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Adolescents' online literary talk and the controversial challenges for children's literature scholars

The Cambridge Dictionary defines controversy as something there is a lot of disagreement or argument about because it affects or is essential to many people. Based on children's reading responses to picture books, Arizpe and Styles (2003) point out that our knowledge about readers' responses depends on their capacity to express themselves through diverse channels and on our ability to understand them. Drawing on this idea, I will dedicate this presentation to discuss adolescents' uses of the Internet for literary socialisation and reading responses and the methodological challenges for scholarly research. How can the researcher fully understand adolescents' participation in those online practices and at the same time, assess the reading responses available online? The controversial matter in the discussion is the location of the researcher: an ethnographic approach would bring him or her closer to the subjects/adolescent readers, and a literary approach to the responses/discourses about literature. Is it possible to assume one approach without the other? If we follow Arizpe and Styles' proposition, the researcher needs to build a capacity to understand the diverse channels of online communication with the adolescents, and only then the assessment of the literary responses would come to light. Does this imply that children's literature scholars require social sciences skills to be better researchers? To tackle this discussion I will firstly and briefly review the leading theories on reader response (Iser, 1989; Rosenblatt, 1978; Chartier, 2003), and later scholarly research on the topic (Fittipaldi, 2012; Petit, 2003; Arizpe & Cliff Hodges, 2018). Secondly, I will describe some of the online literary socialisation practices of adolescents that will serve as a corpus of reading responses for this paper. Finally, methodological choices will be discussed together with the controversial impacts of a study of this nature.

Keywords: reader response, adolescent literature, digital practices, literary socialisation, scholarly research

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