits and other narrative consumption (TV, comic books, among others), discussions on *booktubers*, *fanmade* videos, and *fanfiction*.
3. *In-depth interviews*: two students from each workshop were selected to be interviewed and to write “reading journals” with the aim of looking into their habits, their reading paths, and points of view (García Canclini et al., 2015). The cases were chosen according to the participation displayed at the workshops and for the recurring presence of transmedia consumption on their timelines. Two 90-minute sessions were led with a week between each (so they could write in their journals during that timeframe); the interviews were conducted in pairs to establish a dialogue between the participants.
4. *Netgraphy*: subsequently, a netgraphy on Wattpad was carried out as part of the framework project. It is an ethnographical technique adapted to the study of online communities, their consumption patterns, and symbolic construction (Kozinets, 2002). The objective was to perform a general analysis on the structure of the platform as a community of readers, the formats of written content, the transmedia skills displayed by the users, the participation and collaboration dynamics, and the values they create on the content. It was done following the pre-defined project protocol, though an independent spreadsheet was created. The observation was complemented by the testimonies of the students to examine the social dynamics and literacy strategies created in the community.

5. *Mediator interviews*:⁵ in this case, a “mediator” is understood as an individual who directly or indirectly intervenes in the participant’s reading practice environment. The objective of this component was to provide information on the context, as a condition for the study of cultural practices (Kozinets, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 2002). Sixteen interviews were carried out with mediators such as publishers, teachers, cultural promoters, librarians, and street vendors.

It is important to clarify that the sample and methodology were not meant to be representative but descriptive and significant (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). The results were produced by the interpretation of cross-referencing the subject’s perspectives, field observations, and data analysis. The names of the young participants were codified and altered to safekeep their identities in accordance with minor privacy laws set forth in Colombian legislation (Law N° 1098, 2006). Most of the featured discussions revolve around examples of fictional transmedia storytelling; not due to any intent on the research’s part but because the participants drove the conversations to those examples.

TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING: PRACTICE, STRATEGIES, AND COMPETENCES

To comprehend how transmedia storytelling promotes the development of reading and writing skills, it is necessary to understand them as practices that are spontaneous manifestations of the acts of reading and writing, not only of decoding-coding a text, but of building meaning from what is read; they are shaped by the context, interpretation, and baggage of the reader (Chartier, 1992). These operations lead the individual to interact with a speech created by a series of symbolic systems and meanings in a particular situation (Gerber & Pinochet, 2015, p. 186). Each practice constitutes a singular exercise that encompasses

⁵ This paper makes reference to fragments of those interviews to scale up the context of the practices; but they are not fully explored due to space constraints. Though several affirmations are derived from that component.

motivations, attitudes, modes, and specific cognitive states (Gonzalez, Rico, & Sarmiento, 2002).

For Jenkins (2010), transmedia storytelling is an emergent aesthetic embedded in convergence culture; they are stories that migrate from one media to another, whose fundamental trait is the expansion of narrative worlds that create a unity through the active role of audiences (Trapero Llobera & Escalas Ruíz, 2017). Seen from the reader's perspective, they imply a logic structure of mapping a sequence in which each media provides a fractured image that adds up to a broader narration.

To understand reading and writing as practices is to comprehend their cultural dimension as singular acts and the traits they possess for the readers. From page to screen and back, the experiences of readers of transmedia narrations are broad and fragmented, they are characterized by a dispersed order and the involvement of social interactions. They have different origins and motivations: it is possible that the sequence of the story does not begin on any editorial content, it may exceed written culture.

It is the story of a character [Assassin's Creed videogame], a regular person. I looked for further information online about the game and they said there was a book. So I started searching. I went to the Book Fair and wondered if it was true [...] I read the book, I read it completely; when I got to a certain stage I said *ok I'm here*, so I followed the book as I passed the game (Achilles, student, 18 years old).

