Literacy and literary learning on BookTube through the lenses of Latina BookTubers

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Abstract

In this study, we examine various aspects of BookTubers' literacy practices, regarding the personal and social factors that lead readers to devote themselves to the BookTube community, the elements that BookTubers consider as they create and publish video book reviews and the sort of literary learning this digital literacy practice entails. For this purpose, narrative interviews were conducted with six BookTubers, five of them from Latin America and one from Spain. Their answers offer insights into the motivations and unique types of learning that come together in this literary practice. A qualitative analysis of the interviews shows that affective engagement with books is a singular feature of BookTubers' understanding of reading culture and that literary video reviews are created in a complex bricolage process where resources, skills and knowledge are mobilised and develop, both aspects also being associated with the development of an online social reading identity. In addition, an ecological approach to analysing literacy and literary learning in the BookTuber culture points to the importance of framing video book reviews as a didactic resource with considerable potential to bring new learning practices to in-school literary education.

Key words: BookTube, literary learning, video book reviews, youth online literary practices

BookTubing as an emerging literary practice among young people

"I found on YouTube a space where I could share what I read." These are the words of Karla, a 24-year-old Costa Rican who is devoted to reading and recommending books to other readers through video book reviews. Like many other young people worldwide, she is a BookTuber and has her own YouTube channel, where she uploads the 'reviews' and discusses them with her followers (see Fig. 1).

Recently, research on the literary practices of BookTubers has developed simultaneously in various areas of knowledge related to adolescent literacies, digital practices and literary education, such as communication studies, sociology and language and literature education (Paladines-Paredes and Aliagas, 2021). This research highlights the growing and multidisciplinary scholarly interest in analysing BookTubing culture as a literary practice that is currently taking shape outside the context of formal education.

Several theoretical approaches have been applied to research on the BookTube phenomenon over the last decade. The *New Literacy Studies* (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Lankshear and Knobel, 2011; Street, 1984) emphasise the need to understand textual practices as embedded within specific social contexts, including the digital context and informal learning spaces. In the *New Literacy Studies* framework, the BookTube practice is a *vernacular literacy practice* since it is not regulated by the formalities that shape a culture's *dominant practices* (Barton and Hamilton, 1998). In this connection, the concept of *affinity space* (Gee and Hayes, 2012) has been used to explain how the digital socialisation environment works as an organiser of social dynamics in the BookTube community (Semingson et al., 2017); BookTubers take advantage of the interactive affordances offered by YouTube as a virtual space to set up a network of relationships with other cybernauts by means of the BookTube 'channel' where they post their video book reviews.

Boot (2020) argues that the success of video book reviews within the community of readers is derived fundamentally from the enthusiasm with which YouTubers share their reading experiences, something which in turn highlights the importance for young readers of feeling like they belong to a reading community. This interaction collectively converts BookTubers into what Sorensen and Mara (2014) call an *online community of knowledge*, given that they make up a cohesive group that self-regulates the features of the discourse and content generated among its members.

Ehret et al. (2016) point to the need to 'understand' the multimodality of youth literacies from the point of view of the appropriation of discourses and the variety of resources with which these literacies are enacted. Similarly, Burnett and Merchant (2015) underline multimodality in relation to the development of

[Corrections added after first publication: The first and second affiliations were interchanged in this version.]
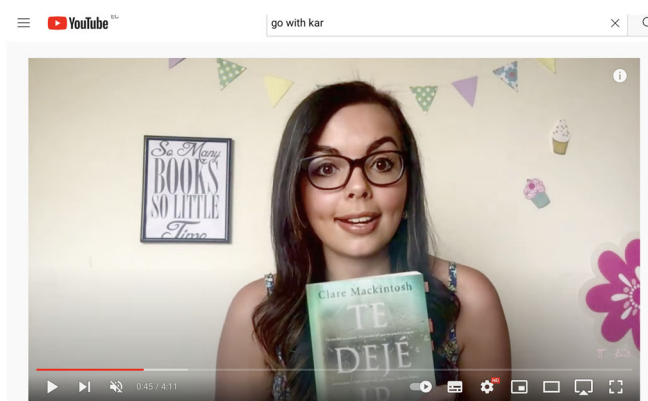
Fig. 1: Screenshot of Karla doing a video book review on her BookTuber channel (Source: https://www.youtube.com/c/GoWithKar)

