

“I want, I can, I’ll do it!”: Proposal of a 2D animated television series for asthmatic children

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Abstract

“I want, I can, I’ll do it!” is the series’ title that orientates the communication and languages of the protagonists of the series, Rita and Pedro as well as their companion Blá, of the themes and sceneries where they act in.

The present proposal was developed on the context of a Master’s Degree in Design of 2011, in Universidade de Aveiro. The fields related to the various options in the creation and elaboration of the visual language of the characters, sceneries and chosen themes are: design, illustration and 2D animation; the pragmatics of the communication, ludicity and learning; the interests and motivations of six and seven years old children; and the manifestation of the pathology of asthma. This communication also means to emphasize the characters of the series and how they communicate.

Keywords: Communication, Ludicity, Learning

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present and bring to discussion the visual language created on the context of the Master’s Degree in Design in Universidade de Aveiro for a television series *I want, I can, I’ll do it!*, directed to the general children and youth audience, and focusing on 6 and 7 years old children with asthma.

In this project, the designer assumes the role of: will manager; interpreter of the available information, working it in a point of view of the communication with the audience; and promoter of a particular form of emotion that motivates the appropriation and memorization of shared contents.

The need to act as a will manager appears with the requirements of working with various specialists, namely doctors – who have the knowledge, but don’t always know how to select and translate the scientific information considering the target, and aren’t always receptive to the idea of cooperating with other specialists even if to develop better strategies of interpersonal communication. Working in interdisciplinary teams requires the maintenance of harmony between the participants, so to ensure the project’s quality (Pagani, 2008). Obviously the designer isn’t expected to know everything about every field of study, but is expected to intervene as a coordinator, hiring specialists and using information regarding the needs of the project (Frascara, 2004:3-4). As interpreter of the information, the designer is expected to translate and simplify the information transmitted by the doctor in appropriate representations for the aimed age group, highlighting the most important details. Finally, one should be able to appeal, through the illustration present in animation and through the actions of the characters, to an emotional connection from the child, in order to create empathy and promote the memorization of shared knowledge. Regarding this, Raquel Pelta (2004:118) questions how design can touch someone’s heart and

declares that the user/reader/spectator must be taken into account because the comprehension of the message is facilitated when an emotional response is provoked. Following this line of thought, André Ricard (2000:106) says that the Human has the brain capacity to feel and register experiences, upbringing and academic education, and considers that, by provoking emotions on the target, the memories’ record may be incited and the learning process facilitated.

One of the theoretical conceptual frameworks orientating the project’s options in general and, particularly, the creation of the visual language, is the field of study of ludicity, by Conceição Lopes (1998; 2004) and ludicity design (2013) by the same author.

The theory of ludicity developed by the referred author was built upon the pragmatic of the communication (Watzlawick et al, 1967) in 1998 and guides the project conceptually.

According to Conceição Lopes, ludicity may efficiently promote the probability of the communication, learning and change. Ludicity, says Lopes (2004), is a human condition, something inherent to the human being, manifested in various ways: like play, game, game playing, toys, leisure, recreation, fest, humor, construction of ludic artifacts; all of these manifestations produce results on the self and on the social learning of the human coexistence on the knowledge of oneself, on recognizing the others, sharing with others, recognizing the effects of inevitability of the influence and responsibility of the choices of ludic interaction with others, and its effects on oneself, on others and on the world.

...no conhecimento de si próprios, no reconhecimento dos outros, na partilha com os outros, no reconhecimento dos efeitos da inevitabilidade da influência e na responsabilidade pelas escolhas da interação lúdica com outrem e pelos seus efeitos em si próprio, nos outros e no mundo. (Lopes, 2004:80)

She also adds that ludicity, for its consequential nature, implies interpersonal communication, learning and change.

A ludicidade, pela sua natureza consequential, implica comunicação e aprendizagem e mudança. (Lopes, 2004:60)

Learning is the personal construction resulting of an experiential process, inherent to someone and that translates on a change in behavior.

...construção pessoal resultante de um processo experiencial, interior à pessoa e que se traduz por uma modificação de comportamento. Lopes, 2004:63)

And change is the result of the internalized learning, manifested in concrete practices.

The conceptualization of ludicity design is informed by the theoretical connection established between communication and ludicity (Lopes, MCO, 1998). Ludicity design (2004) is a concept that generates knowledge, facilitates the comprehension of manifestations of ludicity, and a foundation to the development of an "intervention-education-investigation" methodology that respects any context because it's a part of it.

