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Fanfictions in cyberspace: new ways of reading and forming readers

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#### Summary

The article in question is the result of a course completion work in the area of Pedagogy with emphasis on reader training. It presents a section of the research focused on the analysis of the process of reader education in cyberspace through fanfics, since this type of writing/reading has gained notoriety among readers when it comes to new ways of reading literature. It is assumed that the formation of readers is a continuous activity and that the expansion of the concept of formation and reading beyond school and printed books is already a reality. The object is to analyze the process of reader education in cyberspace through fanfics. This qualitative research is woven from the voices of young readers in their virtual reading environments. The results identify avid and participatory readers, who make of this reading modality a bridge to the reading of literary text, expanding the formation of literature readers in the digital scenario.

Keywords: Fanfictions. Formation of readers. Cyberspace.v

#### Fanficções no ciberespaço: novas formas de ler e formar leitores

#### Resumo

O artigo em questão é o resultado do trabalho de conclusão do curso na área da Pedagogia com ênfase na formação do leitor. Apresenta um excerto da pesquisa centrada na análise do processo de formação de leitores no ciberespaço através de fanfics, uma vez que este tipo de escrita/leitura ganhou notoriedade entre os leitores quando se trata de novas formas de ler literatura. Assume-se que a formação de leitores é uma actividade contínua e que a expansão do conceito de educação e leitura para além da escola e dos livros impressos já é uma realidade. O objectivo é analisar o processo de formação de leitores no ciberespaço através de fanfics. Esta pesquisa qualitativa é tecida a partir das vozes dos jovens leitores nos seus ambientes de leitura virtual. Os resultados identificam leitores ávidos e participativos, que fazem desta modalidade de leitores de literatura no cenário digital digital.

Palavras-chave: Fanficções. Formação de leitores. Ciberespaço.

#### **1** Introduction

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## 1.1 Cyberspace and its possibilities for the formation of literature readers

At the turn of the 20th to the 21st century, important changes have occurred in the social, economic, political, and cultural sectors. As a result, social relations were altered, and we began to live in the globalization era, in which everything happens quickly, especially after the technological innovations that came to make life easier for people in society.

Literature, as one of the essential knowledge in the formation of people, has also followed these changes and started to be called "contemporary literature", which, although it is not a definitive term, is generally used to refer to literature nowadays. At the same time, one cannot fail to mention its close relationship with cyberspace, which is translated by Lévy (1994) as cyberspace. The author defines this space as "[...] a terrain where humanity is working today" (LÉVY, 1994, p. 1).

Although Lévy's position was made in 1994, it is possible to verify that the human being has been appropriating more and more of the spaces developed by means of technological resources, therefore, the events around us started to happen in an accelerated way, and the habits we used to have were and will continue to be changed to fit the cyberspace or virtual space.

When thinking about literature in this context, it is noticeable that the reader has become more and more the protagonist of literary creation, a fact that is due to his or her more active participation in the writing process of the texts themselves. Hence the need to see them, in contemporary times, not only as receivers or appreciators of writing, but as active and participatory subjects (BRITTO, 2003).

The changes that are opening in the field of literature reading bring to the reader the role of protagonist of the formative process, which happens from the transformations that he himself is weaving in the midst of the context in which he is inserted. This fact opens a range of opportunities for the reading of literature to become increasingly diversified, emancipating, and accessible to the most diverse audiences in different digital media.

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When we talk about new possibilities of reading literature and the role of the reader, different from the passive one, as is still commonly seen in most reading spaces, it is possible to come across fanfictions or fanfics - stories created by fans, based on different characters and plots that belong to several products present in the media, such as books, movies, comics, series, celebrities, singers, bands and music groups, in which the reader is as protagonist as the text itself. Fanfics are stories that have been on the rise since the mid-2010s due to the emergence of cyberculture, but they date back much earlier. It is not even known for sure when they emerged in the cyber context.