Transmedia skills have developed in these exercises along with others such as memory, knowledge acquisition, etc.; they are manifested through informal learning strategies. According to Marsick & Watkins (2001), informal learning takes place outside institutionalized education, it is produced as a byproduct of other activities like social interaction; it entails the influence of contextual factors (mediators, previous knowledge, consumption goods), a learning attitude, and the emotional capacity to internalize new abilities in response to the environment. Certain competences have emerged in this convergent ecosystem, which comprises an appropriation process that involves the reader in

diverse practices (playing a videogame, exchanging comments, writing a blog, posting on a social network).

The following list of transmedia literacy competences was produced starting from the transmedia skills taxonomy created by the project (Scolari, 2017), which, in turn, was based on Bloom's proposal of educational objectives (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956),

TABLE 1
TRANSMEDIA LITERACY COMPETENCES (READING AND WRITING)

Competences	Specific competences	Description
To create and modify written content	To conceive	To be inspired by the creations of others to produce content.
	To plan	To plan and organize the structure and plot of a text.
(Subject-text relationship)	To produce	Writing on different formats.
	To evaluate	Evaluation and review of the work of others to give suggestions of improvement (collaborative work).
Use of writing technologies	To modify	To appropriate a text to create changes or original versions.
	To use word processors	To use word processors, editing programs, tools, and formats.
(Subject-technology relationship)	To use online writing platforms.	Knowledge on the dynamics, tools, uses, and capacities of online platforms, their formats, and languages.
	Hypertext & transmedia reading	Ability to jump between fragments of information, stories, texts, and make sense of them.
	To retrieve information	To retrieve, select, organize, and discriminate information and data from multiple sources and formats.

Competences	Specific competences	Description
Sociability (Subject - subject relationship)	To share	To circulate original content among peers or online communities.
	To socialize	To establish forms of social interaction based on reading and writing texts, both physically present or virtual.
	To collaborate	Collaborative reading/writing exercises with other users (collective intelligence).
	To promote	To share reading lists and recommendations (<i>bookmarking</i>).
	Performance	Performance practices derived from texts (book clubs, comic books, cosplay, etc.).

Note: Original content, based on Anderson and Krathwohl's revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.

This taxonomy enables identifying a series of competences displayed by the participants relating to transmedia narrations. It is organized according to the relationship established by the reader to different elements of his or her learning environment. It shows evidence that the changes produced by these narratives on the reading and writing practices are not limited to the relation between texts and formats, or to technology and media, but rather its participative nature leads to the formation of communities and distinct ways of sociability. Some of these competences are briefly explored upon continuation from the point of view of the participants.

During field work, diverse manifestations of reading and writing practices related to transmedia storytelling were found: a gamer who read a book to pass a videogame, a hacker "addicted" to cyberpunk novels, an otaku that consumes the novel, manga, and comic book versions of the same story. There is no particular order to these practices, but a general condition is the integration of elements, through links (hypertext reading) and between fragments of a single narrative;

which produces the sensation that each format contains a single piece of the story that will be incomplete until he or she reads the next one (transmedia reading).

After reading “Marvelous Disaster”, I lent it to a friend and started meeting people over the internet. They told me there was a page, Wattpad, so I looked for information and downloaded the app to read stories. Afterwards, I learned the book “After” came out of that page... [sic] (Beatriz, student, 14 years old).

These practices respond to a game-like logic more than to a formal structure, they are not necessarily motivated by the quest for knowledge (in an academic sense) but rather by the expansion of a narrative experience (to inhabit a fictional world, to socialize with other fans, to escape reality, etc.) (Schaeffer, 2002).

Just as there are diverse reading and writing practices, there are distinct considerations about them. Both the students and their mediators assess each exercise and text. The case observation revealed that the practices concerning transmedia narrations are regarded as a means of entertainment and a hobby, but rarely as a significant exercise that could provide “productive” knowledge. Therefore, these practices are often discarded as a “waste of time”. In spite of this, these readings are highly valued by young readers in an affectionate sense.

