

DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF BLOGS

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims at describing an empirical research carried out in a private school in Fortaleza, Brazil, in which the production of a blog was used as an opportunity to teach writing skills in Portuguese, based on the curricular parameters for Brazilian basic education, which postulate that the teaching of Portuguese has to be based on texts. The theoretical background for this study was extracted from Schneuwly and Dolz (2004), who developed the idea of the teaching dimensions of genres. In order to accomplish our research purposes, a group of teachers from a private school in Fortaleza was invited to take part in a set of activities focused on the use of blogs as teaching tools. The present study seeks to provide a view on the potential of digital writing as a pedagogical tool for the development of discursive skills, contributing to linguistic analysis practices in the classroom.

KEY WORDS: teaching; socio-discursive interactionism; genre; written text; blog.

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Chinese

[Translation Shek Kam Tse]

通过运用博客来发展写作技巧

摘要：本文描述了一个在巴西福塔雷萨市的一所私立学校执行的一项实证研究。该实验在教学中运动博客来发展学生葡萄牙语的写作技巧，而巴西基础教育的课程大纲要求葡萄牙语的教学必须以课本为基础。该研究的理论背景源自Schneuwly and Dolz

2004年提出的流派维度教学的理念。为了达成我们的研究目标，福塔雷萨市的一所私立学校的一群老师被邀请加入到一系列以博客为教学工具的活动中。本研究力求展示将数字化写作作为发展发散技巧的教学工具的潜力，对班级中语言学分析的运用做出贡献。

关键词：教学，社会发散交互主义，文类，作文，博客

Dutch

[Translation Tanja Janssen]

TITEL: Ontwikkelen van schrijfvaardigheid met behulp van blogs

SAMENVATTING: Doel van deze bijdrage is het beschrijven van een empirisch onderzoek, uitgevoerd op een privé-school in Fortaleza, Brazilië. In het onderzoek werd het maken van blogs gebruikt als een middel om schrijfvaardigheid in het Portugees te onderwijzen, uitgaande van de parameters van het Braziliaanse basisonderwijs volgens welke het onderwijs in het Portugees gebaseerd moet zijn op teksten. De theoretische achtergrond van het onderzoek was ontleend aan Schneuwly and Dolz (2004), die de idee van onderwijsdimensies voor genres ontwikkelden. Met het oog op onze onderzoeksdoelen nodigden we een groep leraren van een privé-school in Fortaleza uit om deel te nemen aan een reeks activiteiten gericht op het gebruik van blogs als onderwijsleermiddel. In deze bijdrage willen we een beeld schetsen van de mogelijke waarde van digitaal schrijven als pedagogisch hulpmiddel voor het ontwikkelen van discursieve vaardigheden en het analyseren van linguïstische praktijken in de klas.

TREFOORDEN: onderwijzen, sociaal-discursief interactionisme, genre, geschreven tekst, blog

Finnish

[Translation Katri Sarmavuori]

TITTELI: KIRJOITUSTAITOJEN KEHITTÄMINEN BLOGEJA KÄYTTÄMÄLLÄ

ABSTRAKTI: Tämä esitys kertoo empiirisestä tutkimuksesta, joka tehtiin yksityisessä koulussa Fortalezassa, Brasiliassa. Siinä käytettiin blogia portugalinkielisten kirjoitustaitojen opettamiseksi. Se perustui Brasilian perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelmaan, jonka mukaan portugalini opetuksen tulee perustua teksteihin. Tämän työn teoreettinen tausta perustuu Schneuwlyyn ja Dolzeen (2004), jotka kehittivät idean opettaa genrejä. Tutkimuksen tekemiseksi ryhmä Fortalezan yksityiskoulun opettajia kutsuttiin osallistumaan toimintoihin, joissa käytettiin blogeja opetusvälineinä. Tutkimus tarjoaa näkymän digitaalisen kirjoittamisen mahdollisuuksiin pedagogisena välineenä diskursiivisten taitojen kehittämiseksi ja lingvististen analyysikäytäntöjen tuomiseksi luokkahuoneeseen.

AVAINSANAT: opettaminen, sosioidiskursiivinen interaktionismi; genre; kirjoitettu teksti; blogi.

French

[Translation Laurence Pasa]

TITRE : DEVELOPPER LES COMPETENCES ECRITES PAR L'UTILISATION DES BLOGS

RÉSUMÉ : Cet article présente une recherche empirique menée dans une école privée à Fortaleza, Brésil, où la production d'un blog a été l'occasion d'enseigner des techniques d'écriture du portugais, en référence au programme scolaire élémentaire brésilien, qui postule que l'enseignement du Portugais doit se baser sur des textes. Le contexte théorique de cette étude est inspiré de Schneuwly et Dolz (2004), qui ont développé les diverses dimensions de l'enseignement des genres. Pour réaliser cette recherche, un groupe de professeurs d'une école privée à Fortaleza a été invité à participer à un ensemble d'activités centrées sur l'utilisation des blogs comme outils d'enseignement. La présente étude propose un aperçu du potentiel de l'écriture numérique comme outil pédagogique pour le développement des compétences discursives, contribuant aux pratiques d'analyse linguistique en classe.

MOTS CLÉS : enseignement, interactionnisme socio-discursif, genres, texte écrit, blog.

