

TEACHING IN THE FANDOM REALM THROUGH LITERACY:
AN APPROACH FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS
IN MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA

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“Declaro que este trabajo de grado no ha sido presentado con anterioridad para optar a un título, ya sea en igual forma o con variaciones, en ésta o en cualquiera otra universidad”. Art. 92, párrafo, Régimen Estudiantil de Formación Avanzada.

Firma del autor:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "María Eli AR". The signature is written in a cursive style with a clear, legible font.

AGRADECIMIENTOS

This undergraduate thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents, my brother, my grandmother, and my aunt Rosa. Thanks for your unwavering support.

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ABSTRACT

This critical literature review is part of a larger research geared to people's second languages appropriation, led by the group Literacies in Second Languages Project (LSLP), of which the author is a member. The article first situates the problem of pursuing new approaches that foster students' literacy practices in second languages within (and outside) the classroom. The second part of the paper gives an overview of the concept of fandom and the advantages of embracing it in formal schooling. The next part is a proposal for teachers to incorporate pedagogical practices that match today's interplay between cultural and technological factors. This multifaceted and multilayered approach is an invitation for educators to continue working on their craft. The final part is a glimpse into the author's experience as a fan who is also becoming an English teacher.

Keywords: Literacy; fandom; pedagogical practices; English; approach.

INTRODUCTION

The field of Fan studies has been extensively researched and documented. Scholars have argued about the 'passive' nature of consumerist fans who are manipulated by the media industry, since they were only seen as 'spectators'. However, such conception has been superseded by a wider vision that places audiences as 'producers', in the sense that they are active participants who are engaged within the fandom realm. Henry Jenkins opened this conversation with his book "Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture", published in 1992, in which he analyses how fans are critical of television content and form interpretations (e.g. Fanfiction, fan-art, cover songs, costumes and karaoke). For him, "media fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, spectators who also participate" (1992, p.208). Hills (2002) wondered about fans who are not interested in writing fanfiction or any other 'public material' and brings forward Fiske's (1992) categories of productivity: 'semiotic' (reading a text) and 'enunciative' (talking about it). In his sequel to Textual Poachers, Jenkins (2006) stresses:

One becomes a 'fan' not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a 'community' of other fans who share common interests. For fans, consumption naturally sparks production, reading generates writing, until the terms seem logically inseparable (p. 41).

Notwithstanding the foregoing, Jenkins (2009) clarifies: "Not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued" (p.6). While some will master skills and dive into the fandom, others will only dip their toes to test the water. In any case, a community serves to boost participation and educate members to value the creative process behind a work of art; youths share and appreciate one another's experiences. Herein lies the usefulness of integrating fandom studies in pedagogical practices: internet-mediated tasks for enhancing language learning strategies. Teachers should learn from fandom studies that students are permanently using literacy skills to approach all sorts of multimodal texts. If classrooms are

“safe places” where everyone’s opinion is respected, there will be more space and time for dialogues.

When students reflect on why and how people become fans of a particular artist, sports team, writer, literary saga, music band of any genre, TV show or movie, they are training their critical thinking and applying it to an international and local context. The present approach stems from research of a wider scope that scrutinizes how inhabitants of the city of Medellín interact with other languages apart from Spanish. Since communities are formed through common interests and a language that acts as an entry point for communication among members, teachers and students could broaden the conversations held in the classrooms by introducing topics taken from their passions. Correspondingly, North American professor Rebecca Black (2006, 2007, 2009) has demonstrated how her students have developed their identities and second language skills by being part of a fanfiction network. This constitutes an example for Colombian teachers to look for innovative ways to approach today’s literacies.

SITUATING THE PROBLEM

As New Literacy Studies research has suggested (Knobel, 2001; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Street, 1995), sociocultural and literacy practices in urban and out-of-school settings show an evident interest for studying how languages are dynamic entities that permeate a city. Globalization and technology have set challenges for both students and teachers in terms of shifts on Second Language Learning and Teaching (Garrett 1991, in Thorne, Black & Sykes 2009). The Internet has enabled popular fan culture to spread worldwide, setting alternate “online” spaces that transcend localized social interaction. In the process of learning, students are inevitably taking elements from multiple cultures. This is why researchers (Black, 2008; Gee, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007) have pretended to study the relationship that exists between learning autonomously a second language and the creation of virtual spaces.

Thanks to new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), people all around the world are crossing “traditional, linguistic, and geographic borders” (Black, 2006, p.1). In

this sense, virtual spaces allow language interaction, which has brought the attention of researchers, like Cope and Kalantzis (2000) or Warschauer and Kern (2000), to study them more closely. Although, specifically regarding the link that exists between popular fan culture and English language learning, few scrutiny has been carried out (Lam, 2000, 2004, 2005; Yi, 2005; Black, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009). These researchers have wondered how participants of an online community construct identities that change over time, expanding their social practices and language learning skills. However, in the particular case of Colombia, such a link between popular fan culture and second language learning has not been explored.

Originally, the term “literacy” was deemed to refer to the abilities of reading and writing a text, which were the focus of formal schooling (Makoni, 2012, cited in Mora, et.al., 2018). As these only answered superficial features of communication, namely, linguistic structures, anthropologists and sociolinguistics have widened the notion educationalists and psychologists had narrowed about the discrete elements of language. Therefore, the former have concentrated on performing in-depth searching regarding the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing that vary greatly within and across cultures. Modern education systems and the nation state hunger for power have exerted pressures on the idea of “uniformity”, imposing assumptions of a model of literacy that follow a single set of cultural practices on ethnic minorities. In light of the evident poor understanding of what literacy truly entails, researchers have developed new and bold theoretical approaches in order to explain its complexity. Furthermore, the recognition of new literacy practices involves analyzing the role of communication in societies.

