Digital Records: challenges and achievements at literature classes in high school

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Abstract

This Case Report narrates the trajectory of the project named *Stories de Leituras*, developed in 2017 with students of the 3rd year of High School at the IFSP *campus* Cubatão. The main goal of this project is to discuss how the use of Digital Information and Communication Technologies (DICT) can improve reading activities. The project proposes the use of the Instagram Social Network as a virtual diary in which students can register their relationship with the book and interact with colleagues' posts. The project also aims to reflect on the influence of *vestibular* exams on the choices of literature books adopted in High School.

Keywords: Literature, Digital information and communication technologies, Secondary education.

Introduction: A brief reflection on the use of social networks in postmodernity

Like many other areas, education is facing a critical moment that makes us rethink the current educational paradigm. One of the reasons that leads us to reflect about what we teach and how we do it is the usage of Information and Communication Technologies and its impacts inside and outside Cyberspace.

Social Networks (SN) have become naturalized environments where the interaction, especially of teenagers, happens in an asynchronous and iconic[2] way, with emphasis on the registry of images, especially *selfies*, changing our relation with time, space and information. This does not happen without drastic transformation in the way we interact socially.

One of the most outstanding aspects of postmodernity today is that "the commerce of meaningful life is the most competitive market" (BAUMAN, 2012, p.27)[3]. This market, that stimulates the discourse of success and its importance for individualization, leaves traces in the school environment. In High School, for instance, it directs the choices of what books are chosen, but maybe the most eminent expressions of this discourse is the display of students' happy faces on banners promoting school success rate on the Vestibular (University Entrance Exams)

What is the last cycle of basic education has become a bridge to the university instead of a space for reflection and construction of an autonomous and critical citizen.

The activity that I describe in this paper was aimed to reclaim School as a space where students could choose and develop their reading strategies and reconsider their roles in society.

Han's (2017) essential critique "In the era of Facebook and Photoshop, the 'human face' has turned into a face that exhausts itself totally in its positive value. The face is the face exposed to any 'golden vision.'" (HAN, 2017, p. 48) helped us to understand

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2   The usage of Emojis, cartoons made by Unicode system and widely used in social networks.
3   All the references used in this paper were freely translated from sources in Portuguese. They may vary from English editions.

one of the main goals of this project: to subvert the relationship students have with social media.

In an era of *selfies, to* reevaluate the social media *Instagram* as authoring space, not only as a place of vanity, and to relate it to literature teaching is not only a challenge, but also a necessary provocation.

Oasis, roles and institutions

I know that my narrative happens in an oasis in the desert of the current Brazilian education. My students, from the Federal Institute of São Paulo Campus Cubatão, have cell phones, internet access and our school has computer labs. They are privileged students if we think about the reality of public education. But still, they are teenagers: Boys and girls aged 16 and 17 who were born in an era when the digital network is naturalized as a source of access to information.

We think of this process of naturalization as an effect of a historical cleavage, but we emphasize that this aspect does not correspond to neutrality, especially if we think of search engines like Google, that selects through algorithmic programming what will be available in the first pages of its search tool, hierarchizing and silencing certain discourses.

In addition to this aspect, which requires a deep critical reflection, it is also possible to perceive the effects of this naturalization in language use, at the moment that Google becomes a verb equivalent to "searching the internet" and amalgamates the other social, educational and cultural devices that also promote the circulation of discourses.

Vaidhyanathan (2012) discusses this revolution and coined the term Googlization stressing that "Google has penetrated our culture [...] it is on the threshold of becoming the Web itself" (VAIDHYANATHAN, 2012, p.30) alerting us of the illusion created by the neutrality of access to accurate and relevant information through this search engine.

It is in this context of *Googlization* that many of the students admit to being averse to reading classics and do most of their activities in front of a screen, like any other teenager nowadays. Therefore, leading them in Literature classes and awakening the taste for reading may seem like a failure-to-fail challenge, but one must think that those activities, from computer screens and cell phones, involve processes of reading, interpretation and authorship, and even those which are not related to canonical texts, these students are constantly interpreting and producing in this virtual space.

> Even when unaccompanied by encounters, interaction in cyberspace remains a form of communication. But, we have heard it said a few times, some people remain hours "in front of their screens," thus isolating themselves from others. Excesses should certainly not be encouraged. But do we say that someone who reads "remains for hours before the paper"? No. Because the person who reads is not relating to a sheet of cellulose, it is in contact with a speech, a voice, a universe of meanings that it contributes to build, to inhabit with its reading. The fact that the text is displayed on the screen does not change anything. It is also a matter of reading, although, as we have seen, with hyperdocuments and general interconnection the reading modalities tend to change. (LEVI, 2014, p. 165)[4]

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4   The quotes were translated from the Portuguese version.

