

Chapter 209

Diagnosing to intervene: Diagnostic activities as a pedagogical tools to reflect on the teaching of written production



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ABSTRACT

The objective of this report is to present the results of a diagnostic activity of written production, having as textual genre selected the writing of the Enem. Methodologically, I made use of Action Research to carry out the activity (THIOLENT, 2011). The

analysis revealed that diagnostic activities, when well used, can be consolidated as an important pedagogical device capable of helping us to reflect on the teaching and learning of written production in school.

Keywords: Action research, Diagnostic evaluation, The teaching of written production.

1 INTRODUCTION

Discussing the teaching of the mother tongue is an issue that, every year, has been gaining even more prominence. Geraldi (2006), Leurquin (2020), Buleá-Bronckart (2017), Dolz and Schneuwly (1996, 2004, 2010) and Medonça (2006) are examples of some important references that have been giving their contributions to language teaching; the discussion woven, in this experience report, goes exactly to meet the studies of these theorists. The theme of this report is, therefore, situated in the field of language teaching and learning, focusing on the teaching axis of text production.

The findings presented in this experience report are an offshoot of a Ph.D. research (2020), whose general objective was to analyze the nominal cohesion and connection in the production of the textual genre Writing of the Enem of students entering High School, considering the effects of the meaning of these cohesion mechanisms to ensure thematic progression; and, As guiding questions of the research, I elaborated two: I) *1* *what difficulties does the student entering high school face when producing cohesive texts, when he is submitted to write essay-argumentative texts?* II) how does the incoming high school student appropriate the linguistic-discursive elements materialized in nominal cohesion and connection and use them in essay-argumentative texts?

For the production of this report, I focused on presenting, in general lines, some of the findings revealed in the Ph.D. The thesis is to answer my first key research question, cited in the previous paragraph,

¹ The Thesis is entitled: "The nominal cohesion and the connection in the textual genre Writing of the Enem produced by students entering High School" and was defended in the Graduate Program in Linguistics of the Federal University of Ceará – UFC, under the guidance of the Prof^a Dr. Eulalia Leurquin. This research had the financial support (Scholarship) of the Cearense Support Foundation to Scientific and Technological Development – FUNCAP.

and strengthen the discussions related to the teaching of the mother tongue, especially concerning the learning of written production in the context of the classroom in High School.

To be able to carry out this study, in the methodology, I made use of an important tool: Action Research (THIOLENT, 2011), because I understand that, for the accomplishment of this work, I did not use this tool only for the generation of data; since this research has an interventional character, I acted directly in the teaching and learning process, aiming to solve the problems diagnosed in the students' writing regarding the organization of the textual thematic progression.²

2 METHODOLOGY

My interest in developing this work arose when I performed a diagnostic activity of textual production with students who entered High School. I observed that the students demonstrated to have difficulty regarding the thematic construction in their texts. Therefore, I decided to conduct intervention research, in which I used Action Research. For the writing of this report, it was contemplated, from a universe of 45 students of a first-year class of High School – the class selected for application of the intervention, 3 students, which I will use as a clipping to present and analyze their texts and thus discuss the results.³⁴

I emphasize that, in the Thesis, I analyzed the production of 3 students, which I called Student A, Student B, and Student C; for reasons of space, in this report, I will present, as a clipping, the texts of Students A, B and C, but only the texts of the written production carried out in the diagnostic activity.

For this, I conducted Action Research. However, it should be noted that, for this report, I will present only the first stage of the Research-action focusing on what was diagnosed in the students' writing, in the diagnostic activity.

Thus situated the research, I present, below, its organization and structuring, based on the contributions of Thiollent (2011).⁵

The context of research: the use of Research-action

The research is situated in the field of studies of Applied Linguistics since it defends the work with truly meaningful writing. Rajagopalan (2001), in an interview on linguistics, defends the position that language studies should embark on a reflective dimension. On this question the author tells us:

² For the sake of space, in the report, I will not focus on the discussion of the theorists who were used to support my research; but I will focus on presenting, even as a clipping, the methodological steps of the research and a cut of the analysis and discussion of the data.