Busin (2020, p. 23) says that "[...] contrary to what common sense points out, the Internet does not endanger literature, but rather transforms it as a facilitator of access and also discovery of new authors and readers [...]". With this, adapting to the new reading modalities that have emerged can be a challenge for many, and even somewhat tiring for others. However, when one turns to the readers and authors of fanfics, one can see that their habits of surfing the Internet are geared towards searching for stories with which they have some connection, facilitating reading and inserting them in a context of creating their own texts.

In this sense, there is a major problem that has not yet been discussed: public policies aimed at guaranteeing the reading of literature and access to good books for all people are shallow. Therefore, it is necessary to think about reading education beyond the classroom and to the most diverse types of readers, because there will be new proposals to work pedagogically throughout the transformations that occur in the world, and these will require teachers to be prepared to deal with the most varied types of readers and readings.

Hence the need to effectively take advantage of the resources that are present in cyberspace, so that the classroom is not the only way to access stories, and that each reader feels that he or she also belongs to the social environment through the screens, connected to the network. Therefore, discussing the theme of reader education in cyberspace is a reality and a necessity.

The interest in researching this theme arose from the researcher's trajectory as a reader, since fanfictions were one of her first sources of access to the literary universe.

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Moreover, it was consolidated during the learning obtained through the discipline Literature and Childhood, in the course of Pedagogy at the State University of Rio Grande do Norte - UERN (2021) and also through the participation in the Extension Project UERN Goes to School (2021), as a member of the Reader Training axis, both experiences gave rise to the monograph research mentioned at the beginning of the text.



Thus, it is reiterated that this discussion is necessary to value the new ways of thinking about reading and forming readers, seen as a pleasurable and meaningful practice through fanfics, providing knowledge about the process of new language practices, in addition to expanding the studies in this area, generating data that can help teachers and mediators responsible for the formation of readers to (re)think their practices for reading, especially literature.

To this end, the article is organized into four distinct parts: "Cyberspace and its possibilities towards the formation of literature readers", which was presented in this section, with some preliminary information; "Methodological path taken in the research", which presents the methodological issues that guided the research; "Literature, reader and the fanfictions", where the theoretical foundation is found with the contributions of studies and research about the theme and, finally, the presentation of some data to reaffirm the importance and the contributions of fanfictions to the formation of young readers in contemporary.

### 2. Methodological path followed in the research

The research is supported in the qualitative approach, bibliographical in nature, because it seeks to answer particular questions around the object of study (DESLANDES; GOMES; MINAYO, 2009, p. 21). Through this type of study, one can perceive the multiple views of the scientific work, which provide a better perception of the subject, because they make the experiences of each subject unique. In addition, qualitative research is also a flexible way of accessing new knowledge.

In this sense, the study took place in the midst of a pandemic scenario (2021), so it was necessary to reorganize new strategies for its realization, one of which was to adapt

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the field research to the virtual environment. Thus, being the aforementioned space extremely vast, it was decided to apply an online questionnaire with the fanfic readers participating in the booktwitter community. The origin of the word booktwitter comes from the combination of book, which means book, and twitter, which is a social network that works as a kind of microblog. In this social network, one can share texts of up to 140 characters, besides photos and videos. Within this social network, there is a series of communities. In this vein, the literature aficionados have named their twitter group booktwitter, where all the people who like to talk about books and all kinds of reading are gathered.

The questionnaire was shared on booktwitter with a short period of time for fanficionados to answer via google forms. The first 100 answers obtained in a period of 6 hours were selected, and it was opted to work with only half of this amount, and only one cut constitutes the present article, in which excerpts were selected according to one of the analysis categories, namely: "the contributions of fanfictions to the formation of young readers". Then, the answers were systematized and interpreted according to the theoretical framework that supports this research. The results were illustrated in charts for a better visualization and understanding of the findings of this study.