Although the author points out that the medium[5] has no impact on the reading process, we know that it imposes certain restrictions on the reader and, above all, it is not neutral, so it is important to point out that the objective of this project was to add several production supports so students could explore digital space in an authorial and critical way.

In order to understand our students we should listen to their needs, understand their reading background and especially the reality that surrounds them. Often, the curriculum that conducts Brazilian Literature classes in High School is drawn according *vestibular* lists which disregard the main subject in this process, the reader.

We will not enter into the discussion of standardized test, such as college entrance exams, but we need to think about how these instruments end up being decisive on what is taught at school, ignoring unique characteristics that differ millions[6] of students in their classrooms.

A school that aims at a classificatory, and therefore exclusionary, examination presents an antidemocratic approach to teaching. The constructed image of the School-Product, especially in High School, as just a bridge whose purpose is to achieve approval in the entrance examination, transfers the business logic to learning and transforms a Right into a commodity.

This is a logic of perversion of the role of the School, a space where evaluation should be part of the learning process, welcoming and not excluding, especially when it comes to reading and autonomy of the reader.

Another aspect of the market logic that ends up slipping to School is the constant search for results in the shortest time possible. Currently, bilingual schools and education systems for children's education prematurely aiming to develop test skills not needed until the end of High School are proliferating in Brazil. This causes an essential part of the learning process, experience through contemplation, to be silenced by the discourse of the result. Often, parents invest in the development of their children, thinking only and exclusively in their insertion in the job market.

In contrast to this rampant race for "success" in passing the vestibular, we have the pleasure of reading. Reading takes time, demands concentration and reflection. The reader needs to get involved with the narrative and get carried away with the characters. Reading does not respect the logic of the market; it only obeys the logic of contemplation: the narrative and the reality. It is not uncommon at preparatory courses for entrance exams to work with summaries of classical books to speed up reading, sequestering this precious time that the reader needs to develop their reading skills

It would be the anti-experience that Bondía (2002) attributes to Digital Technologies, but we also see it happening at schools,

> Information is not experience. Moreover, information leaves no room for experience, it is almost the opposite of experience, almost an anti-experience. That is why the contemporary emphasis on information, on being informed, and all the rhetoric intended to constitute us as informant and informed subjects; the information does nothing but cancel our possibilities of experience. (BONDÍA, 2002, p.21)

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5   Based on Regis Debray's definition of midiology in *Manifestos Midiológicos*. "I call 'midiology' the discipline that deals with higher social functions in their relations with the technical structures of transmission [...] The symbolic productions of a society at time cannot be explained independently of the technologies of memory used at the same time" (1995, p.21).

6   In 2016, 8.1 million students'enrollments were registered in the High School, according to INEP's website <http://download.inep.gov.br/educacao_basica/censo_escolar/notas_estatisticas/2017/notas_estatisticas_censo_escolar_da_educacao_basica_2016.pdf> 27/10/2017

Therefore, a project that uses Digital Technolôgies of Communication and Information (DTCI) may seem somewhat antagonistic, addressing the importance of contemplation and the time of experience, but one of the objectives of this project is to appropriate technology in a critical way, reflecting on its use and studying possibilities of transforming the time in the classroom into moments of contemplation and experience.

Dewey (2007) and Bondía (2002) relate time, experience and learning as inseparable points, and digital technologies often seem to shake this triad when they accelerate our interactions demanding immediacy. You need to have quick results, you have to access the information, internalize it and share it without allowing yourself time to experiment and learn.

It is not possible to enjoy reading a classic with the immediacy of the internet and this can be a challenge for our students, accustomed to clicks and *likes*. In addition, reading is a solitary process very different from the virtual world in which we have the illusion of never being alone.

When thinking about this project, I read and reread the authors above, trying to design a path that would allow for the experience and contemplation of reading, in a meaningful and shared way, in which students could be authors within the virtual space, transforming their own contemplation into a dialogue with their readings.

I believe that my experience as a second language teacher has helped me to rethink the way I work in my mother tongue. Teachers and researches of English as a Second Language (ESL) aim to associate language with the communicative act, as Leffa (2012) points out,

> Those who see the language, not as an independent system, but as social practice, cannot dismantle it in smaller elements, because they see it linked to the community that uses it; the language, in this perspective, does not exist outside the communicative event that constitutes it. [...] In the same way, we cannot perceive the language if it is not being used by somebody in some kind of interaction with the other. (LEFFA, 2012, p.392)

If we think of a book as the beginning of this communicative event that serves as a link to social practice of reflection on reading and the reality that surrounds us, it is possible to use the TDCI to amplify this possibility of interaction.