Towards defining literacy, it is worth broaching the concept of “discourse”. Gee (1989) defines it as “a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or “social network” (p.1). The identification of certain social language patterns grants permission to the users of a tongue to interchange opinions forwarded orally, in writing, through drawings or just performed by gestures. History is an immaterial value inherited from generation to generation, despite this, it encompasses several discourses inevitably replicated. Art gives body to discourses, reshaping their meanings and changing them over time. This is why there cannot be an “absolute language”, nor a monolithic view of

literacy. Cognition is an ability inherent to human beings, thus, individuals make sense of their world in a unique way, according to their previous experiences and their reasoning.

New Literacy Studies (NLS) leans toward a new perspective for conceiving literacy as a social practice (Street, 1984). Moreover, a new term emerges, which seeks to transcend how reading and writing are tackled in schools: “multiliteracies” (Cañas & Ocampo, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; New London Group, 1996). Its acknowledgement has taken researchers and practitioners to reflect upon the “new technologies” that are appearing inside the classroom reality. Images displayed in all sorts of virtual platforms and screens have enlightened how discourses are being presented and how narratives imbue every aspect of human existence. Consequently, teachers have got to change their pedagogical practices, so as to give rise to an awareness of acquiring the capacity to move forward one domain of social activity to another, taking into account that: “The ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity and being” (Street, 2013, p.4).

Gee (1991) highlights: “Situations (contexts) do not just exist. Situations are rarely static or uniform, they are actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment-by-moment through ongoing work” (p.190). This means that discourses are influenced by everyday factors that alter a person’s mental state, thereby, their word recall. Gee (1991) distinguishes two types of work enabled by language: Enactive and Recognition. The first happens when humans attempt to relate (organize, coordinate) materials from the outside world in a way that is recognizable to others And the second, refers to “other people’s active efforts to accept or reject our attempts”, that is to say, their reaction in response to our action. Through deeds and words, we get others to recognize “people, things, artifacts, symbols, tools, technologies, actions, interactions, times, places, and ways of speaking, listening, writing, reading, feeling, believing, thinking, and valuing as meaningful and valuable in certain ways” (p.191). The configuration of all elements related to each other in a specific and meaningful schema is what determines our intentions, but, at the same time, we are conditioned by them. It is clear that, as Street (2003) states: “Literacy practices, then, refer to the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (p. 79).

Freire and Macedo's (1987) idea of "Reading the Word and the World" poses an "Emancipatory" view of literacy "as one of the major vehicles by which 'oppressed' people are able to participate in the sociohistorical transformation of their society". Citizens are encouraged to undertake a critical understanding of a text, considering the sociocultural context to which it refers. For this reason, it is reaffirmed that the cultivation of the native language, supports the transformation of the most vulnerable societies, rather than the empowerment of the ruling class through its dominant language. "This elite model of education creates intellectualists and technocrats rather than intellectuals and technicians". Brick by brick, stone by stone, wall by wall, both students and teachers set the foundation for an emancipatory ideology that contemplates language as a major force in the construction of human subjectivities. In short, "The logic of multiliteracies is one that recognizes that meaning making is an active, transformative process, and a pedagogy based on that recognition is more likely to open up viable life courses for a world of change and diversity" (Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, p.14). It is noted that "literacy practices are a more organic phenomenon in which city dwellers play with multiple languages as semiotic and communicative resources to produce richer messages" (Mora, 2015).

Colombia has often been viewed as a monolingual country, what has overlooked the wide range of languages that are spoken across the length and breadth of the country. According to focus on English government-led initiatives, requirements have been formulated toward reaching a benchmark for proficiency levels proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001). Namely, in order to graduate from college, candidates must certificate a B1 level, and a C1 for students from preservice English teaching education programs. Nevertheless, there is no evidence of how Colombian school students interact with English through their direct contact with fan communities. Nor is there any research that analyzes how teachers could transform their pedagogical practices through fandom in order to propel their students' motivation around learning a second language.

Foreign language policies in Colombia have been thought from the imaginary that our cities are monolingual. It is no surprise that the latter comes from the assumption that eleventh grade students have low results in the section of the national standardized test ICFES, supported by the Colombian educational national system (MEN), which pretends

to assess the quality of education. Moreover, government initiatives for improving such scores like the national program of bilingualism (PNB) started in 2004 and due in 2019, present unrealistic goals; in this case, supposedly, by the end of 2019 all students (100%) must reach level B1, taken from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Another program is the one called Programa Nacional de Inglés 2015-2025, identified as “COLOMBIA Very Well” that aims to turn the country into the most educated one of Latin America and the one with the best level of English in South America by 2025. However, there should be other priorities... Luckily, down-to-earth professors have inquired about methods and approaches to settle the issue, based on in-depth academic research.

As a response, Dr. Raúl Mora, professor from Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (Medellín, Colombia) created in 2013, along with some preservice teachers from the Faculty, the student research group Literacies in Second Languages Project (LSLP). “At LSLP, we believe that literacy practices are a more organic phenomenon in which city dwellers play with multiple languages as semiotic and communicative resources to produce richer messages” (Mora, 2015, p.21). In this sense, drawing from the conceptual framework *The City as Literacy* (Mora, 2015; Mora, Castaño, Gómez, Ramírez & Mejía-Vélez, 2015; Mora, Chiquito, Giraldo, Uribe & Salazar Patiño, 2016; Mora, Chiquito, Mejía-Vélez, Uribe, Salazar Patiño & Giraldo, 2016; Mora, Pulgarín, Ramírez & Mejía-Vélez, 2018; Mora, Ramírez, Mejía-Vélez & Hernandez, 2016), the focus is “to break the traditional stereotypes about the scarcity of second- language literacy events and practices present in our hometown”.