discursive practices and genres associated with youth literary practices. The discursive practices of BookTube have given rise to a process of relocation of literary development, due to the appropriation of the reading responses generated and distributed directly from users (Hull and Stornaiuolo, 2014). These contributions show a growing and real interest in research in the literacy practices of young people in different aspects, so we intended to delve into knowing and understanding how the practices of BookTubers are interwoven with literary learning, socialisation, discourse and identity.

Video book reviews as a discursive genre

BookTubers speak directly to the 'imagined' viewer in order to present an oral review of the book and comment on, analyse and display it on screen. Given the large numbers of followers some of them have gained, they seem to have successfully harnessed the potential of social media to make reading a popular habit among young people (Tomasena, 2019). They have shaped a new, vibrant discourse genre—the video book review (what they just call 'reviews')—that has piqued the interest of readers around the world.

Previous research on BookTubers (Paladines-Paredes and Aliagas, 2021) has argued that BookTubers review and evaluate a book using the affordances of the audio-visual language in a virtual ecosystem that reinterprets the notion of analysing–debating–sharing readings on the web. BookTubers have developed their own rules regarding the way in which they, as readers, approach a text, being able to add visual and paratextual elements to the review, contributing to the genre a sense of multimodality that the literacies of the 21st century have adapted to literary practices. BookTubers' video reviews have their own structure, self-regulated by the digital community itself on the basis of implicit

notions of what constitutes a 'good review', in accordance with criteria validated by the community, approval of content, for example, being expressed by leaving 'likes', and recommendations on the YouTube platform. These video reviews act as digital epitexts (Lluch, 2010) that expand the reading experience and generate interactive content centred around the book.

Few qualitative studies published recently examining BookTubers' discourse from an emic stance have made key contributions to the field. In a recent descriptive analysis with a focus on education, Ravettino-Destefanis (2017) describes how BookTubers "interpret their reading: they prepare their performances with enthusiasm, making full use of words, gestures, images and sounds. They construct eloquent stories, have turned what they do essentially into a profession, and, in some cases, their efforts yield benefits on a monthly basis" (p. 106). Tomasena (2019) uses virtual ethnography to explore the complex relationship between BookTubers and the publishing industry: how that relationship is constructed, how it evolves and what benefits it yields. Taking a similar line methodologically, Anderson (2020) conducts ethnographic interviews with three BookTubers in order to understand the functioning of what she calls the *distribution of knowledge*, a process by which BookTube generates literary knowledge. What we have, thus, is an interesting process in which literary competences are developed in an informal context and constructed around BookTubers' own particular forms of expression and literary text analysis, in addition to particular discursive and interactional norms that they learn by participating in the community. This process is evident in the sharing of technical knowledge on BookTube related to the production and editing of videos so that other potential BookTubers can build these skills. This constitutes concrete evidence of the practical learning that can take place through YouTube, seen from the perspective of the participants themselves.

Aims of this study

Our goal is to document the process of creating and publishing video book reviews from the perspective of BookTubers themselves, taking into account the diverse personal, interpretative, communicative and artistic factors that guide them in this process, as well as their motivations, experiences, literary preferences and beliefs. Our research questions are therefore as follows:

- What induces some young people to open and keep active a channel on BookTube?
- How do BookTubers conceive, create and publish their video book reviews? What process do they

follow, and what interpretative and communicative criteria do they apply in this process?

- What sorts of learning does the video book review creation process entail? And what views predominate in the BookTube community with regard to the potential applications of video book review culture and practices in the school classroom?

Methodological approach

We adopt a qualitative and emic approach (Merriam, 2009; Willis, 2007) to the study of literacy and literary learning in the BookTube community. Our data consist of the BookTubers' own discourse regarding their reading habits as recorded in *guided narrative interviews* (Kvale, 2011), which are distinguished from other research interviews by their autobiographical texture. In narrative interviews, the interviewees narrate their story and express their views in their own words. The role of the researcher focuses on posing key questions that will reinforce the biographical and reflective texture of the narrators' discourse.

