

FACING THE CHALLENGE – DEVELOPING AN INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN FOR PORTUGUESE AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN BRAZIL BASED ON MULTILITERACY

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ABSTRACT

Adopting the multiliteracy concept and embracing the challenge of developing meaningful and captivating classes for Portuguese as Foreign Language in Brazil, this paper proposes an approach which includes the use of different technologies to learn and teach Portuguese, the reading of graphic novel adaptations of Brazilian literature classics and the creation of a multimedia product called book trailer based on those novels. The whole process aims to promote aware, committed and multiliterate students.

KEYWORDS

Information and communication technologies (ICT), Multiliteracies, Book trailer, Graphic novel, Brazilian literature, Portuguese for foreigners.

1. INTRODUCTION

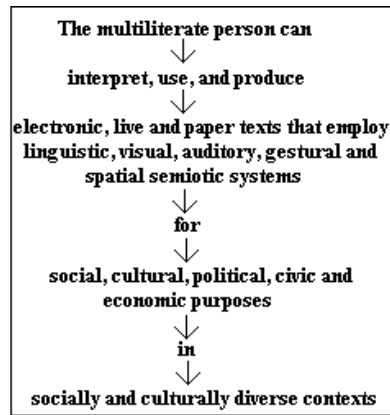
It has been a challenge to provide meaningful, relevant and interesting content for heterogeneous students of Portuguese as Foreign Language in Brazil. The challenge becomes larger if we consider the changes society has been facing because of the shift from a page-base to a screen-base world. This change-in-progress has been affecting many aspects of our society, for example, the form “new communications media are reshaping the way we use language” (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000:06), raising questions as “how do these changes affect the ways we learn, use and teach languages?” and debating issues as “the status of CALL [computer-assisted language learning], its theoretical grounding, its cultural embeddedness, and its effectiveness” (Kern, 2006:183). This paper aims to develop an approach which considers the use of different technologies (once computers have become a convergent device and there has been a growing access to other technologies as cameras, camcorders and free software), the importance of cultural aspects during the learning process and the rule and effectiveness of technology in the educational field. About the last one, as Kern stated, it “is not technology per se that affects the learning of language and culture but the particular uses of technology” (Kern, 2006:183). Agreeing with Kern, some specific questions will guide this research as: (a) will the use of a multimodal approach help the students to understand linguistic and cultural aspects of Brazil? Will the technology adopted be an obstacle or will it make the attempt to work with Brazilian texts easier? Will the learning process be more meaningful? Will the students be more committed with the new kind of activity which will be suggested? How can the multiliteracy concept be worked in a second language class through different technologies?

2. MULTILITERACIES

One consequence of those changes mentioned above in relation with the educational system is that students are demanded to be capable of reading and producing multimedia texts as well as the “old” printed ones. Students are expected to have multiple literacies and educators are expected to teach students to become a multiliterate person. As Hicks (2006:3) wrote, the discussion about how students “can produce and consume texts in critical, creative and ethical way” has become “crucial in creating an informed, engaged and

multiliterate citizenship”. Multiliteracy is a concept which presents worthy perspectives when we search answers for how literacy teaching can enable students for this switching world, once it “focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone” (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000, p.05) and so it allows readers to be “cognitively and socially literate with” a variety of texts, “a problem solver and strategic thinker” (Anstèy and Bull, 2006:41).

Table 1. Multiliteracy (Anstèy and Bull, 2006:41)



Adopting multiliteracy while developing materials for Portuguese as Foreign Language in Brazil sets another challenge: the creation of an approach which includes and works with a variety of modes and media, promoting critical thinking and enabling students to learn Portuguese in an involving and motivating way. Embracing the multiliteracy, considering the profile of the students who will take part in this pilot study, the facilities of the center where those students will study this semester, the language syllabus expected to be taught and the current publishing industry in Brazil, book trailers and graphic novel adaptations of classics of Brazilian literature are potential resources to develop a teaching approach.

Book trailers have become popular in Brazil (e.g. BookTrailer - <http://www.booktrailer.com.br/Home.html>), mainly among teenagers and young adults. A book trailer is normally an advertisement for novels created by book publishers or authors to sell their books. It can be defined as a multimodal text in which a variety of semiotic modes are combined. The multimodality can be explained as an approach that understands “communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attends to the full range of communication forms people use – image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on – and the relationships between them”(Jewitt, 2009:14). Using a book trailer in a pedagogical approach creates “opportunities for students to re-enact the main storyline of books they read, using live video clips, pictures, music, voice-overs and other digital tools” (Digital Booktalk). The idea of using a book trailer to work the understanding of classics of Brazilian literature is partially based on the “composing” concept fostered by the *Conference on English Education Belief Statements About Technology* (Swenson et al., 2005). According to it, when students create their own product (a video clip, a music, a movie trailer and etc.), their personal concept of literacy is reinforced. However, as there are time and some technological limitations to produce something very time-consuming (as movie trailers and video clips), the book trailer shows itself as an ideal option. The time limitation, in turn, demands students to focus on the main points of a book or a graphic novel, exercising selection and condensation of the text, while they are making the book trailer.

About the graphic novels, they are characterized as “fiction or nonfiction books presented in comic book format that require multimodal literacy for understanding” (Hammond, 2009: iii) and they are considered “an emerging new literature of our times” (Campbell, 2007, p. 13). As Downey (2009:181) mentioned “graphic novels today are being used increasingly by educators to engage reluctant readers, reach out to visual learners, and illustrate social and cultural themes and topics”. They are also a flourishing market in Brazil which has produced award-winning literary adaptations in the last years.

