

Diagnosing to intervene: Diagnostic activities as 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 (THIOLLENT, 2011). The analysis revealed that diagnostic activities, when well used, can be consolidated as an important pedagogical device capable of helping us reflect on the teaching and learning of written production in school.

Keywords: Action research, diagnostic evaluation, teaching of written production.

1 INTRODUCTION

Discussing the teaching of 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 making their contributions to language teaching; The discussion woven in this experience report is exactly in line with 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 PhD research (2020),¹ whose general objective was to analyze the nominal cohesion and the connection in the production of the textual genre Redação do Enem of students entering high school, considering the effects of meaning of these cohesion mechanisms to ensure thematic progression; and, as guiding questions of the research, I elaborated two: I) *what difficulties does the student entering high school face when producing cohesive texts, when he is submitted to writing essay-argumentative texts?* II) in what way does the student entering high school appropriate the linguistic-discursive elements materialized in nominal cohesion and connection and use them in essay-argumentative texts?

¹The 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 Prof. Dr. Eulalia Leurquin. This research had the financial support (Scholarship) of the Cearense Support Foundation to Scientific and Technological Development – FUNCAP.



For the production of this report, I focused on presenting, in general lines, some of the findings revealed in the PhD Thesis, in order to answer my first key research question, cited in the previous paragraph, and to strengthen the discussions related to the teaching of mother tongue, especially with regard to the learning of written production in the context of the classroom in High School.

In order to make it possible 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 progression².

2 METHODOLOGIES

My interest in developing this work arose when I carried out a diagnostic activity of textual production with students who entered high school³. 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 class of first year of High School – the class selected for application of the intervention, 3 students, which I will use as a cutout to present and analyze their texts and thus discuss the results⁴.

I emphasize that, in the Thesis, I analyzed the production of 3 students, who 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 an Action Survey. However, it should be noted that, for this report, I will present only the first stage of Action Research, 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.

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 an excerpt, the methodological steps of the research and a clipping 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: to have demonstrated difficulty regarding writing in relation to the thematic progression in the diagnostic activity.

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



2.1 THE CONTEXT OF RESEARCH: THE USE OF ACTION RESEARCH

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

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

Thus, using the results that were obtained through the analysis of the data in the written productions of the students, I will seek to apply them in order to raise reflections about the work with the written production in the context of the classroom⁶.

For this, as I have already mentioned, an 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 an Action Research, because it is empirical research in which one sees an attempt at intervention in the search for a solution to a problem, in addition to allowing the participants of the action, researcher and the individuals involved in the diagnosed problem, to interact in the process, contributing, for the generation of the data that will be observed.

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

- I) the practical objective, which intends to contribute to the equation of the problem considered as central to the research;
- II) the objective of knowledge, which obtains 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 with empirical basis, 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 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 own 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 research, stating that action research is insufficient, when it is devoid of the character of science; therefore, the author considers it challenging to insert action research in a scientific research perspective, in addition

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



to recognizing that there are many groups of scholars who see in action research a certain lowering of academic requirements.

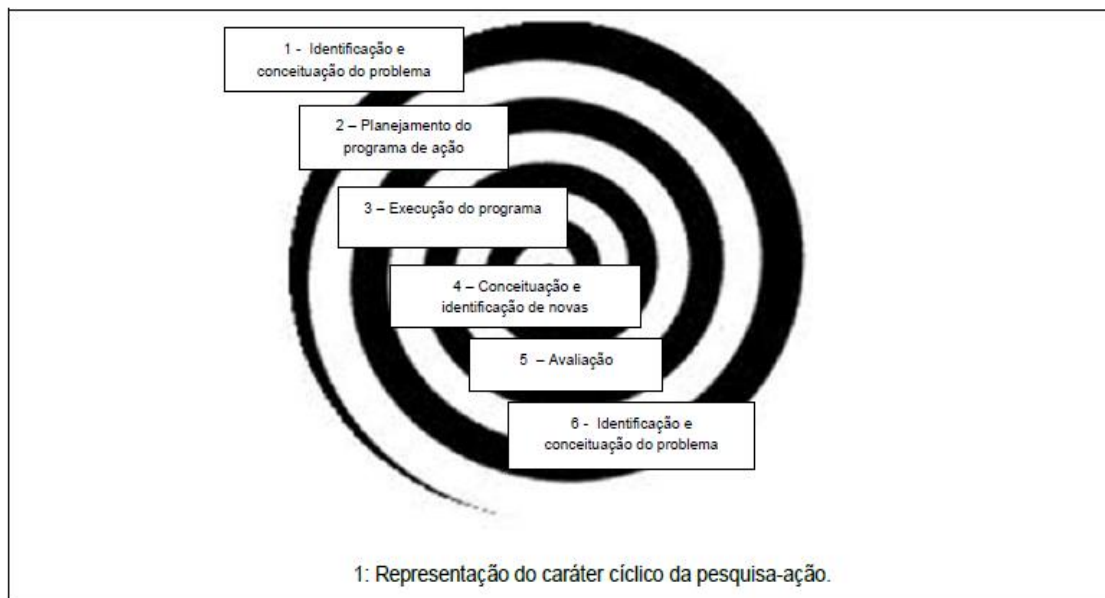
However, I defend and agree that all research, although it has a scientific character, does not fail to consider the expectations of those interested in its objectives and results, for example, as well as understanding that researchers are not neutral or passive. Thus, this challenge in guaranteeing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

This type of research is a mode of experimentation in a real situation, in which the researcher intervenes, consciously, in the observed problem; instead of participants being seen as "guinea pigs", in Action Research, they are seen 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 to Action Research a cyclical character:

Figure 01 – The cyclical character of Action Research



Source: Prepared by Jordan (2004).

