

# Literacy and Reading for the 21st Century

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## ABSTRACT

Each textual genre requires a specific approach by the reader. She needs to understand the composition of the texts, the languages that are articulated in it, in order to notice the singularities of literary texts and the symbolic systems they involve. The 'Redigir' Project develops and makes available, free of charge, activities to be used by teachers of Portuguese. The project deals, among others, with literary texts, exploring their comprehension from a perspective of literary and digital literacy, multimodality, and multiliteracy studies. Our goal is the development of students' reading skills and the training of teachers who will help the students improve their reading skills of diverse textual genres on printed and digital media. Our proposals include activities about contemporary poetry, whose authors are interviewed by our team. There are also proposals involving the creation of picture books exploring augmented reality. We aim to contribute to the teachers' training and help them put into practice recent literary and linguistic theories, working in a meaningful, critical and transformative way.

## KEYWORDS

literacy; reading; literature; multimodality; multiliteracies.

## RESUMO

A leitura de diferentes gêneros textuais exige diversas abordagens pelo leitor. Ele precisa perceber a composição dos textos, as linguagens articuladas nele, perceber as singularidades do texto literário e os sistemas simbólicos envolvidos nele. O Projeto Redigir desenvolve e disponibiliza, gratuitamente, atividades para serem aplicadas por professores de Português e trabalha, entre outros, com textos literários, explorando a compreensão deles numa perspectiva do letramento literário, digital, da multimodalidade e dos multiletramentos. Nosso objetivo é a formação de leitores e de professores que vão ajudá-los a desenvolver competências de leitura de diversos gêneros encontrados em suportes impressos e digitais. Entre as propostas há atividades com poesias contemporâneas, cujos autores são entrevistados pela nossa equipe. Há também propostas de criação de livros de imagens, com realidade aumentada. Buscamos colaborar para a formação de professores que coloquem em prática teorias recentes dos estudos literários e linguísticos, trabalhado de forma significativa, crítica e transformadora.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

letramento; leitura; literatura; multimodalidade; multiletramentos.

## I. READING AND READING LITERATURE

Understanding texts of any kind is not a trivial task. Reading each textual or discursive genre requires different movements and strategies from the reader. One is expected to notice aspects related to the composition of the texts and the languages they explore and articulate.

If we think of certain more specific genres, such as literary ones (tale, novel, poem, among others), we will see that it is not enough to know how to read to become a good reader of literature. Moreover, the reader needs to notice the singularities of literary texts and the symbolic systems around which they are developed.

Reading those texts requires an initiation, since normally literary texts are not understood in depth without reflection on their parts, their aesthetics, the symbolic systems they mobilize and the ideological aspects that are generally hidden between the lines. It is not by chance that discussions about literacy have been used to make room for specific approaches, such as literary literacy. In Brazil, this area of study is represented by Rildo Cosson (2014), Aparecida Paiva (2005) and Graça Paulino (2001), among others. It appears that reading literature mobilizes linguistic, as well as aesthetic and functional skills that are different from the ones required when reading informative or entertainment texts.

According to Paulino (2001: 117), literary literacy is “related to the aesthetic work of the language, to the fictional pact and to a non-pragmatic reception” of the text. For her,

a literarily literate citizen would be one who cultivates and incorporates literary readings as part of his or her life, preserving their aesthetic character, accepting the proposed pact and picking up cultural aims in a broader sense, and not only functional and immediate objectives for the act of reading. (Paulino, 2001: 119-120; our translation)

Associated with literary aspects, other perspectives seem suitable for the work with texts, such as digital literacy and multiliteracy, in addition to a focus on the multimodality of texts, including literary ones.

What has been called *digital literacy* in Brazil is one part of the idea of literacy within social practices related to digital technologies, as defined by Magda Soares in her seminal 2002 paper:

To summarise, the screen, as a new writing space, brings substantial changes to the forms of interaction between writer and reader, between writer and text and between reader and text and even, broadly, between human beings and knowledge. (...) a hypothesis is that these changes bring social, cognitive and discursive consequences, and are thus constituting *digital literacy*, that is, a certain state or condition acquired by those who appropriate the new digital technology and practice of reading and writing on the screen, which is different from the state or condition – literacy – of those who practice reading and writing on paper. (Soares, 2002: 151; *our translation*)

Multiliteracies are associated with the 1996 manifesto put forward by the New London Group, which outlines a school for the future that highlights the dimension of multiplicity in languages and cultures found in the school environment (Cazden *et al.*, 1996). Multimodality is an inescapable aspect of the texts that circulate in our society. That is to say, their composition and structure, composed of diverse semiotic modes, also require more complex and sophisticated reading skills.