Considering this conceptual map it was decided to elaborate a communication proposal that used ludicity to communicate, especially with 6 and 7 years children with asthma through television broadcast. The objectives of the proposal were creating educative audiovisual material that: helps children to develop their capacities; that contributes to understanding the disease considering everything involved, from explaining how the respiratory system to the way it affects the body during a crisis; shares knowledge about symptoms interpretation and control, in order to reduce response time and needed care; informs about danger detection; explains what happens during a medical appointment and the most frequent treatments; encourages the adherence and maintenance of the treatment; explains how to prevent and minimize crisis; and demystifies the disease and the stereotypes connected to it, as a way to promote better self-esteem, self-image and action of the asthmatic children as well as the importance of exercise.

Problematic

For this study, it was taken into account that asthma is an allergic disease that affects 600,000 people in Portugal (Borja-Santos, 2011), from which 200,000 are children. From the 15% of the affected Portuguese children population, 11% are between 6 and 7 years old, and need to be frequently hospitalized. It is also considered that the child is capable of taking part in the control of one's clinic situation from a very early age (according to data by

Associação Portuguesa de Asmáticos, 2009).

Moreover, television is recognized as the most efficient audiovisual communication media: In 2007, 99,3% of the Portuguese households had, at least, one television and, according to *Marktest Audimetria/Media Monitor* of 2008, each Portuguese watched, on average, 3 hours and 35 minutes of television broadcast per day, and the Portuguese population between 4 and 14 years old watched, on average, 2 hours and 52 minutes, 7,7% more than the year before (Pereira, 2009:43). According to *Kids' Power – A Geração Net em Portugal*, it's also a fact that children like and watch a lot of television (Chaves, Mónica; Dutschke, Georg; APEME 2007:39). The authors of this study of the Portuguese context of the Web Generation focus that, even though the internet is an important mean of communication to children, they still dedicate more time to television: about ¾ of the children questioned by the study referred they spent more time watching television than surfing the internet.

...em termos de repartição de tempo, a Televisão parece continuar a ser o foco de atenção privilegiado neste segmento: cerca de ¾ referem despende mais tempo a ver Televisão que a navegar na Internet. (Chaves, Dutschke, 2007:39)

Besides that, when confronted directly with the question of whether they prefer the internet or television, 41% of the children questioned said they preferred television, over 37% who preferred the internet and 22% who liked both.

... no que diz respeito à preferência entre internet e a televisão, quando confrontadas directamente com esta questão, as crianças dividem-se: 41% preferem a televisão e 37% a internet, havendo 22% que gostam tanto de um como do outro meio de comunicação. (Chaves, Dutschke, 2007: 39)

This data reveals the need of a preventive measure that involves the children and supports the deconstruction of stereotypes generally associated to the disease, such as the limitation of open air physical activities and sports' practice, fearing the aggravation of the disease, as André Moreira, responsible for a study on how sport's practice is beneficial to the control and improvement of the disease, defends (Lusa, 2009).

Reinforcing this need, André Moreira concluded that the children that increased their physical activity had a significant improvement in terms of an antibody (immunoglobulin E) that is found in great number in people with allergic diseases (Lusa, 2009). He also defends a regular practice of moderate exercise should be part of the treatment commended by the child's doctor, just as it's done with the medicines.

Taking the exposed problematic into consideration, the present project can become a contribution to make the communication with 6 and 7 years old asthmatic children possible, promoting their participation in the improvement of their own life quality.

As Frascara says:

In sum, the purpose of communication design is to affect the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of people... (Frascara, Jorge. 2004:13).

About the target

The greatest challenge is focusing the project in the reception. The designer must understand the motivations and interests of children with 6 and 7 years old so that the information can be directed more attractively and make an impact in their worlds. The study developed by Chaves and Dutschke, published in *Kid's Power* was taken into account for this matter. It presents us the "Geração Net" (Web Generation): Children born after 1995 (year of the massification of the internet) that master the technology, for they were born with it and accompanied its development. And the main target of this project is part of this generation. According to the book, children of this generation are really smart and can't be overlooked or fed with irrelevant pretensions or outdated concepts (Chaves, Dutschke, 2007: 17) and when communicating with them, one should avoid old-fashioned words and use those closer to their vocabulary. According to the authors, people of this generation present some general cultural characteristics that define them and where they reflect themselves (Chaves, Dutschke, 2007: 90). The members of this generation show independence and autonomy; emotional and intellectual opening; inclusion (in terms of race, gender, culture); open mind and freedom of expression; innovation; concern about their maturity; need and ability to investigate; need for immediacy; sensibility to the corporative interest; and trust and authenticity.