TABLE 2
EXCERPT FROM GINNY’S READING JOURNAL (SEPTEMBER 1ST, 2016)

Time	Place	Activity	Brief description
12:30 PM	School	<i>Culpa tuya</i> – Wattpad book	I read it while I had lunch, it was interesting, I nearly finished it.
1:30 PM	School	Life Project reading “La Salle”	It is very interesting and it helps to plan our future.
9:40 AM	Bus	<i>Culpa tuya</i> – Wattpad book	I became addicted to the story, I read while I was free.

Note: Original content, produced by the participant.

Through the reading journals it was possible to confirm that these practices are done during spare time, their structure is similar to that of a book: they have rules, but they are more flexible, convened. At the same time, socialization is a key component; storytelling often becomes an excuse to engage on social interactions.

I have my “yo-yo”, who reads to me ... [who is “yo-yo”?] She is my friend. She reads to me when we are in class, there is a relationship ... she reads to me on Wattpad and I love the way she reads because she behaves in a very different manner when she reads and mocks, so it makes me laugh [sic] (Irene, student, 15 years old).

It is possible to deduce a reading practice that combines technology [Wattpad], a social interaction, and a performance [the imitation game] from this excerpt. These interactions take place on a daily basis or through social media; they invite young people to share their readings, comment on them and be involved in a community.

Facebook created many pages and groups and you only give it a like and they invite you. There are people who add many images, that comment on films, they are commenting on what writers do or where you can download the PDF [sic] (Elena, student, 17 years old).

Commenting, searching information on unconventional sources, downloading, uploading, bookmarking, peer evaluation, classifying, and sharing; young people display diverse learning competences on their practices that respond to dynamics set by social media, immediacy, and informal mediators (friends, fans, youtubers, influencers, among others).

There is a page, Lecturalia it is called, you look for a book and there you find what people comment about it; you can also mark it as “read”. You mark it and all the books you have read appear there and also booktubers (Fanny, student, 16 years old).

Such skills feature a kind of collective intelligence in reading and writing (Jenkins, 2010; Rodríguez et al., 2015). In it, knowledge is not

so much what the individual reader can understand of a text, but what he or she can contribute to a community of readers and what they may profit from it. They confer with their peers in search of new reading material, they share “booklists”, and use them as a selection criteria. Due to the overwhelming amount of reading material available, sharing readings serves as a “route map” for these practices which encourages interaction in participative communities of readers (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006).

A common exercise is to compare elements such as plots, characters, and interpretations, from one media to another. This contributes to the narrative experience as a whole that implies a playful immersion (Schaeffer, 2002), which contributes to the appropriation and participation of a particular story.

Alice [in Wonderland], for example, I read it in English. I loved how it describes things: you compare only the first movie [2010, Tim Burton’s adaptation] and how it compares to the fantastical dictionary. The first book gives descriptions of this kind, but it gives it more like an emotion, it gives it a macabre mood, a little dark [sic] (Achilles, student, 18 years old).

This testimony evidences a comprehension of the multiple versions of the same story (even in different languages). It represents a type of transmedia competence that allows him to find meaning out of dispersed fragments through comparison (intertextuality), interpretation, and enjoyment.

This is supported by the multimodal nature of transmedia narrations, which is to say its capacity to contain and jump between different languages (verbal, iconic, audiovisual and sound). The preponderant role that image has assumed in reading phenomena is notable because it has become one of the dominant signs for meaning creation in contemporary societies (Correa, 2010). However, to read images is a skill rarely addressed in literacy processes in Colombia.

[What caught your attention about these books?] Well, the drawings. Sometimes the cover can capture something important ... There are books in

which, for instance, the cover's aesthetics are enough to catch my attention [sic] (Cassandra, student, 16 years old).