Greek

[Translation by Panatoya Papoulia Tzelepi]

Τίτλος, Ανάπτυξη δεξιοτήτων παραγωγής γραπτού λόγου μέσω των blogs

Περίληψη. Αυτό το άρθρο έχει στόχο να περιγράψει μια εμπειρική έρευνα που διεξήχθη σε ένα ιδιωτικό σχολείο στην Fortaleza της Βραζιλίας, στην οποία η παραγωγή ενός blog χρησιμοποιήθηκε ως ευκαιρία να διδαχθούν δεξιότητες παραγωγής γραπτού λόγου στα Πορτογαλικά, βασισμένες στις παραμέτρους του Αναλυτικού Προγράμματος του Δημοτικού Σχολείου της Βραζιλίας, το οποίο Αναλυτικό Πρόγραμμα απαιτεί ότι η διδασκαλία των Πορτογαλικών πρέπει να είναι βασισμένη σε κείμενα. Το θεωρητικό υπόβαθρο αυτής της μελέτης εξάγεται από το έργο των Schneuwly & Dolz (2004) οι οποίοι ανέπτυξαν την ιδέα της διδασκαλίας των κειμενικών ειδών. Για να πετύχουμε το σκοπό της έρευνάς μας, μια ομάδα δασκάλων από το ιδιωτικό σχολείο της Fortaleza προσκλήθηκε να πάρει μέρος σε κάποιες δραστηριότητες για τη χρήση του blogs ως διδακτικό εργαλείο. Η παρούσα μελέτη επιδιώκει να δείξει μια άποψη της δυνατότητας του γραψίματος στον υπολογιστή ως παιδαγωγικό εργαλείο για την ανάπτυξη διαλογικών δεξιοτήτων, συμβάλλοντας στις πρακτικές γλωσσικής ανάλυσης στην τάξη. Λέξεις κλειδιά: Διδασκαλία, κοινωνικο-διαλογική αλληλεπίδραση, κειμενικά είδη, γραπτό κείμενο, blog

Italian

[Translation Manuela Delfino, Francesco Caviglia]

TITOLO: Sviluppare capacità di scrittura attraverso i blog.

SINTESI : Questo contributo si propone di descrivere una ricerca empirica condotta in una scuola privata a Fortaleza, in Brasile, in cui la produzione di un blog è stata usata come un'opportunità per insegnare capacità di scrittura in Portoghese, basandosi sulle indicazioni curricolari dell'educazione di base brasiliana, secondo la quale l'insegnamento del Portoghese deve basarsi sui testi. Lo sfondo teorico di questo studio è derivato da Schneuwly and Dolz (2004), che hanno sviluppato l'idea delle dimensioni didattiche dei generi testuali e letterari. Per rispondere ai nostri obiettivi di ricerca, un gruppo di docenti della scuola privata di Fortaleza è stato invitato a prendere parte a un gruppo di attività focalizzate sull'uso dei blog come strumenti didattici. Questo studio si propone di fornire uno spaccato sul potenziale della scrittura digitale come uno strumento pedagogico per lo sviluppo di capacità discorsive, contribuendo alle pratiche dell'analisi linguistica in classe.

PAROLE CHIAVE: insegnamento; interazionismo socio-discorsivo; genere testuale e letterario; testo scritto; blog.

Polish

[Translation Elżbieta Awramiuk]

TITUL: ROZWIJANIE UMIEJĘTNOŚCI PISANIA POPRZEZ UŻYCIE BLOGÓW

STRESZCZENIE: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest opisanie badań empirycznych prowadzonych w prywatnej szkole w Fortaleza, w Brazylii, w której pisanie blogów zostało wykorzystane do kształcenia umiejętności pisania w języku portugalskim, kształcenia opartego na zaleceniach programowych dla brazylijskiej edukacji podstawowej, które postulują, żeby nauczanie portugalskiego opierało się na tekstach. Teoretyczne podstawy niniejszych badań formułowali Schneuwly i Dolz (2004), którzy rozwijali problematykę nauczania gatunków. Aby uzyskać zakładane w naszych badaniach cele, grupa nauczycieli z prywatnej szkoły w Fortaleza została zaproszona do udziału w warsztatach poświęconych wykorzystaniu blogu jako narzędzia nauczania. Niniejsze badania ukazują potencjał pisania elektronicznego jako narzędzia pedagogicznego służącego rozwijaniu umiejętności dyskursywnych, poprzez włączenie analizy lingwistycznej do ćwiczeń wykonywanych w klasie.

SŁOWA-KLUCZE: nauczanie, socjo-dyskursywny interakcjonizm, gatunek, tekst pisany, blog.

Portuguese

[Translation Paulo Feytor Pinto]

TÍTULO: O desenvolvimento de competências de escrita através do recurso a blogues

RESUMO: Este artigo pretende descrever uma investigação empírica levada a cabo num colégio privado de Fortaleza, CE, Brasil, em que a produção de um blogue foi utilizada como uma oportunidade para desenvolver competências de produção escrita em português, baseada nos parâmetros curriculares nacionais do ensino básico brasileiro que postulam o ensino do português baseado em textos. A base teórica deste estudo foi extraída de Schneuwly & Dolz (2004) que desenvolveram a ideia da dimensão educativa dos géneros textuais. Tendo em vista os objetivos da nossa investigação, um grupo de professores de um colégio privado de Fortaleza foi convidado a participar num conjunto de atividades

centradas no uso de blogs como ferramenta pedagógica. O estudo em questão pretende abrir perspectivas sobre o potencial pedagógico da escrita digital no desenvolvimento de competências discursivas, contribuindo para práticas de análise linguística em sala de aula.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: ensino, interação sócio-discursiva, gênero textual, texto escrito, blogue.

Spanish

[Translation Ingrid Marquez]

TÍTULO : EL DESARROLLO DE LA HABILIDAD ESCRITA A TRAVÉS DEL USO DE BLOGS

RESUMEN: Este ensayo propone describir las investigaciones empíricas llevadas a cabo en una escuela particular en Fortaleza, Brasil, durante las cuales se produjo un blog para crear la oportunidad de enseñar la habilidad escrita en portugués, con base en los parámetros curriculares de la educación básica brasileña, que postula que la enseñanza de la redacción debe ser por medio de textos. El fondo teórico del estudio salió de Schneuwly and Dolz (2004), quienes desarrollaron la idea de las dimensiones didácticas de los géneros literarios. Para lograr los propósitos de nuestra investigación, un grupo de maestros de una escuela particular en Fortaleza fue invitado a tomar parte en una serie de actividades enfocadas en el uso de blogs como herramientas de enseñanza. Este estudio busca presentar un panorama de las posibilidades de usar la escritura digital como herramienta pedagógica para desarrollar las habilidades discursivas, y así contribuir a las prácticas de análisis lingüístico en el salón de clases.

PALABRAS CLAVE: enseñanza, interaccionismo socio-discursivo, género, texto escrito, blog.