³ The school where I conducted my research is EEEP – José Maria Falcão, located in the municipality of Pacajus-Ceará.

⁴ The criterion I used to choose the students in the research was: having demonstrated difficulty regarding writing regarding the thematic progression in the diagnostic activity.

⁵ I clarify that the studies of Thiollent (2011) are not my basic theory of research. To better understand the theoretical foundation of the research, I suggest reading my full Ph.D. Thesis, since here I present only a part of the methodology and a clipping of the data.

when I refer to critical linguistics, I mean, first of all, to refer to linguistics focused on practical issues. It is not the simple application of theory for practical purposes, but thinking of the theory itself differently, never losing sight of the fact that our work has to have some relevance. Relevance for our lives, for society in general (RAJAGOPALAN, 2001, p. 12).

Thus, using the results that were obtained through the analysis of data in the written productions of the students, I will seek to apply them to raise reflections about the work with the written production in the context of the classroom.⁶

For this, as I have already mentioned, action research will be undertaken, since I will be, sometimes a teacher of the room, sometimes a researcher of my teaching practice. According to Thiollent (2011), this work can also be considered action research, because it is empirical research in which an attempt to intervene in the search for a solution to a problem is seen, in addition to allowing the participants of the action, the researcher and the individuals involved in the diagnosed problem, interact in the process, contributing, to the generation of the data that will be observed.

For Thiollent (2011), Action Research has two main objectives:

- I) the practical objective, which aims to contribute to the equation of the problem considered central to the research;
 - II) the objective of knowledge, which obtains the information that, without the procedures used in the research, would not be possible to access them.
- Action research is thus

a type of social research based on empirical, conceived and carried out in close association with an action or with the resolution of a collective problem in which researchers and participants, representative of the situation and/or the problem, are involved in a cooperative and participatory way (THIOLLENT, 1986, p.3).

It is considered, therefore, that "action research is not the study of what others do, but that of our practices" (DOMINGO, 1994, p. 9).

Based on this, it is valid to consider that, as the researcher is directly involved in the process of research and analysis, Thiollent (2011) recognizes possible weaknesses regarding the rigor of the research, stating that the Action Research is insufficient, when it is devoid of the proper character of science; therefore, the author considers it challenging to insert the Action Research in a perspective of scientific investigation, in addition to recognizing that many groups of scholars see in Action Research a certain lowering of academic requirement.

However, I defend and agree that all research, although it has a scientific character, does not fail to consider the expectations of those interested in its objectives and results, for example, as well as understanding that researchers are not neutral or passive. Thus, this challenge in guaranteeing this type of research a scientific character is surmountable through an adequate and consistent methodological basis.

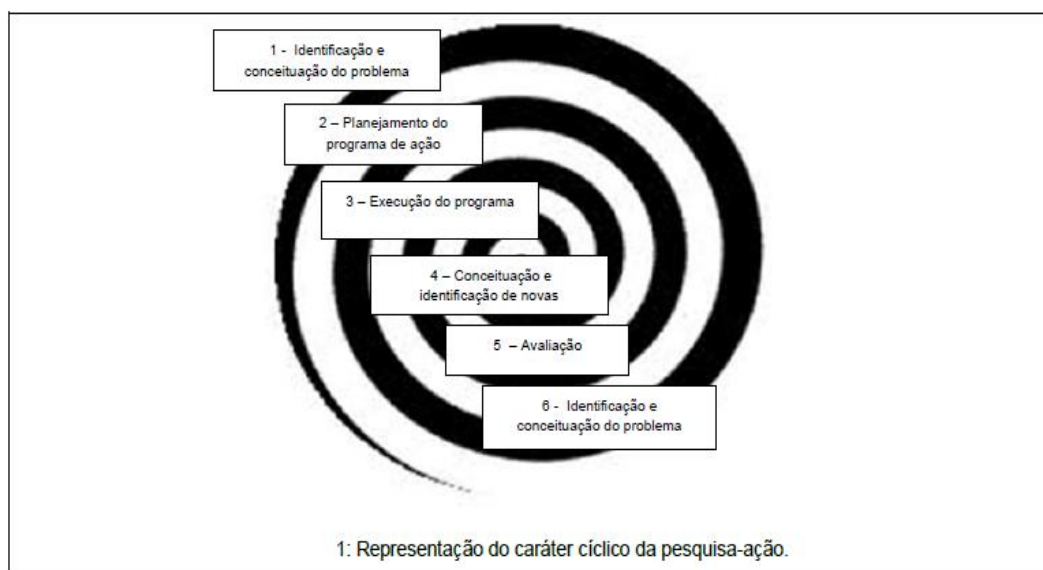
Thus, I bring, according to the author, some guidelines that structure the methodological practice of Action Research.

