From canon to school fandom: #Orson80 as transmedia educational storytelling

Del canon al fandom escolar: #Orson80 como narrativa transmedia educativa

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This article analyzes the #Orson80 pedagogical experience, an educational transmedia storytelling proposal that has been inserted into the school curricula and that, at the same time, generates productions that exceed the walls of the classroom. Through a qualitative methodology, which combines in-depth interviews with content analysis, we conclude that transmedia literacy can be enriched if teachers' practices are added to those developed by students outside the classroom.

KEYWORDS: Transmedia literacy, fandom, education, Argentina, canon.

Este artículo analiza la experiencia pedagógica #Orson80, una propuesta de narrativa transmedia educativa que se inserta en la currícula escolar y que a la vez genera producciones que exceden las paredes del aula. Siguiendo una metodología cualitativa, que combina entrevistas en profundidad con análisis de contenido, se concluye que el alfabetismo transmedia se puede enriquecer si a las prácticas que los alumnos desarrollan por fuera del aula se suman también las de los docentes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Alfabetización transmedia, fandom, educación, Argentina, canon.

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, which stems from a broader investigation[3], we analyze an educational experience that can be understood in terms of transmedia storytelling, and which allows us to discuss how literacy processes are being transformed in the context of education. Following Scolari (2013), transmedia storytelling can be defined as stories that extend across diverse media and platforms, doing so with the active participation of audiences. We will specifically focus on #Orson80, an initiative launched in October 2017 that presented itself as an "Educational Transmedia Project". We are interested in it because it was generated, promoted, and developed within the educational field.

In order to properly tackle the many aspects of this experience, we will first explain some of the main concepts organizing the theoretical framework behind our analysis. With the conceptualization of traditional media literacy as our launching pad, we will chart a path through different categories that might help us articulate possible relationships between transmedia storytelling and education. Then we shall describe and analyze #Orson80, looking at how it came to be, how it was developed, and how it was deployed on diverse media and platforms. Finally, we will offer a few remarks on transmedia literacy and consider possible approaches to it within education.

Our investigation used a qualitative methodology involving two research methods. On the one hand, we carried out Skype interviews with the people responsible for this educational experience, that is, with those who ideated it and set it into motion, as well as with those who participated as academic collaborators and/or specialists. Through these dialogues, we tried to understand #Orson80 from the point of view of our interviewees. In the tradition of anthropology and other social sciences, we will henceforth identify these subjects only via their initials and job positions, so as to preserve their identities and personal data (Guber, 1991). On the other hand, we have also performed a

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[3]   PICT Project (2015-0373) –Plan Argentina Innovadora 2020–, "Innovation in education policies: discourses and strategies on digital literacy in the context of inclusion," directed by Dr. Mónica Pini (CEIECS-UNSAM).

content analysis of the many transmedia extensions that make up the educational experience. This consisted in describing texts and images from the project's official website, looking at #Orson80's underpinning theories, and examining the students' own productions and the topics they dealt with[4].

FROM MEDIA TO TRANSMEDIA LITERACY

The tension between what happens inside and outside the classroom has defined pedagogical research and new literacies. Transmedia and even media literacy are framed within such comings and goings. In fact, the relationship between media and education has a long and troubled history (Morduchowicz et al., 2003) in which communication media have consistently revealed the need to adapt or update teaching practices according to the sociocultural context of each era.

In this sense, one of the main concerns of media literacy, since the beginning, has been to connect the world surrounding the student –a world crisscrossed by media– to what happens in the classroom. In 1981, McLuhan and Carpenter published an essay suggestively titled, "Classrooms Without Walls". They argued that, thanks to the amount of information shared by mass media, most education happened beyond school walls, a phenomenon that was upending the monopoly of books as the principal teaching aids (McLuhan and Carpenter, 1981).