### 3. Literature, readers and fanfictions

When one searches on Google about the definition of literature, it is possible to find several definitions, one of them says that it is the art of the word (SARTRE, 2006). For this reason, a series of questions around literature are generated, which permeate feelings and emotions. Thus, in this research, it was preferred to understand that literature is the art of the word, above all, meaningful to its readers.

It is known that the origin of literature goes back to the time of caves. According to Todorov (2009, p. 22), "literature is not born in a vacuum, but in the center of a set of living discourses, sharing with them numerous characteristics; it is not by chance that throughout history, its borders have been inconstant". In this sense, it can be seen that the processes

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in which the practice of reading literature unfolds have always driven changes in the reader, whether in his critical and creative thinking, or in his life.

With this perspective around an approximation of the ideas about literature, it is still valid to state that it has an important role in human formation, especially because it touches on the reader's internal paths. The experiences that are made possible from the contact with the narrative change in us more than can be seen, that is, the reflective process in which one dives, changes who we are, because there is in literature a humanizing character belonging uniquely to it (CANDIDO, 2017). In this line of reasoning, it is also perceived that its influence is capable of forming us into politicized, creative, and autonomous readers.

Its importance in the life of the young reader, especially in contemporary times, has only been solidified, despite the fact that the indexes indicate that we live in a society that reads little or almost nothing. In this sense, its possibilities, raised through fanfics, are only a little of what can be found in cyberspace. They are natives of the digital culture, so a meaningful relationship with literary reading must be established in the contemporary digital space, since literature is part of life and exists to aid the development of the best version of the human being (TODOROV, 2009).

Since the dawn of humanity, there have been certain groups of people who gather around a work, be it musical, theatrical, or literary, to admire it. The people who are now part of these groups are known as fans. According to the Concept website, "a fan is a staunch supporter or follower of something or someone. The term comes from the English word fanatic, equivalent to the concept of fanatic in our language. A fan is a person who defends his or her preferences with passion, drive and tenacity. Over the years, these groups in which fans gather have become known as fan clubs. In these clubs, fans develop several activities in order to feel closer to the admired person or artistic manifestation (OLIVEIRA, 2021).

The emergence of the internet, digital technologies and cyberspace made the activities developed by these fans, inside the fan clubs, to be transformed to follow the changes arising from the digital context which humanity started to live, and also changed

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the nomenclature of these fan clubs to fandoms. Fandoms are characterized as the new contemporary fan clubs, the word comes from the junction of two English language words that are kingdom, which means kingdom, and fan which means fan, in free translation the word becomes kingdom of fans. "With the advent of the Internet, fandoms started to aggregate an increasing number of people, breaking geographical and even linguistic barriers [...]" (VARGAS, 2015, p. 24).

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It is worth noting that fandom is not one, there are several types of fandoms. If we are fans of a certain book, for example, Harry Potter, we can say that we belong to the Potterheads fandom, which means Harry Potter fans; if we are fans of the books of the Percy Jackson saga, we belong to the demigods fandom; if we like a band, like Mcfly, the fandom to which we belong is the Galaxy Defenders, and so on.

Regardless of what the fandom is, fanfictions are the main activity developed within this universe of readers. They are seen as activities that increasingly enable the access of young people belonging to these communities to the contemporary literary world, since, for them, it is much easier to get interested in reading from something they already like, rather than from a far-fetched text, or one indicated by the school, with which they often do not feel identified.

Perhaps the main novelty of the fandom system lies in its effective contribution to the formation of a new reader. A reader who, besides receiving, understanding and interpreting a text individually, seeks in books the opportunity to participate in an Internet community. This new reader, who was born in the virtual era, does not accept a passive reception and does not understand reading as an isolated activity. Moreover, he considers himself a true fan of books, assuming the relationship between erudition, media, and entertainment. (MIRANDA, 2009, p.1).

The young people coming from the digital culture have the Internet and all the tools to handle it at their disposal, so they always try to be connected and present in the most varied spaces. The fandom comes to provide readers precisely the opportunity to participate in an active community on the Internet, combined with the role of protagonism that these new readers crave.

