

TUTORING AS A SPACE OF AGENTIVE PFL TEACHER EDUCATION

A MONITORIA COMO ESPAÇO DE FORMAÇÃO AGENTIVA NO ENSINO DE PLE

LA MONITORÍA COMO ESPACIO DE FORMACIÓN AGENCIAL EN LA ENSEÑANZA DE PLE



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ABSTRACT: This article aims to report an experience of teaching Portuguese to American learners within the scope of tutoring. We highlight the role of tutoring as a space for agentive teacher education since the tutors actively participated in the teaching process, made conscious choices, considered the specificities of the students, reflected on their actions, and increased their pedagogical repertoire. Furthermore, we reinforce the premise, already pointed out by other researchers, that tutoring contributes to the process of teaching identity-building. Thus, we defend the use of this space for critical and agentive teacher training, especially in the area of Portuguese as a Foreign Language, which still lacks regulation and institutionalization in Brazilian universities.

KEYWORDS: PFL. Tutoring. Agentive Teacher Education. Teacher identity.

RESUMO: Este artigo objetiva relatar uma experiência de ensino de PLE para aprendizes estadunidenses no âmbito da monitoria. Destacamos o papel da monitoria como espaço de formação agentiva, uma vez que os monitores participaram ativamente do processo de ensino, fazendo escolhas conscientes, considerando as especificidades dos alunos, refletindo sobre suas ações e decisões e aumentando seu repertório pedagógico. Além disso, reforçamos a premissa, já apontada por outros pesquisadores, de que a monitoria contribui no processo de construção da identidade docente. Assim, defendemos o aproveitamento desse espaço para uma formação crítica e agentiva, especialmente no ensino de PLE, que ainda carece de regulamentação e institucionalização nas universidades brasileiras.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: PLE. Monitoria. Formação Agentiva. Identidade docente.

RESUMEN: Este artículo tiene como objetivo relatar una experiencia de enseñanza de Portugués como Lengua Extranjera (PLE) a estudiantes estadounidenses en el contexto de la monitoria. Destacamos el papel de la monitoria como espacio de formación agentiva, ya que los monitores participaron activamente en el proceso de enseñanza, tomando decisiones conscientes, considerando las especificidades de los alumnos, reflexionando sobre sus acciones y decisiones, y ampliando su repertorio pedagógico. Además, reforzamos la premisa, ya señalada por otros investigadores, de que la monitoria contribuye al proceso de construcción de la identidad docente. Por lo tanto, defendemos el aprovechamiento de este espacio para una formación crítica y agentiva, especialmente en la enseñanza de PLE, que aún carece de regulación e institucionalización en las universidades brasileñas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: PLE. Monitoria. Formación Agentiva. Identidad docente.

Introduction

The human agency comprises fundamental concepts, such as intentionality, identity, autonomy, motivation, and attribution of meaning, which influence the reasons and motives that guide actions or lack thereof (VIANINI; ARRUDA, 2022). Therefore, it is the focus of studies applied to language learning and teaching. The development of agency in teacher training is desirable because “agentive teachers [...] promote situated learning contexts that enable the achievement of previously established teaching objectives. The attitude of these teachers involves awareness, control of their choices and pedagogical actions, implying a sense of ownership of the teaching process” (VIANINI, ARRUDA, 2020, p. 143, our translation). Agentive teachers, therefore, are aware of their possibilities and capabilities to act in their contexts and manage their agentive resources in favor of meaningful teaching. Additionally, these teachers are more likely to promote autonomous learning. According to Teng (2019, p. 22), “Teacher autonomy has been recognized as a major dimension that affects the development of learner autonomy in foreign language education”.

Teacher trainers play a crucial role in building teaching agencies (LIMA, 2014; VIANINI; ARRUDA, 2022) by providing training practices centered on autonomy. These practices aim to stimulate reflection on teaching practice and the development of pedagogical and emotional strategies, enabling teachers to make independent decisions about the direction of the teaching they wish to provide. In view of the benefits of teaching and learning, each and every training space must be aimed at developing a teaching agency.

Among the instances of teacher training, monitoring is recognized as a teaching support strategy (FRISON; MORAES, 2011) and a space for building teacher identity (GOMES *et al.*, 2016; SILVA *et al.*, 2015), although still little explored in terms of promoting integrated, critical and reflective training (NASCIMENTO; BARLETTA, 2011). In the area of language teaching and learning, recent initiatives have sought to explore the potential of monitoring. Aquino (2020) discusses the role of a monitoring program in a university context for teacher training and for the teaching and learning of German as a foreign language, arguing that monitoring work can be an important tool for the process of critical training of the future teacher and researcher in this language.

Cordeiro, Albuquerque, and Baldin (2020) analyze the perceptions of students who acted as monitors in a university extension program teaching Portuguese to speakers of other languages and propose monitoring as a teacher training action by allowing students, still at the

beginning of their training, actively participate in teaching-learning processes that help them in the construction of being a teacher. Their analyses “reveal that the monitoring activity raises theoretical-practical issues of the Literature degree (which are often not addressed within the course curriculum)” (CORDEIRO; ALBUQUERQUE; BALDIN, 2020, p. 315, our translation).