For this study, six young BookTubers were interviewed by the first author. They were selected by

means of a multi-step process. The first step involved referring to a prior study (Paladines-Paredes and Aliagas, 2021) consisting of a discourse analysis of a set of video book reviews published on 17 Spanish-language BookTube channels. We emailed these 17 BookTubers and invited them to participate in this interview-based study. We also tried to reach them by sending private messages via social media such as Instagram or Facebook. The second step consisted of applying the so-called *snowball technique* (Miles and Huberman, 1994) by asking BookTubers who had agreed to participate to reach out to other BookTubers in their own social networks, consolidating a sample of six participants. All signed an informed consent form before being interviewed. Table 1 provides basic background information for the interviewees. All were women (this gender distribution was unintentional) aged 21–25 years living in different Latin American countries or Spain. All had started BookTubing in their teenage years, at age 17 or 18, and the majority combined BookTubing with their studies or work, aspects that overall show the extent to which BookTube has penetrated the everyday life and culture of young people.

The interviews were carried out in Spanish using Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, Inc.) and

Table 1: Background information for the BookTubers who were interviewed

Name	Country of origin	Gender	Age	How long they have been a BookTuber	Occupation	Name of YouTube channel	Link to channel
Liz	Ecuador	F	24	4 years	Doing a communications degree	Caminos literarios [literary paths]	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJH000dNo-aq5NDDpbe9PSg
Lucinda	Mexico	F	21	4 years	Doing an arts degree	Lucinda entre libros [Lucinda among books]	https://www.youtube.com/user/LucindaGarza
Francisca	Chile	F	20	5 years	Arts graduate	FranUrriolaR	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoEJm45sh3OPUpDuwy6VRCQ
Karla	Costa Rica	F	24	4 years	Biology graduate	GoWithKar	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGs2NtrbTFEa1mPehEAx9Ag
Yaiza	Spain	F	25	6 years	Nurse	Pergamino Literario [Literary scroll]	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtr3oEczPgdNlnq9kp_LLHw
Lili	Spain	F	20	3 years	Doing a law degree	Liltworld	https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCr2yS5wfpsYYkUyZz9sMjGQ

framed as a guided narrative interview (Kvale, 2011). In practical terms, each interview was semi-structured and covered the following points:

- Sociological data about the BookTuber, including name, age, country of residence, language(s) they spoke and anything else that seemed relevant in socio-cultural terms.
- Reasons/motivation for becoming a BookTuber: the first steps, opening a channel, the influence of other BookTubers on their participation and their expectations.
- The process of creating a video book review, such as how they chose a book to review, how they conceived the script or structure, the literary elements that they focused on when designing the review and what they considered when editing the video.
- Interaction with their audience, such as literary exchanges deriving from the comments they received about their videos and the influence of their followers on how they went about creating videos.
- Views with regard to the personal and professional literacy and literary learning experienced as a result of being a BookTuber and the potential value of video book reviews for formal educational purposes.

The interviews were video-recorded and transcribed in their entirety. The resulting full transcript was then coded using Atlas.Ti software (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH); the answers provided in the interviews were coded in relation to the thematic organisation of the topics of the questions carried out in order to create a thematic organisation that allows explaining (Hine, 2005). In addition, other implicit content categories were pointed out, in relation to motivation for becoming a BookTuber, the video book review creation process, interaction with followers and literacy and literary learning.

Findings and discussion

The results are presented below according to the above-mentioned thematic categories, in some cases broken into more specific subcategories. Excerpts from the transcripts have been translated into English from the original Spanish. The selected excerpts allow to illustrate the thematic categories selected in each case.