Evaluation will be addressed throughout this conversation, but we will start with some basic questions like: Who are my students and what would they like to read?

Some will say that the School is obliged to present classical works so that the students can have the opportunity to read them at least once in their lives. I agree and quote Ana Maria Machado,

> Of course, today teaching is different and the world is different. It is not conceivable that children are put to study Latin and Greek, or to read heavy, full, original versions of ancient books .... We just do not have to fall on the opposite end. That is, to think that any reading of classics by young people has lost its meaning and therefore, in these times of primacy of the image and domination of the different screens, the word printed on paper must be abandoned. (MACHADO, 2002, p.12)

The author mentions two important points for our reflection; the first one concerns the reading of the complete and original works, and I agree that depending

on the age group, we must work on versions to introduce the small reader into the pleasurable world of literature; however, with High School students we can choose titles that allow the work be devoured and well digested.

However, some books on the prestigious lists of college entrance exams are challenging even for the most avid readers. How many of our students have the autonomy to explore *Macunaíma* by Mario de Andrade and understand the depth of this narrative, without resorting to long internet searches?

There is nothing wrong with research: it is extremely enriching, and those who pinpoint school duties are likely to respond that it is the teacher's role to guide the student, deciphering reading with him, and encouraging that search for knowledge. Once again, I agree, but do we want a student who depends on the teaching figure to read or one who can walk an autonomous path and build his or her own reading background?

This should be done in elementary school, some people will affirm. "If the reader finds knowledge with a good number of classic narratives from a very early age, these eventual encounters with the masters of the Portuguese language will have a good chance of happening almost naturally afterwards." (MACHADO, 2002, p.13). However, is not High School a cycle of Basic Education?

Another point that Machado (2002) places is the predilection for screens to words printed on paper. Our students are increasingly leaning on electronic devices to study and entertain themselves, and if apparatuses become so present, I wonder if I should not invite them to my class, using them as a doorway or as a space to take the discussion about reading out of the physical limits of the School.

The questions, presented above, show that I am aware of recurring concerns posed by parents, co-workers and even students, and precisely because I consider them, I have developed the project I will describe below, with the intention of providing more autonomy to High School students so that they can appropriate the role of reader, constructing their own meanings for what we call literary classics.

I must say that this report is not a lesson or a plan to achieve success with the use of TDIC, but rather a process of reflection on the teaching practice and the path we choose to draw with our students when we are faced with the dilemma of digital screens versus books .

Still relying on language teaching researchers, I cite the sense of plausibility, Prabhu (1990), to justify that this subjective aspect of teaching involves much more than a method or a recipe. It is up to the teacher to reflect on the needs of each of his classes, to adapt activities and to suggest readings.

Therefore, the purpose of this narrative is to propose a new look at our approach to literature teaching, often guided by standardized tests. Social Media and all the development of the project will serve as an illustration for a deeper discussion: Is it possible use digital means to promote reading autonomy?

The project *Readings Stories*

As described above, the project was developed with 3rd year high school students who had access to cell phones or computers and this enabled the first part of the project. This step was developed outside the classroom as a concomitant exercise in the reading process, intended to be developed as a homework assignment.

The project name comes from a tool, *Stories*, available on the *Instagram* with which users can take pictures that will be erased in 24 hours. At first, I thought about using this tool to record the reading process of the students, but since the registry would be erased, I decided to publish photos (or small videos) in the Instagram feed, which, in addition to making it possible to record more permanently, hashtags that optimize the search within this form of Social Media.

I predicted that in proposing the use of Social Media, some students would be resistant because they would probably not want to link the content they produce in private life to academic life. Resistance that seems to reinforce the idea that what is produced at School is detached from real life, as something artificial that would not have dialogue with daily life. I suggested that each student create a unique, yet publicly accessible account for project development and from the 103 students enrolled in the participating classes, only six did not create accounts or produce any content related to reading.

In order for the students to feel part of the whole process, they were responsible for choosing the book title through voting. I proposed a list of five books whose theme communicated with the age group of the readers and was also pertinent to the programmatic content proposed in the annual planning.

As junior high school students and studying Brazilian Modern Literature and its characteristics, I proposed the following works: JD Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye Field," Helena Morley's "My Girl's Life," "Mayombe," Pepetela, "Captains of the Sand" by Jorge Amado.

Two of these titles are on FUVEST 2018's mandatory reading list and were purposely chosen, since one of the hypotheses of the project was that students would choose the book according to indications for vestibular tests.