The relationship between word and image has been of great importance for the publishing industry for quite some time; this testimony underlines the significance it should also have for literacy programs since “in a world where images are becoming one of the leading points for creating meaning, a good reader should also possess a high level of visual literacy” (Correa, 2010, p. 34).

These practices are not “meaningful” for many mediators; formats such as hypertexts, hypermedia and transmedia are usually outside school curricula in Colombia (Amador-Baquiro, 2018) and the skills they develop are often discarded. Nevertheless, some of the interviewed mediators acknowledged the value of experimenting with storytelling and reading formats (even in adapting them to topics more relatable for the students).

There are certain standards you [as a teacher] aspire the students to meet and develop certain competences such as text inference, interpretation, argumentation, and assertiveness; from that foundation, you have the freedom to organize the reading program (A. Ramírez, personal interview, September 1, 2016).

However, tensions persist. The educators expressed their reservations about how to conduct a transmedia reading or writing exercise. The concept of transmedia storytelling remains fairly unknown to most of them. Students know how to engage them, but they regard them as a hobby, without becoming aware of the competences they acquire in the process. When these two factors are taken together, it is understandable why these narrations are not included in school programs and why there are few applied examples.

ANALOGS & DIGITALS

Technology is set as an opportunity for young people to access reading material due to their precarious economic situations. For some

participants, digital reading is related to a matter of access more than to the quest for diverse reading experiences:

I've read most of the books on the internet ... I'd rather read the printed ones, but the originals cost 40,000 COP [13 USD approximately], I don't work and they don't buy them for me [sic] (Achilles, student, 18 years old).

The workshop participants manifested a predisposition towards printed books and a disconnection to digital ones; for some, it is caused by certain physical discomfort produced by staring at a screen for long periods of time; for others, it is due to the material contact:

I'm fonder of printed books, it's like I read something on Wattpad and sometimes I forget I've read it. On the other hand, I remember more with a printed book because I hold it, I'm more fond of the story [sic] (Harry, student, 18 years old).

This “fetish” for printed books reveals that the practices of these young people bear a rapport with the material object. For them, these stories cannot be completely extracted from printed formats because the objects play two functions: to be used and to be possessed (Baudrillard, 2010). Digital formats allow for easy access but do not carry a sense of possession that some relate, even directly, to their comprehension and appropriation. In terms of transmedia storytelling, this would mean acknowledging that to merely digitalize a text is insufficient and that this appropriation processes should promote new kinds of reading experiences. A publisher commented on this regard:

We have an audience of digital natives, they ... can't stand PDF copies because they deem them primitive. They will look for additional content, that the eBook offers chances for online content. This generation is used from hypertexts, to convergence, and transmedia (R. Nieto, personal interview, December 9, 2016).

Though they seem precarious at times, the transformation in the reading and writing practices prompt these students to seek expanded

experiences: hypertexts, images, apps and videogames are just some of the possibilities explored by the publishing industry.

FANFICTION: CREATION AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

In order to analyze the competences related to written production, the analysis was focused on fanfiction, not because these skills were not present in other practices (such as blog writing, reviews, and comments), but because it is a written object in which the participative nature of transmedia storytelling is more apparent. Fanfiction is a writing exercise derived of the appropriation of a text that was transformed or expanded; it represents the navigation between platforms guided by a story and the expansion of the narration by way of collaborative content.

It was detected that several Colombian participants had experienced the desire to consume and create content derived from popular fiction (30.6% of the respondents answered that they enjoyed creating stories of their favorite characters). Reading and writing fanfiction on platforms such as Wattpad is an appealing exercise motivated by a sense of dissatisfaction with a story (transmedia or otherwise).

On Wattpad, I found an adaptation of *Hush Hush* (Becca Fitzpatrick) told by Patch – one of the characters - ; the girl committed and made it very detailed, because the story seen by her is quite similar to Rebecca's, but I liked it ... I like to find the stories that are there and they are very good [sic] (Elena, student, 17 years old).