BookTubers and affective engagement

Recent voices in the field of Literacy Studies (Burnett, 2019; Leander and Ehret, 2019) point to the need to understand youth literacy practices from an intimate perspective, considering *affect* a key category for understanding readers' identities and ways of being in relation to texts and practices. Thus, it is important to study what motivates the participants of a discursive community, what kind of concepts build meanings and how the feelings and perspectives of the participants themselves come together in the creation process of key texts. In line with this affective turn in literacy studies, the interviews carried out with the BookTubers sought to understand how their feelings and beliefs first brought them to the BookTubing community and then shaped their video book review creation process.

All the BookTubers interviewed reported that their motives for joining the community of BookTubers responded to a personal need to share their own reading experiences with other readers. This personal need points to the inner perception that they lacked a social space where relationships centred around literature might develop: hence, the need to create such a social space and begin to produce content as a strategy to generate connections and dialogues around books. This is how Karla recalled her first steps into the BookTube community:

> I said to myself "I need to talk with someone about the books that I read. I don't have any friends who like the same books as I do". And I found in YouTube a space where I could share what I read (Karla).

Thus, the search for an affinity space (Gee and Hayes, 2012) centred around books is a key reason for approaching the BookTube community. In fact, one key to understanding the origins and formation of the BookTube community and its success among young people is the fact that BookTubers view themselves as social peers, a point Yaiza makes in the following transcript excerpt:

> When I discovered BookTubers for the first time I realized that they were young like me, they were not university professors or academics, and I realized that there were people who read the very books that I myself liked, and that this could be a space in which I could connect with other readers (Yaiza).

These BookTubers place a striking degree of emphasis on the feeling that they missed being able to speak with other people about what they were reading, the lack of physical spaces for that purpose and the resulting social need to create such a space on YouTube, an online community of knowledge that would foster social circles specially devoted to reading. This is especially clear in Lucinda's discourse:

I was motivated by the social dimension of reading on BookTube. It is assumed that reading is done in solitude, but we [readers] actually enjoy reading more when we can converse with someone else about what we have read, when we can recommend it [a book] to someone else, when we tell them "Read this, I swear you're going to like it" or something like that (Lucinda).

Taken together, these quotes by Karla, Yaiza and Lucinda show clearly that these young people were motivated to join the community of BookTubers by a need to connect with others who were similarly inclined and share their reading experiences. Thus, the possibility of social connection with other people was generally the foremost expectation that led these young people to enter the BookTube community. When young people fail to find friends with the same interests, the possibility of either creating a virtual community that responds to those interests or integrating themselves into a pre-existing virtual community is, as Lluch (2014) argues, an appealing pathway to socialisation. This allows them to develop a social reading identity, based on the social dimension of reading, sharing common interests and learning from other readers just like them.

BookTubers' bricolage practices around the 'review'

BookTubers' literacy practices are configured around various implicit notions (i.e. what is a book review) and standards (i.e. what constitutes a 'good' video review of a book) as well as a certain amount of knowledge about literary analysis (typically fragmentary and school learned) that interplay in a 'bricolage process' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966) through which they mobilise their resources and knowledge to create an orally delivered video-recorded book review. The video creation process involves making a set of decisions centred around the book and their reading experience: which book to review, the communicative intention of the video for the 'imagined' audience, the role of literary analysis in the review and the editing of the video. In the creation process, the BookTubers are guided by certain norms that—as we have noted—are largely implicit.

a Selecting a book

Most BookTubers mentioned that selecting a book for commentary was usually guided by certain general criteria but without these criteria being in any way 'rules' to be applied systematically. They all mentioned spontaneity and impulse as a usual feature of their book choice process. They acknowledged that there was a crucial relationship between the spontaneous emotional responses that a book aroused in them as they read it and the decision to record a video review about it and that this intuitive reaction—sometimes after very little reflection—played a decisive role in the final decision. Thus, as illustrated in the quote from Karla that follows, it was their emotional connection with the story or with one of the characters that drove the decision to review a book:

I have to be books that stir up the emotions too much, that arouse strong feelings in me. Books that I feel will really stick with me (Karla).

In addition to the emotional dimension, which was personal, some BookTubers reported that the choice of book was also influenced by factors such as whether they foresaw that their followers would be interested in it or not. In the following quote, Lucinda articulates the two facets, personal and communal, that come into play when she selects a book, not only her awareness of the BookTube community but also her leadership role within it.