Faced with a scenario in which theory attempts to account for increasingly mixed practices, imagine what it is for a reader to deal with reading literary texts in digital media, dealing with texts that employ several languages and semiotic modes. And are we ready of this in Brazil?

## II. MASS EVALUATION AND READING

Pisa 2009 Results (OECD, 2011) show that it is difficult for Brazilian students to build an answer considering information from different parts of the text, to draw inferences of different types, to deal with texts of non-familiar genres, as well as to understand non-continuous texts (eg.: graphics, tables and forms). These, however, are essential skills for reading both in print and digital environments, with the literary text being an element that adds complexity to this equation.

These results are partially explained by research (Souza, 2005; Coscarelli and Santos, 2009; Castro, 2017) that demonstrates that many educational materials are not helping students to develop these skills. Flores (2015), analysing educational materials, sustains that there is no deeper reading activity, nor satisfactory work with images, because in most of the exam items she analysed there is a concern with grammatical aspects and, particularly, with what is considered “right” or “wrong” according to normative grammar. Often, images are not even mentioned in exam items.

An analysis of how advertising texts are explored in elementary school (Bethônico and Milagres, 2016) confirms that the content of the images, as well as their relationship with the verbal text and the meaning they help to build, are poorly explored. Some of the advertisements they have analysed investigate intertextuality across literary texts and genres, an aspect which is not even mentioned in the questions proposed to the students.

Considering that examinations aim to verify what the students have learned during the lessons, we might conclude that analysing images, as an important and integral part of texts, is not a systematic practice in many Brazilian schools. These results are reinforced by Coscarelli and Santos (2009), who conclude that textbooks still make a very superficial use of the elements that could underpin teachers' and students' literacy, notably digital. This helps us, at least in part, to explain some of the Brazilian students' scores pointed out by Pisa and other large-scale assessments.

Considering the gap revealed by several studies, the Redigir Project sought to work on these aspects. This is what we will present in the next section.

### III. THE 'REDIGIR' PROJECT

Redigir [Compose] is an extension project based at the School of Language Arts of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), Brazil. Its goal is to produce activities to be used by teachers of Portuguese with their students. Among other materials, we work with literary texts, seeking to explore comprehension from the perspective of literary literacy, digital literacy, multimodality and multi-literacy.

In this paper we explore aspects related to multimodality, namely verbal and nonverbal languages orchestrated in the texts, as well as aspects related to the conditions of production and reception of those texts. We also explore aspects related to multiliteracies, i.e., the cultural diversity that can be noticed and that leads to awareness of our differences. This leads us to raise questions about the perspective of a dominant and single culture, as opposed to a perspective of multiple, hybrid and concomitant cultures.

The aim of the project is both to educate contemporary readers and to train teachers who will be able to help students develop skills that will enable them to read, in depth, many textual genres, including contemporary literary texts, in printed and digital media. Here, we will focus on the activities that deal with literary texts or are related to poetic expressions.

### IV. HOW REDIGIR HAS BEEN TRYING TO CONTRIBUTE TO LITERARY LITERACY

Redigir is a project involving the participation of undergraduate and graduate students, as well as volunteers, who participate in weekly meetings to produce and discuss theoretical texts that can help improve this form of literacy. These activities are a collective production. They comprise materials for the students and include instructions, comments and suggestions for teachers who intend to use the activities with their students. When ready, the activities are posted on

the Redigir website, where they can be accessed for free, and are announced on Facebook.