The most voted work, however, was the novel by J.D. Salinger and because it is an North American novel, I proposed that students try to establish dialogues with Brazilian books that they had already read.

Throughout the project, they produced several posts[7] in which they cited books, films and songs that converse with the narrative of the main character, showing that they were able to interpret and establish relationships between different artistic manifestations.

These posts were photos or small videos, followed by excerpts from the book and personal comments. Although they were free to comment on their impressions, some criteria were adopted to validate publications such as the following: use of appropriate language to the academic environment, respect for colleagues' production and weekly access frequency.

Students were to publish at least two posts per week and add in the caption the following hashtags: #stories_de_leituras, #literatura, #ifspcubatao that would make it easier to search for productions related to the project. One of the hashtags, #literatura, is already widely used within the Social Media and was adopted for the project to attract users who were not necessarily students of the federal institute.

Some students reported that this increased the number of interactions; however, the most significant interaction was from the colleagues involved in the project.

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7   It is important to note that this phase of production was done outside of class hours, so that they could have the time of experience (as pointed out by Bondía) and could reflect on their posts as a process of authorship.

I created an *Instagram* account myself and kept my reading diary respecting the same criteria set for the students. I also used the account to indicate readings or videos available on the internet that talked about the chosen work.

At the end of the 4 weeks, the first phase regarding the use of *Instagram* was completed and the students participated in a debate in which they were to share their conclusions, both reading and the process of postings.

Who read best?

The evaluation, unlike the exam that emphasizes this classification, is a process that is "characterized by its diagnosis and inclusion" (LUCKESI, 2014, p.25), and therefore must consider the singularities of the evaluated. It is an essential moment in the learning process and should not be dissociated from its purpose of reception.

The inheritance of the technical conception of examinations distances us from the possibility of providing a moment of collective sharing and construction, because issues of classificatory order undermine this opportunity.

Pragmatic questions can be measured and classified, but how can one define who has read better or who has read correctly when considering the student's individual interpretation?

That is why, in particular, I believe that the reading process cannot be measured at a time of watertight evaluation and that this kind of requirement inhibits and drives readers away. Most of the classical books allow several discussions that only make sense if shared, not only between teacher and students mediated by a test, but with every classroom as a community.

Nevertheless, we must evaluate. Our system requires that students be classified by grades and from the perspective presented, the most effective way to do this is in a continuous way as proposed in the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education, which point out the possibility of evaluating the performance of students of "various forms, such as the observation and recording of students' activities" (BRASIL, 2013, p.115).

In the project presented, the students were evaluated according to their productions, visual and written, and also by the interaction that they established with the productions of their colleagues. From this process, several questions arose that were used for the second phase, a debate in the classroom.

In this debate, each student had on average two minutes to present his reflections and ask questions of his colleagues. A controlled time was fundamental to enable all students to have the opportunity to present their opinions and to ensure a moment of general debate at the end of the class.

What do the posts say?

At the beginning, students had specific guidelines for content production. These instructions punctuated aspects that would be fundamental for evaluation at the end of the project, but this did not prevent them from working in an autonomous and authorial way as shown by some selected captions reproduced below[8]:

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8   The captions were reproduced exactly as published by the students, with no corrections or change in layout.

1. "4:40 am. After seven successive chapters, I stare at the beginning of the fourteenth and encounter the following passage, which, mixed with the apex chorus? of the song "Famous Last Words" - from my, by the way, favorite band -, made me give that SQUEEZE: "(...) The day was

    beginning to brighten. Wow, I was on the last. No one imagines how depressed I was. It was then

    that I started talking more or less aloud with Allie. Sometimes when I am very depressed,

    I usually do this."

    Funny - not to say tragic - that one of the passages sung at the apex seems to bring the exact opposite of the ideas that surround Holden's mind while depressed.

    I'm not afraid to keep on living

    I'm not afraid to walk this world alone."

2. "I was organizing my internship reports and I thought how cool it was to be a child with no worries other than having fun. I could relate this to both Holden and the Captains of Sand boys. In both works the characters were forced to grow, although Holden is more spoiled than the "meliantes". He even has the will to live alone, but his relationship with Phoebe, his little sister, shows how much he likes to be a child."

3. "Beginning my reading, I end up having the same reaction I read in Postmodern Memoirs of Brás Cubas: I am surprised by the language and how a novel of 1952 can be as current as if it were made in 2017. This timelessness is reinforced by the so the protagonist Holden has his vision of the world, with his complaints and his youthful squalor. At the moment I see his difficulty fit in, at only his seventeen years, his attitudes divide between a child and an adult, so I will leave a reminiscence in my photo of the way he treats Ackley: childishness!"