1 INTRODUCTION

The publication of the PCNs (Brazilian Curriculum Parameters) (Brasil, 1998) initiated a process of change concerning the teaching of the mother tongue in Brazil. These documents are disconnected from formalist proposals and have adopted a functionalist perspective, grounded on a linguistic-discursive basis. We do not want to affirm, however, that this change has been fully accomplished inside the Brazilian schools and, consequently, within the Portuguese classes. We cannot deny the important contribution of these official documents for the construction of a new paradigm for the teaching and learning of our mother language, whose functionalist inspiration can be observed in the proposed course book choices that, for different reasons, have been subject to efforts to adjust to the PCNs' guidelines.

According to Rojo (2000), while the PCNs introduce innovation, they also require a great reflection effort to be put into practice in the classroom, especially concerning the treatment of texts as the basic teaching unit and, consequently, the treatment of genres. Although the PCNs date back to the 1990s, the idea of adopting the text as the basis for teaching and learning is a little older. Rojo and Cordeiro (2004) point out that this principle had been mentioned since the 1980s in several curriculum proposals, as well as in an important work in the field, entitled "The text in the classroom," written by Geraldi in 1984.

This does not mean that the pedagogical treatment of texts has been the same during these three decades. According to Rojo and Cordeiro (2004: 8-9), the text constituted, at first, an "empirical object" which created opportunities for the teaching of reading, writing and linguistic analysis, becoming a "support for the development of strategies and abilities for reading and writing" only later on.

This procedural approach also meant that the structural properties of texts started to be explored from a textual linguistics point of view. Therefore, concepts such as textual super, macro and microstructure, and cohesion and coherence, among others, started to be approached in the context of an epilinguistic and metalinguistic

analysis. In all these stages, according to the above-mentioned authors, a certain level of “silencing” was inevitable concerning the treatment of the conditions of production and circulation of texts.

From the observation of this gap in language education methods, we decided to carry out an experiment, at first as a pilot project, in a private school in Fortaleza (CE), the capital of a Northeastern Brazilian state, in which the blog was selected as a study object for the teaching of writing. The blog was chosen for several reasons, such as: 1) it has been adopted by an ever-growing number of users (according to data presented by *Época* magazine, ed. 428, 31/07/2006¹, 75 thousand blogs are created in the world every day; 2) we consider it important to introduce basic education teachers to the written production in the digital sphere, helping them to understand that the kind of language used in the digital environment results from new forms of interaction; and 3) we intend to propose, in a tentative and preliminary way, a didactic sequence using a text of increasing importance in our society, such as the blog. For Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004), a didactic sequence is

[...] a set of school activities focused on an oral or written genre in a systematic way [...], [aiming at] [...] helping the learner achieve improved mastery of a genre, thus making him/her able to write and speak in a more appropriate form in a given communicative situation [...]. (p. 97)

To accomplish these goals, we adopted as theoretical background the theory of socio-discursive interactionism, henceforth SDI, specially the studies by Schneuwly and Dolz (2004) and other researchers who have been working from this theoretical point of view in the design of proposals for genre teaching. Therefore, we used an interpretational methodology, which meant that we participated in the universe of the subjects of the study (the teachers), in order to accomplish a pedagogical action in a cooperative and participative way.

This article is divided in three sections: first, the presentation of the basic concepts that compose our theoretical background, namely the socio-interactionist framework, which includes the notion of text, discourse type, sequence and intertext; secondly, a brief description of the literature regarding blogs; and finally, the account of our experience in the above-mentioned school, where we detail the methodological procedures we used and the results achieved by this pilot project.

2 SOME FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

Considering that the concepts related to genre studies are at the same time very blurry and not really consensual, we decided to present the main notions concerning SDI. We will therefore address the notions of text, discourse type, sequence and intertext. It is important to make clear that the epistemological foundations of interactionism are very complex, since they result from a dialogue among several disciplines in the domain of human sciences. Machado (2005) also warns us about the interpretative difficulties imbedded into the term socio-discursive interactionism,

¹ Amorim and Vieira (2006). Check <http://revistaepoca.globo.com>

which result from the frequent use of terms with different meanings to refer to this basic concept.

The notion of genre will be considered while we detail the notions of text, discourse type, sequence and intertext, since authors such as Bronckart, Schneuwly and Dolz do not present a defined concept of genre. Machado (2005) considers that the genre framework must be understood within its insertion in an integrated context which encloses the fields of language psychology and language pedagogy. Therefore, the author argues for the idea that "SDI [socio-discursive interactionism] does not take genres as its privileged units of analysis, nor does it consider that their analysis is its main objective" (Machado, 2005: 238).

At first, this statement may sound strange or even contradictory, considering that the subjects of our research (Basic School teachers) had decided to use the blog as an educational tool. However, Schneuwly and Dolz (2004) point out that the intermediary and integrative character of genres provides the articulation between language practices and the learner activities. In other words, genres function as an expectation horizon for the members of a community, while working at the same time as supporting elements for the accomplishment of language action. For these reasons, they are granted the status of "instruments." However, we intend to take a different direction, as did Machado (2005), defining what a genre is not, arriving at a definition of what can effectively be considered one. Therefore, we present below the main concepts related to SDI, as termed by Bronckart (2003):

TEXT: [...] the notion of text refers to all units of language production which convey a linguistically organized message and which tends to produce a coherence effect on the addressee. Consequently, this unit of language production can be considered the highest communicative level. (p. 71)

TYPE OF SPEECH: [...] linguistic forms which are identifiable in the texts and that manifest the creation of specific **discursive worlds**; these types are articulated among themselves by means of textualization and **enunciative** mechanisms to provide the textual whole its sequential and formal coherence. (p. 149)

SEQUENCE: [...] designates more conventional organization patterns or, more specifically, language [*langagières*] organization modes, which are developed within the overall textual plan (narrative, explicative, argumentative sequences, etc.). (p. 121)

INTERTEXT: [...] it is constituted by the set of genres elaborated by the preceding generations, the way they are used and eventually transformed and reoriented by the contemporary social formations. (p. 100)

In a more recent publication, Bronckart (2006) reaches the conclusion that the term "intertext" is not adequate, considering that the common use of that term expresses a different meaning from what is intended in the SDI field. Thus, the author decides to replace "intertext" by "archtext", without any change in the term definition. Of all the concepts mentioned above, maybe the concept of text is the most complex, as well as the most abstract. In that sense, the concept of text may be the one which has undergone the greatest revision. Machado (2005) points out the fact that, in the last studies carried out by researchers led by Bronckart, Schneuwly and Dolz, the concept of text has been replaced by the notion of action.

