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Gamebooks in Classroom: The Practice of Bloomian Synthesis in Portuguese Language Classes in Elementary School

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1. INTRODUCTION

Young British readers in the 1980s experienced a growing lack of interest in previously attractive literary genres such as fantasy, science fiction and others. The British publisher Penguin's bet to innovate its book catalog and rescue the interest of young readers was to offer them books that were also considered games, and so the series *Fighting Fantasy* (1982-1995) emerged.

After a few weeks of low sales, the success of these gamebooks has increased astronomically to the point that practically all young people have at least heard of this new type of book (Green 14). After a few years, other countries rushed to translate these titles, and in just over a decade they achieved worldwide sales (Katz 82).

Taking into account that context of the past century, it was thought to elaborate a school project involving these textual hybrids that were so successful for the generation of readers before today. The gamebooks are not a mere experimental that was relevant in the last century, and they still seem to be novelty and originality for many current readers.

With this, it was thought to apply the gamebook to current students to motivate them to read something different and also to perform a really meaningful activity to take into their lives.

2. IS IT A GAME OR A BOOK?

For many authors and readers, gamebook, as the name says, is an object that is part game and part book. However, this classification is very generic. According to Silva, a gamebook is a book that offers an interactive narrative to its reader, who is called "reader-player", which presents bifurcations in its plot as if they were paths to be chosen. This reader-player who makes these choices, which bring positive or negative consequences to the protagonist of the story. If we can compare this narrative with a video game, for example, the reader is the one with the joystick in hand, and the protagonist is the character controlled by him/her. An example can be known below:

> 26
>
> You open the door a fraction, just enough to see that the room is full of vicious-looking Attack Dogs, growling and barking loudly. There must be at least ten of them. There is a bunch of keys hanging on a nail at the back of the room. The slavering beasts are frantically trying to get out. Some of them begin chewing at the door frame. If you want to go inside the room to get the keys, turn to *143*. If you would rather shut the door and walk on, turn to *276* (Livingstone 2012).

The reader-player, in the above example, at the end of the playful reading of the 26th reference - the name commonly given to short scenes of this kind of narrative - should choose to go directly to the 143rd or 276th reference, facing the consequences of his choices. After this choice, other narrative junctions will appear to him/her.

Still in this comparison, this narrative, as well as a video game, also has elements of games. In this case, these elements were taken from the first *Role-playing games* - popularly known as RPG - such as the use of six-sided dice, paper, pencil and eraser. This is because the reader-player controls the hero´s decisions in the narrative and can hurt him/herself, collect clues and objects, meet allies or enemies, test his/her ability and luck in tests that require them, among other trials in this fictional world. With this, his initial values vary constantly and memory is not always the best solution to maintain the active immersion and coherence of the reader-player.
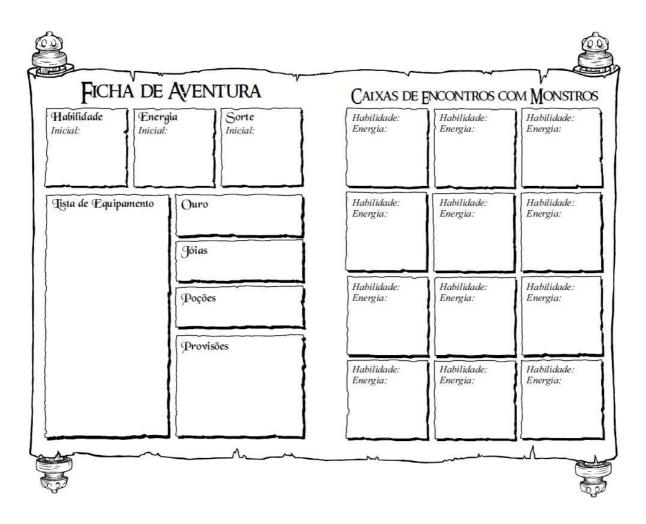
Figure1: A character sheet sample

Source: Livingstone 2013.