I review the books that I like most, the sort of book that you cannot stop talking about, which I think my followers will like (Lucinda).

This comment and others suggest that the choice of book may sometimes be influenced by factors related to the BookTuber's identity within the BookTube community. Given that these BookTubers are avid consumers of content created by peers within that community, they strive to differentiate themselves from other BookTube channels through their choice of books. While most BookTube reviews focus on a particular genre or type of book, these BookTubers said that they preferred to choose texts that had not already been reviewed or at least had received little attention. As they put it:

I like to review books by authors who are not well known or whose work is not mentioned elsewhere on YouTube. That way I give my channel a special distinguishing feature (Lili).

I always look for Ecuadorian authors to review, and try to differentiate my channel from others that way (Liz).

The preceding quotes reveal a certain tendency to specialise thematically in their BookTube channels.

Given the increasing number of BookTube channels on YouTube, it is essential to find a specific area of content that is not already being covered in order to gain access to the larger virtual community. At the same time, the quotes also show the concern of these BookTubers to bring something new to the community, an impulse partly linked with their desire for a small degree of fame or at least visibility.

It is also worth noting that some of these BookTubers receive copies of new publications from publishing companies or independent authors, in the hopes that they will promote them on their channel. Certain tacit rule governs this dynamic. First, receiving a book does not oblige the BookTuber to review it or even mention it on their channel, though sometimes BookTubers will do so in keeping with their own particular criteria. Yaiza, for example, consciously tries to promote authors or small independent publishers:

> My main reason for reviewing a book is that it was sent to me by an independent publisher or is being self-published by the author (Yaiza).

Nor do YouTubers have any obligation to speak well of the book received; generally, if having read the book, their impression is negative, they simply do not review it. None of the BookTubers interviewed stated that they had on some occasion felt pressured by a publisher to review a book positively.

b Planning and carrying out the video review

Most of these BookTubers explained that they did not follow any formal planning procedure because they were afraid that the result would come out too 'structured' or 'academic', though they admitted that making a video did require a certain amount of preparation, at the very least careful thought about key points in the book for analysis. In this sense, the video reviews illustrate what Barton and Hamilton ([1998](#)) call a *vernacular practice* that is carried out external to the culture of formal education and the academic discourse associated with it.

The interviewees stated that the key idea underlying the preparation of the video review was that it must come across like a natural conversation. In this fashion, the video review acquires a conversed and narrative texture. To accomplish this, while some of these BookTubers reported using a prepared script, others limited themselves to a written list of points they wanted to cover or used no written prompts whatsoever, relying entirely on a mental plan. The following quotations show these different strategies and understandings of 'the script':

> I do not like writing out scripts very much because I want the people who are watching the video review to feel like I'm in a conversation with them, as if we were having coffee together and I'm telling you what I thought about the book (Lili).

> I always have a script prepared for each of the videos, and each script depends on what particular topic related to the book I want to talk about (Lucinda).

> I do not follow a prepared word-for-word script, but I do have my bullet points. I have an outline of the topics I want to cover (Karla).

The BookTubers who habitually used some kind of written outline explained that these outlines were helpful to give their video structure or contained concrete information about the book such as its historical or literary context, the author's background, the genre to which the book pertained and the key literary aspects that they wanted to cover in the review. Thus, these notes were useful to keep them on track as they spoke.

c The literary dimension of the book review

In spite of their apparent lack of planning with regard to what they would say, the interviewers had fairly clear-cut ideas about how to organise their evaluation of the key literary aspects of the book being reviewed. Thus, the interviewees all reported that they organised their review around a set of literary elements whose analysis they regarded as essential, such as the psychology of the main characters, the plot and the style. This is consistent with a previous analysis of the discursive structure of video book reviews (Paladines-Paredes and Aliagas, [2021](#)), which identified three elements, incorporated into discursive rhetorical moves (Swales, [1990](#)), which defined the implicit structure of the video review, namely, presentation, evaluative analysis and closing. The BookTubers reported covering other aspects such as intertextuality, the book's historical context or its relation with social issues, depending on the BookTuber's particular interests or literary training. This can be seen in the quotes below:

> Usually I think the plot is very important, as is explaining to readers how the characters are constructed (Liz).

