The SCP Foundation’s role in the development of academic literacy and the promotion of reading and creative writing

La Fundación SCP en el desarrollo de la alfabetización académica, fomento de la lectura y la escritura creativa

SCP基金会在学术素养, 阅读培养和创意写作的推广

Фонд SCP в развитии академической грамотности, продвижении чтения и творческого письма

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Abstract

This article analyses the international creative writing project SCP Foundation as a constructive hyperfiction based on the creation of fictional scientific articles. The objective of this study is to specify the formative aspects of this literary practice and explore the implications for planning innovative and educational classroom activities. To do this, articles were selected according to the relevance principle - the 25 SCPs with the highest impact and the best scores - and a qualitative analysis was performed employing thick description and textual analysis. The findings show that the SCP Foundation is an affinity space in which important literacy-based learning is developed. In addition, it is noteworthy that a highly heterogeneous formal-academic linguistic register is used in the selection of the topics, the resources employed, the complex hypertext structures and the multimodal elements. Furthermore, in this literary practice, information disorders such as fake news, data manipulation and research ethics as well as aspects related to literary reading such as urban legends and creative writing, generally converge. Therefore, these are unique texts that promote Media and Information Literacy in informal contexts in addition to being works that have the educational potential to encourage reading.

Keywords: information literacy, reading, creative writing, informal education, creepypasta.

Resumen

En este artículo se ha analizado el proyecto internacional de escritura creativa Fundación SCP en tanto que hiperficción constructiva basada en la creación de artículos científicos de carácter ficcional. El objetivo del presente estudio se ha centrado en concretar los aspectos formativos de esta práctica letrada y explorar las implicaciones para el planteamiento de actividades de innovación educativa en las aulas. Para ello, se ha realizado una selección basada en el principio de relevancia: los 25 SCPs con mayor impacto y mejor puntuados y se ha realizado un análisis cualitativo a través de una descripción densa y análisis textual. Los resultados hallados muestran que se trata de un espacio de afinidad en el que se desarrollan importantes aprendizajes vinculados a la alfabetización. Además, es destacable el uso de un registro lingüístico formal-académico con una gran heterogeneidad en la selección de temáticas, recursos empleados, complejas estructuras hipertextuales y elementos multimodales. En esta práctica letrada, además, convergen trastornos de la información como fake-news, manipulación de datos, ética de la investigación y aspectos relacionados con la lectura literaria como leyendas urbanas y escritura creativa en general. Se trata, por lo tanto, de textos únicos que promueven la Alfabetización Mediática e Informacional en contextos informales y son obras con potencial formativo para el fomento de la lectura.

Palabras clave: alfabetización informacional, lectura, escritura creativa, educación informal, creepypasta.

概要

本文分析了SCP基金会推广的，基于虚构科学文章创作建设性超小说的创意写作国际项目。 本研究的目的在于详细说明该实践的培养形成方面，并探索对课堂教学创新活动规划的影响。为此，我们根据相关性原则对SCP进行了选择：对影响力最高、得分最高的25个SCP通过密集描述和文本研究进行了定性分析。结果表明，这是一个亲和空间，其中发展了与识字相关的重要学习。 此外，值得注意的是，在选择主题、使用的资源、复杂的超文本结构和模态元素方面，正式学术语言域的使用具有很大的异质性。在这种法律实践中，假新闻、数据操纵、研究伦理等信息紊乱以及与文学阅读相关的方面，如都市传说和创
Anнотация

В данной статье анализируется международный творческий писательский проект Fundación SCP как конструктивный гипермысел, основанный на создании вымышленных научных статей. Цель данного исследования заключалась в уточнении формирующих аспектов этой правовой практики и изучении последствий для планирования образовательной инновационной деятельности в классе. Для этого был произведен отбор по принципу релевантности: 25 SCP с наибольшим влиянием и наилучшими показателями, и проведен качественный анализ с помощью плотного описания и текстового анализа. Полученные результаты показывают, что речь идет о пространстве близости, в котором развивается важное обучение, связанное с грамотностью. Кроме того, следует отметить использование формально-академического лингвистического регистра с большой неоднородностью в выборе тем, используемых ресурсов, сложных гипертекстовых структур и мультимодальных элементов. В этой правовой практике сходятся такие информационные нарушения, как фальшивые новости, манипулирование данными, исследовательская этика и аспекты, связанные с литературным чтением, такие как городские легенды и творческое письмо в целом. Таким образом, это уникальные тексты, способствующие развитию медийной и информационной грамотности (МИГ) в неформальных контекстах, и произведения с образовательным потенциалом для продвижения чтения.