Research findings have shown that English should not be looked at from a foreign language perspective, since people all around the city (Medellín) use it as a means to communicate among the members of a community. For instance, “English is only confined to the classroom practices or the official media” (Mora, et.al 2015, p.1). There are billboards, store ads, English words in graffiti, tattoos, fashion (t-shirts), restaurant names (and their menu), and English texts in local bookshops. These realities of literacy practices outside school have been widely documented and reported. Furthermore, recent studies include the role of Pop Culture and the realm of Fandom as a vehicle to foster second language learning (Agudelo, 2019). In conclusion, people are interested in practicing

languages, especially English, in organic and non-institutionalized spaces where they hold conversations and language exchange meetings. Also, gamers report having been motivated to learn more thanks to interaction with others in online games. English, then, becomes an entry point for allowing communication and cultural interchanges. As a result of the lessons learned throughout the years, there is enough research to propose an approach that gives a twist to second language learning in the classrooms.

Research problem question: How could Colombian teachers implement fandom studies in the classroom to foster students' literacy practices?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term “fandom” dates back to the nineteenth century, as many authors have traced it on their research with P.T Barnum as manager of Swedish singer Jenny Lind in her American tour spectacle, where music fans crammed into her. Baseball historians also refer to the term as audiences congregated as close as possible to baseball and football players (Cavicchi, 2018; Cavicchi, 2017). Others go even further with the abbreviated form (“fans”) of “fanatics”, that according to the Oxford Latin Dictionary, in late seventeenth-century England, meant: “Of or belonging to the temple, a temple servant, a devotee”; but later acquired a negative connotation: “Of persons inspired by orgiastic rites and enthusiastic frenzy” (Jenkins, 1992, p.12). These people were seen as savages, mad and obsessive. As a means to keep the artists from being harmed, barriers and platforms were built.

However, it was not until the late 1800s in the United States that the concept reappeared, when sports journalists used it to call early baseball spectators, who had a disruptive behavior and distracted the players (Jenkins, 1992; Cavicchi, 1998). Moving beyond its pejorative misconception, since 1960, scholars started to make research about Star Trek Fans (Black, 2005; Coppa, 2006) due to the growth of technology, even if they still were frowned upon, a matter that will be tackled later. The spread of fan culture has been accelerated by mass media and the internet, which has made possible a closer study of it.

As Lucy Bennet (2014 cited by Booth, 2018, p.1) marks: “the fan studies field of scholarship [opens up] an avenue where fans [are] treated and viewed as active and creative individuals; the study of which potentially offers rich insights into media consumption, identity, textual engagement and communications”.

Anne Jamison (2013) digs even deeper in the origins of fandom, considering that even if the name [fan] was not exactly used, there is evidence that supports an emerging vision, just as she pinpoints in “A Prehistory of Fanfiction”, from her book “Fic: Why Is Fanfiction Taking Over The World?”, addressed in Cavicchi (2018). In accordance with what she wrote, in spite of the fact that the Greek Philosopher Aristotle’s work regarding “art” and “mimesis” (<<art as an imitation of nature>>) has always been highly praised, Greek historian and rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus differed from him. He maintained that art is the imitation of what others had “gotten it out before you”. The art of writing comes from imitating other good writers (Jamison, 2013). Jamison (2013) highlights how, for instance, William Shakespeare’s famous plays were a result of a wider effort: “Renaissance dramatic authorship was a more porous and collaborative affair that we imagine”. The English playwright must have drawn inspiration from multiple voices, plays, experiences, and innovations of actors and others who were part of his company “The King’s Men” (Jamison, 2013). Here arises a recurrent topic in Fan Studies: Fanfiction, the written products of fans who are inspired by the plot of a story, its characters or by the actors’ performances, and decide to make an artifact out of it. Such interest in forging a stronger relationship between their likes and their life experiences shows how dedicated they are to heightening their status as “fans”.

Approaching fandom into the field of pedagogy, few scholars have inquired about its impact on Second Language Learning. Such is the case of Rebecca Black (2005, 2006, and 2007) who has wondered about how participants of an online community construct identities that change over time, expanding their social practices and language learning skills. Within the direct link between fandom and second language learning Black posits that the online site Fanfiction.net becomes a common space where dialogism interactions among fans are possible and recurrent (Bakhtin, 1981), since there is always an active and instant author-reader feedback through a tool implemented in the platform called “author’s notes”. Readers respond to each section of a given chapter making suggestions

about rhetorical choices and uses of language (Black, 2005), that influences the writer's decisions on appropriate changes. In this regard, people meet in online spaces in real time and comment on one another's fictions in order to provide feedback and make recommendations, thus, creating an intercultural environment. Therefore, there is an evident sense of "ownership" or an "identity mark" that drives the audience to keep on commenting; as well as a "dynamic participation" in which opposing voices and/or forces collide to create the final stories. The many distinct identities and cultural perspectives remain in motion nurturing a multifaceted and shifting identity.

Furthermore, she justifies her interest in researching the implications of technology-mediated fan practices in ELLs literacy and identity evolution, by broaching Lam's (2000 and 2005) works: an in-depth case study of a Japanese immigrant who created a website about a Japanese singer and one of a Chinese high school senior who emigrated to the USA as a child, and who became an anime fan webmaster. In a previous study she had focused on anime-based fanfiction. The subject of study, Tanaka Nanako is a native Mandarin Chinese speaker who moved to Canada in 2000 when she was 11 years old. During her 2005 research, the author evinces how Nanako's writing had improved only a few months after joining the platform. According to the Results, the author highlights how Nanako's involvement in Fanfiction.net helped her improve her writing and language skills. Furthermore, her "literate engagement in this space allowed her to draw on an array of dialogic resources to scaffold her writing, and also provided her with a supportive social context for foregrounding and backgrounding different aspects of her identity..." (Black, 2006, p.11-12).

New Literacy Studies scholars have made research toward an emerging passion for identities in the 21st century regarding nation, ethnicity, religion, community, as well as those made around popular culture, fashion and lifestyles (Yon, 2000). Identity, then, becomes influential in ELLs' literacy practices. For instance, new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) facilitate social interaction. Black (2005, 2006, 2007, and 2009) assesses how classroom teaching practices ought to be revamped. Literacy practices are defying traditional teaching methods that set the roles of experts (teachers) and learners (students) and that ascribe social positions to English language learners, whose abilities in their first tongue are often viewed as a hindrance; cultural roots are

considered barriers. In the case of the fanfiction site, Nanako's multiple identities did not interfere with her language appropriation, on the contrary, they allowed her to communicate in Mandarin, Japanese and English, to interact with fans worldwide, and to forge her motivation.