⁶ I suggest reading the Thesis, so that such reflections may be perceived in greater depth.

This type of research is a mode of experimentation in a real situation, in which the researcher consciously intervenes in the observed problem; instead of participants being seen as "guinea pigs" in Action Research, they are regarded as active; it is also noted, instead of separation, the co-participation between researcher and people involved in the problem investigated, without, however, failing to guarantee the research its "scientific spirit".

Considering the issues mentioned, let us analyze the following figure that suggests Action Research a cyclical character:

Figure 01 – The cyclic character of Action Research



Source: Prepared by Jordan (2004).

According to Jordão, action research is composed of "a cycle of planning, execution, recognition or investigation of the facts and evaluation and so on" (JORDÃO, 2004, p.03).

Applying this composition of Action Research to my intervention context, this figure can be represented as follows:

1) Identification and Conceptualization of the Problem	From a diagnostic activity of written production of the genre Writing of the Enem, I observed that the students demonstrated to have difficulty in constructing the thematic progression in their texts. We have, therefore, the following problem diagnosed: students entering high school present difficulties in constructing/developing the thematic progression in their texts; they, therefore, have difficulty giving the text cohesion.
2) Plan of Action	Knowing the difficulty of the students in producing cohesive texts, I prepared a Didactic Sequence, to teach the genre Writing of the Enem; however, in this Didactic Sequence, the focus goes beyond the teaching of this genre, that is, I focused on working on activities that teach students to build cohesive texts –I focused on the mobilization of textualization mechanisms (nominal cohesion and connection), so that students

	appropriate these linguistic resources, to build thematic progression in their texts.
3) Implementation of the Programme	Activities focused on the mobilization of textualization mechanisms for the construction and development of the theme in the text; in addition to activities aimed at teaching the genre in question. That is, the activities focus on the uses we make of nominal cohesion and connection in the textual genre Writing of the Enem for the construction and development of thematic progression.
4) Conceptualization and Identification of New	The student produces his text; then the teacher corrects it to verify possible outstanding problems related to the thematic progression; after that, the intervention activities are carried out, so that the students can rewrite their text.
5) Evaluation	We evaluated the proposed intervention activities, to see how they could or could not help the student to appropriate the textualization mechanisms in their texts, to build and develop the thematic progression.
6) Identification and Conceptualization of the Problem	After we asked for the production of text, corrected, checked outstanding problems, and worked on intervention activities, so that the student could rewrite his text, we started this cycle again.

I corroborate my choice for this work methodology since I recognize that, through Action Research, the teacher can reflect on his practice, continuing work strategies that have proven to be successful, improving them, even more, and reviewing others that did not work, fixing teaching routes to facilitate the process of learning and the development of writing, which is our focus.

In this way, this work also presents a bias not only investigative-analytical but also interventional, which may contribute to future discussions on the subject, verified in the teacher's action, that is, action research allows the teacher to also perceive himself as a researcher, a researcher, who, from observations of his practice, can contribute to discussions about the teaching and learning of mother tongue.

Diagnostic activity: data analysis and discussion

Before presenting and analyzing the diagnostic activity performed in the class, it should be emphasized that, for this report, I will focus only on the results of the written production made in the diagnostic activity of the 3 selected students and I will not extend myself to the analysis of the other stages of Action Research, presenting only the first moment of the research.