One of the main figures in the French strain of the New School movement, Freinet (1896-1966), intuited early on that the daily lives of schoolchildren were far removed from the topics taught in classrooms. Media literacy, in its diverse forms, finds its first precursors in Europe and North America, although there is also a strong Latin American tradition (Albarello, Canella, & Tsuji, 2014, p. 34); and in its nascent stages, it was largely focused on performing critical readings of

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4   In this article, we refer to students, youths, and young adults interchangeably, although we are aware of the theoretical differences between each term. In the same way, we will not distinguish between varying degrees of access to digital technologies, since such conceptual discussions exceed the scope of this paper.

potentially negative contents in traditional communication media
−principally in the press, radio, film, and television– with the goal of
reversing its noxious effects (Potter, 2010, p. 685; Scolari, 2016, p.
5). However, under the umbrella concept of media literacy, proposals
for content productions were quickly put forth within educational
institutions. These proposals led not only to educational programs or
materials published in newspapers or broadcast on radio and television,
but also to journalistic school publications, marking a transition from
mere critical reading to actual production (Albarello et al., 2014, p. 34;
Canella, Albarello & Tsuji, 2008).

In the last few years, the communicational ecosystem that
engendered media literacy has been substantially transformed. From
the point of view of Media Ecology (Scolari, 2013), we might see this
communicational ecosystem as an overlooked environment, in which we
live and breathe without being entirely aware of its existence, just like a
fish doesn't know what water is (McLuhan, 1964). This environment is
characterized by a "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2008) that employs
"relational technologies" (Aguado & Navarro Güere, 2013, p. 65), such
as mobile devices, in order to create and share materials in blogs, social
media, and open platforms. In this participatory culture, media contents
are no longer sealed packages delivered to isolated consumers via
distribution technology. Instead, they have become a continuous flow
that adopts many forms during the reception stage and is also changed
by the active participation of users, who intervene in these contents
(Albarello, 2017, p. 223).

Within education, subject knowledge is undergoing a similar
transformation, being threatened by a kind of knowledge that "is more
unstable –more profane or mundane– and has blurred boundaries, as is
typical of the Information Society" (Landau, 2006, p. 75). This blurring
of boundaries does not only happen between media and platforms
spanned by mediatic flows, but rather anywhere and at any time, since
learning tends to be ubiquitous (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Moreover,
this ecosystem cultivates generational differences in how people
relate to media, differences not entirely explained by the categories of
digital natives and *migrants* (Piscitelli, 2009; Prensky, 2001; White &
Le Cornu, 2011), but which nonetheless reveal, even today, how far
removed some teachers are from current shifts in teaching practices.

In this sense, Scolari (2016) asks, "Can we still talk about media literacy when the broadcasting communication model (one-to-many) is being displaced by the web model (many-to-many)?" (p. 6), and then affirms:

> Media literacy can no longer limit itself to the critical analysis of television contents or to the production of school projects inspired by the broadcasting and press models. The traditional media consumer is now an active subject who is not only developing interpretative skills of increasing sophistication in order to understand new narrative formats but is also, with greater frequency, creating new contents, mixing them up, and sharing them on social media. It is in this context where the concept of transmedia literacy can enrich the traditional idea of media literacy (p. 7).

It is worth mentioning some of the key distinctions Scolari makes between media and transmedia literacies. First, the former put schools front and center, while the latter focuses on informal learning outside educational institutions. Second, while traditional literacy was inspired by linguistics and media literacy was anchored to a theory of media effects, transmedia literacy adopts cultural studies and the media ecology as its main theoretical focal points. Finally, the author makes it clear that transmedia literacy can be understood as an expansion of –rather than an alternative to– traditional media literacy. In short, what is transmedia literacy? Scolari defines it as "a set of skills, practices, values, sensibilities, and learning and sharing strategies developed and applied in the context of the new collaborative culture" (2016, p. 8).

Therefore, transmedia literacy sheds light on how children and young adults are engaging with media outside of school –in the context of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2008)– and, in turn, seeks to discover how they are informally acquiring communication competencies. Following Maggio, transmedia literacy can be considered a *genuine inclusion* of technology in the classroom. There are two reasons for this: from an epistemological perspective, transmedia literacy engages with disciplines that are increasingly being affected by new ways of constructing and circulating information and knowledge; and from a cultural standpoint, it connects with how children and young people

are naturally employing technology outside of school (Maggio, 2012, p. 21). In this sense, Burbules analyzes the implications of ubiquitous learning in light of the spread of mobile devices, which has characterized the digital ecosystem during the past few years. As he affirms, "The traditional differentiation between formal and informal education blurs when we realize that physical location is no longer a restriction when it comes to how and where we learn" (Burbules, 2014, pp. 3-4). In other words, the differentiation between what lies outside and inside the classroom is increasingly meaningless, since the trajectories of both teachers and students send both towards "transmedia stages" (Ambrosino, 2017, p. 16). From an educational point of view, transmedia storytelling can resignify and enrich the pedagogic experience, as long as it is conceived in pursuit of knowledge (Ambrosino, 2017).