I like to include elements like the plot, the characters, the author's style, what the book made me feel, if it's related to other books I have read, that kind of thing (Lucinda).

It is also important to analyze the story behind the book, the relationship, the message that the author wants to give and the analysis that is made of the narrative (Yaiza).

The video review constitutes an important exercise in literary analysis because it takes place on a digital platform where young readers interact, interpreting elements such as the author's intention, the literary context and the importance of the book in its historical or social context. Taken together, these features make it a valid approximation of a vernacular literary interpretation process.

d Emotional engagement building on a valued aesthetic video experience

If we focus on the communicative context, the pragmatic function of a video book review is to urge and convince the viewer to read a particular book. The expectation is, therefore, that the video review will arouse sensations of interest or curiosity in the potential reader so that they read the book and then reflect on and/or discuss their reading. These BookTubers felt that their audiences particularly valued the naturalness of their expression as evidence of the quality of their reading engagement as well as the fact that their discourse came across as sincere and personal:

I want to see that the BookTuber devotes time, or that the person is involved in what they are saying and does not just do it to do it, does not do it just to upload one more video, but rather that they share that impulse that, in the end, a good video review is one which makes you say "I've got to read that book!" (Lucinda).

Lucinda's quote is important for what it reveals about the emotional value of the message the BookTubers seek to send to their community. What is valued is the sincerity and feeling conveyed, more than the content of the video as such. The discourse of the review therefore reflects the personality and individual interpretation of that reviewer's reading of the text. The audiovisual character of YouTube enables the BookTuber to give a face and feelings to a pre-existing genre, the literary book review, a genre that exists in both academic and vernacular contexts, whether on paper or in digital form.

In fact, the BookTuber's mastery of discourse in YouTube videos is key if the review is to be well received within the community, which to some extent implies that it must align with certain implicit values and a particular aesthetic sensibility: it must be natural, sincere, personal and genuine. Here, Lili tries to define what a 'good review' means to her:

For me, a good review is one that makes me want to immediately run out and buy the book to read it, because if the video gives you that impression, it is because the BookTuber really made an effort to convey this, in an impartial way, and more than just because they are fanatics, they give me convincing reasons to read the book they have reviewed (Lili).

e Interaction with followers

Once a video book review is published, YouTube allows the community to interact with the content creator by means of comments about the video. This enables the BookTubers to see what their followers think about the content they have generated, and such comments can even—as we noted above—influence the BookTuber's subsequent choice of books to review:

In the comments I get, people comment especially about aspects of my review that they liked or did not like, and this way we continue to build up this community in which everyone participates (Liz).

In general, the comments are positive, they help me to understand what people like and what direction to take in the reviews I upload (Francisca).

For the BookTubers interviewed, an important concept was that BookTube ensured that interpretative and experiential knowledge about a book was constructed organically. Although, in the early history of BookTube, the participation of followers was limited to commenting on the video in writing, new forms and genres of interaction are emerging, particularly those that make use of the potential of live streaming. One of these new genres is the so-called *group read*, in which all members of the community read the same book at the same time.

Currently, we are doing group reads, so we all agree on a book to read and then we comment on it bit by bit as we read, with live streaming sessions, and this way people get involved more in what I do, it is not

just one individual talking to the camera about what she thought about the book she read but instead we have the collaborative community in which everyone can participate (Yaiza).

This interactive process has several of the features that Jenkins et al. (2006) argue are indispensable for participatory culture: the sensation on the part of the community's members that their views count and the high degree of social connection that they experience by being able to interact freely within the community. This idea connects with the initial motivation of the BookTubers to find a community of readers that share their interest in and passion for literature, as we noted above. YouTube as an interactive social context on the Internet satisfies that need, thereby allowing the participatory community to take form.