Bronckart (2003) divides discourse types into four groups: interactive discourse, theoretical discourse, interactive report and narration. This division is derived from

two: firstly, the coordinates that organize the verbalized thematic content fulfill an operation of conjunction or disjunction with the coordinates of the ordinary world, which generates discourse varieties aimed at exposing (conjunction) and narrating (disjunction); secondly, a procedure that frames the producing agent in relation to his discourse and to the elements that constitute the conditions for discursive production generates an implicative or autonomous discourse. All these discourse modes are universal and materialized in different ways depending on each language, and can be upgraded in different sequences and genres of texts. For a better understanding, see Figure 1.

| General world coordinates | | | |
|---|-------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | Conjunction | Disjunction |
| Relation with the production act | Implication | Expose Interactive discourse | Narrate Interactive report |
| | Autonomy | Theoretical discourse | Narrative |

Figure 1: Discourse types (Bronckart, 2003: 157).

Some relations can be derived from these concepts, that is, every text is considered a genre sample, which can be made of only one or of several discourse types, which can in turn be planified (linguistically organized) into one or more textual sequences. Considering these relations, we question what a genre could possibly be. Machado (2005) answers this question:

[...] text genres can never be identified and defined on the sole ground of their linguistic properties, which means that any identification-definition-classification project based only on inner characteristics must be abandoned. The identification of discourse types and/or sequences would not be enough for that purpose. However, this conclusion does not allow us to affirm, *ipso facto*, that the identification of discourse types and sequences is useless, nor does it deny that it can be used as a criterion, along with many others, for the characterization of a certain genre. Similarly, recognizing that discourse and sequence types are not sufficient criteria for genre classification does not allow us to deny their occurrence within texts nor to affirm, categorically, that they do not need to be taught and learned or that it is useless to carry out studies which have them as objects. (p. 248)

To sum up, if it is certainly true that conceptualizing genre within this theoretical framework is a hard task, at least that does not invalidate what we recognize as such: editorials, fairy tales, and medication prescriptions, to mention only some examples. Schneuwly and Dolz (2004), on the other hand, prefer to characterize genre as an "instrument." To explain this view, Schneuwly (2004) conceives a tripolar configuration (check Figure 2), in which he has placed the instrument between the subject and the situation.

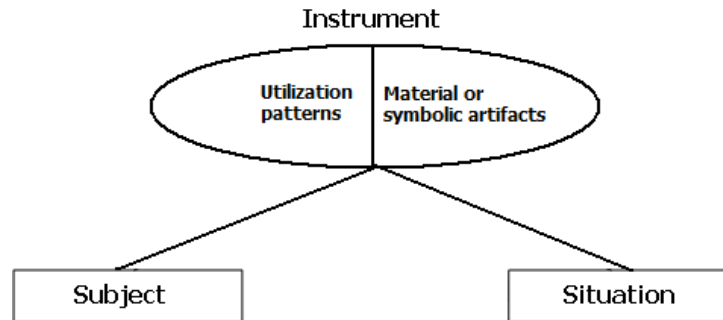


Figure 2: Instrument tripolarity (2004: 25).

The instruments are socially designed and guide subject behavior. The subjects, in turn, can also be transformed by the instruments. To become the mediator between the subject and the situation, the subject must gain full command of the instrument. According to Schneuwly (2004: 24), "the instrument makes us see the world in a certain way and provides us with a particular knowledge of the world." In this sense, we understand that the appropriation of an instrument by teachers opens new possibilities for them to understand the world and to act upon it. In the next section, we shall present a brief summary of what has already been written about blogs.

3 THE BLOG AS LANGUAGE BEHAVIOR

Although blogs are relatively recent, they have been the object of extensive research work in the fields of Linguistics and Education. Lankshear & Knobel (2006) lead us, through their work, to a reflection about the phenomenon of new literacies, which is characterized by new paradigms concerning computer-mediated digital technologies. In that perspective, the authors focus on collective intelligence, dispersion and participation, among other aspects of new literacies, constantly referring to several analyses of different forms of participation in blogs. According to Lankshear & Knobel (2006: 13):

To say that new literacies are constituted in part by their 'ethos stuff' [...] is to draw attention to their affiliation with the cultural logic of the insider, or second, mindset described earlier and, more specifically, with social and ontological constructs like Web 2.0. This, in turn, is to draw attention to the deeply participatory nature of these literacies, nowhere better instantiated than in the social practice of blogging.

Based on the premise that there is a broad participation process in blogs, we intend to discuss the blog's fuzzy nature: whether it is a genre or, even, a medium for a specific genre. The motivation for this discussion is the fact that texts produced by Brazilian students, in general, have no other intended audience than the teacher. Since blogs are written to a specific and 'real' audience, we believe that blog

production in the classroom might stimulate the verbal interaction process during writing lessons.

Unlike Lankshear & Knobel (2006), other researchers have considered the blog as a genre itself. Among those works, we highlight the ones by Komesu (2005), Ferreira (2006) and Miller and Shepherd (2006). Other studies focus on the register used in blogs, such as those by Ruiz (2005), Pimentel (2006) and Caiado (2007).

From a discourse analysis perspective, Komesu (2005) investigates the linguistic-discursive dimension that constitutes the blog writer activity, based on the hypothesis that the production conditions of blogs emerge from privacy made public. From this point of view, Komesu (2005) does not agree with the categorization of blogs as digital diaries, since the search for visibility is one of the objectives of blog writers, whereas in personal diaries privacy is an aspect to be maintained. In other words, blogs are constituted of and work in very distinct ways from those of the traditional diaries.