At the same time that the gamebook has the ramified narrative already known by readers of *Rayuela* (1963), by Júlio Cortázar, or more recently by the interactive episode of *Black Mirror* series, known as *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018), it differs from them precisely by bringing in itself a simplified system of RPG rules. Unlike the so-called "table RPG" that teach their players their rules through hundreds of pages and days of dedication, the rules of a gamebook are quickly learned, because its idea is to be "more book" and "less game". Therefore, reading is the main focus, and not so much the charge for assimilation of extensive rules.
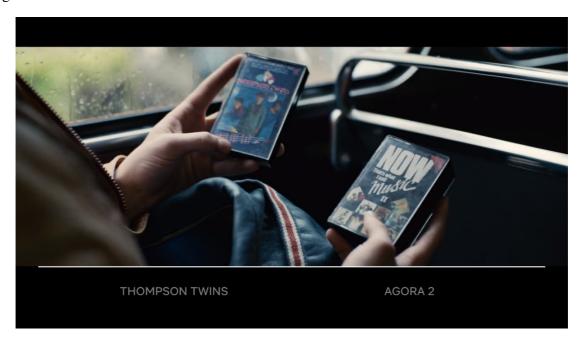
Figure 2: the 2nd bifurcation of*Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*

Source: Print screen from *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* ("Bandersnatch" variable length).

Many other hybrid genres have emerged from the gamebook, such as the interactive phone call, game-comics and interactive TV program. This only further proves the power that the gamebook has exercised and continues to exercise through interactivity and the active participation of its target audience in what it is offered.

3.LIKE AN ADVENTURE IN A PARTY, BUT ALONE

The project with the gamebooks was built and executed in two classes of 8th elementary grade classes, in a private school located in the city of Paulínia/SP during the second semester of the year 2016.The idea was to think about how to do a literary adaptation for the gamebookformat. This type of activities could be done thanks to the school's openness to differentiate projects that would be outstanding in the lives of students. Its goal was to go beyond the vacation mandatory reading, with easy tests that would request information located both in the book and in virtual pages about the required texts.

It was decided to use some of the *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks for the school project on reading and text production. Thanks to the pioneering of the *Fighting Fantasy* series in the history of gamebooks. In addition, this series was the most translated, marketed and sold in Brazil and the world, and is considered a high-quality gamebook series for gamebook consumers, belonging to the "Golden Age" of gamebook (Silva44). In Brazil, this series is found for sale by Jambô Publishing House, and it is sometimes found in large bookstores and

available at most of the websites responsible for the book sales, such as *Amazon*, or second-hand book sales, such as the *Estante Virtual*.

This task was based on the Bloom´s Taxonomy "synthesis", its 5[th]category. The "Bloomian synthesis" is useful for the student who wishes to be creative, in the sense of being the owner of new authentic creations. It consists in joining parts of something to form a whole. This recombination of examined fragments, from a new perspective, results in a new product. This joining of pieces of something provides something brand new, impossibleto be perceived previously (Bloom et al. 137).

The children´s versions of the books *Frankenstein* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* were chosen to be adapted. These choices were made because they are also books that are easy to access and acquire, and can be read during vacations without any major problems, thanks to the language used, which is easy to assimilate and its subject matter addresses issues such as science fiction and horror. As in the year of application of this project the school demanded the work with child and youth adaptations of literary classics, each book reading was charged to a respective room.

The project was executed in five stages:

- Step 1: Presentation of the project to the classes

Students were divided into groups of 5 or 6 members each. This decision was made since the classes had an average of 30 students each. With this, the idea was to form 5 to 6 groups per class. An uncompromising research was asked to be done at home in order to sharpen their curiosity for the "gamebook" nomenclature. Some search results from the internet were brought to the room and some gamebooks from the mediator's private collection were distributed, one per group. His intention was to make each student know in practice what the structure of a gamebook is like, and the contact with the series that gave rise to this literature seemed to be a good option for that.

Having in hand - literally - the model to be used for the project and keeping in mind the reading done during the school vacation of the motivating literary book, the work of each group would be to select a cutout of the original text to be converted into the interactive format. They were suggested to choose the part they found most interesting or the one closest to an adventure narrative, with an impacting action or several actions happening. From the choice of the excerpt, which could be a few pages or even whole chapters, the groups would

be free to synthesize and recreate in any way they wished, making additions or deletions to this adaptive process.

- Step 2: the adaptation itself

The second stage lasted until almost the end of the semester. A gap was opened for some texts to be without their rules systems, since the text is more important than the numbers in the classes of Portuguese language. The narrative extension also needed to be reduced.