Ecology of literary learning in BookTube culture

It is important to understand literary learning through BookTube from an ecological perspective. Given the interest shown by the educational community in the video book review genre, which is clearly of special relevance to the area of literary education (Burnett and Merchant, 2015; De la Torre-Espinosa, 2019), it was felt of interest to hear what the BookTubers interviewed would have to say about the potential relationship between the reading practices they experienced on BookTube and literature-related learning in formal educational contexts.

a What can be learned through BookTube?

Regarding personal learning, most of the BookTubers interviewed referred especially to their personal growth as readers, to how the channel had influenced their choice of readings, to the new narrative genres that they now read and even to how they had reinforced or developed new interpretative strategies for reading. BookTube can thus be regarded as a community in which are experienced forms of vernacular learning related to reading, literary appreciation and knowledge about books and literature, as well as a community that contributes to the development of a person's self-concept as a reader.

> YouTube has opened for me the opportunity to get to know other BookTubers, publishing companies, literature of different types and so on. It has turned me into a better reader (Liz).

> I have also learned to value the path I have followed as a reader from when I started my channel up to

now. I can tell that I have grown as a reader (Lucinda).

BookTube also enables the members of this community to cultivate values such as perseverance—indispensable if one needs to keep a channel active by regularly creating and uploading content—as well as learning to speak in videos to an 'imagined' audience that can be highly participatory and even critical. The following comments show how important these two aspects are for the development of a YouTuber.

> I have learnt that you have to be constant, persevering to keep going with this. Though sometimes I get a bit behind, my followers know that they can be sure that the work I am going to do will be quality work (Karla).

> I have learnt to value myself more and speak more freely in public, but it is true that now it's like I'm not [nervous], it's easy for me, I speak much more freely (Yaiza).

b What is the potential of video book reviews as a tool for in-school learning?

All the interviewees took a positive stance regarding the integration of BookTube culture into formal education. However, they all agreed that it was essential that, before attempting to create their own video book reviews in the classroom, students must have a full understanding of the features of this discourse genre in order to avoid trivialising it. They regarded it as equally crucial that the classroom teacher should be fully familiar with the particular features of video reviews, at the discursive, instrumental and communicative levels, in order to ensure that the genre served effectively as a tool for learning.

> BookTube can serve very well as material for teaching, but only if the teacher really knows how to do it well (Liz).

In most of the interviews, mention was made of the need to teach students to read without making reading an obligation. This reinforces the idea that BookTubers' primary motivation is to find a space for independent reading for pleasure, which clashes with the sort of required structured reading typically found in formal educational contexts. Already consistent with this line of observation, some scholars (Margallo, 2012; Misas, 2015) emphasise the role of the teacher and

other mediators in the process of fostering reading and the choice of appropriate sets of texts for reading (in accordance with reading level) as strategies to create solid reading habits in teens and young adults. This points to a need to rethink current educational approaches to reading in a way that reinforces creativity through the use of the available technological tools.

> There are more and more spaces for learning and I think that if teachers use these sorts of videos to motivate their students to read, there will be increasing numbers of young people who get interested, especially in reading things that at first they were told were not worth the effort (Lucinda).

According to the interviewees, this transformation of the educational approach to reading can include BookTube, which involves understanding video reviews as didactic digital epitexts—because they generate literary content in audiovisual format—and as a 'free' reading response articulated around the sharing with others of the sensations and perceptions that a book has left after being read. Interestingly, the BookTubers' discourse reveals their conviction that, if this resource is to be used in the context of formal education, it would be essential to keep it complementary. BookTubers are generating discussions, proposals and learning that is not regulated by formal education but that could be an interesting alternative as a mediating resource for literary reading and as a way to stimulate interest in reading.

> I think BookTube could be used in primary or secondary schools, as long as the purpose of the videos we make is properly understood. The problem in schools is that mandatory reading is not attractive to students. BookTube would be like a complement, something that motivates students to read, but not something that turns into the central focus of the class (Lili).

