

Multimedia Strategies to Encourage Reading: a Study of the Don Casmurro Case

Estratégias Multimídia de Incentivo à Leitura: Estudo do Caso Dom Casmurro

Estrategías Multimidia de Incentivo a La Lectura: Estudio del caso Dom Casmurro

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Abstract *The paper presents strategies based on multimedia resources in order to promote reading habits and pleasure when reading. The text analyzes Assis' Don Casmurro novel that has been disseminated in many products and platforms (TV series, websites, ARG game, Mil Casmurros Project) that explore multiple sensorialities, languages, and narrative forms. Given the difficulty of traditional education with the theme, the objective is to attract young people to read the original work.*

Keywords: *Education; cognition; reading; multimedia; Don Casmurro.*

Resumo *O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar estratégias de recursos multimidiáticos para promover o hábito e o prazer à leitura. Para isso, é feita a análise do caso da obra Dom Casmurro, de Machado de Assis, divulgada em diversos produtos e suportes (seriado de TV, site, jogo ARG e Projeto Mil Casmurros), que exploram múltiplas sensorialidades, linguagens e formas de narrativa. Diante da*

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dificuldade do ensino tradicional com o tema, almeja-se atrair os jovens para a leitura da obra original.

Palavras-chave: Educação; Cognição; Leitura; Multimídia; Dom Casmurro.

Resumen *El objetivo de este trabajo es presentar estrategias de recursos multimediáticos para promover el hábito y el placer a la lectura. Para eso, es echo un análisis del caso de la obra Dom Casmurro, del escritor brasileño Machado de Assis, divulgada en diversos productos y soportes (seriado de TV, juego ARG, Proyecto Mil Casmurros), los cuales explotan múltiples sensorialidades, lenguajes y formas de narrativa. Ante la dificultad del enseño tradicional para el tema, búscase atraer los jóvenes a leer la obra original.*

Palabras-clave: Educación; Cognición; Lectura; Multimedia; Dom Casmurro.

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Introduction

The traditional Brazilian educational system is showing signs of crisis. The quantitative increase observed in literacy rates does not imply in the educational quality improving. Though more students have attended schools, their performances are still below the desired. According to data from the Proler Report (2010): “[...] 59% of the students in 4th grade of Elementary School still have not developed basic reading skills...”; and Brazil was placed last in the reading assessment between 15 year old teenagers from 32 different industrialized countries. One of the largest problems is functional illiteracy, which means that the individual can read and write, but does not have the ability to understand and use texts of different natures (newspaper, magazine, letter, book) and in different contexts—professional, personal, etc.

We believe that this crisis in education must be thought of under two complementary perspectives. The first one refers to the historical, sociocultural, and economic problems of functional illiteracy; and the second is the traditional teaching method, which usually disregards the use of activities and resources that explore the senses (visual, touch, auditory), which make the teaching and learning activities more fun and pleasurable.

The objective of this article is to present strategies based on multimedia resources that encourage the habit and the pleasure of reading. To do so, the text is divided into four parts. In the first part we briefly discuss the main causes of this problem in schools with reading development. In the second part we present the concept of cognition based on approaches of the cognitive sciences that argue that the cognitive process involves the body and its interactions with the environment. The next part presents strategies and multimedia resources that can help and encourage a love for reading. At the end an analysis is made of the book *Dom Casmurro* written by Machado de Assis, which has been disclosed in several different media (TV series, websites, ARG game, and in the Project *Mil Casmurros*) that explore multiple sensorialities, languages,

and narrative forms with the objective to attract young people to read the original work.

Education Crisis: a brief overview

The reality of reading in Brazil is very diverse: on the one hand, a large part of the population does not have contact with the traditional reading and, secondly, the outdated teaching, in relation to new stimulus, loses to more attractive media⁴; meanwhile, those who at least in school age were readers, stop being so and lose the habit⁵.

Researchers concerned with the issues of education that contributed to the current state of education in Brazil were consulted in order to discuss these topics. In the area of education, writing standards seem to dominate a model of transmission of thought, in a tidy set of data, typical of a modern world in which an ideology prevails that understands the transmission of information by the schooling process via institutions traditionally hegemonic in power such as Church, State, laws, and sanctions.

Several authors in the education field, Arendt (2001), Meszaros (2010), among others, were concerned since the 1960s with formal education crisis and problematized the ideological instances and of power present in the educational process. In a line of thinking about the education in practice, Paulo Freire (1967) and Richard Rorty (no date) bet on affection as a facilitating element of learning based on everyday experience by the creative use of language.