By studying the results of the project developed by the mentioned authors about the motivations and interests of the Portuguese children of 6 and 7, it was concluded that the children targeted by the series were mature and didn't like to be treated like children. They're loyal and sensible to values such as brand ethic and a product's quality and, once deceived, it's really hard to win them back. Between the values they find important, one can find fantasy, love, power, fear, stability and humor. Besides that, children are really social beings, who interact spontaneously with one another, play and learn together. Despite that, television is the activity in which they spend more time, which influences their world and choices the most, and the most transversal activity to the diverse age groups and genders, female and male.

...em termos de repartição de tempo, a Televisão parece continuar a ser o foco de atenção privilegiado neste segmento: cerca de ¾ referem despendem mais tempo a ver Televisão que a navegar na Internet. (Chaves; Dutschke, 2007:39)

Illustration and animation influences

The analysis of illustration and 2D animation graphic languages was one of the tasks that had to be done to achieve and support a visual style for the animation of *I want, I can, I'll do it!*. From the start, there was an influence from animations such as *La Linea* (by Osvaldo Cavandoli, 1972) because of the line that builds the character, actions and environments and the plain background that reacts to the mood of the character; *Peanuts* (by Charles Schulz) for the colors' simplicity and almost plain sceneries, repeated elements and emphasis on the children characters, each one of them with really different characteristics, with whom people can relate; and from the recent *Pocoyo*, with white backgrounds, occasional elements that define the scenery and create perspective and where the focus is given in the characters and their actions. Although, a deeper analysis was needed to understand what were the most used and popular graphic languages and how *I want, I can, I'll do it!* could be somehow original.

To support this need for originality, Frascara says that the image should be visually strong so that it can attract and retain the attention of the observer, differentiating itself from the context that surrounds it (Frascara, Jorge. 2004: 11-13).

In order to find the categories to analyze the different illustrators and animations were taken into account the publications by Wucius Wong, *Fundamentos del Diseño* (1995) and *Principios del diseño en color* (1995) and *Sintaxe da Linguagem Visual* (2003) by Donis A. Dondis. By taking the basic visual elements mentioned by Donis A. Dondis and crossing them with the objective analysis by Wucius Wong (*Fundamentos del Diseño*, 1995) that separated the elements in categories and characterized them clearly, the following principles for an evaluation of graphic languages were found: as conceptual elements, dot, line, plane and volume; as visual elements, shape, size, color and texture; as elements of relation, direction, position, space and gravity; and as practical elements, representation, meaning and function.

The ones taken into account were, essentially, the conceptual and visual elements, separating them in the categories determined by Wong: the dot as shape; straight, curved, broken, irregular, handwritten and conceptual line; line with sharp, knotted, irregular and wavering body; geometric, organic, rectilinear, irregular, handwritten, accidental, positive and negative shapes; contrast found on figures, size, color, texture and gravity; decorative, spontaneous and mechanical texture; and texture created by drawing or painting, print or copy, stain or dye, by cuts or collages. In terms of color, it was considered the publication *Principios del diseño en color* (Wong, 1995) and chosen to indicate black, white, neutral colors (grey tones), primary colors, secondary colors and the contrasting and analogous colors.

By analyzing various illustrators (Bruno Munari, Enzo Mari and Yela Mari, Madalena Matoso, Kveta Pakovská, Katsumi Komagata, Gémeo Luís, Ann and Paul Rand, Sara Midda, Laura Ljungkvist, Dwell Studio and Taro Gomi) the main principles were found: simplicity in the representation; prevalence of organic shapes; a diverse

typology of lines; the use of white; bigger inclination to light tones and strong intensity of primary and secondary colors and color harmony made by contrast.

By analyzing 57 different animations (selected from the *Catalogue Guide 2009 – Children's and youth programming screenings*, taking into account cases of 2D animation for children with ages close to 6 and 7 years old) similar tendencies could be observed: the simplicity of the figure and sceneries is maintained; there's the same tendency in terms of colors, although with a greater preference for the color harmony made by analogy; the positive shapes were mostly organic and irregular and the lines were broken, curved and irregular.