Ключевые слова: информационная грамотность, чтение, творческое письмо, неформальное образование, creepypasta.

Introduction

The digital world has ushered in important changes to the educational landscape: new opportunities have opened up and novel challenges have emerged. From this perspective, digital competence implies the creative, critical and safe use of information and communication technologies to achieve objectives related to work, employability, learning, the use of free time, inclusion and participation in society (Ministry of Education and Science, n.d.). In this regard, functional literacy, understood as the ability to act effectively in the community (UNESCO, 2006), includes new knowledge, skills and attitudes linked to the digital age. Accordingly, 21st-century society and digital transformation require new competencies linked to (multi)literacy, a concept that is constantly being updated depending on the context in which it is used (Cassany & Castellà, 2010).

From the educational and cultural standpoint, one of the main benefits of the information age, in addition to communication, is that any internet user has limitless and immediate access to (mis)information. However, this is also its main risk - such an explosion of data makes it increasingly difficult to access the desired information, identify if it is relevant or verify its veracity. In this respect, UNESCO proposes the integrative concept of Media and Information Literacy (MIL). This recognizes the fundamental role of information and the media in our daily lives in terms of freedom of expression...
and access to information. Grizzle and Singh developed the five MIL laws, which Arévalo (2017) summarizes as follows:

1. Information and communication are essential for citizen participation and sustainable development in all its forms.
2. Every citizen is a creator of information and/or knowledge.
3. In information messages, the media are not always neutral and therefore the truth must be made understandable.
4. All citizens have the right to access and understand new information, knowledge and messages.
5. Media and information literacy is not acquired immediately, it is a living process and a dynamic experience.

The global pandemic caused by Covid-19 has highlighted the vital importance of Media and Information Literacy. In this context, information and communication seems to be overwhelming and is constantly changing and being updated. The social networks are used as dissemination channels and sources of information, yet they are rife with hoaxes and fake news concerning political and governmental issues (Salaverría et al., 2020; Destiny & Omar, 2020; Jenkins et al., 2013). Furthermore, much of the communication media broadcasts messages that require scientific literacy to understand them.

Formal education cannot afford to keep social and technological advances at a distance. Schools have not yet effectively integrated new tools into their teaching-learning processes, while the use of digital resources is limited to peripheral activities. In this respect, the Covid confinement period has forced schools and colleges to accelerate, and sometimes improvise, the processes required to adapt to the digital world.

An additional factor is that young people spend a lot of their free time on the Internet, especially on social networks such as Instagram, YouTube or Tik-Tok. In a study carried out on a sample of 60,000 Spanish, American and British families, Qustodio (2020) reported that the time Spanish children and adolescents spend on social apps has increased by 170%. Adolescents are also exposed to distorted and manipulated information through these social media outlets.

Confinement and quarantine are likewise influencing cultural habits related to reading: according to the report Conecta Research and Consulting (2020), prepared at the beginning of the pandemic (April), the relative number of frequent readers has increased by four percentage points. In this regard, the Germán Sánchez Ruipérez Foundation (2020) has indicated that these changes in reading habits could have a long-term impact.

The ‘new normal’ requires an urgent adaptation of the teaching-learning processes in which formal and informal education are embedded in such a way that they develop (multi) Media and Information Literacy (García-Roca, 2021). To accomplish this, one must explore the students’ vernacular digital practices in a way that recognises their interests and educational needs. Now, more than ever, studies looking at their literary practices in affinity spaces are a priority (Gee & Hayes, 2012).