THE ORIGINS OF #ORSON80

The birthplace of a transmedia storytelling –be it a book, film, television series, comic book, or videogame, among other possibilities– defines its later development. That is, although this narrative world may be accessed through any of its extensions, its genesis will always be the point of reference, in order to maintain coherence and prevent dispersion (Jenkins, 2003). This is a common practice in intertextuality, with narrative extensions citing each other in order to strengthen their attachment to the shared world. For this reason, it is usually said that one may know where such narratives begin, but not how and when they end (Scolari, 2013). In the case that concerns us, #Orson80 directly references Orson Welles and his radio adaptation of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, which turned 80 in 2018. The project's multiple meanings depend on its being an educational experience, which began in – and for – a school. Moreover, the pound sign before the name indicates a hashtag, so it can be mentioned on Twitter, where it has an official account.[5]

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[5]   @Orson1938.

#Orson80 was the product of an informal conversation, in October 2017, between teachers in a private school in Greater Buenos Aires,[6] Argentina. It quickly expanded to include two other schools, where the teachers involved also work.

Their main concern, in launching the project, was not transmedia storytelling in and of itself, but rather the disconnect that exists between extra and intracurricular activities.

> The preoccupation that brings us together, in a sense, is the divide we find between what students do outside of school and what they're taught in the classroom, which are two completely different things and which lead students to be, think, and feel one way in school and another outside of it (M.,[7] communication teacher).

These teachers, from within their schools, hoped to engage with what they believed to be common practices among their students. That is, the project stems from an observation already made by Freinet (1974), who called attention to the disconnect between what children and young people do in school and what they do elsewhere. The relationship between education and media has been marked by constant tension, much like the one between education and information and communication technology (ICT). Even as the debate on ICTs and their impact on education rages on, generating diverse and divergent positions regarding their inclusion in schools (Landau, 2013), social practices continue being transformed, while experimentation with these practices is generating new levels of complexity. As Dussel and Southwell (2007) maintain, what is considered to be basic, necessary knowledge

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[6] Refers to the 24 districts that surround the autonomous city of Buenos Aires: Avellaneda, Almirante Brown, Berazategui, Esteban Echeverría, Ezeiza, Florencio Varela, General San Martín, Hurlingham, Ituzaingo, José C. Paz, La Matanza, Lanús, Lomas de Zamora, Malvinas Argentinas, Merlo, Moreno, Morón, Quilmes, San Fernando, San Isidro, San Miguel, Tres de Febrero, Tigre, and Vicente López.

[7] Note that interviewees will only be identified by their initials, as will anyone else they may mention.

is resignified with each passing era, and so is the role of the school and how it can cope with "cultural productions" then in circulation, not only within such institutions but also beyond them. In fact, these authors point out that, even when society's cultural productions contribute to building and revamping schools, the relationship between both is problematic. In #Orson80, the gap between the school curriculum and youths' everyday knowledge and practices manifests itself in the following way:

> If you're a literature teacher and one of your students is a writer on Wattpad and you're not aware of that, well, that means something isn't right. Or maybe you have musicians in the classroom and you don't know because these kids are uploading material to YouTube or sharing their performances on Instagram, or perhaps they're recording little videos, playing characters with separate social media accounts… It's a lot to take in, isn't it? (M., communication teacher).

Teachers became involved with #Orson80 because they recognized its potential, then looked for what they could contribute from their own areas of expertise. Nevertheless, teamwork was one of the defining traits of the project. At the beginning, there were only three teachers. They had different specialties, from art to computer science and communication, among others; and taught various disciplines (English, art, sociology, IT, and so on) at their schools and others in the neighboring area. Later on, the project grew to include five teachers and two collaborators, who were academics or specialists from universities rather than schools[8].