4. "I did not expect that, all that Holden's bullshit on the train with Ernie's mom to me, was way beyond that little talk" for pure sport. " It really seemed that he had been attracted in some way by the madman's mother there, and that he wanted, as he says himself, "to take care of her right there." This I found very strange, in the end, the age difference was huge and he the minor. I can understand that he may have been attracted to the woman, but his behavior made me weird.

    Oh, I also found it interesting that Vogue was a famous magazine from the time the book was written. The photo is from a magazine from the time the book was launched."

5. "One thing that is always common to me in reading is feeling the weather or imagining one, and I always take that feeling and carry it to the rest of the narrative. It is as if it were the emotional tone of the story, that in "The Catcher in the Rye" is given by a cold and solitary climate, (I felt it very much when I read "The Ocean at the End of the Road", that has a very " blue "). I think the most precious thing is the visit he makes to Professor Spencer. As a student I highly value the student teacher relationship and in the case of Holden, maybe this will help.

    I confess that until now I identify more with the teacher than with Holden kkkk himself. "(...) there are old people to chuchu, like the old Spencer, who is in the greatest happiness only because he bought a blanket (...)". I'm just that kind of person, but I get even more cheerful with non-stick cookware."

6. "Making a few comparisons, the lead character in" The Catcher In The Rye "reminded me of 2 books I had contact with earlier (one of them being

discussed in literature class). In the 3 books present in the photo, we have as protagonists young boys who are excluded from society in different ways, however, in each of them the solution comes in another way (or does not come). As Captains of the Sand was a book addressed in the classroom, I will speak of Martin Page's book "How I Became Stupid". He brings a humor and irony similar to that of Salinger in "The Catcher In The Rye", in addition it has as protagonist also a young boy who is not accepted in the society and rebellious. Unlike Holden, Antoine (the protagonist of Martin Page's book) seeks his acceptance into society by becoming a stupid person (do not confuse with stupid). Some aspects of this "stupidity", in my opinion, are present in Holden, but, unlike Antoine, who chose that, Holden ends up being that way by nature."

The examples cited above illustrate how students have appropriated the project's goal of visual creation (with photos and videos) as well as the texts produced in the legends, conversing with their experiences of literary and world readings - including excerpts from songs, questions about responsibility, sexuality and affections, enabling a dialogue that goes beyond the reading experience and establishes a community bond through life shared experiences.

What I learned from this project

Initially, the students showed some resistance to using a Social Network for school purposes. I believe that this gesture shows the split between personal life and academic life, since the use of RS is primarily associated with moments of entertainment.

Some students also questioned whether a formal evaluation, such as analogic test, would not be more pertinent, reinforcing the traditional school paradigm rooted in students who spent much of their trajectory conditioned to moments of watertight evaluation.

Another aspect to be considered is that this project required periodicity and personal interpretations, since the student was to point out excerpts from the book, making it difficult to use abstracts available on the internet.

It was interesting to note that the choice of the book with students' participation also influenced the engagement of reading. Many of them commented that the plain and usual language adopted by J.D. Salinger deconstructs the idea that a classic book is difficult to read.

The teenagers got involved with the narrative of the main character, Holden, for sharing doubts and reflections pertinent to this age group. This identification appeared significantly in the captions of Instagram postings and at the end of the project when they were able to discuss questions about language (slang usage) and Holden's maturation process in the classroom, relating those topics to their own experiences personal.

The students experienced two moments that extended the project proposal to the entire school community. Firstly, when the literature monitor built up a representation of the project in our public school board, where virtual connectivity was represented by colored lines linking the comments. There was also a publication of a note on the institutional website describing the project to the community. These actions reinforced the importance of reading for those students who, to a certain extent, felt valued as participants in the project.

In the end, they seemed surprised that the book they had chosen could be considered a classic and studied at school and this made me, as a teacher, rethink the process of choosing the books suggested for my High School students.

The innovative use of digital environments as reading journals was also an aspect that enabled a discussion about the impacts of Social Networks on teenagers' interactions and how they perceive these environments, developed primarily for the propagation of the simulacrum[9] that perpetuates aspects of postmodernity and consolidate that "the society of transparency is a society without poets, without seduction and without metamorphosis" (HAN, 2017, p.159)

Using *Instagram* was a way to develop a shared reading journal in which they could create, access and share their impressions, keeping that experience alive even after the end of the project and establishing a closer and meaningful relationship, in addition to evaluation of the reading process.

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9   Based on Han's (2017) definition of this concept.