"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: the design, illustration and 2D animation; the pragmatics of the communication, ludicity and learning; the interests and motivations of the six and seven year old children; and the manifestation of the pathology of asthma. This communication also means to emphasizes the characters of the series and how they communicate.

Keywords

Communication, ludicity, learning

Introduction

The present communication brings 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!", aimed 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 communication with the audience point of view; 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

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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 of feeling 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 projectual options in general and, particularly, the creation of the visual language, is the study field of ludicity, by Conceição Lopes (1998). According to the author, ludicity may efficiently promote the probability of the communication, learning and change. Ludicity is referenced by the author as something inherent to the human being, manifested in various ways, and that produces results on the social learning of the human coexistence:

> ...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 interacção lúdica com outrem e pelos seus efeitos em si próprio, nos outros e no mundo. (Lopes, 2004:80)

Also adds, "A ludicidade, pela sua natureza consequencial, implica comunicação e aprendizagem e mudança" (Lopes, 2004:60).

Learning is the "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.

Considering this context it was decided to elaborate a communication proposal that used the ludicity to communicate, especially with children with asthma of 6 and 7 years, through television broadcast. The objectives of the proposal were; creating educative and audiovisual material that helps children to develop their capacities; that contributes to understanding of the disease (from 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; that 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 from the asthmatic children as well as the importance of exercise.

1 Problematic

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 children population, 11% are between 6 and 7 years old, and needing 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 (Associação Portuguesa de Asmáticos, 2009). Moreover, the 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). It's also a fact that children like and watch a lot of television (Chaves, 2007).

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 declares (Lusa, 2009).

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 on the improvement of their own life quality.

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2 About the target

The big issue 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 one can direct the information more attractively and make an impact in their worlds. In this sense, the study developed by Chaves e Dutschke, published in "Kid's Power" was taken into account. It presents the "Geração Net" (Web Generation): Children born after 1995 (year of the massification of the internet) that master the technology, for they have accompanied its development. According to the book, children of this generation "...são muito espertas e não podem ser menosprezadas nem alimentadas com pretensões irrelevantes ou conceitos ultrapassados." (Chaves, 2007:17) and when communicating with them, one should avoid old-fashioned words and use those closer to their vocabulary. According to the authors, this generation presents some general cultural characteristics that define them and where they reflect themselves. They 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.

3 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 constructs 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 perceptive and where the focus is given in the characters and their actions.

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 you 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 inclination 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.

4 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 and 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

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only in line as silhouettes on the background. The environments 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. 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.

Blá is the third character, shaped as a little speech balloon that morphs himself 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. He's generally a white balloon with rosy cheeks, changing his color according to the situations or Rita and Pedro's states of mind.

Figures 1, 2 and 3. On the left: Pedro and Rita playing (January, 2011). Source: personal. In the middle: Pedro, Rita and Blá (January, 2011). Source: personal. On the right: Blá explaining the respiratory system with Pedro's help. (January, 2011). Source: personal.
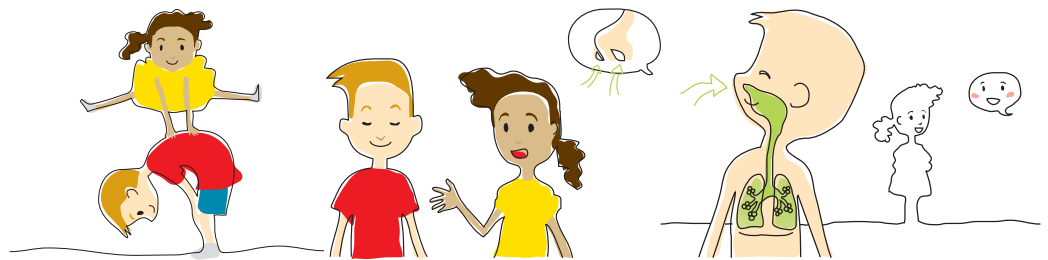
At last, the characters representing Pedro and Rita's parents. The relational perspective given is from Pedro and Rita's point of view: they're always really big, represented as long legs wearing adult shoes, no matter the situation, and they work as obstacles, even if well-intentioned ones, to the children's action.

Figures 4, 5 and 6. On the left: Rita and father (January, 2011). Source: personal. In the middle: Pedro and mother trying to be kind (January, 2011). Source: personal. On the right: Rita and mother.

(January, 2011). Source: personal.

Conclusion

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.

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 a emotional connection and, by consequence, memorization of the information.

This project ended with a group of characters that try to stand up between 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.

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Although the characters had been tested with a small group of children through flip-books, some problems were detected and should be corrected. In order to complete the series, further tests will need to be made.

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