This expansion was driven not with any specific intent but instead via professional relationships. In this sense, the networks that teachers belong to –and which they come to integrate as they work at different institutions and during different shifts– made it possible to expand #Orson80 into other schools in Greater Buenos Aires:

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8   #Orson80 was carried out by teachers during their office hours and with the volunteer participation of collaborators, fans, students, and other users interested in the project.

I decided to participate in the #Orson80 transmedia educational project for several reasons. To begin with, I've known M. for a long time, and while I'm used to tackling transmedia storytelling from the point of view of communication, the fact that she was approaching it from an education standpoint, even though it's also a communication phenomenon, I thought that was revelatory (P., specialist in communication and education).

I was contacted because of a comment I had made about Orson Welles on public television. So someone from the #Orson80 project asked me if I could write something about the topic. And I thought it was a good idea to expand on what I had said in that earlier interview, so I recorded my own podcast and shared it with them (A., media and journalism specialist).

Both specialists became involved with the project because they personally knew someone responsible for it and were familiar with the topic and its potential growth in the field of education. There was also an additional layer of networking, not just between colleagues in an educational institution but also among those members of the online academic community who were interested in the topic and were concerned about education in general. In both cases, teachers and academics joined #Orson80 by making contributions related to their own fields. These interdisciplinary approaches became the project's identifying mark and fundamental feature, as shall be explained in what follows.

AN EDUCATIONAL TRANSMEDIA PROPOSAL

#Orson80's educational proposal –that is, its set of contents, strategies, and resources– hinges on transmedia storytelling and addresses both teachers and students, albeit with different approaches towards each. In this section, we will focus on teachers.

From the beginning, the project stood on a pair of complementary pillars: one interdisciplinary, the other curricular. Its opening stages involved the preparation of a work proposal, which included its own justification and drafting, and which aimed to assist those with little experience in such projects. This led to the creation of an official

website, built on the free Google Sites platform, for teachers to learn more about and join #Orson80. Here, the goal of explaining and justifying transmedia storytelling in the context of education is both implicit and explicit. In its introduction, the website frames the project as a homage to what was "likely the first transmedia expansion" of H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, a live CBS radio play by Orson Welles on the night of October 30, 1938.

FIGURE 1

Source: #Orson80 homepage.[9]

More concrete information is offered via a collection of links, showing how transmedia storytelling can be used in the classroom. Through these links, visitors can read the Wikipedia page on transmedia storytelling, watch a Simpsons parody of *The War of the Worlds*, look at a student's drawing, and access different sections of the website. As the introduction explains, #Orson80 "is structured around a work schedule that is divided into approximately three weeks and pursues a variety of educational goals" related to preschool, elementary, and secondary school levels (although it includes proposals for only the latter two). #Orson80 seeks to accomplish many objectives. On the one hand, it hopes to embrace knowledge and practices that students have acquired

9   See: https://sites.google.com/view/orson80transmedia/home

outside of school and incorporate them into "everyday school routines", aiming to "integrate the creative logic of transmedia storytelling" into the classroom in order to inspire critical reflection on the use of ICTs and social media. On the other, it hopes to spark debate on the impact of new media and fake news, so as to involve students in the "expansion and creation of new products" using diverse expressive tools.

In the website's other sections, visitors can find an explanatory statement, work plans, and proposed activities. The explanatory statement proposes the following educational objectives: a) to collaborate in the administration and development of a collective project that can spread to many media platforms; b) to generate an array of narrative and artistic expressions: letters, short stories, posters, drawings, phrases, installations, comics, memes, infographics, and so on; c) to debate meanings, express ideas effectively, and create narrative worlds that expand the main text, *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells; and d) to reflect on the influence of technology on everyday practices via general discussions and subsequent essay writing.

To put it simply, the website describes an approach that enables both individual and collective creation, embraces diverse media competencies, and proposes a critical analysis of the communicational and informational context occupied by teachers and students.

