

ACTING OF THE TUTOR IN THE FORUMS OF THE PROGRAM FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION IN MEDIA IN EDUCATION

MACEIÓ, MAY 2010

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Scientific Research

Research and Evaluation

Continuing Education in general

Research Report

Abstract

This article discusses the tutoring in Program of Continuing Education in Media in Education. Reports a research stage, performed a qualitative approach based on case study, aiming to verify how was the performance of the tutor in promotion of the interactivity and in the construction of affectionate bonds, from the observation in forums of the first edition of this Program. The practice evidenced in the forums shows that responsibility with the tutors played a role and is regarded as a very positive, considering that is their first experience in online tutoring. However, the quality of work is related both to the number of students and the profile of the class that is working. Teachers and students have much to learn about the process of online learning, sharing responsibilities.

Keywords - *tutoring, interactivity, discussion forums*

1. Introduction

In virtual learning environments (VLE), the presence of people is by participation in the proposed activities in a given course, utilizing the various interfaces: forum, chat, log book, webmail. This participation takes place

basically through the use of the written language and requires of the participants some characteristics, necessary in a learning community.

The VLE has a number of interfaces to enable interaction. We will highlight the forum because that's where the meeting takes place in the class. The forum is an asynchronous interface, which can be used and consulted at any time, leaving participants free to access, within a predetermined time. The forum begins with defining a topic for discussion and accepts not only the creation of new contributions, as well as the clarification of issues, counter-arguments, questioning of all or a participant in particular [5].

Among the responsibilities of the tutors is the systematic monitoring of the student by checking the posted activities, commenting on them, returning them when there is need for some modification. In forums, the presence of the tutors is essential, contributing to the reflections of the group, verifying the adequacy of contributions, encouraging the dialogue, questioning, and clarifying obscure points if necessary.

So we ask: how was the performance of the tutors in the forums of the Program of Continuing Education in Media in Education? What activities have developed and which can be observed in using this interface? Our hypothesis is that tutors acted in a way that promotes the interactivity and the creation and maintenance of affective bonds made possible by the interface.

The Program of Continuing Education in Media in Education was proposed by SEED/MEC, in partnership with federal universities and state and municipal departments of education, aiming to meet the demand for continued formation of teachers for use of the Technologies of the Information and Communication (TIC) in the public schools.

At this stage of research we have done observations, making a mapping of the presence of tutors and students in the 23 forums held in the Basic Cycle of Media in Education in his first bid, conducted from September 2006 to July 2007.

After mapping, we establish some criteria for selecting the forums to carry out analysis of the activities that tutors made by checking if acted in a way that promotes the interactivity and the creation of affective bonds in the various classes. In this article we present the results of this study.

2. Methodology

The comments and consultations in the forums were used for data collection stage of the case study that we conducted, whose aim was to verify how was the performance of the tutor in the promotion of the interactivity and in the construction of affective bonds with the students.

During the Basic Cycle of Media in Education 23 forums were held, so it was necessary to make a selection among them. For the selection we mapped the presence of tutors and students in each of the 23 forums, in the five classes that finished the cycle. The selection was made according to the following criteria: a) forums that were made as compulsory activities, b) a forum for each module with the highest incidence of the presence tutor/student, c) the topic put the issue under discussion, emphasizing aspects of practice teachers and critical thinking, d) a forum of each group, attending to all the tutors, e) presence of meaningful dialogues. Five forums were selected for analysis.

We made a comparative study of the participation of tutors and students in the forums of the first five modules, with the aim of analyzing a forum in each class. We consider the number of participation of the tutor and of the student in each module, class and forum.

The presence of the tutors in the forums was mapped on the modules of the Basic Cycle, from Introductory to the Printed Materials, examining the five classes that have completed this cycle. The forums selected by the module and class are in Table 1.

MÓDULO	CLASS	FÓRUM
Introductory	1	Technologies in the education
TV and Vídeo	3	TV in the school and the today challenges
Radio	5	Radio in the school
Informatics	2	The computer and his functioning
Printed Materials	4	Importance of the book

Table 1 – Forums selected for analysis by module and group

For purposes of analysis, we based in Stokes [9], which suggests some strategies for assessment of interactivity in VLE. Although the author refers to participants in general, we limit the observation of the indicators for the participation of the tutor in relation to the type of cognitive activity that performed and the resources they had to support the exploration of new possibilities for the group. We add to the indicators proposed by Stokes [9] to

identify dialogical interactions and the presence of affective elements. This gave us the organization of data into four categories that we will describe following, featuring the work of the tutors in the forums of Media in Education.