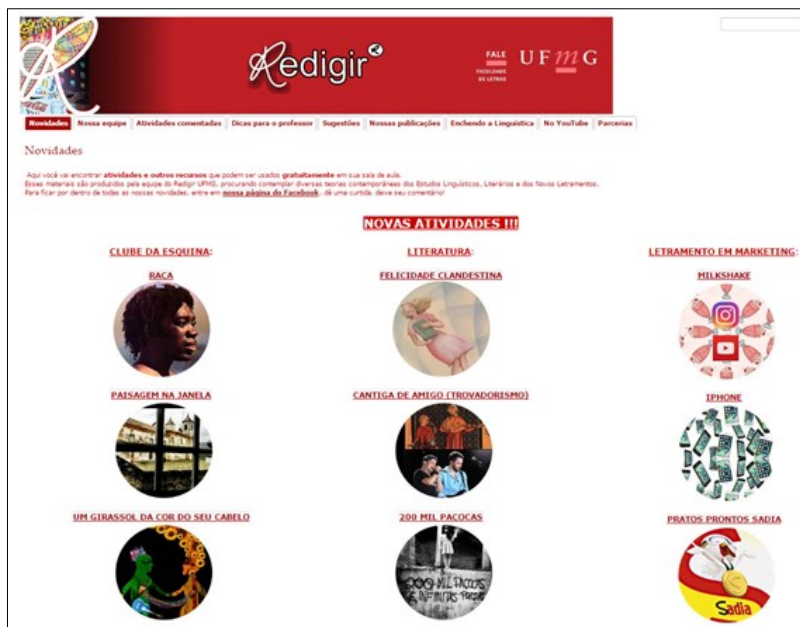


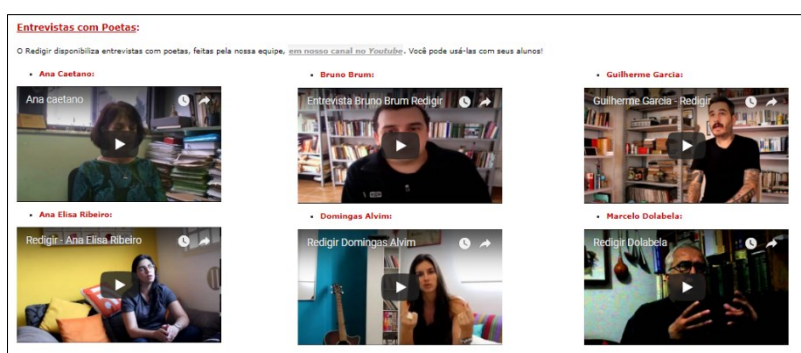
Figure 1. Print of the Redigir web page. <https://sites.google.com/site/redigirufmg/>



Figure 2. Print of an advertisement for one of the activities on Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/redigirfaleufmg/>

Among other ideas for activities available on the website, we present activities based on contemporary Brazilian poetry and poets, who are interviewed by our team and talk about their lives, their creation process, and recite the poem studied in the activity so that students can hear the poem in the author's voice.

With these activities, we aim to develop students' abilities regarding reading, comprehension and interpretation of texts, stimulating reflections on the theme, as well as the appreciation of the aesthetics of the composition, its sonority and poetry. We also value authorship, so we seek to interview the authors whenever it is possible. We believe that these interviews allow students to understand that poetry is alive and is written by people close to them.



**Figure 3.** Print of the pages with poetry activities and interviews with Brazilian poets. <https://sites.google.com/site/redigirufmg/atividades/poemas>

The work with literature that we develop in these activities involves diverse literary genres, such as poetry, short stories, chronicles, and children's literature. We have also expanded this work to other art forms, namely songs from various styles and videos (animations, documentaries, movie extracts).


One of the activities available for teachers was created based on the video documentary *Rivers and Tides*, directed by Thomas Riedelsheimer in 2001, which presents the work of Andy Goldsworthy, a British artist who produces his art using elements of nature such as stones, twigs, flowers, and ice.

Given the ephemeral nature of these works, which are built and left in nature, photographing them is an important part of the artistic process. In the activity we propose, students are stimulated to discuss the concept of art, how it is produced, what it is to be an artist and what the role of art in our world should be. In addition, students create new works, photographing and exhibiting them, inspired by the work of Goldsworthy.

Authorship, namely giving voice to students, is another aspect that we attempt to stimulate. It is important that students are able to understand and appreciate different forms of art, but it is also crucial that they realize they can create their own art, expressing their views on various themes and in different

ways. They must understand that art is not a privilege of the elected few, but it is the result of sensibility, thought, experimentation, and practice.

**Projeto Andy Goldsworthy**  
(Material do Aluno)

1. Em grupos discuta com seus colegas a respeito das seguintes questões:
  - a) O que é arte?
  - b) Como se faz arte?
  - c) O que é ser artista?
  - d) Qual o papel da arte? / Para que serve a arte?
  - e) Você conhece algum artista (pessoalmente ou por suas obras)? Como é o trabalho dele?

Registre as respostas do grupo por escrito e, se possível, num gravador ou em um vídeo.
  
2. Agora assista aos seguintes vídeos:
 

River and Tides (extraits 1):  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O9TyHzP-8b8&feature=share>

River and Tides (extraits 2):

**Figure 4.** Print of the students' page of the 'Project Andy Goldsworthy' activity.  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5vbPjm8AR5pTVB5QlFWc0s3ZE0/view>

One of the important aspects of literary texts is their musicality, their rhythm. Historically, music has been a powerful form of accessing and disseminating literary texts. We seek to develop materials exploring songs, both for their social relevance and for their richness as a form of art and communication. Thus, we have created activities with various musical styles using songs that deal with a range of themes. In these activities we explore musical aspects such as sonority, rhythm, melody and harmony. The activities also stimulate students to discuss the meanings that music and lyrics lead us to construct, the linguistic resources used for that purpose, the historical context in which the song is produced and the relationship between this context and aspects of their lives.