It is on this form of education, through dialog and inclusion of content into the student's reality, that we base the possibility of multimedia supports to be able to contribute in the development of reading. This conviction stems from the observation of the strong presence of radio, TV, computer, cell phone, and other means in the lives of schoolchildren, adolescents, and adults.

⁴ Studies of the Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education (Clade).

⁵ Ibope Intelligence 2008.

The psychologist and head professor of the Department of Education at PUC-Rio, Maria Mamede-Neves (2011), explains that reading and listening to stories are activities that have enchanted men since young, but a lack of interest comes on them when they enter school where the learning loses its fun and contextualized character.

The author notes that many young people have fun reading on multimedia platforms, surfing the internet, as well as playing or talking online. This shows that, if set up at a level outside the traditional school using fun activities, reading can prove to be extremely attractive for anyone. It is valid to point out that the intention is not to discard the traditional forms of reading and formation of an abstract and critical thinking. The proposal is to demonstrate that sensory, affective, and social-cultural factors can complete the learning.

The purpose of this article is to see in multimedia supports and their products ways to encourage reading and promote a broader concept of this habit, or on the concept of textuality involving audiovisual media, games, sound, and other resources (McKENZIE, 2004).

Another way of thinking about the cognitive process: the expanded cognition

In the book *Extension or Communication?*, Paulo Freire (1977) argues that one of the main problems of formal teaching is a pedagogy focused on the transmission of knowledge. Instead, it proposes the collective construction of knowledge and understands that Education should not be the imposition of decontextualized knowledge. For him, education is communication, the joint participation of subjects in the act of thinking. Only dialog is capable of communicating effectively. For this approach, students are thought of as active subjects in the construction of knowledge.

However, the issues related to education by transmission are not limited to social-cultural, economic, and political problems. They also refer to the assumption that cognitive processes are basically linked to

the superior skills of human intelligence (logical reasoning, verbal language, and others). Studies of cognitive sciences defend that the mind, to operate, relies heavily on the sensory-motor apparatus and on the individual's interactions with technical objects and their peers.

For several authors of cognitive sciences, the term cognition is not limited to the superior skills of the intellect. Cognition includes all activities and processes operated by the mind (CLARK, 2001; LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1999). The mind, in turn, would be the result of a long evolutionary process involving the relationship between body and brain and their interactions with the environment (DENNETT, 1996; LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1999). Thus, the mental processes involve not only the skills traditionally classified as mental, but all human skills, including sensory-motor, perceptual, emotional, and social. Hans Paul Moravec (1988) explains that the higher skills of the intellect, which have existed for only about 100,000 years, could only be developed because they were sustained on our body apparatus and sensory motor skills that have been in a cumulative process of evolution over billions of years and only because of that is that they are automatic today.

Lakoff and Johnson therefore define the idea of "expanded" cognition:

Mental images, emotions, and the conception of motor operations are also studied from a cognitive perspective. [...] Because our conceptual systems and our reason arise from our bodies, we will also use the term cognitive for aspects of our sensory motor system that contribute to our abilities to conceptualize and reason. (LAKOFF; JOHNSON, 1999, p. 11-12).

For this view, cognitive processes involve superior skills and also the lower substrates. Affection, memory, and other senses affect the way we relate to our environment and the way we learn.

Among the precursor authors of this cognitive approach is Lev Vygotsky. The Russian psychologist defends that teaching and learning are derived from the social relations of the individual with society. For Vygotsky (1985), the basic psychological functions are reflexes, but the higher functions are only developed through learning, which implies that they need social interaction. Vygotsky also foresees the importance

of the mediation of technical instruments such as technical artifacts and language in the development of concepts.

Thus, it appears that for knowledge to be built, the context with the medium (technical objects and social relations) and the use of resources that explore the student's various senses and pleasures are fundamental.

By understanding that the body, feelings, perceptions, and sensorialities act in favor of cognitive development and not in opposition to it, it becomes possible to minimize (or perhaps overcome) the alleged oppositions between what is fun and serious, pleasure and education. The multimedia resources made possible to use by digital media allow the use of different languages (visual, auditory, touch) that stimulate the senses making the activities of teaching and learning more fun and enjoyable.