As for the teachers' own motivations, the project foregrounds the need to encourage autonomy, critical reflection, and new ways of learning, and, in so doing, promote the relevance and importance of pedagogical mediation in practices developed by students.

> Sometimes the role of teachers goes unnoticed. We distinguish between technique and social practice. Working with teenagers gives you a glimpse of what they're doing, so you see how they learn to use Snapchat through trial and error, for example. They know the technique, but they're not so aware of broader social practices (M., communications teacher).

The role of teachers, in this educational transmedia proposal, is to problematize issues that are not always given enough attention and which should be considered alongside the everyday use and appraisal of, for example, social media.

Students need adult guidance on social practices related to, for instance, privacy protection, both one's own and those of others, and safeguarding the public, private, and intimate spheres. The transmedia topic engages them from this angle as well. If you take a picture of something, can you publish it? On whose authority? It's great to show them certain basic norms they're unaware of (M., communications teacher).

Regarding the grading of project activities, the website offers articles and videos by different authors who talk or write about the matter of evaluations and who discuss the materials that function as thought triggers for said activities, such as texts, comics, and novels in both English and Spanish. As mentioned before, although the #Orson80 team shares a common teaching background, one of its members is an expert in the field of communication, which means the theoretical bedrock of the project is comprised of work by both local and international academics in the fields of communication and education, including Rebeca Anijovich, Alicia Camilloni, Henry Jenkins, Edith Litwin, and Alejandro Piscitelli.

As noted before, and in line with how the project has been carried out from the outset, the goal was to introduce activities that would not neatly fit into the confines of any one discipline. This approach also influences evaluations. Teachers can evaluate from a curricular standpoint, yet #Orson80 was not conceived in terms of individual subject areas but from a broader perspective. There are no tasks or activities specifically meant for language, social sciences, and so on, which is what gives the project its richness and complexity. Instead, teachers are meant to embrace a more interdisciplinary point of view. This implies a degree of risk, since teachers hoping to join the project must rethink their role, both pragmatically and epistemologically.

Another feature of #Orson80 are the work plans that guide it. There are two of them: one for work inside the classroom, which shall be the focus of the following section; and another for work beyond school walls, which invites specialists and experts from various disciplines to publish their research on Medium.

FIGURE 2

Source: Webpage for contributions by specialists and academics.[10]

This second extension of the transmedia project centers its thematic approach on the concept of *news literacy*:

> Welles didn't mean to trick people, but people were tricked anyway because he was such a good actor. The power of persuasion, as a theme, is related to the development of critical thinking, which we talk about so much in education and include so often in reading lists and curriculums, and addressing it is one of the main objectives of M.'s project (P., specialist in communication and education).

To specialists, the Orson Welles radio play is newly relevant in light of recent debates on the credibility of news sources, particularly within

[10] See: https://medium.com/@orson1938

the digital ecosystem. This suggests a renewed critical reading, which is the main purpose of the media literacy tradition.

> I thought it was fitting to make the connection between Orson Welles's play, and how his contemporaries used it to critique the emergence of radio, and what's happening now with fake news, with some taking advantage of this phenomenon to discredit the internet and its role in the spread of information (A., specialist in media and journalism).

This way, #Orson80 means to problematize –and inspire debate and critical reflection on– issues that students might otherwise ignore or naturalize, such as news consumption. To carry out these processes, the project calls upon specialist collaborators and teachers, who often create their own contents:

> There's the matter of teachers as creators of educational objects and products. Although students occupy creator and prosumer roles, teachers are creators, too (M, Communication teacher).

Putting it simply, the #Orson80 transmedia storytelling expands through the work of teachers and collaborators, though it is completed mainly by students' joint and collaborative participation, as we shall see up next.

From canon to fandom: student productions

One of the main components of #Orson80 are the contents produced by students and conceived in transmedia terms. Throughout this article, we have referred to canonical contents and fandom in the context of transmedia storytelling. Yet these topics become even more relevant when addressing student-made work. Following Scolari (2013), the canon consists of narrative extensions belonging to the official story, whereas fandom –the domain of fans– is comprised of productions made by followers and admirers of said story. In educational terms, the canon represents the official #Orson80 proposal, with its diverse platforms, contents, and activities, while fandom is made up of productions made

by students, who sometimes follow their teachers' directives and other times move beyond their assignments' limits and expand the frontiers of the narrative world.