3. The acting of the tutors in the forums

In forums held in the Basic Cycle of Media in Education we analyze how was the performance of the tutor in the promotion of the interactivity and in the construction of affective bonds. The observations were organized into four categories: a) dialogical interactions, b) cognitive activities present in assistance from tutors, c) exploit new opportunities by the tutor, d) presence of affective elements.

a) Dialogical interactions

We consider dialogical interactions the units of these dialogues in the forums that involved at least three people. All forums start with a explanatory message posted by the tutor, which refers to the readings performed in the unit of study and indicates to students what the content of the discussion. This message is an invitation to participate. In all of them, the teacher asks them to read the contributions of colleagues and interact commenting, questioning, expanding those that drew the most attention or which would become most identified. The Table 2 indicates the number of participations of tutors and students and the dialogues found in the forums for each class.

Forum	Participation Tutor	Participation Student	Dialogues Found
Technologies in the education	39	94	9
The computer and his functioning	22	101	9
TV in the school and the today challenges	39	58	4
Importance of the book	19	47	3
Radio in the school	23	57	3

Table 2 – Dialogical interactions

We observe that, the greater is the participation of members of the group, is also the largest number of dialogical interactions.

The dialogues found show the consistency between the proposed question and answers of the students and appear predominantly in the first days of realization of the forum. Participation of the tutor in the dialogues does not occupy a central position. Students have full liberty to talk among

themselves. In the observed forums, the tutor participates, do not monopolize the conversation, but give indications of the students of what it considers a good argumentation.

b) Cognitive activities present in the interventions of the tutors

The term cognition is used to "identify the set of mental processes involved in the acquisition of knowledge, perception of the world (and ourselves) and how that world is represented" [2]. In the case of the performance of the tutor, we have identified cognitive activities that are desirable to be responsible for establishing the dialogical process that is characteristic of interactivity.

Considering the reflections from Silva [7] about the performance of the teacher in the promotion of the interactivity, such as that establishes the conditions for intervention by the student, and, as indicated by Stokes [9] for analysis of the interactive process, we defined four cognitive activities, possible to be executed by the tutor in forums: formulation of questions; explanation of questions; realization of returns to the content and realization of syntheses. The incidence of these activities in each one of the forums is shown in Table 3.

Forum	Formulation questions	Explanation questions	Returns to the content	Realization of syntheses
Technologies in the education	15	12	7	1
The computer and his functioning	0	14	2	1
TV in the school and the today challenges	8	18	5	0
Importance of the book	2	9	1	1
Radio in the school	2	17	1	0

Table 3 – Cognitive activities executed by the tutor

The formulation of questions by the tutor is present in almost all forums in varying degrees. The highest incidence occurs in the forums “Technologies in the education” and “TV in the school and the today challenges”, and is absent in forum “Computers and his functioning”.

The presence of questions is an important aspect in the interactions, because it creates a cycle involving curiosity-research-reflection-action as a methodology that promotes critical thinking among students and teachers [1].

We find in several forums opportune questions that lead students to think about the possibility of linking theory and practice, such as

his reflection leads us to understand the attention that you're dispensing with regard to analyzing what is watching, it is important

that this discussion be brought to the students, where it will be possible to talk about the theme. How about doing an experiment with them? (Tutor - forum "TV in the school and the today challenges").

The questioning comes in line with the objectives of the course, which proposes a reflection on the critical use of media, the authorship of the teacher as someone who develops practical and can discuss them. The questioning would be extended to other participants, asking those who have developed such experiment and what results are achieved.

Perhaps a part of the explanations that we find with high incidence in all forums could be converted into issues that instigated the research, new propositions, enriching the dialogical process and increasing the possibility of interactivity.

The explanation of questions is more cognitive activity present in all forums analyzed. Is related to the content domain, essential condition for the exercise of the functions of the tutor [3].

In the forums, the tutors comment, have additions to the proposals of the students, adding information, making suggestions and returns to the texts of the studied unity.

It is part of the profile of the tutor present pedagogical soundness with respect to the subject of the course, allowing quick and appropriate interventions [4]. It is necessary to construct good arguments to agree, disagree or cause the students to broaden their way of seeing what is put, pointing to the possibility of multiple viewpoints about the subject under study.

This is evident in the forums, although there is need of thinking about the form of presenting the explanations, since complementary questions might be articulated to them, increasing the possibility of dialogue and interactivity.

The returns to the contents of the course is an indication that the tutor studies and knows the material is made available to the student, so that might be able to follow the discussion and contribute effectively. This appears in all forums and features when it becomes necessary: before a doubt put by the student, before a superficial contribution, which makes the tutor to ask if the student read the material and the position he takes on what is being discussed.

The content studied is the leitmotif of the discussion, although the multiplicity of interests make other emerging themes, issues peripheral figure who sometimes take and occupy a significant place in discussions.

In this aspect, it is also necessary flexibility, not to confine the discussion to the limits of the material, whereas the classes with the participation of teachers from various areas who have knowledge built up over their working lives. The forum is an interface suited to the multiplicity and the tutor needs maturity to succeed in reconciling the various interests and needs, and gently lead those who deviate too much from the purpose of the discussion. Therefore, it is interesting that during the course of the discussions he will performing minor syntheses, provoking the resumption of the ideas proposed and maintaining focus.