As I have already mentioned, the universe of this research included forty-five students. Of these, I select three. To preserve the identity of the research participants, we will call them Students A, B, and C. Before we present and advance in the analyses, present the theme required for this diagnostic activity. The theme of the text was: "Urban violence in Brazil". Thus, it is expected that the student, when writing, presents, in his text, keywords and expressions that resume the theme of the text, so that they can build the progression of the theme.

The activity guided the students to write the genre Writing of the Enem, of the essay-argumentative type with the aforementioned theme. Next, I transcribe the text written by Student A.⁷

In the diagnostic evaluation of Student A, I mentioned the difficulties related to the writing process, as we can observe in the text that follows.

Text 1: diagnostic activity – Student A

1. The violence in Brazil is quite in the daily life of Brazilians
2. Until many Brazilians who have already gotten used to it and **the others** who already have
3. Until pressure. **Those** in power could do differently as
4. decrease the number of prisons, not accept **them** to pay bail, that each
5. **of them** fulfill their punishment and own up to their mistakes, **they** also 6. could fight drugs in Brazil and put more police
7. prandão on the streets, in the communities and justice do what it has
8. Law.⁸

In the text of student A, in addition to finding grammatical problems, such as nominal agreement ("up to many Brazilians", in line 2), verbal agreement ("those in power could" in line 3), spelling errors ("assumar", line 5), punctuation and syntax errors ("Violence in Brazil is quite in the daily lives of Brazilians has up to many Brazilians", in line 1), we can observe that the text also presents many referencing errors, that is, the student has difficulty in making resumptions of one referring to another and difficulty in constructing the progression of the theme in his text.

To illustrate this difficulty in constructing the progression of the theme, we can summarize, in the table below, how the student introduces his idea, how he develops it, and how he finishes his reasoning.

He begins by stating that violence is frequent in Brazil.
He continues his idea by stating that many Brazilians have become accustomed to the violence that has already become so trivial in the country; however, there are other Brazilians who are going into depression because of this situation.
He then finalizes the text with his proposal for intervention. It advocates reducing the number of prisons, refusing to pay bail, and stricter laws that make those who break the law pay.
Then, he introduces in his text another discursive topic: the fight against drugs; and the expansion of police on the streets. And he concludes by arguing that justice must do what is rightfully theirs.

A first observation to be made is that the student does not delimit the theme of violence in an urban scenario, and only speaks of violence in a more general context, as we can observe in line 1: "Violence in Brazil is quite much in the daily life of Brazilians"; however, when the student-produced his text, it was expected that he would situate the problem of violence in the Brazilian urban context. If he had done so, the central theme of the text would have been delimited and contemplated in his discussion.

About the proposal suggested by the student, in addition to the measures proposed to combat violence as a solution to the problem of urban violence in Brazil, the student introduces, in line 6, that "they

⁷ The transcription of the texts was made as the students wrote in the original.

⁸We number the lines of the texts to facilitate the performance of the analyses.

could also combat drugs in Brazil", bringing a new discursive topic that, although we recognize that the theme violence can present relations with the drug theme, however, the student did not establish, in the text, an adequate "stitching" that would guarantee textual cohesion, to be able to relate these two themes that, although they presented an interrelationship, were not well related, compromising the textual thematic progression.

In addition to this issue, there are referencing problems in the way the student constructed his anaphoric chains: in line 2, the indefinite pronoun "the others" refers to the source unit "Brazilians"; however, the constructed referencing leaves room for poorly elaborated interpretations: it is not clear if the student intended to speak of the same referent, or if he was making a distinction between types of Brazilians; in lines 3, 4 and 5, the pronouns used respectively "the", "they", "their", "they" are not taken up either anaphorically or cataphorically, compromising the comprehension on whom these pronouns are referencing.