The series and the characters

Finally, the language of the series was established and characters created. *I want, I can, I'll do it!* intends to be a series of great simplicity, that stands out for its illustrations and explains, synthetically, considering the target audience's ages (6 and 7 years old) and, through image, health related topics. The images to be emphasized appear in color over a white background and come forth to a closer shot, contrasting with the element of lesser importance appearing only in line as silhouettes on the background. Finally, the environments (such a park or the school playground) are defined by sound, making the series richer without introducing visual elements that could dissipate the attention.

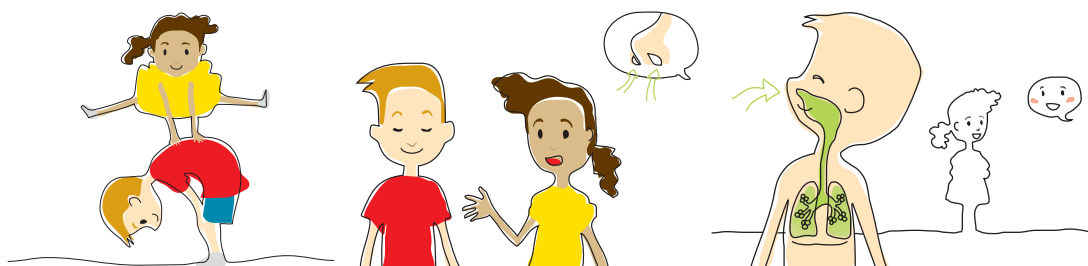
The series is focused in two characters, Rita and Pedro, who share their experiences. Rita is a 6 years old girl, a tomboy, that loves to move around a

lot, runs, climbs trees, plays ball games, dances and jumps in the puddles. When her protective parents want her to stay home and play with dolls instead of going outside, she gets upset and, although she obeys, it's not very willingly. She's grumpy, active, impatient, a little impulsive and very curious. Usually, she wears a lot of yellow. Pedro is an energetic 7 years old boy, who loves to run and jump, winter and water. He doesn't like to stay still or leave his home during winter wrapped up in too many coats. He's a little shy and calmer than Rita and he tries to be obedient and well-behaved, but he can't control the desire of running around and do mischief. He is usually dressed in blue and red.

Blá is the third character, shaped as a little speech balloon that morphs itself and assumes new representations and has a calm, delicate and rhythmic adult voice. In the narrative, this character represents the conscience and appears when Pedro and Rita need help, advice or explanations about complex things. It's generally a white balloon with rosy cheeks, changing his color according to the situations or Rita and Pedro's states of mind: for example, when they're sad, it reflects it in its expression and assumes a grey color just as they do; when it sees them happy about something, it assumes a positive green tone. It may also assume shapes, depending on what he is explaining.

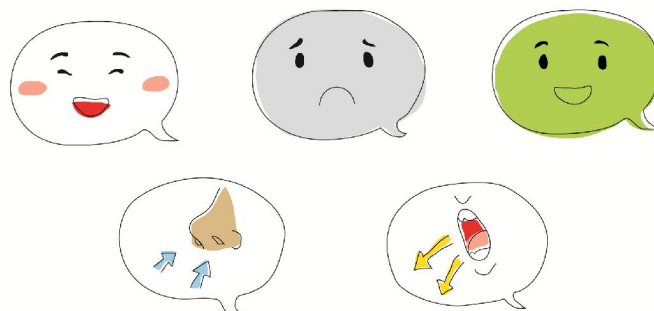
Moreover, besides the normal context colors associated to the children and Blá, colors related to specific moments were determined for a better communication: for example, when in an explanatory moment about how the breathing system worked or how playing and exercising was healthy, the color green would represent those positive moments and things; or when the children are bored, sad or uncomfortable, they turn gray just like Blá.

Figures 1 On the left: Pedro and Rita playing. In the middle: Pedro, Rita and Blá. On the right: Blá explaining the respiratory system with Pedro's help.



Source: personal - January 2011.

Figure 2 Various reactions by Blá.