Multimedia strategies as a way of learning

Among the teaching approaches that combine learning and fun are some that are part of the everyday life among schoolchildren and are extremely popular, such as playing video games, watching television, listening to the radio, using a computer, browsing the internet, using a cell phone for more than a simple call, etc. Because these media are already rooted in the everyday life of people, their use for education becomes more favorable because there is no need to force a new habit or go against socioeconomic factors that also restrict other alternatives.

A type of multimedia strategy to encourage and teach reading could be based on games. Today, electronic games have taken a lot of the time of people of all ages. They are a form of multimedia entertainment that is gaining popularity quickly. Studies have demonstrated the potential of this form of entertainment in order to develop sensory motor skills, logic, and others, including learning through pleasurable activities.

A research was done by the University of Nottingham Trent with 24 students of the English School of Loughborough. They were between the ages of 16 and 24 years old and had down syndrome or autism. After testing their skills in batting tennis balls and then training using the

Nintendo Wii games for five weeks, 75% of the students improved their performance in the game and 53% showed improvement in learning. A similar experiment is described in the book *Mind Wide Open: Your Brain and the Neuroscience of Everyday Life* by Steven Johnson (2008) in which the author develops games so that to go on to the next phase the player needs to have constant attention on a given activity, which can be used for treating a deficit of attention in patients. Similar cases can be observed in professions that involve hazards. Flight simulators work like games and are used to train the pilots professionally.

Educational games are another option to arouse interest in reading and classroom content. An article published on the site *Olhar Digital* reports the experience of Professor Gilson Schwartz, from the School of Communication and Arts, who developed an electronic game called *Global Conflicts*, which is similar to *The Sims*, through a tool now being used by 500 schools in Europe. The game aims to help students understand socioeconomic problems through the figure of a journalist, a character that stores interview answers in a text and produces his news highlight at the end with the information retained. The researcher proves that the retention of content through this experience rises to 60%/70% due to the interest it awakens by simulating the experience. So its focus is on "converging playing with something serious for the retention of content" (Interview given to the TV program RedeTV, *Olhar Digital*, also available at the link – http://olhardigital.uol.com.br/produtos/central_de_videos/games-invadem-as-salas-de-aula).

Another experience that highlights videogames as a learning tool in schools because it arouses curiosity on matters is the example of the private school Santa Maria in São Paulo where the students develop their own video games according to the content studied. As explained by the Coordinator of the Research and Development Group of Electronic Games at the school, Muriel Vieira, "to make the boy jump, the software asks the programmer to put gravity, force, and acceleration of movement." (Ibid).

The children approve the method showing that only handouts, blackboard and chalk, and lectures are no longer sufficient to hold the attention of young people. According to the testimony of a history student that follows the project of using games in education, "games teach and help us when it's time to study because it is a more dynamic learning experience. We live with the problem and know how to solve it in our daily experiences" (Data taken from the report made by *Olhar Digital* – http://olhardigital.uol.com.br/produtos/central_de_videos/jogos_educativos).

However, we need to highlight the need for a teacher's presence in the classroom during the process even with the use of games, because it is the teacher who mediates between the information that can be transformed into knowledge. "Often students have contact with games at home, but they don't relate them to a historical context, or to geography, or to a mathematical formula. So the presence of the teacher is important to draw attention to this data," explains Michel Goulart, a history teacher participating in the project of games in the classroom.

Therefore, these examples serve as proof to what has already been shown in research and demonstrated in the articles the group of Technologies of Communication, Cognition, and Entertainment⁶, which corroborates with the modifications of the skills of students, regardless of the media support or of the product as entertainment. Along similar lines, when thinking in reading, it can be seen that many games also stimulate an adaptation of their stories to a written platform and vice-versa, as well as for the big screen, smart phones, websites, and countless other means.

It is an old strategy to use literature to make adaptations for the cinema or for TV series as a way of making the literary products more popular. One relevant example is the adaptation/development of content through a trans-media way of the *Watchmen* comic strips, by the

⁶ A research group from UERJ has been investigating since 2007 issues related to how digital media and entertainment products (books, TV series, video games, movies) stimulate/require the development of cognitive, sensory, and motor skills among young people.

author Alan Moore, for the cinema. The comic strips of the author already used the language of *flashback*, a tool used in the cinema in a smart way, and in the film adaptation by director Jack Snyder—independently of judging the quality criteria of the work—made it possible for it to become known by the general public from the niche of comics. This process of adaptation enabled the extended consumption across multiple platforms and attracted audiences of specific tastes, which Chris Anderson (2006) justifies to be a result of the "long tail".