The author calls the enunciative relations found in blogs a *dynamic rapport* between the public and the private domains. As a matter of fact, the utterances found in blogs are characterized by the overt exposition of the self, opposing the historical impossibility to say something new and criticize it at the same time. Komesu (2005) gives the example of a blog in which the author focused on the pleasures and difficulties of eating bread and butter every day.

According to Miller and Shepherd (2006), this ‘destabilization’ or ‘intersection’ between the public and private domains, which we can observe in blogs, is a characteristic that has been present since the end of the 1990s. The cultural context where blogs is inserted has also generated reality shows and memoirs, for example.

Research conducted by Komesu (2005) and Miller & Shepherd (2006), despite being related to distinct areas (Discourse Analysis and New Rhetoric, respectively), discuss the relation between public and private matters, which, in our opinion, perfectly matches the dimension of the “new ethos stuff”, as mentioned by Lankshear & Knobel (2006).

An aspect which we consider especially relevant in the work by Komesu (2005) is the classification the author proposes for blogs, based on two criteria: the number of writers, which divides blogs into individual and cooperative ones, and the subject, which classifies blogs into personal, professional and personal/professional ones. Figure 3 illustrates this typology.

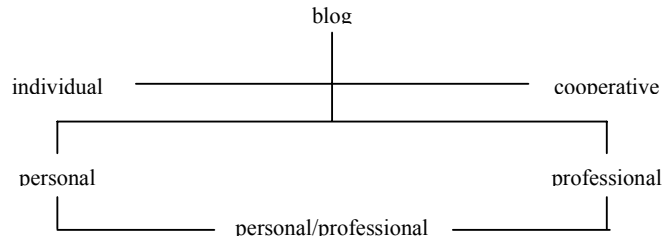


Figure 3: Classification of blogs (Komesu, 2005: 109)

Considering the phenomenon of participation in blogs, as described by Lankshear & Knobel (2006), in which the authors present different patterns and levels of participation strength, we question whether one could consider the possibility of having an individual blog. Is not the blog always the result of a collective production, done by several individuals, even when it is started by a single person? These questions need to be considered when one intends to establish a categorization for blogs.

Ferreira (2006), on the other hand, analyzes the contrast between the language used in blogs written by teenagers and adults, from three different perspectives: utterance organization; sociolectal behavior; and, finally, the topics discussed in the blogs. The author's inquiry led to the following conclusions:

- blogs for teenagers constitute a space for interlocution with their peers, since teenagers' main concern is interaction, whereas blogs for adults are an opportunity for the expression of their individuality, as adults' mostly focus on subjectivity;
- both groups employed specific language; however, the teenagers made a considerable use of slang, swear words, conversational markers, among other linguistic resources, thus making text understanding rather difficult for interlocutors who do not share this digital sociolect. The adults, on the other hand, used primarily standard written language;
- teenager blogs dealt with subjects specific to their universe, such as: school, dating, parties, among others; on the other hand, adult blogs were mainly concerned with subjects such as marriage, work, books, for example.

For Miller and Shepherd (2006), "the content is important for blog writers because it represents their freedom to select and present this content," which is considered by the authors as the most important characteristic of a blog. That does not mean that making generalizations on the content of blogs is an easy task, given its great variety. The authors also point out the "expression of the subjectivity," a pragmatical action that is accomplished by blogs in general. This action, in turn, creates a type of "personal writing" that is based on prizing the writer's personal ideas. In the words of Miller and Shepherd (2006):

[...] we must characterize the generic exigence of the blog as some widely shared, recurrent need for cultivation and validation of the self; furthermore, in these particular times, we must locate that need at the intersection of the private and the public realms, where questions about identity are most troubled.

From this perspective, the authors understand subjectivity as a product of a given point in time and space. Thus the blog as a genre is a post-modern contribution to the art of self-disclosure.

Other studies, such as those by Caiado (2007), Pimentel (2006) and Ruiz (2005), have explored the language used in teenager blogs. Aiming at analyzing the use of digital language, Pimentel (2006) carried out a case study of a blog produced by a teenage girl, where the use of several linguistic resources could be observed, including abbreviations (qtas = quantas, in English how many), spelling changes (nkela = naquela, in English in that one), letter/accnt suppression (faze – fazer, in English make), slang (meu, similar in English to buddy), among others.

In particular, Caiado (2007) and Ruiz (2005) were concerned with establishing a relation with school writing. Caiado (2007) points out that teenagers try purposefully to write in a "wrong" way, thus demonstrating their clear awareness of the notional regularities and irregularities of Portuguese. The author emphasizes that Internet writing must be understood as a linguistic variation, perfectly adjusted to its context of production and circulation, and that it cannot be considered by educators as "wrong" forms.

Ruiz (2005) follows the same idea, though in a little less emphatical way, characterizing Internet language as the result of a linguistic reflection performed by the writer when trying to shorten words or make them resemble oral forms, for example. She also points out the meaning effects this kind of language produces. According to Ruiz (2005: 126): "those who use this kind of language are fully aware that they write that way because they are in a marked environment, where producing light-hearted text in a more informal, friendly and playful style is more important than going against standard spelling or inserting emoticons to speak in written form."

Based on our knowledge of the socio-interactionist theoretical framework and on previous studies about blogs, we started a field research in which teachers would motivate their students to create a cooperative, institutional blog. The term "institutional" refers to the fact that the blog would have as subject the activities and events which took place at the school where this study was carried out. It is also important to highlight that the decision to create an institutional blog was taken after long discussions with teachers and students about the status of the blog to be created.

4 TEACHING AND LEARNING HOW TO WRITE BLOGS IN THE CLASSROOM

For organizational purposes, this section is divided in two parts: in the first one, we describe the context of the research, as well as the methodology we used; in the second, we report the teachers' experience during the blog production activity proposed to the students.

4.1 Research scope and methodology

The present study results from a participant pilot research project that was carried out in a private school in Fortaleza, Brazil, in 2007. This school has approximately 1300 students and about 53 teachers, including all education levels (kindergarten, elementary school and high school). Initially, we selected a sample constituted of 13 Portuguese teachers who worked in Elementary Level I (2nd to 5th grades) and Elementary Level II (6th to 9th grades). The high-school Portuguese teachers were not included in this study due to their lack of time to take part in the project and in the meetings.