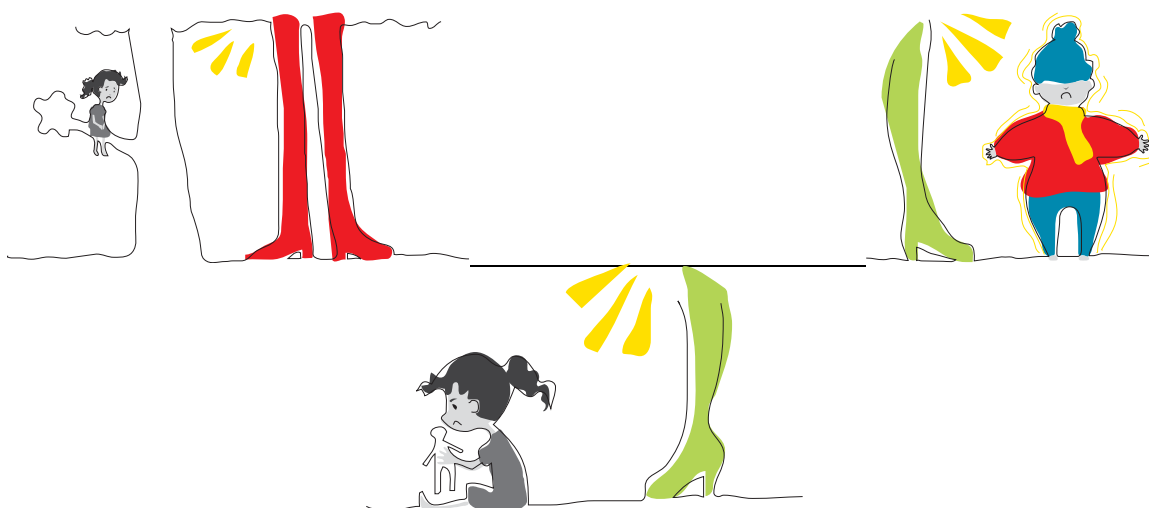


Source: personal – January 2011

At last, the characters representing Pedro and Rita's parents, who seldom appear since the series is focused on the children. The relational perspective given is from Pedro and Rita's point of view: they're always really big, represented as long legs wearing adult shoes, no matter the situation, and

they work as obstacles, even if well-intentioned ones, to the children's action. They usually appear in red or green, depending on the context: when they are mad or if they have good intentions, respectively.

Figures 3 On the left: Rita and father. In the middle: Pedro and mother trying to be kind. On the right: Rita and mother.



Source: personal – January 2011

Conclusions

Asthma is an allergic condition that requires continuous treatment and symptom prevention to stop it from becoming an obstacle to action and having an impact on the social and personal life and economic situation of the patient. The education about the disease, treatment and deconstruction of fake stereotypes should start from childhood, mainly because children are available to learn how to be in the world, with themselves and with others.

The theory of ludicity, developed by the

mentioned author Conceição Lopes, built upon the pragmatic of communication (Watzlawick et al, 1967) opposes to the classical vision of work against fun and entertainment; and it's like a condition of being human that is shown in many different ways, namely in playing, gaming, leisure, recreation, humor, and the construction of ludic artifacts. The human condition of ludicity isn't limited by timelines or institutional obligations since it can manifest itself in any context. However, its many manifestations can be subjugated to an exterior order to its protagonist (as it happens with the school playground, for instance).

With this in mind, the role of the designer as an

illustrator is compiling pertinent information, interpret it, simplify it and translate it in visual elements, knowing in which ones to focus; managing the various participants in the project; and understanding the target audience well enough in order to know how to transmit the knowledge attractively and clearly, and how to create in the audience an emotional connection and, by consequence, memorization of the information. (Lopes, 2003)

This project ended with a group of characters that try to stand out in the panorama of the visual style of the 2D animation in general, being included in a context of health series for children that will cover some needs on the communication between the doctor and the younger patient level. These characters were tested with a small group of children through flip-books: A total of nine children, with ages between six and seven years old (the main target of

the animation), divided in three groups – the first with four girls and a boy; the second with a boy and a girl; and the third with two boys. The children chosen to test the characters were part of a Scouts group and they were questioned in a context with more freedom than school.

Some problems were detected and should be corrected, mainly after noticing the children's perception of the meaning of the colors. In order to complete the series, further tests will need to be made, besides the obvious constitution of a multidisciplinary team, with the intervention from professionals such as animators, pediatricians or any kind of specialist related to the asthma problem and maybe even psychologists.

Further information about the project, a storyboard of the first program and small animations of the characters can be found on: <http://www.behance.net/gallery/I-want-I-can-III-do-it/4124935>.

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