The project website presents activities for both the elementary and secondary school levels. The former are focused on play and consist in the group creation of a board game and a videogame (using the free Scratch platform) inspired by Orson Welles's radio version of *The War of the Worlds*. For secondary school, the proposed activities are far more varied and are divided up into "obligatory" and "optional" tasks. The obligatory tasks involve investigating the topic, finding relevant readings and videos, creating a group board on Pinterest to publish information on H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, and then reflecting on what has been learned in class. As for the optional tasks, they involve "transmedia expansions" on a separate website where students can work on their own.

This alternate website, through several collaborative activities, inspires students to reflect upon the hazy boundaries separating fact from fiction, and on the role new media plays in their perception of the world. These activities can be seen as transmedia extensions of H. G. Wells's book, since students are asked to: publish a blog post on how they would feel about an eventual extraterrestrial invasion, write a magazine article - on the free Flipsnack platform - about how the original novel could be adapted to social media, pen a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* regarding the newspaper's treatment of Welles's radio play, and even imagine an alien's interior monologue on being an outcast in modern society and suffering discrimination at the hands of human beings.

Other activities include: creating an avatar or graphical representation of an alien through a meme, comic, or 3D object (using tools such as TinkerCad or Sketchfab); publishing a digital magazine –on Flipsnack– that looks at the impact of technology on everyday life; using the Educaplay tool to produce educational materials –crossword puzzles, riddles, word soups– that might explain the events of 1938 to elementary school students; and recording a podcast recreating the Welles adaptation and uploading it to iVoox or SoundCloud. Finally, there are other, more visually-oriented activities: an Instagram safari

FIGURE 3

Source: Webpage for the secondary school level.[11]

tour showing a school landmark from a unique perspective and a false news story with Photoshopped images of an alien inside the school.

Putting aside the value of *The War of the Worlds* within the science fiction genre, the alien theme serves as an excuse not only to practice reading and writing skills but also to think about other topics related to the everyday reality of students:

> The alien is another possible discussion topic. It relates to alterity, to otherness. And it allows us to ask who are today's aliens, in my classroom, my neighborhood, my culture. What happens to those who are different, why do we segregate them, and why won't we accept them? (M., communication teacher).

Interestingly, many of the themes and issues tackled during the project and sparked by the original novel call for the use of platforms and social media, without undermining or calling into question the preeminence of the written word (in the sense proposed by García Canclini et al., 2015). This is due to how student work strategies have been conceived: different "entry points" are opened into the subject,

11   See: https://sites.google.com/view/orson80/p%C3%A1gina-principal.

and these can be videogames or films or any other medium. Yet, as part of the courses' educational and curricular approach, writing remains a key activity, since certain ideas have to be written down:

> We like for students to choose what they want to work with. That is, we give them four possible writing activities and we don't negotiate the writing part. The need to write is non-negotiable (M., communications teacher).

Different options are made available, but whatever the format, writing remains a requirement. As Cucuzza and Pineau (2000) affirm, in school curriculums, writing has traditionally occupied –and, as we have seen, still occupies– a leading position over other practices, such as reading. During the project, this act of writing has been carried out via tasks that are not always planned in advance, since some are developed on the fly, but which always give students space to expand the narrative from different perspectives.

Students are conceived as "student users". They are students and, at the same time, users in the sense of being developers or producers (of mashups, micro-videos, photos, and so on, which are also published on social media). But they can also be considered fans who remain engaged outside of school. That is, they are motivated to work on their own, not just on what the curriculum outlines. In this conception of students, with their practices at the center, we come across two intertwined paths: one is canonical, made up of narrative extensions created inside the school; and the other relates to fandom, as students become users in participatory culture (Jenkins, 2008). The path of the *school canon* leads both to activities and assignments that organize student work and to subsequent evaluations:

> In a sense, through our assignments, we're on the canonical side of things. We take control of the narrative, give it a formal structure, and then invite the students in. That said, optional activities do loosen up the structure, allowing for some leeway and still guiding the kids' activities. Evaluations are likewise challenging, because each teacher evaluates not just the work itself but also what's related to his or her own field. If my students create a meme and I'm a language teacher, then I'm going to evaluate it from a linguistic point of

view. Meanwhile, F. might focus on the photography, D. might look at how layers were mixed on Photoshop, and so on (M., communications teacher).