This group of teachers was very heterogeneous, since some teachers had graduate degrees; others had managed to get their undergraduate degree through

special two-year undergraduate programs in Education or Portuguese Language Teaching; some others got their undergraduate degrees from regular four-year programs in Portuguese Language Teaching; and others were still attending their Education or Portuguese Language Teaching undergraduate courses. This initial group participated in two stages of the project. In the last stage, the group was downsized to four teachers.

The school was chosen based on accessibility, as well as on our familiarity with its pedagogical project, since we had previously worked in pedagogical supervision at this institution. We also knew that the elementary level Portuguese teachers in this school adopted a course book that based teaching and learning on genres.

We followed the action-research methodology, which is characterized as "a type of empirical social research conceived and conducted in close association with an action or with the solution of a collective problem, and in which the researchers and participants, representatives of the situation or problem at hand, are involved in a cooperative and participative way" (Thiollent, 1985: 14). Inspired by this methodology, we produced a script with the procedures to be carried out; this script, however, was not meant to be rigidly followed, since we intended to perform a participant study in which the teachers would be the ones to choose the directions to be taken.

Our plan consisted of the following stages: a) an exploratory phase, during which we intended to get to know the research field better, that is, to find out about the type of work which had already been done with digital writing, especially the blog, in the school; b) the presentation of seminars, in order to share with the teachers the academic knowledge already available on blogs, as well as basic information on the general theoretical background of SDI; and, finally, c) the elaboration of a participative project of action, during which the teachers planned a series of activities developed to make the appropriation of the blog possible to their students.

For the analysis of this experiment, we have considered the texts produced by the students and the notes we took during the meetings with the teachers and during the classes, in which we could observe the students' performance and motivation.

4.2 Experience report

In the exploratory phase, we explained to the teachers our intention to carry out a study using the blog as a teaching tool. The group appeared very willing to participate actively in the research. As we already knew that the teachers worked with genres during their Portuguese lessons, we set out to find more about their work with digital writing. The teachers reported never having used the blog in classroom activities.

We also asked what they knew about blogs. Very few teachers knew what blogs were, since none of them were users of this genre. Those who affirmed to know blogs declared that they had heard of the genre's existence because some students, their children, relatives or friends had already mentioned having one. Apart from a teacher who was then conducting a study on speech markers in teenager blogs, they had no knowledge of this genre, nor of the blogs' possibilities for pedagogical

transfer. This diagnosis reaffirmed the need for a research such as the one we intended to accomplish, since it was clear that, in that educational environment, there was a gap in the pedagogical use of digital writing.

The team of researchers and teachers did not set, *a priori*, a specific number of meetings. We were aware that it would be necessary to explore some basic notions of SDI, previously detailed in section 2, as well as research results on blogs. During the meetings stage, we started to present to the teachers the theoretical framework where our study was inserted. We initially suggested the reading of Machado (2005) as preparation for a future presentation by the researcher (Sousa). During the exposition, the teachers' questions were also answered, especially those concerning the fact that, within the theoretical framework we were working with, the notions of text and genre were considered "abstract" notions.

The next meeting was reserved for the study of expert knowledge about the genre blog. The researcher presented a seminar exploring the main conclusions of Komesu (2005) on blogs. It was a very participative meeting, since, besides the theoretical presentation, we set aside a moment for the exploration of some blogs on the web. We visited the blogs recommended by *Época* magazine as the 'most interesting' ones in Brazil: "Jesus, me chicoteia", "Kibe Loco", "Cocadaboa", "Interney", "Querido Leitor", "Pensar Enloquece", "*Blog do Noblat*", and "*Blog do Juca*." We also noticed the teachers' discomfort at the kind of writing used in the blogs. They wondered just how much this writing style used on the web could influence the texts written at school, and tried to understand what attitude they should adopt in relation to this writing, since some of these teachers had already observed samples of this type of language in their students' texts.

Such questions showed the necessity of a third meeting focusing exclusively on these aspects. We suggested the reading of Ruiz (2005), Caiado (2007) and S.C.T. Sousa (2007). During this meeting, we discussed the main points of each text, without any presentations by the researchers. This seminar resulted in a deeper reflection on the language used in blogs, from a different point of view from those of the purist views which affirm that digital writing promotes the "destruction" of the language. The teachers agreed that this kind of language is a result of its specific production conditions. That perception made them state that the terms "adequate" or "inadequate" would be much more appropriate when referring to digital writing than the terms "right" or "wrong."

We pointed out that, from the very beginning of the study, we would not adopt a normative position on these issues; on the contrary, we wanted to keep our investigative perspective, since we had been studying genres for some time already. In this way, we felt we could establish a relation of partnership with the teachers. That partnership could be implemented at decision-making moments, as the research activities unfolded; in other words, both the researchers' and the teachers' opinions were given the same importance.

As one of the teachers had finished her study on speech markers found in blogs produced by teenagers, we asked the group's opinion about inviting this teacher to share the results of her work (Sousa, 2007), which was readily accepted. This teacher also sent her paper by e-mail to the other members of the group. In the following meeting, she pointed out the intermediate position of blogs, having both

written and oral language characteristics. That is why it contains significant speech markers, such as: hesitations, interruptions, conversational markers, expressive punctuation. In her presentation, the teacher also emphasized the meaning effects these markers can provoke on blog readers.

During this meeting, the teachers were asked to reflect on some questions, such as: what type of blog would be created in the classroom, considering that, when we bring the blog into the school context, it is no longer only a communication instrument, but also an educational tool? What contents should be explored by means of the blog? What psychological (students' motivations and interests based on Dolz, Schneuwly and Pietro (2004)), cognitive (student's use and appropriation of abilities), social (the presence of the blog inside and outside the school), and pedagogical dimensions should be involved in the design of this action project?