**Literary practices**

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García, A. (2021). The SCP Foundation’s role in the development of academic...
In a digital context based on participatory culture, transmedia narratives, and collective intelligence (Levy, 2004), the concept of reading acquires new dimensions. This work is part of the New Literacy Studies in which the analysis of literary practices is approached from a sociocultural and situated perspective (Gee, 2004). Previous research indicates that activities such as fanfics (Guerrero-Pico, 2016; Black, 2008), Wattpad (Tirrocchi, 2018), remix (Lessig, 2008), or participating in cataloguing reading communities and BookTube (Lluch, 2017; Rovira-Collado, 2017) help to develop important learning in informal contexts related to literacy, foreign language learning and reading promotion. The new cultural ecosystem has not only opened up new reading itineraries, but also promotes and facilitates the users’ communal participation in a participatory culture (Jenkins et al., 2015); this involves horizontal communication models in which the power relationships are reconfigured. Moreover, they are ideal tools for educational innovation in the classroom (Scolari et al., 2019).

From this perspective, one of the most interesting literary practices is creepypasta. Considered a digital adaptation of contemporary folklore (Cooley & Milligan, 2018; Sánchez, 2018), creepypasta includes a series of ideal characteristics for developing Media and Information Literacy. These are multimodal texts on terror that are hyper-textual (Landow, 2006) and metafictional in nature, in which real events documented by the media are manipulated, decontextualized and appropriated (García-Roca, 2020). In creepypasta, (meta)fiction, hoaxes and fake news are brought together, with terror as their theme (ibid.; Taylor, 2020). Paradigmatic examples of this can be found in the narratives of Momo Challenge, Slenderman or Jeff the Killer.

This study has analysed the SCP Foundation as a literary practice that is closely linked to Creepypasta. The SCP Foundation is an international creative writing project in the wiki form. It chronicles the findings of a secret scientific organization tasked with investigating fictitious objects, and anomalous and supernatural phenomena which potentially pose a direct or indirect threat to humanity; its objectives are summarized in the motto - Secure, Contain and Protect. In the SCP registry, each entity has its own entry and is labelled with a number, prefixed with “SCP”. In addition to the SCP records, the site contains various stories and accounts from the Foundation’s investigators who experiment on or discuss SCP entities. They are, therefore, collaborative fictional texts or, in the words of Pajares (1997), constructive hyperfiction related to science fiction, horror and urban fantasy.

The project arose from a paranormal event thread on the 4chan forum where the first ‘special containment procedure’ was posted: SCP-173 in 2007. This text awoke the creativity of other users who expanded the fictional universe of the SCP Foundation. Later on, specific affinity spaces were created to bring together these narratives where users could act as a true collective intelligence through a wiki format.

The scpwiki.com website and its Spanish counterpart scp-es.com are large databases containing information on anomalies and containment procedures that have been demominated SCPs. These repositories include summaries of the discoveries as well as the containment procedure used and instructions for future investigators.

The main characteristic of these texts is that they are written in a style that simulates the scientific method and science writing. In the affinity space guide, this is defined as the “clinical tone” and is based on precise, concise and professional writing. In this regard, the guide for creating an SCP states: “you are writing from the perspective of an SCP investigator […] investigators should try to be distant and unemotional in their
writings”. Each article is independent and each procedure is numbered with a unique code (e.g., SCP-173).

Regarding previous research, no studies have been found that rigorously analyse the SCP texts created in these affinity spaces. This research gap needs to be explored to analyse the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are promoted when reading and writing such texts, as well as to consider how they can be transferred to the classroom by designing didactic proposals that are based on the students’ real interests. Consequently, this study has set the following objectives:

• To explore the participatory and collaborative mechanisms of the collaborative SCP Foundation project.
• To extract the text characteristics that have the greatest impact.
• To analyse the main formative potentialities of the affinity space, where learning takes place in an informal context.

Methodology

The empirical gap that exists regarding this creative writing project means that it has been impossible to apply a validated analytical instrument. Therefore, to achieve the proposed objectives, qualitative exploratory research has been designed to provide a first approach to the object under study. As it is a virtual community being assessed, this research combines ethnographic techniques that evaluate the community’s behaviours, habits, and reactions, etc., along with a documentary analysis of the artefacts produced by the users.