Jenkins (2006) posits how fan culture should not be reduced to passive media consumption, a thought that had been circulating through academic settings. Just as he had pinpointed 14 years earlier in his first work "Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture", Star Trek fans ("Trekkies") were portrayed as "nerdy guys with glasses and rubber Vulcan ears..." (Jenkins, 1992, p.17) and, therefore, satirized. Jenkins gives a particular example of an occasion when Star Trek star William Shatner (Captain James T.Kirk) showed up as a guest host of the program Saturday Night Live (SNL). There, he is asked questions from fans about minor characters in individual episodes (which they cite by title and sequence number) and even about the combination to Kirk's safe. Shatner answers with: "Get a life, will you people? I mean, I mean, for crying out loud, it's just a TV show!" He also tells the crowd to live adult experiences ("you, there, have you ever kissed a girl?"). Later, after having been confronted by a convention organizer, he comes back to the stage and explains that it was a "recreation of the evil Captain Kirk from episode 27, 'The Enemy Within'" (Jenkins, 1992, p.17-18). In spite of this script being a skit from the SNL show, and not a real-life interaction to Star Trek fans, it was used as an example to reveal some popular stereotypes about fans and the representation of fan culture during the 60's.

On the other hand, Jenkins broaches the concepts of "good" or "appropriate" taste and "wrong" or "inappropriate" taste; which are determined by social classes (Bourdieu, 1979). In this sense, tastes are embodied by people's experiences within a cultural group and supported by educational institutions. This is how class differentiations are forged, resulting in "desirable and undesirable strategies of interpretation and styles of consumption" (Jenkins, 1992, p.16). Hence, "improper" taste becomes unacceptable, since it goes against dominant cultural hierarchies, which may be viewed as "universal" and "eternal". Accordingly, Bordieu (1980 cited in Jenkins, 1992 p. 17) poses: "The most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as the possessors of legitimate culture is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separated". Then what is

seen by fans as meaningful, artistic, transcendent and innovative, others see it as banal and conventional.

All in all, fans appreciation for a story's narrative, the creativity involved in the writing process, the moral and ethical choices made by the characters, the conflicts that add the tension, the sudden twists, the vivid descriptions of the scenery, the background and the physical and psychological traits, and many other things that make a literary work, a TV show, a musical band or an artist worth following. Such masterpieces are appealing to people all over the world, who decide to turn into fans thanks to a growing sense of relatedness: they have awakened a part of themselves that will shape their identities. Fan interpretative practices foster reading skills necessary for approaching a text. Ergo, fans claim their own right to make interpretations and representations of fiction, who they consider as concrete places in space and time that fit in with their realities.

Even further, within the fan community, certain groups of fans are classified in a pejorative sense. Such is the case of the previously mentioned Star Trek fans who belong to the "G.A.L." ("Get a life") club. Besides, rivalry between literary science fiction fans and media fans (Jenkins, 1992). Concerning this, an event occurred in a Twin Peaks computer net discussion group, where someone was called "Trekkie" and told to leave. The term "Hardcore Trekkie" began to be used to refer to people who were "too fannish" and soon became a media constructed stereotype (Jenkins, 1992). For that reason, fans preferred to identify themselves and be described by others as "Trekkers" or just as "fans". This means they recognize their involvement in a subculture and feel proud for sharing personal experiences with other members. Thanks to their participation in a large social and cultural community, they encourage one another to feel accompanied and to take pleasure in expressing their fascination about a certain topic.

APPROACHING FANDOM IN THE ELT CLASSROOM: A PROPOSAL

Group Work- Fandom in the classroom

Shannon Decker introduces the work of Guzzetti, Elliot and Welsch (2010), in their book "DIY Media in the Classroom: New Literacies Across Content Areas", recalling how they explore "Do it yourself" media as a means to integrate students' interests in the classroom. Kate Elliot's and Diana Welsch's zine, a space where issues of social justice were addressed, shows this perspective of including materials with which students can become more engaged in the lessons. About this, Decker claims that DYI media into the classroom is "an experiment in trust between a teacher and his/her students that requires relinquishing some control to collaboratively design the learning experience" (Decker, 2009, p.6). She also mentions that although this is challenging, it is essential for recognizing students' skills and strengths. In her own experience, Decker had her students choose among composing songs, blog, write zines, and even choreograph and dance; this turned out to be successful. Indeed, there had to be a mediation between what students enjoyed doing and the competences she wanted to meet through the course and the task objectives.

Such a way of working brings up dialogues about the importance of expressing one's own thoughts, and the necessity of being heard and respected; without having to agree with each other. It is worth taking into account that "classrooms are public, regulated spaces" (Decker, 2009, p.13), which is why it is crucial keeping record of the type of issues that are referred to. Classrooms ought to be 'safe places' where students' voices echo on every wall. Teachers must provide students with the tools for lending weight to their arguments so they can speak up for themselves. Even if some may feel overwhelmed at first, the more they are exposed to situations in which they have got to put forward their point of view, the more practical experience they will acquire. Regardless of age, students, like all human beings, have got opinions to add to and to contribute to the class debate. Honoring the individual in teaching practices means letting students' interests and experiences in, and using them as shareable learning opportunities.