The cognitive activity of the attainment of syntheses, was scarcely exercised during the forums analyzed. We identified a very modest presence in some of the forums, and more as a resumption of general aspects of the content and not necessarily in the resumption of a number of ideas circulating in a given time interval, within the duration of the forum.

c) Exploit new opportunities by the tutor

Explore new possibilities means showing other references that could enrich the dialogical process and add significant elements to the process of knowledge construction. According to Stokes [9], this construction can be observed when it presents personal experience and when you add references. Shows students the attention of tutors for study, research, learning process, always in progress.

This aspect was not very experienced by tutors, the forums in analysis, as presented in Table 4.

Forum	Present personal experience	Add references
Technologies in the education	0	0
The computer and his functioning	2	4
TV in the school and the today challenges	2	0
Importance of the book	0	3
Radio in the school	1	1

Table 4 – Exploit new opportunities by the tutor

Regarding the addition of references, few references were added in the forums analyzed. Maybe because in each module already exists plenty of material for reading and the students themselves inform to the tutors the difficulties of time for realization of all the suggested readings. The coordination of the course recommends that tutors avoid this, because the course already available sufficient material resources.

d) Affective elements present in the dialogical process

The construction of affective bonds through writing is part of the mediating action of tutoring. Therefore, it is necessary to know the student and his profile. In community learning, affectivity should be encouraged as a facilitator of learning. These bonds can contribute to student success and stay on course, also serving to stimulate the tutor in work performance.

The identification of affective elements in the forums was made considering three categories: expressions of encouragement (or appreciation) of students ideas explicit, use of standardized expressions and personalization of messages (Table 5).

The expressions of encouragement and appreciation of students ideas are needed to increase their self-esteem, making them feel part of the group. The development of a sense of belonging is important for the creation of affective bonds at VLE [8].

Forum	Encouragement expressions	Use of standardized expressions	Personalization of messages
Technologies in the education	2	0	39
The computer and his functioning	5	0	22
TV in the school and the today challenges	18	0	39
Importance of the book	5	0	19
Radio in the school	1	0	23

Table 5 – Affective elements present in the dialogical process

Concerning the occurrence of discussions, would be expected that conflicts arise. However, even when there are disagreements, these are considered part of the discussion and do not jeopardize the harmony of the group. We do not perceive the interference of the tutors in the administration of conflict explicit.

The presence of standardized expressions characterizes an attitude of superficiality of the tutors who has no interest in knowing the fact that students

have to say. Not found in any of the forums, standardized messages issued by the tutors, indicating the treatment to the student more individualized, which means to Souza and Souza [8], respect for differences, the establishment of "communication guided the individual," encouraging group participation, attitude very favorable to the strengthening of affective bonds.

Concerning the personalization of messages, all messages sent by the tutors have been customized, indicating a careful reading of the ideas presented by students.

We note the active presence of the tutors in the interactions, contributing to the formation of a learning community. This active participation contributes to the creation of links between participants, leading the group to the learning objectives that keep them on course [6].

We found that there is an effort of the tutors to keep the group active during the performance of the forum, sometimes helping each student's posting, sometimes letting talk to each other, highlighting some aspect of speech that deserves further reflection.

The practice that is displayed in the forums shows that responsibility with the tutors played its role and is quite positive, considering that is their first experience in online tutoring. However, the quality of work is related both the number of students and the profile of the class with which it works. Teachers and students have much to learn about the process of online learning, sharing responsibilities.

4. Final considerations

The active presence of the tutors indicate that they have made their contribution to the formation and maintenance of the learning community. We infer, therefore, a pleasant presence of professionals who like and identify with their work.

Of the comments in the forums, we consider some aspects deserve attention in the formation process of teachers for tutoring, in order to improve the quality of interactions and give the forum a character of interactivity: a) the need to transform statements into questions, so to stimulate reflection and critical thinking of the participants, b) the making of summaries, highlighting the ideas presented, to facilitate monitoring of discussion by participants, c) the

presentation of personal experiences as a way to redeem built knowledge into practice and serving as example of resolution of certain situations.

The practice of tutoring in Media in Education demonstrate knowledge of the tutors in relation to pedagogical practice in online education, and their presence is well marked in the dialogues undertaken in the forums. However, there is much to learn in relation to a questioning attitude, to convene the participants the necessary dialogical practice for interactivity. There is certainly interaction, and this is crucial in learning, but the interactivity, according to Silva [7], is not the mark of the forum, given the small number of dialogical interactions identified. The biggest challenge is to achieve the effective participation of the entire group. We believe that the level of interactivity found was the possible at the time of the first online education experience for both teacher and student for Media in Education.

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