Others are conflicted between the tension provoked by their respect for the original material and their desire to expand and modify it.

I read one [fanfiction] of Harry [Potter] that is set after the story. It didn't catch my attention because, yes, maybe it is a tribute to the books, but it is as if it loses some emotion (Daphne, student, 17 years old).

These students represent two kinds of readers and reading attitudes towards texts: open and conservative. Fanfiction writing is the result of a creative self-stimulation triggered by the sense that a story is

incomplete, whether it is because they disliked certain events of the plot or due to their yearning for more. Since readers create the limits of the narrations within their own individual reception processes (Schaeffer, 2002), practices such as these seek to expand those limits and complete a story in which they have invested time and affection.

Although many participants stated they had consumed fanfiction, few of them admitted to having written any or having even tried (12.6% of the respondents). There are several reasons for this disparity: first, a general condition of Colombian participants was that they were more consumers than producers of content; second, fanfiction is an activity related to a game-like exercise and regarded as “unproductive”.

[Have you tried to publish your own material on Wattpad?] Well, I tried it once because I had a great story in my head, but for some reason I didn't. [Did you withhold?] I got stuck with the idea in my head until I forgot it. [You never tried again?] Not really. I like writing in my notebooks and keeping them and reading them afterwards [sic] (David, student, 16 years old).

It is common that the texts are not published for fear of criticism. Young people compare themselves and the work of other amateur writers to that of recognized authors; in consequence, many experience a tension between their desire to contribute to the expansion of the story and a self-inflicted sense of shame or inhibition.

[Have you ever tried to write fanfiction?] I've tried but there are things that I lack. I did it with other characters, with periods of my life ... But you don't do it because you don't want to be “boleteado”⁶. How embarrassing (Kat, student, 15 years old).

Whether they publish or not, fanfiction writing stimulates the competences to create and modify written content. On the workshops, the students produced texts inspired by the discussed narrations and their ability to conceive and compare the story in relation to the referential text was remarkable, to produce it (attempting to emulate

⁶ Teased, Colombian jargon.

the writing style of the author), and to change certain elements or events that displeased them in the original version.

TRANSMEDIA LITERACY ON WATTPAD: A GENERAL OBSERVATION

Wattpad was created in 2006 as a platform for creative writing which also allows for sharing written content. It was highlighted by several participants of the workshop as a frequent space for reading and writing. Upon continuation are some preliminary findings resulting from the ethnographical observation, following the criteria explained in the methodology.

Wattpad functions as a hybrid between a content platform and a social network. It combines elements from both to create an online community of readers. The principal activity in it is the publishing of literary content such as fanfiction, short stories and poetry, among others.

It is similar to a blog in that each user creates content according to their own interests, edits them, and publishes them so they can be freely read. It is possible to continue editing after the publication, which enables interactive exercises of individual and collective writing. For instance, publications under the tag “requests open” are contents expanded by the request of followers as a sort of “writing on demand”.

It also comprises elements of a social network such as the creation of customizable profiles that work as avatars for user interaction inside the platform. The exchanges are focused on publishing content; the format allows for leaving comments, but compared to other social media, these are centered on the texts themselves. Users act as a kind of “publisher”, which may create a certain kind of stress between them, but it is an example of collective intelligence and participatory culture.

In Wattpad you could create your own story and make your comments and add your favorites and the people would remark on what they thought about the story. I enjoyed logging in and reading. I also wrote, but I refrained from publishing [sic] (Beatriz, student, 14 years old).

Though it was found that self-criticism could also produce self-censorship in some youngsters, plenty felt encouraged to participate in the community, to share, create, and read.

