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Dosier: Real Issues in Real English Classrooms - Problemáticas reales en aulas reales de enseñanza del Inglés

Engaging Secondary English Students Through Transmedia Storytelling: Digital Platforms and Content Creation to Enhance Literacy

Involucrar a los estudiantes de inglés de secundaria a través del relato transmedia: plataformas digitales y creación de contenidos para mejorar la alfabetización

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of English literature at the secondary level increasingly combines traditional texts with digital media such as films, podcasts, series, author interviews, and social media content. In this multimodal landscape, both print and digital resources shape contemporary literacy practices. This article examines the potential of transmedia narratives to enrich literature education by leveraging adolescents' involvement with digital technologies and content creation. Using a range of literary and digital artifacts, the project encouraged students to interpret and produce literary content across multiple platforms. The pedagogical approach drew on Dörnyei's (1994) research on motivation, Livingstone's (2012) work on ICT in education, and theories of transmedia literacy and participatory culture proposed by Scolari (2018), Montoya (2021), Ferrarelli (2021), and Miller (2020). Acting as a facilitator, I linked students' everyday digital practices with formal literary study, which resulted in increased motivation, more profound engagement with literary texts, and greater participation. By becoming active content creators, students bridged formal and informal learning environments and developed participatory and transmedia literacies. The final reflections point out the ability of transmedia narratives to foster creativity, engagement, and meaningful learning in contemporary English literature classrooms.

Keywords: literature, transmedia narrative, transmedia literacy, participatory culture

RESUMEN

La enseñanza de la literatura en inglés en el nivel secundario combina cada vez más los textos tradicionales con medios digitales como películas, podcasts, series, entrevistas a autores y contenido de redes sociales. En este paisaje multimodal, los recursos impresos y digitales moldean las prácticas contemporáneas de alfabetización. Este artículo explora cómo las narrativas transmedia pueden potenciar la enseñanza de la literatura al conectar con el interés de los adolescentes por las tecnologías digitales y la creación de contenidos. A partir de una variedad de artefactos literarios y digitales, el proyecto invitó a los estudiantes a interpretar y producir contenido literario en múltiples plataformas. El enfoque pedagógico se basó en las investigaciones sobre motivación de Dörnyei (1994), el trabajo de Livingstone (2012) sobre TIC en educación y las teorías de alfabetización transmedia y cultura participativa propuestas por Scolari (2018), Montoya (2021), Ferrarelli (2021) y Miller (2020). Desde mi rol de facilitadora, vinculé las prácticas digitales cotidianas de los estudiantes con el estudio formal de la literatura, lo que se tradujo en mayor motivación, un compromiso más profundo con los textos literarios y una participación más activa. Al convertirse en creadores de contenido, los estudiantes lograron tender puentes entre los entornos de aprendizaje formales e informales y desarrollar alfabetizaciones participativas y transmedia. Las reflexiones finales destacan el potencial de las narrativas transmedia para fomentar la creatividad, la participación y un aprendizaje significativo en las aulas contemporáneas de literatura en inglés.

Palabras clave: literatura, narrativa transmedia, alfabetización transmedia, cultura participativa

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Introduction

“As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say, finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.”

“The Death of the Author”

Roland Barthes

The teaching of English literature at the secondary level leads us to explore a variety of resources, ranging from the classics to the most avant-garde literary works. In the classrooms, students might engage with a wide array of materials, including printed texts, films, author interviews, podcasts, series, and even literary resources shared on social media platforms. In this regard, I personally agree with Carla Montoya (2021), who argues that "Stories have always been told or listened to, even long before writing existed, whether to inform, entertain, or educate" (p.145). Printed and digital media thus play a fundamental role in contemporary education.

Students engage with literature not only as readers but also as producers, creating content that circulates across digital networks. Within a learner-centred framework, they assume an active role while the teacher guides and facilitates engagement in a participatory culture. Informal digital practices are integrated into formal instruction, establishing bridges through which literature traverses multiple contexts. This article presents a transmedia project based on *The Great Gatsby* and “The Grass is Always Greener,” highlighting transmedia content creation as a strategic tool for enhancing student motivation and literacy.

Theoretical framework

This article explores student motivation, referencing Zoltan Dörnyei (1994) on its social dimension and Sonia Livingstone (2012) on its impact within ICT in education. The analysis of transmedia narratives, informal learning integration, and transmedia literacy will draw on the works of Carlos A. Scolari (2018), Carla K. Montoya (2021), and Mariana Ferrarelli (2021). Vincent Miller's (2020) contributions to participatory media culture will inform the discussion of content creation and dissemination. Let us define some key concepts before exploring the literary transmedia projects.