In order to explore the students' musical repertoire, by drawing their attention to a critical analysis of what they have been hearing, we work with songs that radio stations are currently playing, songs they will listen at parties and

places that they usually go and that are enjoying success on the Internet. This approach brings us closer to the students and helps us to deal with topics that are dear to them, at the same time it encourages them to critically listen to those songs.

We also use older or contemporary songs that are not widely publicized, but which are important to the repertoire of Brazilian popular music and deal with current themes. This work with songs of different styles and eras highlights the different forms that poetry can take and the nuances it can explore. Thus, we bring students closer to poetry and to analytical reading of multimodal texts, stimulating their experience as producers of texts in diverse formats.

One element that is present in many of our activities, whether dealing with literary texts or not, is digital technology. We seek to exploit the resources offered by these technologies to encourage student productions and also to help them to develop skills related to digital literacy. There is no specific focus on linguistic or literary issues in the activities we produce, there is no focus on school content, and there is no proselytizing about what is right or wrong in reading and producing texts. There is, however, an attempt to help students develop skills that are essential to literacy in the 21st century. Jenkins (2009) identified the skills that contribute to a participatory culture:

Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement. The new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking. These skills build on the foundation of traditional literacy, research skills, technical skills, and critical analysis skills taught in the classroom.

The new skills include:

Play — the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving.

Performance — the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery.

Simulation — the ability to interpret and construct dynamic models of real-world processes.

Appropriation — the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content.

Multitasking — the ability to scan one's environment and shift focus as needed to salient details.

Distributed Cognition — the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities.

Collective Intelligence — the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal.

Judgment — the ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources.

Transmedia Navigation — the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities.

Networking — the ability to search for, synthesize, and disseminate information.

Negotiation — the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms. (Jenkins, 2009: 4)



As Jenkins (2009) alerts us, the development of these skills requires a “more systemic approach to media education.” Therefore, this is not a goal that will be achieved by individual actions, but requires broader and longer-lasting programs instead. That is why we believe in the value of the contribution of Project Redigir to the development of better readers and more proficient writers for the current century. We believe that with the activities we produce, test and make available at the web site, we are taking a step towards what Jenkins proposes.

In the following section, we present a proposal developed by our team to challenge and stimulate students’ digital literacy, combining music and poetry, and exploring multimodality and interaction using augmented reality.

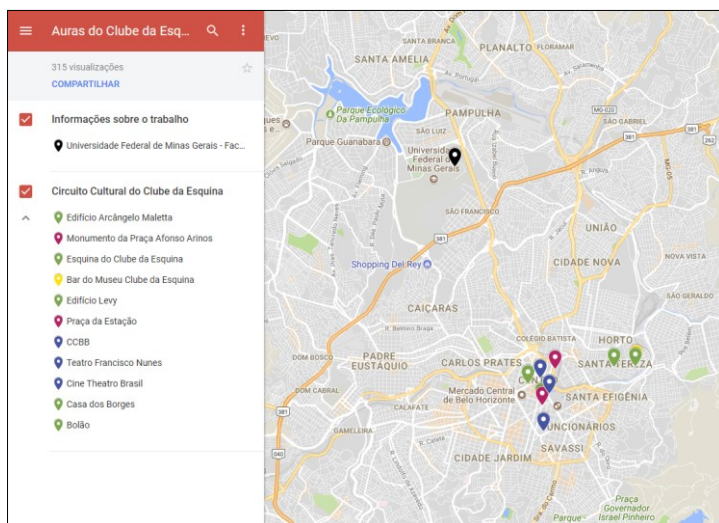
#### V. ‘CLUBE DA ESQUINA’ AND AUGMENTED REALITY

A set of proposals of classroom activities to be used by elementary and high school teachers was built together with graduate students of Linguistic Studies at UFMG, exploring resources for augmented reality (Aurasma). The challenge presented to those students was to create activities developing the main theme of the musical movement known as ‘Clube da Esquina’ [The Street-Corner Club]: the songs, the lyrics, the artists and their history.