When we think of fanfictions, we immediately associate this term with something recent, which emerged with the polarization of the internet and digital technologies,

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however, they date from before the emergence of these new tools, only that this modality of writing/reading has always been seen only as entertainment, negatively and often even infantilized.

However, Vargas (2015, p. 22) states: "the emergence of fanfictions has been known since the moment there was a registered reader interested in them". Some even relate the writing of fanfiction to fanzines, which became known in the mid-1970s. These fanzines were handwritten and exchanged between fans, but this exchange was something very restricted, staying only in that circle of fans. It is so much that, if we stop to analyze, we can realize that the name fanzine "[...] refers again to the word fan, this time joined with magazine - magazines in English that had a basically homemade structure, with very modest circulation and circulation" (VARGAS, 2015, p. 23). In the mid-1970s, of the 20th century, fan readers began to play a participatory role, even if, at that time, their participation had less focus.

Much of the popularization of fanfictions is due to young consumers, fans of literary works published by the cultural industry that has been present in our society since the late nineteenth century, but the impacts caused by its emergence have only become noticeable through technological advances.

It is worth pointing out that the writing of this work does not aim to create social, political, and economic problematizations regarding the cultural industry, especially when dealing with the area of literature, which contributed to the existence of mass culture from the novels of serials - but it is necessary to register that the defense of the right to read literature is for everyone. Unfortunately, this is not yet the case in our country. However, by defending access to quality education, literary texts and fanfics are read critically and make possible a new perception of the world, which can be achieved through reading education, as Yunes (2010) explains:

[...] not only of books, but reader of images, reader of various languages, reader of politics, reader of public administration, reader effectively committed with his critical eye in the discussion of the paths that society needs to take to achieve a balance between production, leisure, well-being and creativity. (YUNES, 2010, p. 54).

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Despite the constant challenge of forming readers, it is believed that there are ways to captivate the interest of these individuals. After all, talking about new possibilities of reading does not exclude the texts considered canon. The canon should not be left aside, on the contrary, its presence in the formation of readers is essential, in fact, "[...] reading, like many good things in life, requires effort and that the so-called pleasure of reading is a construction that presupposes training, qualification, and accumulation," explains Azevedo (2004, p. 38). Thus, literature is necessary in all its rich versions throughout history, whether classics or contemporary texts.

Many readers have not gone through this construction/reflection process, because for them the works indicated by the school, most of the times, are or were extensive and sometimes complex, lacking mediation and/or meanings, causing lack of interest and distance from them. However, we must remember that the indexes of research, focused on the practice of reading, point out that the main source of access to books is the school and it is up to it to (re)think the mediation and meaning of reading practices and literary texts.

## 4. Contributions of fanfictions to the formation of young readers

Being a reader in contemporary times implies a series of factors, such as interest, focus, incentive, autonomy, and conditions for the acquisition of a book, which, as we know, is not cheap. Fanfics, in this context, are a form of writing/reading that work in an accessible way and that can contribute to the formation of the reader. In this vein, we present below some excerpts that illustrate the voice of the readers of fanfics, identifying their contributions to the reading formation

### Table 1 - Contributions of fanfics in the formation of new readers

Do fanfics contribute to/with the formation of new readers? Justify your answer.

**Azriel:** For sure, there are many types of "niche" literature that we don't find in schools/bookstores/libraries and also the fact that often "you" already have an interest in the object of inspiration of the fanfic is a great incentive to consume the work.

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**Oliver:** Absolutely. Fanfics are first and foremost an extension of stories we already love, so I believe it's much more enjoyable to read about what we already know. When the story is interesting and well written, allied to characters that we already love, it is very easy to spend hours reading without realizing that more than 20 chapters have already passed. This can awaken our curiosity for new stories outside the universe of fanfics, so I believe it helps to create reading habits.