That is why it is valid to analyze the case study of the multimedia strategies of *Dom Casmurro* in several franchises to awaken the young user of content becoming an active reader who goes through various media.

The case study: Dom Casmurro multimedia

This article chose to analyze the literary classic *Dom Casmurro* by Machado de Assis, one of the most widely read works in the country due to being a product tested in various media beyond the printed book. It has its own version in film, a TV series, game, audio book, *mashup* of book with the history about the bestseller's style, YouTube interventions, and a book clip version (a kind of movie trailer that tries to attract the reader into the book's universe), products that perform a context from the story closest to the audiovisual language used by young people. There is also summarized material in numerous handouts for the college entrance exam public, and the *Dom Casmurro* book has been adapted for audiovisual, comics, and cinema, which contributed to increasing its popularity with the general public.

An audiovisual production option worth being analyzed is the TV series *Capitu* (2008), which is an adaptation of the *Dom Casmurro* book broadcast by Rede Globo, but with a difference: it is already born hybrid with a site, blog, twitter, DVD, plus the product is advertised on television, a fabric of various metaphorical layers of text.

What needs to be analyzed first is how the adaptation can insert metaphorical elements that expand the content and serve as a complement

to the deepening of the work. And later how the transmedia elements work on the convergence of different aesthetic experiences and participation on the network.

Analysis of the Capitu series: the use of metaphors

Different than trying to represent the original work, the realization of the TV series is based on the director's cut out perspective, in this case a metaphorical imagery adaptation that combines the content of the writing, the meanings, with the representations of different semantic elements in textuality on the television screen.

The director makes a creative review in redrawing the book's story with new interpretations. As the main metaphor, the opera in a theater was chosen (automobile club of Rio de Janeiro) as a setting for storytelling because, according to him, the opera approaches the world of masks, which is the main question in the plot of the story: the betrayal or not of Capitu as judged from the perspective of Bentinho.

Another metaphorically adapted aspect is the image of the character Capitu, updated for the modern world while maintaining similar references to Machado de Assis' text, as the two stages of adolescence and adulthood represented by different characters. So the director, in a creative process, carries out the mixture of elements such as fun, dreams, and circus for the representation of characters as a way to sustain the escape of Realism, so opposed by Machado de Assis.

It can be said that the elements for the free creation are studies of metaphorical references represented by the image, which the more the viewer gains knowledge of, the more is perceived and entered into Machado's world. Because the language of the TV series is audiovisual, the content is passed not only by the words recited by the character Bentinho, but also by the coding created in other elements such as, for example, the costumes that create a mixture of the image of a delicate princess with the view of the character of an oblique and disguised gypsy. The skirts have free movement, continuous and skewed, cut obliquely, with attached petticoat, like foam, reminding one of the explosions

of sea on a day with a hangover, which symbolizes a dialog with the character in the book, when it expresses Capitu's vision with his "eyes with a hangover or of a disguised oblique gypsy". A lens is fitted in front of the camera at the time of recording, dubbed the "Dom Casmurro lens", which was also used in recording Capitu, under the perspective of Bentinho, which is also a metaphor of the vision of the character, from the eyes of Capitu.

Voices, sounds of memories are redeemed and used as well as the fragmentation of the camera positioning of the characters to give a certain movement and modernity to the message that the director wants to give his audience, in a fragmented narrative structure, resources used in the composition of an audiovisual literacy already acquired by the young spectator.

After all, these resources used by the director function as a kind of provocation of the spectator who knows the story, to give more proximity to the different languages with the content of the printed text.

The director Luiz Fernando Carvalho, in an interview with the website, revealed that one of his concerns:

was to overcome the prejudice that many young people have about Machado often because it was the first high school reading assignment. What I did was reaffirm it in terms of content and language. The text's synthesis is his. Now, of course I mirrored those situations and launched them into other relations of images, looking for dialog with symbolic possibilities of modernity, raising the text to other visibilities. (<http://capitu.globo.com/Capitu>)

But depending on the speed of the scenes and rapid assembly with several references, the viewer cannot capture all the information at the same time in multiform points of the screen that have metaphors in dialog with the original text. Therefore, the metaphorical references to the book by images or other external and of mass culture products will only be noticed if there is a previous cultural repertoire on the viewer's part.