Regarding the data collection and analytical procedure, a thick description of the affinity space and a textual analysis of the most important SCPs have been performed. The results have been divided into two sections:

• The first section presents the main findings related to the affinity space analysed, focusing on how the reception and text creation process functions, the different roles taken by the users in the community, and the possibilities for user interaction that the web interface promotes and enables.
• The second section presents the results obtained from the text analysis: the structural characteristics of the discourse (hypertextual, interactive, etc.), the format (multimodal or transmedia), the themes, plots and scientific evidence employed (linked to scientific literacy), and the literary and metafictional devices used.

There are various virtual repositories in which SCP Foundation articles and stories are stored. However, in this work we have focused on http://scp-es.com/ as the official website of the Spanish-speaking branch since it is an exclusive community of this type of textuality as well as being the most used in Spanish.

Regarding the corpus of works considered for textual analysis, the selection was made based on the principle of relevance: the 25 SCPs with the greatest impact were chosen, as measured by the number of ratings given by users. Furthermore, these SCPs characterise the community’s narrative and discursive models; they are the most canonical. To carry out this analysis, we employed the same model used to analyse Creepypasta in a previous work (García-Roca, 2020). The sample selection consists of the following texts:
Table 1

Sample analysed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample analysed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SCP-173</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCP-682</td>
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<tr>
<td>••</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCP-049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCP-2317</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the sample analysis, it is important to clarify that these are the top-rated SCPs and, therefore, the best known. Many belong to the first series (the first generation) of SCPs and reflect a nascent community that was shaping its canon, style and identity. In the following list, the publication dates can be identified from the code assigned to the text:

- **Series I**: SCP-001 to SCP-999 (2007 to 2011)
- **Series II**: SCP-1000 to SCP-1999 (2011-2013)
- **Series IV**: SCP-3000 to SCP-3999 (2017-2018)

**Results**

*The SCP Foundation as an affinity space*

The home page of the Foundation’s website uses the following message to warn readers that they are entering a dangerous restricted space: “Warning: The Foundation database is classified. Access by unauthorized personnel is strictly prohibited. Perpetrators will be tracked, located and detained”. It is thus presented as a space in which the reader will find secret documents and files.

The space’s interface is structured in wiki form with reports on paranormal events and artefacts; this makes it simple and intuitive since the user is used to this interface type. The general functioning of the web space is based on collective intelligence and creativity through the publication, revision or translation of published articles.

The community of readers and writers gathered in the affinity space http://scp-es.com/ assists new members by developing user guides for those accessing the website for the first time - the guides for newbies, FAQs and the site rules summary. In addition, for the more creative users, the guide hub features a manual on How to publish an SCP. The guides have been developed to improve writing and narration: how to use narrative techniques that are common in this affinity space, such as elision - omitting potentially key information either explicitly (erasing or crossing out data thus making it impossible to read) or implicitly.
Of all the training material on writing, the *Technical Writing* (http://scp-es.com/technical-writing) and *Technical Words* (http://scp-es.com/technical-words) sections stand out. These pages develop concepts related to the physical sciences (quantities and units, physics, chemistry, and geology), life sciences (biology, neurology, and medicine), engineering, technology, and linguistics. Let us remember that the texts are fictionally written by specialist investigators using a pseudo-academic style (known in the community as the *clinical tone*).

The *SCPs* have a homogeneous structure:

- **Item #:** is the code and name assigned to the phenomenon, object or entity under study.
- **Object classification:** there are different categories (*safe*, *euclid*, *keter*, *taumiel*, or *neutralized*) depending on the *SCPs* containment complexity.
- **Special Containment Procedures:** in this section the mechanisms for capturing and neutralizing the *SCPs* are specified.
- **Description:** the main characteristics and anomalies that each *SCP* can cause are detailed.
- **Annexes and appendices:** reports, stories, interviews, and failed experiments, etc. are indexed here.
- **Footnotes.**

Different roles exist within the community; they define themselves as a literature community and, therefore, they emphasize that they are mainly readers. However, there are different participatory forms and mechanisms: the evaluators make it possible to locate articles of greater or lesser quality; the reviewers, using the information from the evaluators, ensure that the virtual space’s quality standards are maintained through page editing or elimination (temporary or definitive); the translators help increase the visibility of *SCP-ES* in other languages and facilitate the reading of texts from other non-Spanish-speaking countries; the expert witnesses act as beta readers; the writers, graphic designers and illustrators, the voice actors, and the moderators and administrators all help to organize the operation of the virtual space.