When we returned to the school in the second semester of 2007 and met with the teachers once again, we realized that, due to the activities some teachers were involved with during that stage, it would not be possible to carry out the research with all the teachers, as we had thought initially. Then, after collective discussion, it was decided that only the Elementary School II teachers would take part in the pilot project, since they had available time to co-ordinate the activities proposed. Thus, our group was downsized to three Elementary School II teachers and one Elementary School I teacher, who was chosen by the group because she had already finished her monograph work exploring the language of teenager blogs. The four remaining teachers had undergraduate degrees in Portuguese Language Teaching, and two of them had specialization degrees.

Another decision to be taken concerned the group of students who would participate in the pilot project. The decision to work with a sample of 8th and 9th grade students was unanimous, for they were more independent. The group of the students was chosen based on criteria such as commitment and availability to participate in the project, since they could be asked to come to school at other times apart from their regular school hours.

During the same planning meeting, we also felt the need to discuss the notion of didactic sequence with the teachers, to enhance their theoretical confidence when building the pedagogical proposal. We suggested the reading of Dolz, Noverraz, and Schneuwly (2004), who present the necessary procedures for the accomplishment of a didactic sequence.

In a subsequent meeting, we discussed each of the stages comprised in the procedures suggested by the above-mentioned authors, namely: presentation of the situation, initial production, modules and final production. After that, the teachers built a "didactic sequence" for the blog. While they planned the sequence, our task was to try to establish relations between the pedagogical practices designed and the theoretical framework previously studied by the group. For that purpose, we revisited the notion of text and, having understood it, in the context of the SDI theory, as a communicative unit, the teachers started questioning if each blog post could not be considered a text in itself. We then decided to discuss if a blog constituted a genre in itself or a means for the communication of different genres. We also reflected on which enunciative mechanisms would be employed by the students for the creation of the blog: if they would make use of the school's "voice"

or of their own “voice” when writing posts; if they would be merely descriptive or enhance descriptions with evaluative expressions; which would be the addressees of the blog, among other questions. The teachers said that it would be more appropriate to have that discussion in the students’ group, because as we intended to carry out a text production project with emphasis on interaction, the decisions should also be taken with the students’ participation. That decision did not hinder the planning of a didactic sequence for the teaching/learning of the blog.

The resulting plan comprised a series of six meetings, guided by the methodology on didactic sequences suggested by Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004). The stage of presentation of the situation was accomplished in two meetings: first, the project of building a blog was presented to the students, as well as some samples of this genre. Differently from what we had assumed, blogs were not so often used by the students as we had thought. Some of them had never read a blog. However, this aspect did not represent an obstacle to our research. On the contrary, as one of the teachers pointed out, “From that moment, students started feeling very excited; as we gave explanations on blogs, several questions came up out of their curiosity regarding the procedures for building the blog.” From this comment we can conclude that, in spite of remaining a school task, the idea of working with digital writing motivated the students and captured their interest (psychological dimension).

In the second meeting, the communicative situation involving the students was determined (the purpose of the blog, the addressees, the nature of the students’ participation), as well as the contents to be explored. Together, students and teachers decided that they would produce a collective blog focusing on the main school events or news. The kind of language to be used in the blog was a controversial topic and, to settle it, the teachers always referred to the audience to which their production was addressed. It was decided that the students would use an informal register, but without abbreviations, since parents, teachers and other members of the school community would also read blog.

The members of the group also voted for the blog’s name – the winning proposal, “CME in action,” contains the initials for the name of the school (Maria Ester School, in Portuguese *Colégio Maria Ester* – CME). The students were then divided into groups and asked to write collaboratively a text on a subject related to the school’s extracurricular events, in which they all participate during the year, and which focus on different content areas, such as “Geoarts,” “Literarts,” and “Building reading.” According to Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004: 99), “the presentation of the situation is, therefore, the moment when the group builds a representation of the communicative situation and of the language activity to be performed.”

On the occasion, to facilitate the students’ understanding of blogs, they visited several blogs, observing the format and the textual structure, among other aspects. This activity made the teachers reflect on the notion of architext (Bronckart, 2006), thus relating theory to practice. As a matter of fact, the students were not supposed to create the blog; rather their task was to use an existing sample and adapt it to a real communicative situation. In that sense, to prepare the students to start writing the blog it was necessary to capture the blog at a certain moment in time, inserted in samples of texts historically written by other generations.

In the third meeting, the students accomplished the first text production – they elaborated their profile, which was then evaluated in group and later typed and stored in a folder called "Blog profile." During this meeting, the teachers observed the textual, grammatical and spelling difficulties the students presented and, from this diagnosis, they were able to highlight the problems in each of the texts and to suggest their rewriting. Students were tutored in small groups of two or three. As we can observe, it was possible to accomplish, in one single meeting, two stages of the didactic sequence suggested by Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004): the initial production and one of the modules.

In the fourth meeting, the students started writing posts, following the same production, evaluation and rewriting process which guided the previous meeting. One of the teachers commented on the textual production process. She said:

The impressions I want to register here refer to the elaboration of the initial production, when the students started to choose the event or project they would write about in the blog. Some students were concerned with expressing their opinion sincerely, afraid of not having their positions accepted, when, of course, they received negative criticism, such as that people might not like the project because it did not "look like" the students, or because the blog was not publicized among the students, or the students' participation was very small [...]

One of the texts criticized the organization of the school's newsletter and was posted after our meetings. The students noticed that the possibility of presenting their negative views on curricular and extracurricular school activities publicly would make them smooth their discourse. It was thus possible to observe the manifestation of the social dimension of blog writing; that is, the teachers told the students that, in case they wanted to express a negative point of view, it was advisable to keep away from personal evaluations. That fact made the teachers reflect about the diverse operations entailed in the production of a language action, in that specific situation related to enunciative mechanisms. The teachers also discussed with the students the importance of the context of text production in determining a text's organizational characteristics.

Their fear of expressing their opinions through words made a group of students post the following image:

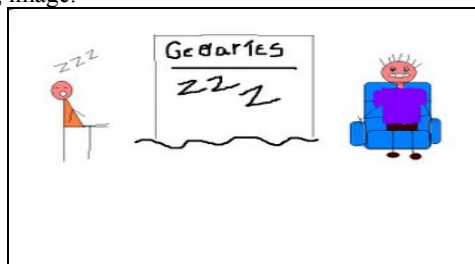


Figure 4: Geogartes (Cmenaativa, 2007).