In a nutshell, DIY media are “those tools and practices that facilitate creating new media texts, such as a song, an online journal entry, or a videogame” (Guzzetti et.al, 2010, p.17). Evidently, students seem more attracted to these because of the amount of time they spend in the World Wide Web and the easy access to internet pages. Video Games are in themselves literacy activities (Gee, 2003; Steinkuehler, 2007, both cited in Guzzetti et.al, 2010); 21st century literacy abilities are forged due to players’ interaction with the environment (Johnson, 2005; Kafai, 1995, cited in Guzzetti et.al, 2010). Critical thinking and reading skills, predicting, decision making and problem solving are some perks of playing video games; key for participating in the knowledge economy (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996, cited in Guzzetti et.al, 2010) . Thanks to these, players develop a sophisticated design mind-set that allows them to be creative and construct knowledge (Gee, 2003 cited in Guzzetti et.al, 2010). With Design Thinking, a way of thinking and experimenting for solving problems, people identify strategies to overcome complex challenges (Hyer, 2006 cited in Guzzetti et.al, 2010). In order to do so, collaborative teams ought to be set up for the emergence of new ideas.

Youtube and Video Sharing sites are certainly other online spaces in which people watch music videos, series, movies, clips from TV shows; they also post their own homemade videos and share them with their friends, family members and followers. Apart from that, video tutorials, TED talks, National Geographic videos, and all sorts of educational content, are available for free, enabling students to search for information on the Internet about scientific, technological, artistic and cultural topics. By doing so, they start to discover what they are into, what catches their eye, what makes them curious, and most especially, what they find relatable to their lives. In a school setting, topics must be carefully weighed out, due to the public nature of classrooms (Guzzetti et.al, 2010). Besides, these must be discussed with the students, since there might be some that are triggering.

Fandom and Wikis

Blogs and Wikis are other spaces that allow people to display their beliefs and points of view about certain issues that somehow touched them (positively or negatively) or that are

close to their lives. While some people prefer to opt for a personal blog that serves as an online journal, others use them for book or movie reviews and commentaries on political, social and cultural matters (Guzzetti et.al, 2010). Moreover, Laflen (2020, p.2) affirms: "Wikis facilitate collaborative learning through community-focused enquiry and student-generated content". Hence, wikis are another resource worth including in the classrooms due to the possibilities they represent in terms of group work; students are encouraged to share their ideas, respect one another's points of view, build knowledge together and do research to widen their perspectives.

In the work undertaken by Angela Laflen (2020), named "Putting Wikis to Work in the Literature Classroom", she addresses the usefulness of studying wikis to move away from traditional models of teaching. Acknowledging that today's students read less printed text and literary works, the author cites N. Katherine Hayles: "students read incessantly in digital media and write in it as well...only infrequently are they encouraged to do so in literature classes or in environments that encourage the transfer of print reading abilities to digital and vice versa" (p.3). Subsequently, students' reading practices ought to be attended by teachers, for they need to be improved. The theory on Critical Literacy suggests that students critically reflect on what they receive, whether it be in audio, video, image format, or in digital text, and on their own use of technology. Wikis, then, can help to strengthen critical and literacy skills, as well as teaching and learning practices.

Wikis were created in 1995 by Ward Cunningham, an Oregon programmer, who coined the name from the "Wiki-Wiki" or "quick" shuttle buses at the Honolulu Airport. What makes them malleable is that they are websites on which anyone can post material in different formats without knowing about programming languages; also, anyone can edit them. (Laflen, 2020). Wikis can be designed with an encyclopedia style, travel guides and even fandom spaces. Even if some have restricted access or are used to plan meetings or coordinate projects, they have some fundamental characteristics: "Wikis use simplified hypertext markup language; Anyone can change anything; Linking within wiki pages is easy; Content is always evolving and never finished" (Laflen, 2020, p.4). Although the author's research focuses on the benefits of wikis for the Literature class, they are equally applicable to the English as a second language class. Laflen (2020) contends that there are four specific strengths of using wikis in the classroom: "First, facilitating writing and the

development of multiliteracies; second, fostering collaboration; third, unsettling textual authority; and fourth, conflating authorship and audience” (p.4). These will be described below.

First of all, wikis facilitate writing activities and “support writing instruction” in that: “using a wiki as a writing tool maximizes the advantages of reflection, revising, publication, and of observing cumulative written results as they unfold” (Parker and Chao, 2007, p.61 cited in Laflen, 2020). Students are allowed to observe and follow the steps in the designing and composing process: wikis archive all the changes made to a page. Besides, since Wikis emphasize “text, not software”, it makes them practical for boosting multiliteracies (Laflen, 2020). As Selber indicated, computers are often included in academic contexts to support an instrumentalist view of technology, which he calls “functional literacy” (Selber, 2004, p.14-21 cited in Laflen, 2020). For him, apart from knowing how to operate computer programs, students need chances to develop skills in critical and rhetorical literacies (Selber, 2004, p.24-25). Through wikis, students will be able to perform collaborative authoring or writing, which would make them more aware of their writing process and contributions to a text.

The second component, “Fostering Collaboration” brings up the concept of collaborative pedagogy: writers write in context to others. Karen Burke LeFevre (1987, p. 39, cited by Laflen, p.6) posits that the social aspect of writing should be taken into account inside of the classrooms, where there is a real audience of readers; critical thinking is promoted. Jennifer Riddle Harding (2007, p. 134, cited by Laflen, 2020, p.6) conceives that wikis, due to their “approximate co-presence”, “provide shared spaces that blend aspects of class discussion with writing”. Thanks to this, students practice reading and writing in academic contexts. Both instructors and students participate in scholarly conversations (Laflen, 2020). As claimed by Rebecca Moore Howard (1999, cited by Laflen, 2020, p.7) students utilise “patchworking”, a practice in which multiple voices of authors and resources are included before writing their own ideas.

The third strength, “Unsettle Textual Authority” leads to making students critical readers and writers. As stated by Matt Barton and Robert Barton (2011, IX, cited by Laflen, 2020, p.7), wikis “open up issues that may have seemed hopelessly abstract before”. Students

are shown how the writing process operates before any literary work or the final version of an academic text are completed. This helps them to understand that writing as a process is complex and implies going through steps: "Writing and producing knowledge are ongoing processes that are continually modified by many contributors" (Laflen, 2020, p.8). Recognizing the debatable nature of texts means that students who participate in wikis are prompted to expose their own ideas.