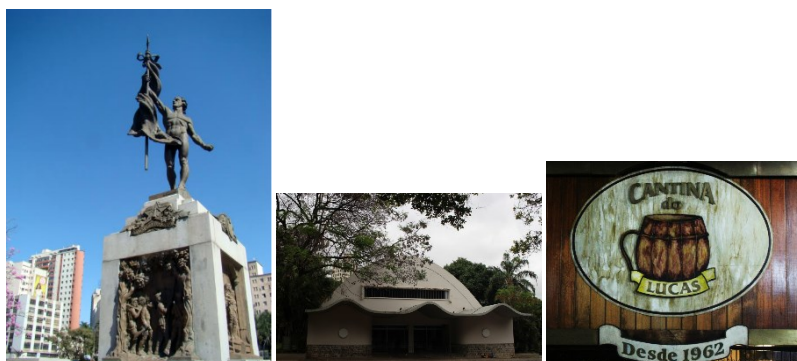
‘Clube da Esquina’ was a musical movement that took place in Minas Gerais, Brazil, in the 1970s. It was led, mainly, by the singer and composer Milton Nascimento, by the musicians of the Borges family (Márcio, Telo, Marilton, and Lô Borges) and other talented musicians and composers – Toninho Horta, Wagner Tiso, Beto Guedes, Ronaldo Bastos, Fernando Brant – who got together and recorded two double albums with songs that combined unique melodies, harmonies and arrangements to lyrics that are poetic and delicate as well as simultaneously politically powerful and engaged. These compositions have been recorded by musicians from several countries and influenced many artists, launching the state of Minas Gerais onto the world music scene, contributing with a consistent and sophisticated musical style.

Among the activities created by the students, there is a picture book in which the images take us to videos of poems which were written and recited by the students/authors. These poems were inspired by the songs and lyrics of ‘Clube da Esquina,’ as “Paisagem da Janela” [What I see from the window], “Os sonhos não envelhecem” [Dreams do not age] and “Tudo que você podia ser” [Everything you could be]. Access to the videos is made through *Aurasma*. Students have also created an activity in which they recorded videos of people talking about their aspirations when they were young and what they became afterwards. When *Aurasma* recognizes the photograph of the person at a young age, it launches the video in which the person, now a grown up, talks about his/her

dreams and plans for life. Another activity they have created using this application is a map<sup>1</sup> with a route of places that were important to the artists of ‘Clube da Esquina’ around the city of Belo Horizonte. As soon as the visitor visualizes the image on the map using the cell phone, *Aurasma* launches a video with information about the place on the picture, which could be an interview, a text, an image or a song related to ‘Clube da Esquina.’ Thus, one can take a tour around the city and get to know better the stories about ‘Clube da Esquina.’



**Figure 5.** Map of the Clube da Esquina cultural circuit – Belo Horizonte.



**Figure 6.** Material created by the students using Aurasma. **Figure 6a.** Trigger: Monument at Praça Afonso Arinos. Overlay: Video: Léo Diniz interpreting “Subindo Bahia, Descendo Floresta”, Rômulo Paes. **Figure 6b.** Trigger: Francisco Nunes Theater. Overlay: Lô Borges singing Paisagem da Janela. **Figure 6c.** Trigger: Sign at Cantina do Lucas. Overlay: Comic book – Milton Nascimento and Fernando Brant at Cantina do Lucas.

1 Map of the Clube da Esquina cultural circuit - Belo Horizonte, produced by the students Bruna Amarante de Mendonça Cohen, Demétrius Faria dos Santos, Eduardo Dias de Carvalho Filho e Fernanda Santana Gomes. Available at: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1pNkzWg0Jlfrw4sit52qCO-BlwTQQ&usp=sharing>

This was a valuable experience for all of the graduate students who created the activity and experienced it themselves. In order to produce videos, they had to listen to the songs, analyse the lyrics, discuss the themes and do research on the artists and their story, as well as to produce and share the materials they created. This experience has shown us, as teachers, that this form of activity develops more skills and produces more knowledge than we can account for in a test or than we can foster or promote in a traditional expository class, as reflected in the banking model of education discussed by Freire (1974), for instance.

## VI. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We have attempted, in this paper, to briefly present the work of a team that has been working for 19 years, looking for ways to put contemporary theories of learning into practice, articulating and integrating theoretical foundations from different areas, including Education, and Language Arts, such as Linguistics, Literature, Discourse Analysis, Semiotics and Psychology, in order to contribute to a more appropriate education for our digital times, which cannot be less human.

The website of Projeto Redigir currently has more than 120 activities available for free use among teachers and more than 900 monthly accesses by teachers from various countries. The project has received, through Facebook, positive feedback from teachers who use its set of activities in their classrooms. We believe that with these activities the project helps to qualify teachers to put recent theories from several areas into practice, replacing traditional normative and classificatory practices of language and literature, with a more meaningful, critical and empowering practice.

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