On the other hand, of all posts, this is the one which has received, until this moment, the highest number of comments, a total of eight. We could observe that, when they moved from an enunciative position to another, from blog producers to addressees, the students did not present any discomfort in expressing their criticism. Perhaps this change can be explained by the fact that, in the position of "commentators," they felt in some way free from the responsibility for what they enunciated. Such assumption can be illustrated by the following comment:

"BiaAaAaAa Mandou muito bem!!! e falou a realidade!!! Alunos nem ai!!! Deixando o tio Lúcio De cabelo em pé!!! Hauahuahauah Mais a postagem ficou MUITO MASSA... A.D.O.R.E.I."

("Bia said it very well, and said the truth! Folks don't give a dam!!!, Driving teacher Lúcio crazy! Hauahuahauah but the post was WICKED... LOVED IT").

Another comment by a student, on the other hand, criticized the absence of a written statement of the author's point of view: "I found it a true work of art (for kindergarten students), because it shows a 'great' variety of colors. Summing up: The idea was excellent, but the interpretation did not live up to it."

We also observed a change in the type of language used by the students. Although the posts were written in an informal style, the comments to them were expressed in far more colloquial language, characterized by expressive punctuation, slang, onomatopoeic expressions, among other resources.

During the fifth meeting, the students built the design of the blog and of each post and, after that, the texts were finally posted and the blog "CME in action" was **officially open**. This meeting represented the continuity of the process followed in the previous stage, since the students had rewritten their posts after the evaluation of the teachers, carried out in each one of the groups. The teachers informed us that the evaluation process throughout the project was carried out in a formative way, that is, they highlighted the text sections where there were textual, grammatical or spelling problems and what could be improved during the re-writing phase.

When using technological resources, the teachers could rely on the expertise of the employee responsible for the school's computers, who informed them on the procedures for opening a blog, step by step. To make the blog more attractive, as one of the teachers reports, the students themselves "[...] had the idea to transfer their texts to Power-Point, to make it easier to insert images into the texts." In addition to that, the teachers were unanimous in affirming that they had learned a lot from the students, revealing, this way, that interaction among students and teachers promotes the sharing of different forms of knowledge.

The sixth and last meeting was destined to the reading and writing of comments on one another's posts. On the process of interaction in the blog, we point out that the comments were not restricted to those by the students who had produced the texts themselves. According to one of the teachers: "[...] after these meetings, we noticed that the students were spreading the word about the blog to their classmates [...]." This shows that, after this pilot project, the blog was often discussed in the school, and also worked as an evaluation parameter of the school activities, with the students even making suggestions to improve these activities. One of posts

suggested a new organizational format for the school newsletter: "[...] there should be an entertainment section, with wordsearch puzzles, crossword puzzles, spot the difference games, this kind of thing! Perhaps with these changes, the students would feel more motivated to read the periodical."

At this point, as school vacations were near, we noticed that the interaction in the blog did not become as intense as we had thought. But we believe that the digital literacy pedagogical work in this school has only started with this first experience, especially because the teachers showed interest in continuing this project and designing others.

5 CONCLUSIONS

As for the theoretical framework used for this study, SDI, it is important to make clear that the teachers who participated in the project felt insecure concerning the application of some of its concepts, such as the notions of discourse type and textual sequence. Therefore, there is a need for more seminars to deepen these topics, especially because the text by Machado (2005) gave the teachers only a general vision of SDI theory. Such evidence reveals a frailty in the present research, for the number of meetings for the study of the theoretical principles (SDI) did not prove enough for the learning of these concepts, mainly because the teachers showed great interest in deepening their knowledge in that rich theoretical-methodological context.

The researchers, in their turn, have also considered that the psychological, sociological and philosophical epistemological background ends up obscuring the status, for example, of the notion of genre in the proposed model, notably when there is an attempt to relate it to action.

On the other hand, we believe that this theoretical framework is very productive when it comes to proposing didactic sequences. Although the teachers have tried to follow the procedures suggested by Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004), little exploration was made of the "modules" procedure², as well as the writing of other texts, because the writing of the students' profile and of one post are considered as initial productions and the text rewriting as final ones. The "modules" enable students to take part in different activities, all aimed at providing them with the necessary tools to master a specific genre.

We also consider that digital writing can constitute "potential educational subjects." According to Dolz, Schneuwly and Haller (2004: 182), a textual genre exists as a:

potential, on the one hand, because a selection must be made to match the students' capacities and, on the other hand, because the model as such could not be taught: it is by means of the activities, of the manipulations, communicating or metacommunicating about them, that the learners will eventually have access to the modelled genres.

² Probably, time constraints have played a role in making it difficult to explore the modules phase.

We understand that digital literacy work can be understood not only as favorable instruments for the exploration of the linguistic, cognitive and social abilities of the learners, but it can also represent an opportunity for reflection focused on (re)defining the teachers' pedagogical practices. The following report by of one of the teachers illustrates what we have just stated:

During these meetings we could see a little of the potential of our students which is not very often taken advantage of because we, teachers, are too comfortable inside our classrooms and are afraid to dare to do something with it, and we give up when the first difficulty appears.

On the other hand, the execution of the present research has also revealed another side of teacher identity, in which the teacher stands as the participating agent in the pedagogical process, building and changing the reality instead of acting simply as knowledge receiver during the meetings with the researchers. In that sense, SDI has truly become a science of human development, as Bronckart (2006) postulates.

The accomplishment of the present research made evident the necessity of tightening the ties between the university and the school. Taking as example the linguistically-based theoretical background that underlies the PCNs (Brasil, 1998), we can say that it is not well known by the teachers, in their great majority. If mother tongue education in Brazil is still the target of much criticism, despite the advances proposed by the government official documents, much of it is due to a gap that sets apart the university from the schools.

We are aware that the studies in the area of Applied Linguistics have played a relevant role in bridging this gap, but much work still needs to be done. The present research showed clearly the distance between the academic studies on blogs already available and the effective use of genres in the digital sphere as a teaching tool. We believe, therefore, that this work can extend this much needed dialogue.

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