The project’s fictional universe is vast and, despite most of the creations being *SCPs*, there are also other creations, of which the following stand out:

- Investigative accounts and witness interviews (written in the first person and with a more personal narrative tone).
- Description and analysis of unexplained places (emphasizing descriptive writing).
- *Canon HUBs* - a set of different assumptions from the main Foundation canon, for example: *broken masquerade*, based on a world in which the Foundation is not secret, or the *rat’s nest*, which creates a narrative world where the military killed God and the Foundation’s task is to hide it. A narrative is created that serves as a source text or hypotext for activating the readers’ creativity (it is a hyperfictional activity of a constructive nature).
- *Art HUBs* - in which drawings, images, screenshots or manipulated photographs related to the activities of the Foundation are shared.
• Groups of Interest (GoI) - where the activities of other organizations parallel to the Foundation, which interact with paranormal elements, are developed, for example: Anderson Robotics, which focuses its investigation on the sale of androids, robots, artificial intelligences, and anomalous cybernetics. Here, hypertextual projects are developed with a compatible (though different) canonicity.

Finally, it is noteworthy that in addition to the space's discussion forums, the Foundation has profiles on the main social networks such as Facebook (5,735 followers), Twitter (1,139 followers), Instagram (1,252 followers) and Discord. Moreover, it indexes other related creative writing projects such as role-playing games on forums or in video games.

**Analysis of the SCPs and accounts of the SCP Foundation**

The analysed texts are short, having an average length of approximately 2,000 words (n = 25), including the annexes and footnotes. There are exceptions, such as the piece entitled •• | ••••• | •• | •, which is presented as a sequence of images with no written text, or SCP-1730, which is 28,000 words long.

Generally, SCPs do not include rhetorical or literary devices (figures of speech), nor do they use language with a poetic function. The linguistic register used simulates the formal-specialized one, including a technical vocabulary and idiomatic expressions with special meaning written by investigators for investigators. Therefore, they employ expository/explanatory academic discourse strategies: impersonal narration (impersonal pronominals) that is precise, concise, neutral, and descriptive-objective.

From a narrative standpoint, there is no action or dialogue in the body of the text. However, the articles have documents attached that use different registers, for example: formal and informal interviews (SCP-096), letters (SCP-231), field diaries (SCP-076), personal diaries (SCP-5000), e-mails (SCP-076) or conversations (SCP-055) - these do admit other linguistic registers and communicative contexts in which the characters’ conversations and actions are included.

At the same time, different fonts are used in a significant way, for example: the virtual space mainly uses a font from the *sans serif* family (Verdana), but this font is changed to others such as *Courier New* (used during the 20th century in typewriters) when digital fragments are included, such as in SCP-1471 and SCP-2317. In this sense, the text is formatted in a uniform way throughout the virtual space: there is a clear homogeneity in the use of italics, bold and underscoring, etc.

As noted above, one narrative strategy used in these narratives is elision: in the text there is certain information that the reader explicitly cannot access. In most cases, these are the names of investigators (for purposes of research ethics and data protection), dates (to achieve plot timelessness) and specific locations. However, we also found texts referring to deleted documents or removed images (see SCP-231).

These texts stand out for their multimodality; they include manipulated images and photographs that reinforce and load the written text with verisimilitude. References to images are common in the text body. This helps establish a synergistic relationship between the images and the text, making them more than mere decorative elements, likewise when interview recordings, investigator audio notes, psychophonies, videos and moving images are included.
Despite being short and apparently independent texts, the hypertextual relationships between the different articles coalesce as a network: the SCPs behave as interdependent nodes even though they relate to different SCPs, stories and research reports - for example, to contain SCP-3999 you need SCP-2432; direct contact has been established between SCP-682 and SCP-409 to explore possible interactions; SCP-500 (pills that cure all diseases) have been experimented with in SCP-038, SCP-914 and SCP-253, among others. Almost all the texts include references to other previous or parallel works in order to create a fictional unity among The Foundation’s works.