Conclusions

In this interview-based study with six BookTubers, we have seen that the primary source of motivation for them to join the BookTube community is related to their personal desire to share the pleasure they gain from reading and their need to connect with other readers to talk about literature. It is precisely the lack of such a space that they perceive in their offline social circles that leads them to follow BookTube channels and in some cases open a channel of their own, thus creating an affinity space (Gee and Hayes, 2012) in which to develop a personal discourse surrounding books. Our data

analysis shows that it is affective engagement with a book that enables the creation of the literary video review, whose ultimate aim is to socialise the emotions, responses and personal assessments of the video's creator and her followers, thus turning the video review into a didactic digital epitext that seems able to bring books closer to the new generations.

This experiential and personal discourse about books is the substance of the video book review, essentially an audiovisual literary genre. Though the video book review may constitute a vernacular practice, this does not mean that its preparation is not regulated by certain rules or implicit tendencies. In fact, the creation proceeds along certain basic steps that are articulated in a bricolage process—the selection of a book, planning or preparation, recording, editing and finally uploading—which may be more complex or less so depending on the style, goals and skills of the individual BookTuber.

Also involved are certain implicit communicative criteria that are meaningful in the context of an interactive social space where the exchanges taking place around a book respond to the goal of a 'recommender' who hopes to motivate a potential reader to read the book being reviewed. Specifically, one of these implicit notions has to do with what should be expected from a 'good review', which in large part is related to the type of oral discourse employed by the BookTuber, who seeks to come across as genuine and personal in their assessment of the book and natural in their delivery. It is around these tacit axes that the participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2006) of the BookTube community, as represented by these participants, is formed, and occasionally, these conventions are even made explicit through tutorials that the more expert BookTubers make available to the community. In this sense, BookTube strengthens the notion that young people can use the Internet to read and share valid knowledge about reading and literature, in the process encouraging other to assimilate that vernacular knowledge in a way that is regulated by the BookTube community itself.

Adopting an emic perspective by looking at the video book review creation process from the standpoint of these BookTubers themselves has allowed us to gain insights into a community that places high value on both reading and perseverance and has enabled us to reflect on aspects related to the literary learning that takes place over the Internet in this vernacular context. The dynamics of BookTube culture represented here is an example of what Barton (2001) calls *vernacular literacies*, which takes place in an environment that, albeit not guided, is structured—as we have seen—by certain tacit axes. The more experienced the BookTuber, the keener seems their mastery of the communicative and literary elements specific to the

community. In addition, we have been able to identify the intrinsic motivations of these readers to become BookTubers. The importance of the community is highlighted, of sharing common interests, of organising the sharing of content in pace with the community.

The *genuine* nature of the affective approach to reading is especially relevant for studies related to the teaching of language and literature, which increasingly advocate the sorts of approaches that have sprung into existence spontaneously on the Internet to build bridges between delocalised forms of learning and those that are central to school-bound education (Semingson et al., 2017). The ecology of literacy and literary learning within BookTube culture raises some interesting possibilities for the enrichment of learning processes in formal education contexts. The possibilities for integrating this vernacular practice into the classroom range from merely familiarising students with the video book review as a discourse genre to actually having students produce video book reviews of their own. In the minds of many young people, formal education in the area of literature is too often associated with the mandatory reading of difficult texts and rigidity in their interpretation. Though the BookTubers interviewed seemed optimistic about possible educational applications of BookTube culture, they felt strongly that in the process of adapting this vernacular culture to educational purposes, it must not lose its voluntary and fundamentally social character. This suggests that the discursive features of video book reviews must be clearly defined and understood by all participants before any attempt is made to produce them in the classroom.

In conclusion, BookTubing as an emergent literacy practice constitutes contemporary evidence of the value for the younger generations of readers of making reading a shared and collective undertaking. This social dimension of reading has been fiercely advocated at the theoretical level as one means by which the teaching of literature can undergo sorely needed renewal (i.e. Mata, 2016). In comparison with the literary culture that predominates in formal schooling, which tends to be text centred, BookTube culture, as presented through these participants, places emphasis on the world of the readers—their reading experiences, viewpoints, connections etc.—and fosters the understanding of a literary text through a collective undertaking that accommodates the readers' own particular worldviews, idiosyncrasies and experiences.

Funding information

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