Defining and analyzing key concepts

Motivation

Motivation, the driving force behind every action, is what starts, directs, and sustains our pursuit of goals. As Zoltan Dörnyei (1994) noted, when defining motivation, "One recurring question (...) has been how 'social' a motivation construct should be and what the relationship between social attitudes and motivation is" (p.3). While "attitude" relates to action within social contexts, motivation focuses on internal drives like instincts and needs. Self-confidence, "the belief that one has the ability to produce results, accomplish goals or perform tasks competently" (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 6), is crucial for motivation, providing the initial spark and

sustained drive. Motivation is directly related to success in completing tasks and achieving goals, making literacy necessary. Defined as the ability to use language and communicate effectively, literacy falls short in today's digitalised world.

In this context, Ferrarelli (2021) addresses literacy and coins the term 'augmented literacies'. The author claims:

“Envisaging digital literacy in terms of augmented literacies seeks to disrupt the conventional understanding of literacy: it no longer constitutes a compendium of skills and knowledge but rather encompasses competencies and frameworks for action that accrue in strata, gradually enriching contextual perception and performance, and engendering a perpetually evolving process of resignification imbued with purpose and direction.” (p. 397)

“Augmented literacy,” as Ferrarelli defines it, refers to the set of skills, knowledge, and sensitivities needed to interact, build knowledge, and express oneself in hybrid digital-and-media environments—beyond traditional literacies. In today's world, both in and out of education, linguistic proficiency is essential for communication and understanding, especially within the expanding social and cultural contexts of technological digitalization. The terms 'literacy' and 'augmented literacies' set the grounds for exploring the next concepts, intrinsically connected with this work.

Since this article deals with a transmedia project, addressing transmedia narratives is a major concern. Montoya (2021) argues that “The ways in which (these) stories can be narrated or represented have changed significantly, to the point that today, in the 21st century, we refer to stories told through multiple media as *transmedia narratives*” (p. 145-6). Creating and distributing content across platforms requires specific skills, bringing us to transmedia literacy. Scolari (2018) defines: “Transmedia Literacy is understood as a set of skills, practices, values, sensitivities, and learning and exchange strategies developed and applied in the context of the new collaborative cultures” (p. 4). Therefore, transmedia narrative and literacy are interdependent; engaging with stories across platforms enhances both content consumption and creation. Transmedia, thus, as noted by Montoya (2021) and Scolari (2018), promotes a transformative pedagogical approach in academic contexts.

At last, I get to the definition of participatory media culture. From Vincent Miller's perspective, the author refers to media convergence not only as a producer-driven experience across media sectors but also as a consumer-driven process, “largely as an extension of fan culture” (Miller, 2020, p. 101). Participatory media culture cultivates digital environments that blur the boundaries between producer and consumer, empowering individuals to generate, distribute, and shape cultural content instead of just consuming it.

Formal and informal learning: *The Great Gatsby* and “The Grass is Always Greener”

Transmedia practices connect formal learning with students' informal experiences, prompting lesson redesign. Creating and consuming media content based on classic literature cultivates deeper engagement and develops relevant contemporary skills. From this perspective, the proposal outlined in this article was designed to explore *The Great Gatsby* (1925) and “The Grass is Always Greener” (2000), with a focus on assessing students' comprehension of the texts (consumption) and fostering creativity and originality in expanding and recirculating these narratives across various online channels and platforms (consumption + production = prosuming). This approach aligns with Montoya's (2021) assertion that

“students deconstruct learned concepts to reconstruct them in formats such as posts or publications (critical format), while navigating and exploring effective communication strategies tailored to their chosen platform” (p. 146). On the one hand, this approach mirrors students' realities, fostering a deeper connection with content and developing relevant transmedia literacy skills; on the other, it involves them in creative projects that significantly boost their motivation.

Figure 1. *Transmedia lesson plan for literary artifacts*



The collaborative and participatory affordances of digital environments constitute a key pathway to successful transmedia storytelling, making transmedia literacy skills increasingly relevant to education. Students' familiarity and proficiency in informal digital contexts can significantly facilitate their integration into classroom activities. As Livingstone (2012) notes, this involves "the capitalization of the motivating, flexible, and creative affordances of ICT to engage in more flexible and creative ways with pupils" (p. 10). To fully leverage this potential, current curricula should be enriched by transmedia narratives to impart new meanings and update pedagogical experiences. This aligns with Montoya's (2021) view that "Transmedia literacy plays a pivotal role in observing how students engage with media.' outside the classroom, in order to bring this knowledge into the classroom" (p.147). Participatory engagement with transmedia narratives is facilitated by ICT, enabling students to develop crucial transmedia literacy skills.