The next topic will detail how an approach has been developed including the pedagogical use of graphic novel adaptations of Brazilian literature classics, the production of book trailers, and the use of different kinds of technologies.

2.1 Methodology

The purposes of this approach are to enable students to (a) use spoken, written, and visual language to express themselves successfully to a wide range of audiences and for different goals; (b) employ their knowledge of language structure and conventions, as well as media resources and technological tools to produce, evaluate, and discuss different types of texts; (c) explore a variety of technological and information resources, in a critical and ethical way, to obtain the information and tools they need, creating and sharing knowledge. This project also expects students to show their understanding of graphic novel adaptations of Brazilian literature classics by creating a multimedia product called book trailer. During this process they will also (a) learn film-making and technological vocabulary in Portuguese; (b) discuss the cultural aspects spotted in the graphic novels; (c) question the *status quo* of the society shown in the books, trying to link it with our social structure, (d) learn how to write a script; (e) find out how to produce a book trailer; (f) debate the pro and cons of copyright and the use of materials available on the internet; and (g) promote collaborative and peer work. Adopting this approach we will be able to deal with linguistic and cultural dimensions, as well as to the critical use of technological and information resources.

The participants will be twenty Spanish speaking students from different nationalities, age and gender who are in Brazil taking Portuguese classes (intermediate level) at Centro de Ensino da Linguagem (Language Teaching Center), which belongs to University of Campinas (<http://www.unicamp.br/unicamp/?language=en>). This center has a multilingual library, computer and language lab, and different types of monitors to help the students with linguistic and technological doubts, so its infrastructure and facilities enable the development of this project. Also, during the role process, the students will have the support of their Portuguese teacher.

2.2 Sessions

In the beginning of the first meeting the professor will apply a questionnaire (detailed below) which will be used to assess the project. After the students finish answering it, the professor will present the steps of the project: (a) the students will organize themselves in groups of interests; (b) the professor will explain how the students will show their understanding of the book – instead of writing a traditional abstract, they will produce a book trailer. The educator will define what a “book trailer” is, show some examples, discussing their characteristics, the resources applied and etc.; (c) the groups will assess each group's book trailer through a check list; (d) the students will decide if they want to show their books trailers through the creation of a blog or a channel on YouTube; (e) at the end of this first session, the educator will organize the schedule (both face-to-face and online meetings) of the project. The students will have a month to read the graphic novel and one month to produce the book trailer.

During the first month an online forum will be created so the students will have a virtual place to post their doubts while reading the graphic novels. After that, a second face-to-face meeting will be attended when each group will clarify doubts they still may have about, for example, vocabulary and grammar. During this session: (a) cultural aspects shown in the books will be highlighted and analyzed; (b) they will debate how culture and society involve a game of power which tries to keep the *status quo* (in the past and nowadays) and how this game affects our lives; (c) an example of a book trailer project plot planner and story board will be analyzed, enabling the students to start the first draft of the script; (d) the students will discuss what kind of check list they will adopt to evaluate each other's works; (e) the groups will decide which movie editing software they will use – it can vary from one group to other. (f) some tutorials about how to create a book trailer will be introduced; (g) the students will have a discussion about copyright and appropriation of content from the internet.

The next meetings will occur online, both through the use of the forum as well as through chats scheduled according to the students needs. Before the end of the project one face-to-face meeting will be booked with each group. During that session the students will show just for the educator their book trailer, so if there are any retouches or corrections, the students will have enough time to do it before their presentation.

The last meeting will be the one the groups will show their book trailers to their classmates. During that session the students will: (a) answer another questionnaire (detailed below) focused on their experience of reading the graphic novels and making the book trailers; (b) assess each other's works.

2.3 Assessment

There will be two kinds of assessment: (a) of the project and (b) of the students. The project assessment will be based on questionnaires answered by the students (one in the beginning and the other at the end of the

project), meetings observation and analysis of the forum and chats. The questionnaires will have open-ended and closed questions. The first one intends to observe (a) what kind of experience the students have with technology; (b) what they know about Brazilian literature; (c) if they are used to reading graphic novels or comic books (and in what languages) and what expectations they have of the course. The second questionnaire will focus on their experience during the project and it will be built aiming to answer the questions mentioned in the introduction of this paper. Also, it will be partially developed based on the answers given in the first questionnaire and on observations made by the educator through the process. The student assessment will be split in two. In the first one the students will evaluate each other's works through a check list. The second type of assessment will be the educator's – she will also use a check list, but an expanded one, which will include items as (a) proper use of vocabulary; (b) grammar; (c) pronunciation and etc. The results will be shown during CELDA 2013.

3. CONCLUSION

Currently students are expected to be multiliterate, to be capable of apply their skills to deal with various texts and media. Helping the students to develop those skills (ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize various forms of text) is a challenge teachers and professors have to face everyday. But we need to be aware the “multi-” in “multiliterate” stands for “having many” (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, 2000:928), something that is not single, homogeneous. So, one multiliterate student will probably present not only a variety of literacy, but also different levels of literacies. If we consider a class with more than twenty students from different countries, cultures, religions, age, gender and so on, the previous statement about the prefix “multi-” – that can be seen as naïve or obvious in a first impression – shows its depth. How can educators deal with so many variants, with a so heterogeneous context? Bearing that in mind, this project intends to show that combining technology (video making), popular culture (graphic novels) and traditional academic tasks (reading classic literature) with collaborative work, discussions and an open-mind behavior can be an enticing approach to fulfill an impressive challenge.

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