The last one, "Conflate Authors and Audience" touches on postmodern and poststructuralist theories about authorship. Stephanie Vie and Jennifer deWinter (in Barton and Cumings, 2011, p.109, cited by Laflen, 2020, p.9) pinpoint that even if "we advocate research and teaching practices that highlight multivocality such as citing sources, building upon prior knowledge in the field, and echoing the familiar terms of a discourse community," a model for "true collaborative writing remains rare; our published scholarship commonly follows the model of the individually authored text". Therefore, wikis provide opportunities for students to become readers and authors, as they enable communication among their users. Just as Amit and Erhardt Graeff (2008, p.45, cited in Laflen, 2020, p.9) assert:

Though individual 'readers' will come across wiki pages, they are empowered to edit the very content they are consuming — to superannuate the traditionally bilateral division of reader/author....The reader and author are birthed in union as the wiki 'users'".

For Fandom Studies, making use of wikis means expanding the possibilities in the assignment of tasks to assess second language learners' process. Teachers could reach an agreement with students on a topic they feel motivated to research, gather information on it and write a collaborative paper on the wiki. In this way, all of their voices are heard: they will realize that their contributions helped shaping the text; later on, they will take charge of their own written work since they have internalized the writing structures. If some students share being fans of something or someone in particular, they could be divided into groups and then they could present their final product to the rest of their classmates. With the guidance of the teacher, students will exercise the practice of skills related to teamwork, reading comprehension and second language learning.

Fanfiction in Fandom

As a fanfiction writer herself, Rebecca Black (2005), wrote stories using the characters and settings from the universes created by J.R.R.Tolkien in his novels, but exploring characters and plotlines further. Fanfictions are: "original works of fiction based on forms of popular media such as television, movies, books, music, and video games" (Black, 2005, p.2). What caught her attention the most, as a second language acquisition (SLA) and literacy researcher, and as an English as a second language (ESL) teacher, was how English language learners entered online fanfiction communities to share their own fictions, read and review others. Freeman and Freeman (1994) observed how there were certain factors that lead to language learners' SLA, such as: "level of acceptance by the community, background knowledge and experiences, and interactions with peers and teachers, as well as teaching and learning approaches within the community" (Black, 2005, p.2). In light of this, Black made reference to the notion of affiliation by touching on other terms:

[...] including the traditional conception of "language affiliation" or the level of identification or allegiance a learner has with the target language (Rampton, 1990); the fans' allegiance to, or affiliation with, a particular fandom and fans' "affiliatory" practices with other fans (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000); and fans' commitment to, or affiliation with, writing online (Black, 2005, p. 2-3)

After being a participant observer for a year, Black was able to understand "how language and discourse shape, and are shaped by, the social practices and context of the community (Hine, 2000; Spradley, 1980)" (Black, 2005, p.4). She examined how participants within the platform interacted with others and built a social base. Through ethnographic and discourse-analytical methods, she also inquired into literacy-related activities and fanfiction products of the members who were part of the fan community. She focused on the Japanese animation (or anime) series (a two-part movie and a 70-episode television show), and Japanese comics (or manga) "Card Captor Sakura".

Fanfiction.net is a multifandom site that contains hundreds of thousands of works of original fanfiction divided in fandom categories (Black, 2005). The extensive writing

materials and composition works are of particular interest to the field of literacy because the former entail meaning-making metatalk. SLA and literacy researchers have highlighted how online communication environments that foster interaction become opportunities for language learners to “use literacy skills to forge relationships with individuals who share their interests” (Black, 2005, p.4). What is more, for Black (2005, p.4) : “[...] abilities like reading and writing are not “discrete skill sets that can be learned independently of social interaction but as dialogic meaning-making processes that are acquired and embedded in specific social contexts (Bakhtin, 1986; Gee, 1996)”. For second language learning pedagogical practices, this means that fanfiction can be an appealing tool for students, whether they are involved within a fan community or not, due to the vast possibilities it opens to train literacy skills.

Henry Jenkins (1992) directs attention to fan culture: “[it] is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, inviting many different forms of participation and levels of engagement” (p.5). People get involved in the interface of fanfiction.net in several ways that affiliate them with the fanfiction community. In the personal page, the bio (biography) space allows members to write the fandom they belong to, how long they have been fans, their favourite and least favourite music bands, video games, movies, series and school subjects. Through this information, they share interests with others and forge connections with them. There is a hyperlinked list of all stories an author has posted; each story has a link to posted reviews made by readers. Participants can also create hyperlinked lists of “favourite authors” and “favourite stories” on their personal page (Black, 2005, p.6). All these tools help new members become more familiar with the network before they feel confident enough or decide to publish their own fanfiction works.

In the classrooms, teachers could take examples from the website to show students how it works and then ask them to choose a fandom they are interested in (or they belong to) and write a hypertext taking elements such as characters, fictional settings and plotlines. By analysing formal aspects of the English language through the Linguistic sub-competence, contained in the Communicative Competence, students will be assessed on lexical, phonological and syntactical knowledge and skills (CEFR, 2001, p.13). Likewise, the sociolinguistic sub-competence refers to: “social conventions (rules of politeness, norms governing relations between generations, sexes, classes and social groups, linguistic

codification of certain fundamental rituals in the functioning of a community)” (CEFR, p.13). Finally, the pragmatic component concerns the choices and linguistic resources a language user makes to transmit a message. “It also concerns the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody” (CEFR, p.13). To convey meaning, people deploy different semiotic resources that help them to be clear about what they want to express. In the classrooms, teachers could implement fandom studies in ways students find attractive: if they all agree on a movie or a series to watch, students will undoubtedly feel more engaged in the lessons.