Of course, from the attributions given, we can infer that, in lines 4 and 5, in the example: "it does not accept them to pay bail, that each of them fulfills their punishment and assumes their mistakes, they could also fight drugs in Brazil", the pronouns "they" and "their" refer to the possible source units "bandits", "murderers", "robbers", among others of the same semantic field; and the second pronoun "they" can refer to "rulers" or "politicians"; but this information has been inferred by us, through our knowledge of the world; the student would need, however, to review the way he constructed his textual referencing, since some resumptives need to be linguistically marked in the text.

As for the thematic progression, its development is compromised, since there is a lack of connectives both between sentences and between paragraphs, compromising the organization and structuring of the genre. Discursive topics are not well articulated; a better articulation between the ideas of the text would be necessary to better delimit the thesis, the defense of the thesis, and the intervention proposal, which is the canonical structure of the genre Writing of the Enem. In this sense, we observed that the lack of this articulation of ideas in the text may also end up compromising the composition and structuring of the genre.

Analyzing the diagnostic evaluation of student B, I was also able to list writing problems, such as spelling accentuation errors (number, in line 2) and (time, in line 4); morphosyntax errors (cops decrease, line 7); however, we will focus on the problems related to text cohesion, which is the focus of this study.

I transcribe the student's text below:

Text 2 – diagnostic activity – Student B

1. Brazil needs many changes to reduce violence, in the
2. cities is
a higher number of **violence** than in interior
3. nearby, a way to reduce **crime in cities** is
4. increasing the police guard. Increase the workload in schools,
5. more guards in public places, try to keep teenagers
6. away from drugs.
7. Officers decrease **the use of firearms**. **All this** can 8. mitigate **violence in Brazil**.

When it comes to the linguistic elements used to construct the textual "stitching", the student placed the theme of the text well referring to the theme of urban violence, recovering this source unity with the expression "cities" (line 2) and "in the cities" (line 3); the word violence is taken up by the expressions "criminality" (line 3) and "firearm" (line 7). In this text, we can also give an example of anaphoric encapsulation, for example, the expression "all this" (line 7) resumes the measures suggested by the author of the text to solve the problem of urban violence in the country.

Analyzing the progression of the theme of the text, we can observe the following:

Affirms the need for changes to reduce violence;
It compares violence between urban centers and inland cities;
He then proposes the solution to this problem: he suggests the expansion of police officers in public places; an increase in the workload in schools; keeping teens away from drugs; reducing the use of firearms by police officers.

Note that the student begins his text by comparing the level of violence between urban and rural areas, stating that there are more dangers in urban centers. Then it suggests ways to solve this problem. It is necessary, however, to consider that the student does not create adequate connection structures to establish relations between one idea and another of the text; thus, your text becomes a cluster of sentences that need to be better articulated.

Let us note that there is no relationship of progression between what is said in the topic that would be a possible introduction because this idea is not developed, or resumed; the text does not present arguments that defend the student's opinion, so this lack of connection between paragraphs and sentences ends up compromising the structuring of the genre Writing of the Enem itself, because this text requires, in general, in its organization and composition, exposition of a point of view in the introduction, defense of this opinion in the development, and the solution of the problem treated in the theme in the conclusion, however, the student does not present this structure.

Another aspect that draws our attention in the intervention proposal is that it is not well articulated in the previous paragraphs, failing to build the thematic progression, in addition to bringing new themes that, despite being related to the theme in question, the student does not make this adequate "stitching" to relate the themes urban violence and drugs, for instance.

When it comes to the analysis of the text of student C, let's see, first his transcription, then analyze:

Text 3 – diagnostic activity – Student C

1. In principle, **violence** does not disrespect **the police**, but also
2. **politics**, that is, **to the rulers**. **Nothing** will change without **the**
3. em laws, but there is no point in making **laws** without **them** being
4. fulfilled. It seems like a **banal thing**, but 90,000 people **die**
5. no Brazil because of **violence**, this corresponds to 11% of the entire 6. planet. **Some rulers** debate a lot about Forces
7. **Armed concerning violence**, despite being one more thing so 8. no nexus, because the **armed forces** do not have the preparation, besides
9. not having the proper weapons, beyond which they deal with matters
10. international and non-public. A Way to Change **Violence** in 11. **Brazil** is changing the structure of the **country**, and the penitentiaries, change the 12. structures and **new laws**.