According to Jordão, Action Research is composed of "a cycle of planning, execution, recognition or verification 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 Redação do 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 find it difficult to give the text cohesion.
2) Planning of the Action Program	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 in order 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 Redação do Enem for the construction and development of thematic progression.
4) Conceptualization and Identification of New	The student produces his text; then, the teacher corrects in order to verify possible outstanding problems regarding 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, in order to build and develop the thematic progression.
6) Identification and Conceptualization of the Problem	After we have requested the production of text, corrected, verified pending problems, worked 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 his practice, continuing the strategies of work that have proven to be successful, improving them even more, and reviewing others that did not work, fixing teaching routes in order 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 own 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.



2.2 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 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 have selected three. In order 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, I 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 *Redação do Enem*, of the essay-argumentative type with the aforementioned theme. Next, I transcribe the text written by Student A⁷.

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

Text 1: diagnostic activity – Student A

1. Violence in Brazil is quite in the daily life of Brazilians has 2. up to many Brazilians who have already gotten used to it and **others** who already have 3. even pressure. **Those** in power could do differently as 4. decrease the prisons, does not accept **them** to pay the bail, which each 5. **of them** fulfill their punishment and own up to their mistakes, **they** too 6. could fight drugs in Brazil and put more police than 7. prandão in the streets, in the communities and justice do what it has 8. RIGHT.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 ("assume", line 5), punctuation and syntax errors ("Violence in Brazil is quite in the daily life of Brazilians there are even 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.

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

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



It 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.
It then concludes the text with its proposal for intervention. He advocates reducing the number of prisons, refusing to pay bail, stricter laws that make those who break the law able to pay.
Then, he introduces in his text another discursive topic: the fight against drugs; and the expansion of police on the streets. And finally, I argue that justice should 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, but only speaks of violence in a more general context, as we can observe in line 1: "Violence in Brazil is quite in the daily life of Brazilians"; However, when the student produced his text, it was expected to situate the problem of violence in the Brazilian urban context. Had he done so, the central theme of the text would have been in fact delimited and contemplated in his discussion.

In relation to 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 could also fight drugs in Brazil", bringing a new discursive topic that, although we recognize that the theme of violence can present relations with the drug theme, However, the student did not establish, in the text, an adequate "stitching" that would guarantee the textual cohesion, to be able to relate these two themes that, although they present 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 compression on whom these pronouns are referencing.

Of course, from the attributions given, we can infer that, in lines 4 and 5, in the example: "they do not accept to pay the bail, that each of them fulfill their punishment and assume their mistakes, they could also fight drugs in Brazil", the pronouns "they" and "theirs" refer to the possible source units "bandits", "murderers", "robbers", among others of the same semantic field; and the second pronoun "they" may refer to "rulers" or "politicians"; but this information was 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 marked linguistically 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. The discursive topics are not well articulated; it would be necessary a better articulation between the ideas of the text, to better delimit the thesis, the defense of the thesis and the



proposal of intervention, which is the canonical structure of the genre Redação do 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 errors (number, in line 2) and (horaria, in line 4); morphosyntax errors (the police 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 2. cities are greater the number of **violence** than in interiors 3. proximos, 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. Police officers decrease **the use of firearms**. **This can all** 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 unit with the expression "cities" (line 2) and "in the cities" (line 3); The word violence is taken up by the expression's "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) takes up 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 inner cities;
It then proposes the solution of this problem: it suggests the expansion of police officers in public places; the 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. After 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.

Note that there is no progression relationship between what is said in the topic that would be a possible introduction, because this idea is not developed, 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 Redação do 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 to 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 student C's text, 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 law's** 3. change, 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 the **7 Forces**. **Armed** in relation **to violence**, despite being such a thing **8. no nexus**, because the armed forces do not have the preparation, besides 9. not having the proper weapons, beyond what 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 ("in relation to violence", line 7), of verbal agreement ("the armed forces do not have", line 8) and errors of standard vocabulary register ("preparation", line 8) and (line 1) "In principle violence does not disrespect the police", presents a more diversified use of referencing elements and connectives, 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, its text is organized as follows:

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

We observed that, although the student tried to establish a line of reasoning that, in my view, would relate the problem of violence with the gaps found in the legislation, he does so leave the text full of gaps, because it is not perceived a 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 resumption and introduction, let us analyze how the student makes his resumptions regarding the term "violence". Throughout the text, the student demonstrates a diverse lexicon of expression to resume this term: for example, when using "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 term "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", taken up in (line 4) by a direct anaphora and by a hypernym, "country" (line 11).

Regarding the use of connecting elements marked in the text with a dash, 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 sentence and another; uses connective with concession sense "despite" (line 7); and connectives with a sense of addition: "in addition to" (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 adequate to the intended meaning, of sum, the use of the adverb "no" (line 1), in the first sentence, should be avoided; refitting, 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 present 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 way, well "stitched".

We also noticed the difficulty of the students in delimiting their opinion, the defense of their point of view and the proposal articulated to the discussion of the text.

Finally, we noticed that of all the difficulties pointed out, that of 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 constructing 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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