Sometimes, hypertextuality or network structure is combined with interactivity. Although the web interface does not allow the inclusion of complex interactive elements, some texts require the reader to perform certain actions that go beyond sliding the finger, for example, to purchase the SCP-1471 or to access the Foundation terminal in SCP-2317.

On the other hand, they include metafictional resources and strategies; for example, in SCP-2317, in addition to not following the classic virtual space structure, the users must put themselves in the shoes of different workers and access The Foundation terminal to obtain classified information. In this way, different levels of information access are established in the form of a reticular structure. SCP-895 inserts the images from a live recording (including a clock showing the current time) of the containment area in which the SCP is located. SCP-3999 disorients the reader by including various overlapping narrative voices.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

The use of mobile devices has exploded during the pandemic and the time spent reading has increased. However, it is a complex process to evaluate the changes in vernacular literacy practices since they underlie the very concept of reading (Canclini et al., 2015). Nonetheless, previous research has inferred that these activities have also increased (FGEE, 2021; Conecta Research and Consulting, 2020).

The most significant aspect of this practice is the format and linguistic register used: the diegesis (Genette, 1982) constructed by the community presents a series of research articles prepared by scientists. Therefore, the register used (formal-academic) must be carefully fostered. On other creative writing platforms, such as Wattpad or fanfiction repositories, the focus is on the plot and the poetic function of the language (Pianzola et al., 2020; Black, 2008) whereas the formal aspects are not so relevant.

Another characteristic of the SCP Foundation is the network structure of its articles: there are hypertext relationships between the different documents. This provides a fictional unity to the entire project. It is a literary practice in which the ideals of collective intelligence (Lévy, 2004) and collective creativity (Casacuberta, 2003) are put into practice. Although the fanfics and fanarts are also hypertextual (transformative) works, their structure is nourished by a single author or source text (Guerrero-Pico, 2015). There are few collaborative fiction projects based on the wiki hypertext structure that have managed to create such a complex canon and such a large community (Cleger, 2010).

This literary practice has certain similarities to others, such as Creepypasta. Both textualities are based on supernatural occurrences, they are generally horror stories with multimodal and hypertextual characteristics but without a recognized authorship;
they also represent a potential danger to the reader (Henriksen, 2018; Taylor, 2020). It is, therefore, a constructive hyperfiction in which each SCP or fragment contributes to the development of a larger project (Pajares, 1997).

However, certain differences stand out, making them distinct literary practices: *creepypastas* are generally stories, while SCPs are scientific articles; each *creepypasta* constitutes an independent *canon* and is produced by different users unconnected to each other while in *The SCP Foundation*, there is a complex transverse *canon* encompassing all the SCPs, and each of them is written by a user (or several in coordination). The SCPs do not have the objective of transcending beyond the repository in which they are housed and do not use as many metafictional resources as the *creepypastas* (García-Roca, 2020).

The *SCP Foundation* is an affinity space (Gee & Hayes, 2012) that promotes the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes linked to formal education. It encourages recreational reading and writing, and activates the creativity of the internauts, who get used to reading and writing in an elaborate and complex linguistic register (formal-academic), at the same time as interacting with the scientific method, enjoying texts in their mother tongue (and in other languages), and associating with a virtual reading community.

It is important to note that the SCP Foundation is about invisible learning (Cobo & Moravec, 2011) acquired in a serendipitous and unexpected way, according to Connor’s (2009) classification. However, users also make an intentional effort to acquire skills and abilities that improve their writing competence (reading guides, tutorials, mentoring activities and beta readers, etc.). In any event, it is about knowledge related to the users’ interests, which ensures significant and competent learning (Amo, 2020).

In addition to the learning that it promotes in informal contexts, the SCP Foundation can be an ideal tool for developing Media and Information Literacy in the classroom. Sometimes, these literary practices are conceived as prohibited or clandestine readings, independent from institutional ones (Cassany, 2013). However, the school must react to the reading behaviours and habits of its students, incorporating them in an appropriate way (Amo, 2020; Scolari et al., 2019). This is especially relevant at such an exceptional time as now, when there is significant interference, or mutual interference in the words of Trilla (1992), between the formal and informal education contexts.

**Bibliographical References**