The platform itself promotes literacy exercises that possesses a sense of community through mechanisms such as: chat rooms, hashtags, trending topics, writing contests. In the writer's section, the platform suggests guidelines for the users to become "popular authors": (1) updating content constantly; (2) using hashtags, images, videos, etc.; (3) interacting with followers; (4) sharing texts on social media; (5) participating in contests; (6) chatting with other users and sharing knowledge. The motivations and dynamics behind reading and writing practices on Wattpad display a showcase and value-based criteria that are supported on popularity and interaction.

Wattpad users feature transmedia skills such as producing, collaborating, and evaluating. The platform has also become a significant source of reading material for the participants: many downloaded the app on their mobile phones and interact on it in their free time:

[How many hours a week on average do you spend on Wattpad?] Time flies on Wattpad. I would say about 10 hours per week, well, maybe two every day [sic] (Ginny, student, 17 years old).

Their explorations on the platform are relatively indiscriminate; driven initially by popularity until they develop their own criteria. Therefore, Wattpad is a privileged space to visualize multiple manifestations of how students get involved in interactive and meaningful reading and writing practices. Further inquiries are required, but these general observations are a starting point for the exploration of transmedia competences that are being developed by it.

CONCLUSIONS

Literacy has a double quality. On the one hand, it encompasses a myriad of practices that –as was previously stated– are developed within diverse environments, modes, and motivations; on the other hand, it involves the development of competences that, in these times

of transmedia storytelling and convergence, are frequently acquired through informal learning strategies. They take place in the individual paths of the readers as a self-taught exercise that is produced over the course of daily activities and through the contact with their immediate surroundings (Conlon, 2004), but of which young readers and their mediators are often unaware or simply do not recognize them as skills.

The introduction of these narratives in the written ecosystem of young people leads to the formation of “transmedia skills” – related to the interaction, consumption, and production of digital media (Scolari, 2017) – with a broad scope of practices. In the Colombian case, it was noted that these competences display a hybrid nature derived from the material conditions in which the participants inhabit. Precarity, contact with global culture and access to technology, produce environments where the skills and strategies of the analog written world converge with others that emerge from the digital world. They are not perfect, they are in a state of development that depends on both environmental factors and the reader’s trajectories.

Digital reading is a practice that responds to some precarious conditions in Colombia. Field observation revealed that many students approach digital supports because of their own limited access to written content, but also with the aim of integrating into the transmedia sequence found in digital formats. A caveat should be mentioned: due to some difficulties experienced in the course of the research, it was restricted to students of public schools; it is possible that if the study should be expanded to young readers with more socioeconomic resources, some of these observations could change as well.

The analyzed cases and the examples described by the participants revolved around fictional transmedia storytelling. The discussions centered on fiction as a result of the participants leading them in that direction. Though fictional and non-fictional transmedia –understood as a “macro genre” shaped by the merging of formats, the interaction with the users, and a “truthfulness pact” among interlocutors (Buitrago Guzmán, Guzmán Ramírez, & Arredondo Londoño, 2015; Vásquez-Herrero, López-García, & Lovato, 2017)– bear the focus on the story as a common element between both genres. Further research should

elaborate on these kind of narrations to compare the different modes, attitudes and skills being developed.

Transmedia storytelling is a place for negotiation between school institutionalism (structuring and formal) and the personal and informal literacy exercises these young readers undertake in everyday life. Hence, even though the analysis conducted in this study included reading and writing as a unified practice in its structure –they are complementary acts that create a whole– but multiple in they way they manifest.

By extension, the observation was aimed at describing these practices from the perspective of youth culture as its own place for creating meaning. The goal of this research was to undertand youth transmedia literacy practices as a basis for making pedagogical proposals and not the other way around. The objective was to ponder on learning strategies from daily informality, from the young reader's contact with the changing environment of media convergence; to retrieve the competences that are being developed by transmedia storytelling but regarded from the point of view of those who interact with them. In essence, to realize that behind every individual exercise of a young person reading a book on a screen, of writing a fanfiction, or sharing a comment on a story, there are world representations, text interpretations and skills in development.

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