- Step 3: the end of the adventures

What the groups produced, in the end, were solo adventures, which according to Silva (2019) are gamebooks whose main characteristic is to have less than 50 pages in length, and their system of rules being optional. Compiled, this set of solo adventures would compose a "collection of solo adventures". The model would be very similar to the books of the series *Viver ou Morrer* of the Brazilian writer Athos Beuren, the main figure of the gamebooks in the country. The project cannot be completed due to the insufficient ammount of interactive texts, but it has had good public acceptance.

An example of a solo adventure can be known below:

> THE LOST TREASURE
> You have just entered an abandoned castle centuries ago in search of a treasure that is said to be hidden in the haunted place. The door closes behind your back and now you are on your own. Go to 1.
> 1
> You light a torch and remove spiderwebs from the front of your face as you walk down a humid, dark corridor. Suddenly you notice a wooden door ajar on the left side of the passage, but at the same time you hear something crawling ahead, after a right turn. If you want to enter the door, go to 2. If you decide to follow the corridor and investigate the noise, go to 3.
> 2
> You enter a tight room where a skeleton is sitting on a throne. Next to it is a large closed chest. On the skeleton's finger is a gold ring shaped like a star. If you want to get the ring, go to 4. If you try to open the chest, go to 5.
> 3

When you turn the corner, you come across a giant leech. There is no escape. It devours you. Your adventure ends here!

4

By removing the ring from the skeleton, it creates life, gets up and attacks it. You will have to face it! To win, roll two dice until you get the result seven. Each time you fail, you are hurt and you lose one point of Life (you have ten points of Life, if you reach zero, it's your end). If you win, go to 6.

5

The trunk is locked. The clasp has a star-shaped knob, so you decide to take the skeleton ring to try to use it as a key. Go to 4.

6

After defeating the skeleton, you take the ring and use it to open the chest. When you open it, however, you are surprised to see that, in place of the bottom, there is a ladder that leads to another point of the castle. A secret passage! You enter the chest and go down the steps to a room full of gold and jewels! Congratulations, you won! (Beuren 32-33).

It is noticeable that the solo adventure above is of fast consumption and easy absorption, and the attraction of the student productions was precisely to work with the literary, reinventing characters, promoting the re-reading of scenes and events. It was confirmed that every adaptation involves the creation itself.

- Step 4: Rethinking the mission

Students should answer a questionnaire about the feasibility of the project. Your information can be found below:

Table 1: questionnaire questions

QUESTION	KIND OF ANSWER
1. Before the project started, had you ever heard about gamebook?	- Multiple choice ( ) Yes ( ) No
2. How do you rate your contact with the gamebook?	- Multiple choice and discursive ( ) Very good ( ) Good ( ) so-so

	( ) Uninteresting Why?
3. Would you buy or borrow a gamebook for your vacation or school term?	• Multiple choice ( ) Yes ( ) No
4. Would you refer the gamebook to friends and family?	• Multiple choice ( ) Yes ( ) No
5. What is the most attractive topic in a gamebook?	• Multiple choice and (possible) discursive ( ) Fantasy ( ) Sci-fi ( ) Horror ( ) Other If you chose "other", say which one.
6. If you could choose between the printed book or in digital format (pdf, for example), which would be the easiest/easy to read?	• Multiple choice and discursive ( ) Printed ( ) Digital Why?
7. What are the greatest facilities you have found in adapting the classical reading required by the school for the gamebook? List as many as you find necessary.	• Discursive
8. What are the greatest difficulties you have encountered in adapting the classical reading required by the school for the gamebook? List as many as you find necessary.	• Discursive
9. What do you think is feasible to do with the final product of your work?	• Multiple choice ( ) Expose to other classrooms of the school ( ) Publish in ebook ( ) Print publication ( ) Discard
10. Were you satisfied with the final result of your	• Discursive

group's work? Justify it.	
11. Would you do the project again the following year, with a theme more suitable for the age group and content worked in room?	• Multiple choice anddiscursive ( ) Yes ( ) No Justify.
12. Were you attracted by the fact that the gamebook presented you with a more playful reading?	• Multiple choice ( ) Yes ( ) No
13. Which book you would like to find in gamebook format?	• Discursive
14. After the project, did you notice any gamebook being sold somewhere?	• Multiple choice and (possible) discursive ( ) Yes ( ) No If YES,where it was?
15. A new gamebook costs in the range of R$ 20-25[i] each, and one used varies from R$ 10-20[ii] each. What do you think of this price?	• Multiple choice ( ) Expensive ( ) Fair price ( ) Cheap ( ) I´m not used to buy books
16. You have a reading habit?	• Multiple choice and (possible) discursive ( ) Yes ( ) No If YES, what do you like to read?
17. The reading of the gamebook stimulated you to know more about the classic worked in room?	• Multiple choice and discursive ( ) Yes ( ) No Why?
18. The reading of the gamebook has brought you something good for your personal life?	• Multiple choice ( ) I think I've improved my