The transmedia literacy skills identified across the literary artifacts were production, social and content management, and media and technology. These skills were organized following a route from informal discussions to multimodal productions. Once the texts had been read, the students selected specific story elements and created social media posts. As Scolari (2020) notes, Instagram's "immense popularity among teenagers is undeniable, permeating both their school hours and leisure moments," and its use is often "scattered over leisure time, and it is connected to other social media like YouTube, Facebook, or Snapchat" (p. 99). Within this digital landscape, students extended their projects beyond characters' or authors' social media accounts to include infographics and newspaper articles, thus generating new narratives.

Along the process, the students weren't simply consuming the literary works but actively creating new content based on them. "A design of seminars or workshops with teacher support is decisive and essential for developing transmedia educational projects linked to curricular content, enabling students to utilize media according to their contexts, interests, and academic needs" (Montoya, 2021, p. 146). In this line of analysis, the students' creation of social media posts, particularly Instagram accounts, demonstrates social and content management skills. They had to consider how to represent the characters or themes authentically within the chosen platform, managing the narrative and engaging with potential "followers" in a consistent and believable manner. Jenkins (2006) argues that "convergence is more than just a technological process; that the culture of convergence is a participatory one in which 'consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content'" (p. 3). The class was increasingly involved in presenting and sharing their outputs, interacting among themselves, and even collaboratively producing their projects.

Figure 2. The Great Gatsby – Transmedia project

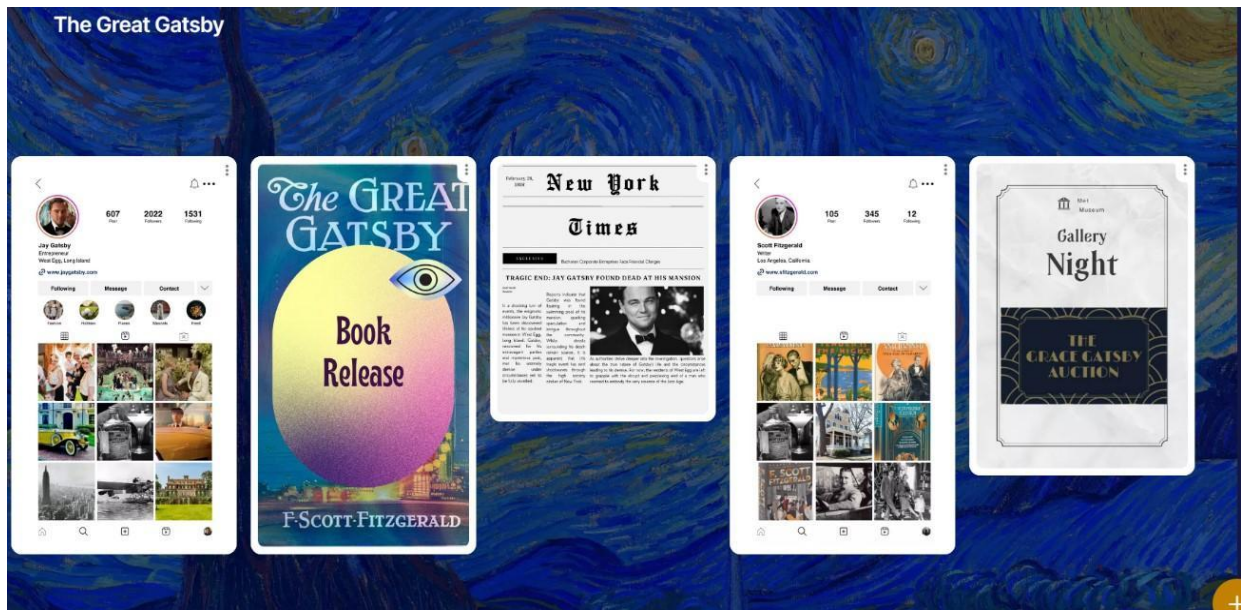
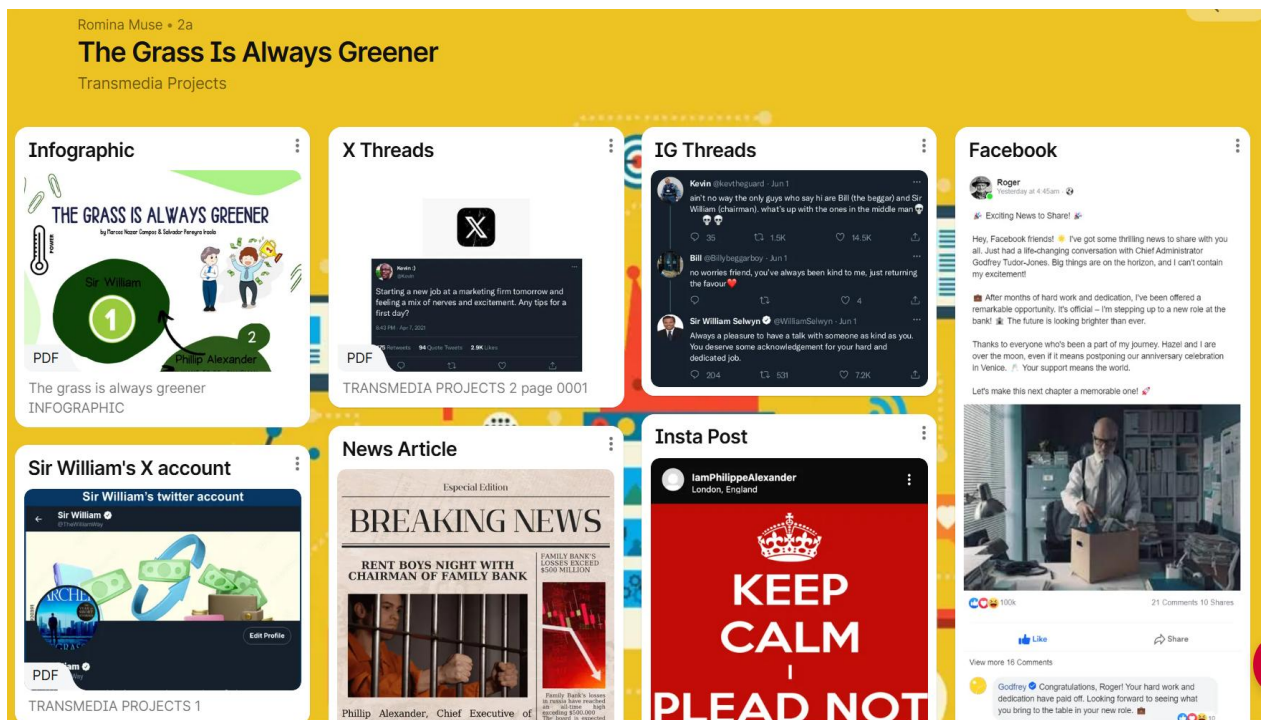


