E-learning pedagogy undergraduate students' writing: an intervention for improvement

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Cultural-historical psychology in Brazil

According to Freitas (2004)

- In the 70's: started to be known
- In the 80's: dissemination of ideas
- In the 90's: beginning of concept development

- Today: 44 cultural-historical psychology Research Groups

- Our group: 'Educação e Psicologia Histórico-cultural'
    'Education and Historical-cultural Psychology'
    Leader: Magda F. Damiani

Some context information

- Functional illiteracy rate: 70% of population
- Brazilian Open University (UAB)

  920 support sites/poles (in small cities); nearly of 315.000 university opportunities for studentes

- Public Health System Open University (UNA-SUS)

  - On-line network of universities which aims to qualify health professionals

- Close to one million e-learning students around the country (UAB + UNA-SUS)

Research context

- Focus on 1 e-learning site/pole UAB/UFPel

- Undergraduate Pedagogy class with 32 students (31 women, 1 man)

- Duration of the Pedagogy course: 4 years (2009-2012)

- One in-person meeting per week and daily activities in the Learning Management System (Moodle)

- The researcher was the class teacher for 3 semesters

Research methodology

- Qualitative longitudinal (3,5 years) study
- Netnography research perspective(Hine, 2000)
- Data collection (moodle). Tools :
  - document analysis (texts; reports)
  - observation (netnography)(Gil, 1999)
- Data analysis: Content analysis(Bordin, 1977)
- Final analysis: focus on 3 selected students
- Based on dialogic-pedagogical interventions

Research hypothesis

- The type of communication demanded by e-learning favors the practice of writing
- The exercise of writing can lead to the development of higher psychological functions
- The writer must be aware of his/her errors in order to control them, improving his/her communicative ability
- Dialogic-pedagogical interventions can successfully improve written expression

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Objectives and rationale

- **Main objectives:** to investigate the improvement possibilities of written expression in e-learning pedagogy students through dialogic-pedagogical interventions; to evaluate the interventions

- **Justification:** several research studies indicate shortcomings in the written expression of students, at all levels

Pre-intervention diagnosis of students' writing

- Previous analysis, by five teachers
- Criteria
  - appropriate use of words
  - clarity of the ideas
  - argument building

- Diagnosis
  - 11 % great amount of difficulties
  - 42 % medium level of difficulties
  - 47 % few or no difficulties

53% of students: big or medium writing problems

Interventions

Based on:

- Vygotsky's concepts

  - Imitation

  - Zone of proximal development

  - Consciousness and control

  - Higher psychological functions

  - Thinking and speech

  - Inter/intrapsychological processes

- Text linguistic's concepts

  - Cohesion

  - Coherence

  - Argumentation

Interventions types
(through forum, chats, text exchanges)

1) Structuring and organization of academic texts (2009)

2) Assistance/guidance on the writing of academic papers (2010)

3) Assistance/guidance on the writing of abstracts (2011)

4) Assistance/guidance on the writing of scientific articles (2011)

…

5) **Writing workshop: "I write, but do they understand?" (2012)**

   - collaborative discussions about the quality of writing - in good and poor texts (forums)

   - direct intervention (comments/corrections) on students' texts

6) Writing the final paper (Pedagogy Course) (2012).

   Provision of

   - cognitive, practical and linguistics exercises (to be carried out…)

Writing workshop
(main intervention)

- **20** students from 4 e-learning poles (UAB)
- Duration: **20** days, 100% on moodle
- Activities:

1) Writing short texts focusing on their own writing and on the motivations that led them to enroll on the workshop
2) Discussion of errors in their texts (forum)
   Why are they are considered errors?
   How can we correct them?
3) Re-submission of the first texts after discussions of errors and correction suggestions
4) Reflections on interventions in students' first texts (forum)
5) Discussion of a text without writing problems (forum)
   (selected by the teacher/researcher)
6) Final individual written reflection about the Writing Workshop experience(s)

Interventions evaluation

- Intervention 1: Structuring and organization of academic texts

- development of text structure awareness

- Intervention 2: Assistance/guidance on the writing of academic papers

- first experience of direct intervention in the student's texts
- small improvements of text quality

- Intervention 3: Assistance/guidance on the writing of abstracts

- attention to the importance of writing syntheses as a cognitive exercise
- Improvements in the ability to recognize texts' main ideas

Intervention evaluation

- Intervention 4 : orientation of the scientific articles writing

- impact on consciousness of errors and texts problems

- improvement on the process of ideas exposition

- still many writing errors

- Intervention 5 : Writing Workshop

- widespread acceptance of the proposed intervention

- fewer errors and better written statement of arguments

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Summary of preliminary results

Mainly related to the importance of consciousness and control

The students

   - reacted positively to the interventions in their texts

   - perceived the importance of recognizing their errors for the improvement of their textual productions

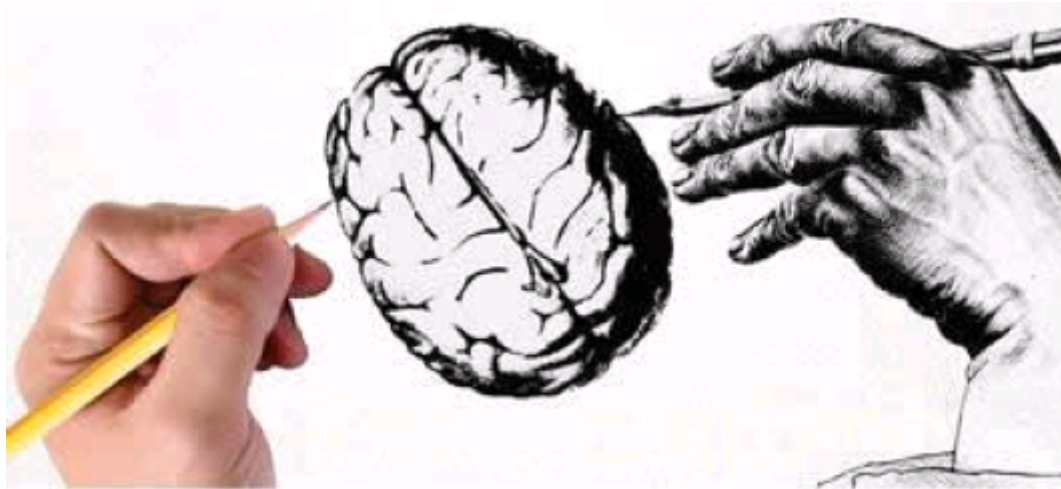   - became motivated, requesting other writing workshops and more writing exercises

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