These authors (Black 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009, Yi 2007, 2008, and Lam 2000, 2004, 2006) have shown how popular cultural and social media have made an impact on second language learners’ literacy and communicative competencies. On the one hand, research on how people find alternatives to learn a language and become a member or a fan in a virtual community, like Fanfiction.net, suggests that there still are uncharted waters that need to be explored. Online identities are displayed through fans’ products (fanfiction & fan-art) and shape their discourses. This happens due to the acquired knowledge of both the fictional and “real” world. The latter pertains to authors’ social accounts, namely, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Reddit (the photos they post and the comments they write related to their private lives), and interviews and comic-cons, where they talk about the roles they played. Fans are interested in all this because they see these artists, writers, musicians, singers and actors as idols. Such virtual interactions make fans feel closer to the people they admire. Yi (2007) calls these sites “cyber-shelters” for teenagers, in which they could “freely communicate and express themselves in a relaxed environment” (Black, 2009, p.6). New media and ICTs are providing language learners with a “qualitative different relationship” with English (Lam, 2000, p.468, cited in Black, 2009, p.28).

Fandom and Literacy

The field of literacy, specifically New Literacy Studies (Heath & Street, 2008; Kell, 2006; Street, 1984, 1995, 2013a, 2013b), has raised important questions about literacy practices in out-of-school contexts (Knobel 2001; Hull and Schultz 2001; Street 1995; Tannock

2001; Warriner 2009). NLS has looked at places such as community centers (Blackburn, 2003), neighborhoods (Compton-Lilly 2003; Gregory & Williams, 2000), and the streets themselves (Conquergood, 2005; Iddings, McCafferty, & da Silva, 2011) to understand how literacy practices have emerged to help their inhabitants connect with their surroundings. Nonetheless, these studies focus on participants' mother tongue. Recent research concerning second or additional languages has been conducted (Mora, 2013; Uribe & Gómez, 2015) for the purpose of elucidating how Medellín citizens play with other languages apart from Spanish through new and different kinds of literacies.

We see the city as a polychromatic, nuanced and layered place where different texts converge and help generate a world with a certain identity and layers of expression and understanding. To really understand those interactions, one must carefully analyse their diverse textual and semiotic interactions (Mora, et.al. 2018, p. 38).

The findings report the presence of English in non-institutionalized settings: advertisements, signs, shop windows in malls, restaurants, bookshops and libraries; called "affinity spaces" by Gee (2004). These become places of social interaction, where people gather to practice the target language and chat with friends. Data collection was based on photographs that were taken around Medellín's Metropolitan Area, which show how English literacies are shaping the city and the dynamic processes entailed in creative outcomes. Visual literacy (Seglem and Witte 2009, cited in Mora, et.al, 2018) is seen as 'the ability to make meaning from information in the form of an image' (Rowse et al. 2012, p. 444, cited in Mora, et.al, 2018, p.43). By dint of the polyangulation approach (Mora et al. 2016d), social research must be handled bearing in mind that realities are clad with multiple layers. In light of this, LSLP researchers contribute to the academic dialogue with an array of experiences that brought them together.

As Lankshear and Knobel (2007) note: "What makes skills and literacies "new" is how "they mobilize very different kinds of values and priorities and sensibilities than the literacies we are familiar with" (p.7 cited in Black, 2009, p.694). Such a vision is closely tied to the concept of "multimodality" (Kress, 2000), a theory that suggests that information is rendered through various modes of representation to utter a message. For language

teachers, it denotes a strategy to approach any topic and foster collaborative creation of knowledge. On this account, students are able to “participate competently in instruction as a result of having developed a secure sense of identity and the knowledge that their voices will be heard and respected within the classroom” (Cummins, 1996, p.16, cited in Black, 2009, p.694). Multimodal texts are molded by icons, images, symbols, sound, written text, letter font type, color, motion and gestures (Mejía-Vélez, 2017); these semiotic resources configure complex meaning-making processes embodied in discourses. Black (2006) pinpoints the notion of ‘little-d/big-D’ Discourses proposed by Gee (1999), according to which language is viewed from a wider perspective that goes beyond its utility in communication, recognizing semiotic and material resources such as “images, avatars, icons, shape, sound, and space” (Black, p.2). Examples of this are the use of GIFs, memes, videos and music, usually found in social platforms such as Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, 9GAG, Reddit and Amino.

My experience as a fan

I recall being in primary school and talking to my friends about the movies and TV shows popular back then, such as High School Musical, Hannah Montana, The Wizards of Waverly Place, and Drake & Josh. Many of them featured songs in English to which everybody wanted to sing along; we tried to by imitating sounds and reading the lyrics with Spanish phonetics. Thanks to the processes involved in second language acquisition, there is no doubt we used that input to shape our skills. Moving through the stages, I started to become interested in what the characters said in the dialogues, and this was made possible with the Spanish subtitles that later I’d be changing to English. I remember taking a notebook, looking for the song lyrics, translating word by word and writing them down. My friends and I loved playing karaoke and learning the dance steps. We had a great time being together and sharing what we all liked and enjoyed doing; there was always something to talk about. We even got matching notebooks whose covers had the theme of High School Musical and Hannah Montana. Like many people, I was deeply influenced by Disney movies and content displayed on the TV screen, as well as Jetix and Nickelodeon. I would ask my parents why the characters’ mouths did not match what they

were saying, and their answer introduced to me what dubbing was, since the original language was English. This led me to search the internet for videos of episodes and movie clips with Spanish subtitles. If it hadn't been for that boost of extrinsic motivation, I probably wouldn't have dived into learning English so deep and wouldn't have reached a higher level of proficiency. I loved English classes, and it was my favorite subject, but being a fan helped me to take part in a larger community.

I also was a big fan of Michael Jackson. I would spend hours and hours with my cousin watching his videos and playing his songs on the CD recorder. We sang out loud and ended up crying about him being dead. I would write his name or its initials (MJ) on the walls, on the pencil case, on my notebooks, on my backpack and on my hands. I talked about him in class presentations and my classmates knew I was obsessed with him, which made me really proud. I had a shirt printed with photos of him, and cried during the whole "This is it" movie. My parents gave me two gigantic books for my birthday: one with the biography and one with a bunch of photos, tiny posters, tickets, and even with his marriage certificate. I would take them to school to read them and show them off. Being a fan of Michael Jackson was a part of my personality and of my identity. I was fascinated by his outstanding dancing, singing and acting as well as by his humbleness and concern about humanity, his ceaseless participation in charity and ecological work. I would cry watching The Earth Song video, in which he wonders about environmental damage and how mankind has turned a blind eye to these horrendous crimes against Mother Nature. With the song Blank and White he rose awareness in combating racism and the importance of speaking the language of love. His outstanding performance in the movie Moonwalker, which gave life to the video of Smooth Criminal, will always be highly praised: his creativity had no boundaries, it was legendary.