Instead, the path of *school fandom* enables other possibilities, as students move beyond mandatory and curricular assignments and come into contact with their own personal motivations and practices in the context of the participatory culture they are a part of:

> Then there's the matter of publishing and distributing content. That's where the interesting part begins and maybe it strays a bit from the purely educational, because you have curricular contents but then students get excited about the topic and start emailing photos or sending memes that have nothing to do with any assignment, but teachers receive them anyway (M., communications teacher).

On this note, we can highlight the following drawing. It was originally penned by a student, unprompted by coursework. Then a photo was taken of it and it started circulating on social media:

FIGURE 4

Source: Meme created by one of the students involved in #Orson80.

To conclude, we can see that the concepts of canonical contents and fandom, usually associated with popular entertainment, can help us explain certain features of transmedia storytelling when these are developed in the context of education. Students' productions, then, constitute practices and expressions that expand a narrative world that begins in their classrooms and leaks into their daily lives.

Final thoughts

One of the most significant aspects of #Orson80, which should receive further attention from a curricular point of view and within a school environment, is that the project has been presented and integrated into the institutional space more as a transmedia storytelling than as a literacy tool. This is confirmed by the project's explanatory statement and our interviewees' observations. The question of literacy comes into play, if at all, when teaching critical reading skills in the context of information overload, which is currently a key topic, as social debates on fake news and post-truth continue to flare up.

In the case analyzed in this article, transmedia storytelling acts as a vehicle to display and distribute the knowledge and creativity of students, who become producers, users, and fans. This is possible thanks to an interest in stimulating debate on topics that can be tackled from different vantage points, such as the issue of alterity. Another point to keep in mind, when it comes to transmedia storytelling in the classroom, is that collaboration is not limited to students' contributions to curricular contents, since the work of teachers, specialists, and project managers, each with their own experience and from within their own discipline, is also important.

On a different note, the transmedia approach, in #Orson80, has a motivating and disruptive function, as it seeks to bring students' extracurricular contents and knowledge into the school, and allows for different levels and kinds of participation. That is, from its inception, the project has adopted a transmedia logic, leading to the two paths we indicated above: one defined by the canon and the other by fandom.

Nevertheless, whether in the observations of teachers and specialists or in our content analysis of the official website, the concept

of transmedia literacy has not turned up. This concept may be part of the project's later development. For now, we can infer that transmedia literacy is implicit in how teachers approach students, what creative activities they propose, and what tools are chosen, without falling back on instrumental lessons but rather enabling the critical appropriation of digital technologies.

This experience allows us to keep thinking and theorizing about whether or not transmedia literacy requires a systematic approach inside the classroom, with study plans that are both multidisciplinary and specific to each discipline –with all the risks this implies– and which are not dependent on the creative role of teachers, as is commonly the case in such initiatives.

Based on everything we have said, we can offer some thoughts on transmedia storytelling and the educational field. Many of the issues brought up by transmediality can be understood as new answers to old questions previously asked within the field of media literacy, mainly those having to do with the relationship between schools and the everyday world occupied by students and teachers. This world, crisscrossed by the internet and social media, again challenges educational practices. Nevertheless, as we use the expressive tools of transmedia storytelling inside classrooms, we might fall into the trap of emphasizing its novelty and ignore that, for it to work within the framework of an educational proposal, teachers must act as mediators. Transmedia literacy should be defined by this constant interrelationship, given that the use of various tools (platforms, social media, software, apps) does not lead, by itself, to significant change in teaching and learning. The concept of transmedia literacy, as proposed by Scolari (2016), can be enriched if we append the practices of teachers and other educational actors to those that students carry out beyond the classroom. This way, we can transform such practices into significant educational experiences, instead of simply bringing entertainment and fiction consumption into an educational context.

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