**Cara:** definitely, I have seen countless acquaintances who didn't have a reading habit and even said they didn't like to read acquiring the habit of reading constantly after being introduced to fanfics, I believe that the fact that they are free and easily accessible along with the possibility of reading about the subject you want with several content options help a lot to develop a greater taste for reading. Fanfics also give a huge variety of content to people who can't afford to buy books..

FUENTE: Data from Oliveira's research (2021).

Through the voices presented with fictional names of characters from famous fanfics, it can be seen that Azriel believes that fanfics contribute to the formation of new readers, for its variety of genres that become available, which, many times, are not found in schools/bookstores/libraries.

Oliver believes that because these stories are an extension of something one already admires, it makes the formation of readers something possible to achieve. Cara, on the other hand, states that one of the contributions that make possible the formation of the reader through fanfics is that they are free of charge. Besides, it is seen as a contribution the fact that fanfics take place in a stimulating, comforting and technological scenario, which gives new readers a sense of belonging when they come across this kind of reading.

Miranda (2009) also highlights this in his studies by saying that the texts need to become an argumentative provocation, a fountain of ideas to be continuously revisited, deconstructed and recreated. Therefore, one of the strengths of forming readers through this type of reading corresponds to the affective contributions to the formation of these new readers, who enter the literary universe through the search for something with which they already have an affinity.

Table 2 - Contributions of reading/writing fanfics

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#### Escrever ou ler fanfics mudou sua forma de ler textos literários?

**Lissandra:** Sim! Depois que comecei a ler fanfics consigo notar mais nuances na forma de escrita dos autores, principalmente as fanfics que leio em inglês, então me ajuda demais a me familiarizar com uma gramática e forma de pensar diferente.

**America:** Com certeza. Não apenas melhorou meu vocabulário e a minha escrita, como também me ajudou a aprender inglês. Foi passando minha adolescência no Tumblr consumindo conteúdo em inglês, principalmente fanfic, que me tornou fluente na língua.

Lily: Sim. As fanfics me apresentaram gêneros e escritas variadas, além de formas de exercitar minha imaginação para uma boa história. Graças a elas, meu TCC - chamado de TG na minha universidade - foi produzido com uma excelência de escrita que jamais teria atingido se não tivesse me interessado em criar histórias.
 FONTE: Dados da pesquisa de Oliveira (2021).

As shown in Table 2, writing and reading fanfics changed the way these readers read literary texts, also bringing several contributions, as in the case of Lissandra, who started to better understand the authors' writing, especially in the fanfics she read in English. America is also an example in the acquisition of new languages, because, through the consumption of fanfics in English, she became fluent in the language. About these contributions, Amarilha (2013) brings to light the importance of literature in our formation and argues that this intense relationship with the fictional transforms the subjects as readers and also as people.

The importance of these results in the life of each subject is undeniable, in addition to other contributions, such as expansion of the imagination, improved perception of feelings in the face of different narratives, reading speed, improved interpretation, and involvement with the story, among many other benefits that this practice triggers in the lives of those who make use of it. These changes have only added to the education of these individuals, and that is what reading does, especially interactive reading. According to Yunes (2010, p. 55), "they summon the reader and facilitate the development of critical thinking, guide the construction of one's own judgment and opinion, favor the emergence of desire mobilized by commotion, by sensitization of intelligence".

In box 3, the readers were asked who they are after the experience of reading the fanfics. Moreover, they were asked to describe the benefits of this practice in their lives.

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#### Table 3 – Benefits of reading fanfics

# Who are you after the experience of reading fanfics? Describe the benefits of this practice in your life.

**Ema:** Emma: Fanfics helped me find a whole community of other readers and facilitated my process of creating new friends. Thanks to fanfics I also had access to new cultures, to subjects I didn't know about. Representativity is something new in books, and that has only begun to be questioned in the last few years, but in fanfics minorities have always been present. Fanfics portray different experiences, working on various social problems. Besides that, as a writer, I got a captive and engaged audience.