Transmedia actions of the Capitu series

Especially in this production, an interactive website was created ([http://capitu.globo.com/Capitu/ 0,,16142,00.html](http://capitu.globo.com/Capitu/0,,16142,00.html)) that worked at the same time that the series was on the air. The website used the same aesthetic identity of composition of the images of the TV series such as collages of newspapers stamped on the page of the website, background music befitting the different periods of the characters (adolescent phase marked by happy music and the adult one by mystery music so as to represent the weight of doubt of the betrayal of a love triangle in the plot of characters Capitu, Bentinho, and Escobar).

In an attempt to join itself to the new digital tools, the production team also prepared a kind of treasure hunt for the general public in a new form of advertising the series called *Capitucrossing*. Following the strategies that turned into entertainment fads in the US, in the transmedia formats (JENKINS, 2008) of development of complementary content, using the potential of different media, the producers spread DVDs of the TV series that had not yet been shown in various public locations in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (bathrooms of bars, food courts in shopping malls, museums, theaters, bookstores, subways, and college snack shops in different districts). And, similar to an ARG (alternate reality game), they launched a challenge for those who found the DVDs spread around the city, suggesting that people write their experience later on the website and pass on the DVD found by placing it in another public place so as to extend the notion of a network. The intention of the producers of the series was to create spontaneous advertising that propagates in a continuous logic without the need to pay employees to do so, thus using the factor of curiosity for it to work and propagate along a network. The objective, therefore, in the role of the producers of the discourse, was to capture a significant and varied number of people to watch the series that was still to be shown on TV, which contributed to the audience on the channel on premiere day.

In parallel a simultaneous action took place by Twitter, calling the public to participate in a project called *Mil Casmurros* ([www.](http://www)

milcasmurros.com.br) in which various actors of Globo as well as Internet users recorded on their home cameras portions of the *Dom Casmurros* book so that at the end of the process the intervention had the participation of 688 people in a collective composition interpreted by the public with different accents and ages. In this project the reading was done creatively, open to the public through interpretations, intonation of the text, pause for the dialogs, but still kept the current reading with singular markings to the printed text (words of the characters, etc.).

After the media conglomerate that provides sensations to the user, it turns out that there are a number of productions via *YouTube* of adaptations of the book performed by users in home videos or by teachers themselves, as teaching material, as well as trailers made by the industry. These tools follow the same objectives of the games, which is to assist in the learning of schools, and as a way of recalling the content and of course the simple possibility of fun and entertainment.

So if on the one hand the industry producers bet on the use of metaphorical resources, of images in movement, to promote the approximation of the public and make it possible for them to go deeper into the book, on the other hand there is the possibility of active participation of this user through the multiple platforms also working as a strategy to generate involvement by experience.

Final Considerations

The case study of this article seen from the perspective of digital media, education, and entertainment had the purpose of doing a sampling of strategies in order to spark learning (even if a formal one) based on the student's experience. In addition to the traditional teaching processes with little appeal, multimedia resources explore the human *sensorium* apparatus that, according to the concept of expanded cognition, favors attention and retention of the content to be assimilated.

The case study of the book *Dom Casmurro* sought to provide examples of how multimedia resources can provide a more fun and contextualized learning process in the learner's experience, favoring a

greater retention of the content. It has to do with a hybrid wager of reading that involves various tasks from the user along with a learning that embraces the different senses and contexts required in the habit of reading and user awareness. In the case of the TV series and the multimedia experiences, information was generated and new linguistic dialogs built by the reader as a participant actor.

The purpose of this research is in agreement with the line of thought of Beatriz Sarlo as to the importance of the book to persist in formal literacy. However, our eyes should be opened to a second literacy that opens us to multiple writings by the world of audiovisual and information technology:

We are facing a change in reading protocols and processes that implies in not only changing a way of reading to another, but the complex articulation of one to another, of reading text and hypertexts, of the double insertion of ones in others, which implies in continuities and ruptures, in the reconfiguration of reading as a set of very different ways to navigate through texts” (SARLO, 1999, p. 65,77).

Hence the importance of schools creatively using audiovisual media and information technology in order to make possible the transit from a linear way of reading to a way that is circular, decentralized, and plural, whose key is creativity in the reorganization of knowledge to new forms of citizen participation and cognitive changes, for the different ways of interpretation and appropriation of media, television, and digital messages and their location in the context of everyday life (BARBERO and REY, 2001, p. 71).

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