Figure 3. The Grass is always Greener” – Transmedia project



When considering the students' engagement with transmedia storytelling, it's worth noticing that “The experience of the object has spun out of the exclusive control of the producer” (Miller, 2020, p. 102). The students fed from a “participatory culture,” proving to themselves that their ability to integrate different media formats to create a cohesive narrative reflects a developing understanding of the interconnectedness of media in a transmedia context. The students' active participation and creative contributions, enriching and expanding the literary artifacts, demonstrated how meaning-making becomes a collaborative process, extending beyond the original texts to construct new narratives.

Final reflections

The project aimed to evaluate students' understanding of the literary artefacts while also encouraging creative expansion and dissemination of these narratives across online platforms. The transmedia experience promoted the design of learning experiences that resonate with students' digital fluency and informal learning practices. Using technology's motivational and creative aspects can boost learning by improving student attitudes and drive. When students successfully engage with digital tools, create content, and share it collaboratively, they become motivated and feel reinforced in their abilities.

The transmedia educational project demonstrated how students could not only learn about literary works, their contexts, and their characters but also be active participants in their narratives and expand them. In doing so, they were able to add new perspectives and have the opportunity to show their familiarity with the digital world while learning about literature. As a result, they not only found pleasure in producing new content but also learned to use the sites they normally consume in everyday contexts and link them to pedagogical ones.

Turning to the opening quote, Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" takes on particular resonance when considering students as both readers and digital writers. The framework of transmedia storytelling and transmedia convergence culture invites audience participation, blurring the lines between consumer and producer. This participatory dynamic diminishes the traditional authority of the author as the sole arbiter of meaning, echoing Barthes' assertion that the text itself and the reader's interpretation become paramount. In the digital realm, students further embody a prosumer role, not only consuming texts but also creating and sharing their own interpretations across multiple platforms, thereby contributing to the collective narrative and further decentralizing authorial control. The transmedia landscape thus becomes a space where the "death of the author" is enacted through the collaborative and participatory engagement of student prosumers who contribute to the ongoing evolution of the story.

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