In the diagnostic evaluation of this student, if we compare this text to those of students A and B, although it also presents grammatical errors, for example, of nominal regency ("with violence", line 7), of verbal agreement ("the armed forces do not have", line 8) and errors of standard word registration ("preparation", line 8) and (line 1) "At first violence does not disrespect the police", presents a more diversified use of referencing and connective elements, interconnecting sentences and paragraphs, allowing a better delimitation of the compositional structure of the text.

However, in the text, there is an absence of words that can situate this problem in the urban scenario, since the theme of the text is "**Urban** violence in Brazil", compromising the delimitation of the theme and, therefore, the progression of the theme in the text. On the development of the thematic progression, his text is organized as follows:

It introduces, states that violence is related to both the police and politics;
He goes on to speak of the need for changes in legislation so that the laws may be enforced;
It brings data that updates the number of deaths caused by violence in Brazil;
Then, he talks about the discussions around the armed forces, arguing that they are not prepared to deal with violence in the country;
It suggests a solution: a change in the structure of the country, penitentiaries, and laws.

We observed that, although the student has tried to establish a line of reasoning that, in my view, would be to relate the problem of violence with the gaps found in the legislation, he does so leaving the text full of gaps, because there is no deepening of the discussion, nor a relationship of continuity between the ideas presented between the paragraphs.

When it comes to the use of cohesive resources of resumptions and introduction, let's analyze how the student makes his retakes regarding the term "violence". Throughout the text, the student demonstrates a diverse lexicon of expression to return to this term: for example, when he uses "the police" (line 1) and the verb "die" (line 4) being part of the same semantic field of the expression "violence"; it also uses the expression "armed forces" (line 6) and the term "nothing" (line 2); the student also takes up the term "politics" (line 2) by the terms "rulers" (line 2), "some rulers" (line 6); another term we would like to highlight is "the laws" (line 2), which is taken up by a direct anaphora at various times in the text (lines 3 and 4) and by a pronominal anaphora ("they", line 3). The term "Brazil", is taken up in (line 4) by a direct anaphora and by a hyperonym, "country" (line 11).

Regarding the use of connection elements marked, in the text, with a trace, we can see that, despite some inadequacies, the student shows to know a good repertoire of connectives, for example: "that is" (line 2), to explain information; the use of the connective "however" (line 3), to establish an opposition relationship; "for" (line 8), establishing a relationship of explanation between one prayer and another; uses connective with a sense of concession "in spite of" (line 7); and connectives with a sense of addition: "beyond" (line 8); this same sense appears in line 9, with the connective "beyond what" – although misspelled – and the connective "but also" (line 1) used inappropriately, because, in order for its use to be

appropriate to the intended meaning, of sum, the use of the adverb "no" (line 1), in the first sentence, should be avoided; readjusting, the sentence would look like this: "At first violence concerns the police, but also politics" (line 1); or, even, with the permanence of the adverb "no": "In principle, violence concerns not only the police, but also politics."

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By analyzing the text productions of the students' diagnostic activity, we could see that the use of cohesive elements to construct the thematic progression in the three texts presents inadequacies: either with problems related to the use of nominal cohesion or with problems of inadequacies regarding the use of connectives between phrasal structures and paragraphs, making it impossible for the theme of the text to be developed in a cohesive, well-stitched way.

We also note the difficulty of the students in delimiting their opinion, the defense of their points of view, and the proposal articulated in the discussion of the text.

Finally, we realized that of all the difficulties pointed out, introducing a theme, developing this theme, and finalizing its idea is the most prominent writing problem in the three productions, revealing that the students demonstrate difficulty in building the thematic progression in their texts, consequently, having difficulty in productively using the textualization mechanisms.

Considering this, we can conclude that diagnostic activities can be an important pedagogical instrument of continuous evaluation, and can help us reflect on our teaching practice with the work of written production in school.

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