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[i]₹262 – 328 (aprox..).
[ii]₹131 – 262 (aprox..).

	imagination
	( ) I think I improved on writing
	( ) I think I've improved on reading
	( ) I think I improved my logical reasoning
	( ) I think I had more desire to read
	( ) I don't think I've made any progress
19. Board RPG evolved to book RPGs, which evolved to card games, which evolved to video game RPGs, which generated another series of new game types. Do you think that the gamebook can evolve? What can it transform or create in the future?	• Discursive
20. In great meetings of geek culture (whose themes are anime, RPG, comics, etc.) you would visit a booth of gamebook publishers to check their releases?	• Multiple choice and discursive ( ) Yes ( ) No

Source: adaptation made from the original teacher´s questionary

The majority confirmed the positive reception of it, although they recognized the difficulty of the required commitment that took them out of their comfort zone for a good cause. Through it, it was also possible to know what the students would find easier to adapt, if they would repeat the project, more experienced, and what their literary preference is.

• Intermittent step: textual revisions

Fortnightly textual revisions were made of what had been produced so far by the mediator. At the same time as the groups (re)thought about the adaptation process, they corrected the flaws in the text and in its structure.

4. AFTER THE DICE ROLLS: FINAL RESULTS

Based on the experiences of the students and the feedback gathered by the questionnaire, the project challenge met their expectations. Involving them in a game that involves overcoming risks and skills in a fictional activity (Caillois), new to this type of audience, proved to be something playful and fun.

The benefits of this type of activity can be many, ranging from increasing interest in reading itself to solving problem situations. Projects like this need to be more publicized in the mainstream media so that the school environment does not focus only on lists of exercises that involve knowing rules, nomenclatures and formulas and demonstrating how they were understood.

At first, each group would have a gamebook to read as much as they wanted in order to have a structure in mind for the construction of their solo adventure. However, the interest was so great that in addition to testing their performance a few times in each gamebook, some members sought out other "model" gamebooks from outside groups, which was also beneficial, though unexpected. With this, the circulation of gamebooks among the groups was also witnessed, which was not previously expected. Finally, it was noted that there was more interest and concentration in reading the classic book for the realization of playful creation activity.

With active methodologies being implemented little by little, the taxonomy of educational goals should be more and more present in teaching. Moving "upstairs" of Bloom's taxonomy is making the school a more attractive environment and giving meaning to what the student learns.

This synthesis activity required more effort from the students and precisely because of this it could be remarkable in their lives, both for taking them out of their comfort zone and for stimulating creativity through reading, playing and contact with the mother language.

5. THE RETURN OF THE HEROS: A CONCLUSION

The gamebooks were the result of RPG, which use fantasy narratives, science fiction, horror, among other literary genres, which are very popular among adult and children's audiences. Allied to this literary attraction and a game system, this textual hybrid part-game-part-book can be of great interest to young readers who seek something "innovative" in their daily readings (Ceccantini andSilva311). Using the gamebook in the classroom, both in

Portuguese language classes and in other school subjects, cannot yet be considered the best tool, but it has proved to be an important pedagogical resource.

However, the fight against retrograde and limiting education is still great. The dissemination of the gamebook culture must be part of the student's highest position, so that there are no impediments in the realization of projects like this one, because of prejudice or fear of what is still unknown. The media can also contribute to the dissemination of what this textual hybrid is, as well as the publishing market can foster contests for new talents in this literary genre in search of, who knows, one day popularizing the gamebook as it was at the end of the last century.

One advantage of the gamebook is that it does not take much effort to be applied in the classroom. It is known that Brazil and India have many educational problems in common, and one of them is the lack of financial resources destined for education (Gindra). With the acquisition of some gamebooks and a lot of teachers´creativity, good results can be obtained with few rupees spent on these interactive books.

There is much to be done for quality education, and projects impacting on student life can have a positive effect on the stimulation of ascension on the "bloominan ladder". If the student today seeks an interactive and participatory education in which he is not a passive member of the process, the gamebook can be a good choice.

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