One day, during Computer class, one of my closest friends back then, told me and the others of the clique of this band she had found while surfing the internet. Its name was "Apollo 3" and it was a German rock band made of three kids who were about the same age as us (11 years old). We would watch their music videos and scream at the top of our lungs the song lyrics (with Spanish phonetics) even if we didn't know any German. We always used to say we would learn eventually but we never really did. We were known among our peers for liking them and they would call us "pollas" referring to "chickens"

because of the similarity between the band's name and the word for chicken in Spanish. It was always the four of us, we would wear jackets of the same color for school trips and paint our nails black when we were out of school, since it wasn't allowed inside of it. We met after school to do our homework and we would also play Apollo 3 as background music. I felt truly happy because I knew I belonged somewhere: we had each other's back. We would dance, headbang and play air guitar. We would print dozens of photos and stick them on our notebooks, on our desks, on our bedroom walls and on our doors. We were already friends before becoming fans of Apollo 3, but this certainly strengthened our friendship: music bonds people together.

In 2012, my cousin introduced me to Taylor Swift. I hadn't really listened to her music because I hadn't given the opportunity to other artists apart from the ones I was already familiar with. The first two songs were Crazier (from the Hannah Montana movie) and I'd lie. We would play them all the time along with other popular songs my cousin loved. She told me what they said and I looked up the words I couldn't understand. Little by little I internalized new vocabulary, expressions and grammatical structures. We would play karaoke with YouTube lyrics videos and with an app called The Voice, which was a game where the lyrics appeared on screen with horizontal bars that would go up and down according to one's voice pitch. There were also four chairs that would turn depending on the amount of points scored. As I was listening to all of Taylor's albums and songs, I pictured how these song lyrics narrated her life events, how these affected her positively and negatively, and described her feelings. As I was growing up and having my own experiences, I related to hers and felt relieved because I could channel my emotions through music by singing along with her songs about friendship, family, love, heartbreak, loyalty, and how she managed her reputation and fame. Being a Swiftie has helped me connect with people: on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, and Pinterest) I read the news Swifties post about new releases and about how thanks to Taylor's songs they have been able to overcome difficult situations.

6 months later, while I was on Tumblr scrolling down, I came across my current favorite band: Twenty One Pilots. The first song I listened to was Migraine. I was enchanted by the rhythm and melody, and wonderstruck to realize how the lyrics perfectly matched what I

was feeling; it hadn't been long before I had gone through all of their albums. Similarly, in 2013, I discovered and heard the song Helena by My Chemical Romance. I was enthralled by the Punk-Rock beats and vampire vibes. I would find myself at night lip-syncing all of their songs and headbanging. After having become a member of the Skeleton Clique and a Killjoy I felt more confident about who I was and wasn't judged for it. Likewise, during the same year, I began watching series such as The Vampire Diaries, The Originals, Teen Wolf, True Blood, Skins UK, among others. Being able to enter different microcosms and multiverses has allowed me to add references to my imagination. Besides, the transition from watching TV shows and movies with Spanish subtitles to watching them with English subtitles has been a part of my language learning process and scaffolding. The constant exposure to input in English and the interaction with other fans have undoubtedly strengthened my language and literacy skills. Every day I read news and scientific papers, watch interviews of my favorite artists (both musicians and actors), and check what they post on social media. These are practices of my everyday life that I enjoy doing, and never has a day passed without having learned something—a new word, an idiomatic expression, a phrasal verb, or an empathetic behavior—. Just as Paul Booth claimed in 2015 that “fandom is the classroom of the future” since it enables transcends the educational system and takes over formal schooling once it is complete:

(...) Fandom may be one of the only places where one is encouraged to think critically, to write, to discuss deeply, and to make thoughtful and critical judgments about hegemonic culture. One's fan identity might be the catalyst of critical intellectual shifts (Booth, 2015, p.1).

Conclusion

Fan studies is a hot topic that has raised the interest of scholars and researchers who investigate the effects of belonging to a fan community. Media audiences take advantage of internet sites and social platforms to create and join fan groups. Given this, people comment on each other's posts, exchange opinions, share experiences, and form bonds. For language learners, this has also meant opportunities for them to practice with native speakers and receive feedback from them. Nowadays, fans are proud of being recognized

as such: they are no longer afraid of being frowned upon, because they have found others with whom they can be “geeks” or “nerds”, terms that used to have a negative connotation. At the end of the day: “People love what other people are passionate about” (La La Land, 2016, written by Damien Chazelle), and everybody has a disposition for certain subjects that are more akin to their personalities. If teachers are made aware of the kind of content students are exposed to, they will shift their pedagogical practices to meet youths’ interests, needs, and even fears.

There is no denying that societies are crying out for a change of focus in the schooling system for one that emphasizes virtues such as cooperation, solidarity, freedom of speech, and compassion. When people congregate around a fandom, they are letting in diversity of opinion, as well as leaving aside stereotypes and misplaced value judgements: fans know first-hand respect is key to ensuring effective conversations. Plus, fans relate to the lyrics of the songs and the stories that allow the reader to dig into the lives of the characters; they identify themselves with them and feel the need to strengthen their language skills in order to comprehend and grasp the deeper meanings embedded in the texts. Whether students are fans or not, some lyrics address global issues and moral dilemmas, and foreground history facts. This invites students to thoroughly assess linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic features. School-based traditional academic texts do not encompass the whole concept of literacy practices, which is why fanfiction is a writing genre that has captivated students’ attention.

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