**Lissandra:** Reading fanfic helped me/helps me a lot in moments of anxiety, as I go back and reread the ones that stuck with me the most or that I liked more than usual. It also helped me a lot with my English learning, since I basically practice my reading every day with them for more than 10 years (I can tell when the grammar in a fanfic is not as good as it could be). I never finished an English course, so all I know comes from fanfics (in the realm of writing and reading comprehension) and TV series (oral and pronunciation aspect). This way I can read scientific articles

articles and books essential for my degree without great difficulties (most of them are in English).

**Cara:** I am even more engaged in reading and can access content that would normally be difficult for me to find.

normally would be hard for me to find. I read a LOT and my pace is very intense so I couldn't afford my need to read, with fanfics I can read a lot without bankrupting my family, I have serious anxiety problems and reading is my main mechanism to deal with it and calm down

I have serious anxiety issues and reading is my main coping and calming mechanism so it's great that I can access reading so easily. Besides, as a lesbian woman, it is very difficult for me to find works that show my experience in a non-stereotypical and hyper-sexualized way, something that I get with fanfics often written and read by lesbian people like me, I feel welcomed and represented better in fanfics than in many literary and cinematographic works. I have also gained a better knowledge of the English language by

read many foreign fanfics in English.

FUENTE: Data from Oliveira's research (2021).

In Table 3 are some highlights of the benefits that reading fanfics has brought to the lives of the participants in our study. In Emma's case, fanfics helped her to find a whole community of other readers and facilitated the process of acquiring new friends. Lissandra talks about reading fanfics as a form of therapy, since they help her in moments of anxiety. Cara started to feel more represented through the contact with reading fanfics. According to Benevides (2008), through reading we recognize ourselves as part of humanity, we

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integrate ourselves as collective and social subjects. There is a world of attitudes, vocabulary, and meanings that feed the members of the fandom community.

For Amarilla (2013), both fandom and fanfiction itself are expressions of the young person's response to the literary universe with which these readers interact. In this sense, the benefits cited here are a reflection of the contact of young readers with this type of reading.

The voices of the research subjects in question imply a discussion beyond reading stories through screens. Moreover, regardless of the genre and the space in which it manifests itself, reading acts as a transformer, since literature is an open door to knowledge. When you become a reader, you begin to perceive the world around you in a completely new way, and the reading you do becomes interconnected with the reading already provided by the world, so that transformations take place. Thus, even in a context bloated with distractions - as cyberspace is - the seriousness of reading will never be annulled.

### 5. Final considerations

Reflecting on the formation of the reader in current times is something challenging. The reading of literature has to compete with the most diverse types of technological gadgets without losing its space, and it is often not possible to realize that everything that is done in the midst of digital platforms culminates in the act of reading. Unfortunately, there are many literary reading practices that are still little known or valued. The fanfics discussed in this paper are an example of this.

Through the theoretical path, along with the voices of the fanfiction writers, we conclude that the act of "fanfiction" can bring numerous benefits in the lives of young readers, such as the encouragement of sociability, support in moments of anxiety, reflection on human dilemmas, and the acquisition of new languages, among many others.

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The research showed that this new model of online reading is highly valued by young readers, and, through it, it is possible to form not only the reader, but also the social subject, who sees in reading a world of possibilities, after all, through the act of reading, the way to transformation is given, so one should be aware of the need to discuss new forms of reading, especially in the current context, especially after having experienced the epidemic context that has only intensified the use of reading and literature in digital platforms.

In view of all this, the potential of this new way of reading literature is reaffirmed, since fanfics have their space increasingly recognized as an instrument for the formation of new readers. Thus, we hope to continue the studies on fanfics, since this is a vast theme full of possibilities.

We also believe that this research can contribute in a positive way to reading mediators, educators in training and reading communities, and that through this theme it will be possible to elaborate new knowledge about the formation of young readers who are in constant transformation.

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