Monitoring is often the only space for specialized training when teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PLE). This is because, although several Brazilian universities promote the teaching and training of PLE teachers, in most of them, the area is not institutionalized (SCHOFFEN; MARTINS, 2016). The recent work by Guimarães and Finardi (2022) shows that there has been an increase in subjects aimed at teaching PLE in Literature courses.

However, when analyzing who the professionals responsible for these disciplines are, it was concluded that most of these teachers are scholarship holders or volunteers and are not permanent professors at universities, in addition to being part of relatively small teams. Therefore, several researchers agree that there is still a gap in preparing students for teaching in the PLE area, which requires specialized training (AZARIAS; AZEVEDO, 2016; BARBOSA; FREIRE, 2017, CAFÉ; MATOS; BORGES, 2018, SCHOFFEN; MARTINS, 2016, entre outros).

Aware that monitoring alone is not capable of filling this gap, we believe, however, in its potential for agentive training, as long as, as Aquino (2020, p. 25, our translation) highlights, the monitoring program goes “[. ..] far beyond carrying out work to reinforce content, resolve doubts and provide assistance in the classroom” and involves “[...] a more active, collaborative and critical participation in the teaching-learning process, both from monitors, as well as enrolled students and teachers themselves” (ibid, p. 25).

In this work, we share our experience monitoring a Portuguese Teaching Program for American learners undergoing academic mobility at a Brazilian federal university. We will present the organizational structure of monitoring, the resources developed and used for teaching, highlighting, through a retrospective analysis of lived experiences, monitoring as a space for the teacher's identity construction and reflective and agentive training. We hope that our experience can serve as a basis for other programs and, ultimately, contribute to PLE teacher training initiatives.

The context

The Portuguese Flagship Program (hereinafter PFP) has been developed at the Federal University of São João del Rei (UFSJ) since 2015 as a result of an academic partnership between UFSJ, the University of Georgia (UGA), and the University of Texas (UT) and has the general objective the training of global professionals, with superior proficiency in the Portuguese language⁴.

Flagship students stay in Brazil for 1 year. In the first semester, they take Portuguese learning subjects taught by a group of professors from different areas at UFSJ, namely: 1) oral comprehension and conversation in Portuguese; 2) Portuguese language, Minas Gerais culture, and cultural identity; 3) grammatical elements of language use, 4) media, society, and culture; 5) Project-Based Learning. In addition, participants take a course related to their academic areas during their undergraduate studies and receive weekly individual tutoring. In the second semester, they carry out internships in their fields of interest in various regions of Brazil, and in December, they return to *São João del Rei* to complete the Program, during which they present their internship reports.

Monitors and pedagogical coordination

The two monitors who worked in the 2023 edition of the PFP are postgraduate master's students in Literature at UFSJ, a condition to work in monitoring the PFP at UFSJ, and went through a selection process through a notice from the International Affairs Office.

Larissa has a degree in Literature (Portuguese and English and their Literature) from the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA) and participated in an internationalization program between Columbia University (NY) and the Brazilian university in 2020. Although it was in the format of *Teletandem*, something very different from the experience provided by PFP, it was possible to have contact with American students in relation to the Portuguese language (LP). Larissa had no experience teaching LP, either as a mother tongue or as an additional language.

Daniel has a degree in Literature (Portuguese and Spanish) from the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Southeast Minas Gerais. His previous teaching

⁴ To learn more about the Flagship, see <https://www.thelanguageflagship.org/>. About the Portuguese Flagship Program, see <https://www.thelanguageflagship.org/content/portuguese>.

experience was linked to the extension program at Cursinho Popular Edson Luís (CPEL), also at UFSJ, which prepares students to take the National High School Exam. There, he worked as a volunteer teacher of Spanish Language and Brazilian Literature in 2022.

The pedagogical coordinator, Carolina Vianini, teaches the Literature - English Language and Literature course at UFSJ. She has a degree in Literature (Portuguese and English) from UFSJ, a master's degree, and a doctorate in the area of Teaching/Learning Foreign Languages from the Federal University of Minas Gerais. Since the beginning of the Teacher Training Program at UFSJ, she has played an active role, both as a pedagogical coordinator and as a teacher of the subjects of Oral Comprehension and Conversation, in addition to Project-Based Learning. His work in the program provided him with experience and expertise in teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PLE).

The students

In the 2023 edition, the PFP had seven students, three from UGA and four from UT. Below, we point out the particularities of each student, their strengths and weaknesses, and their performance in monitoring.

A student at the University of Texas (UT), A1⁵ was very interested in subjects related to Human Psychology, and precisely for this reason, she chose, at UFSJ, the subject “Personality Psychology: Psychoanalytic Approach I”, within the scope of the Psychology course. In the context of tutoring, the student demonstrated commitment to the linguistic contents of the LP, especially the grammatical ones, even though, in the classroom, she did not show much predisposition to expose herself linguistically. More importantly, A1, due to most of his family having Mexican origins, had much Spanish influence in his speech. Thus, within the scope of monitoring, issues of pronunciation in LP were mainly worked on since the student’s speech often suffered interference from the Spanish language, which sometimes compromised her communication.

The A2, coming from the International Relations course at UGA, chose to study subjects related to philosophy and education within UFSJ. This can be related to the student’s enormous proactivity in taking a stance, in classes, on political, social and artistic-cultural issues, for example. In an often activist tone, the student forcefully expressed herself on various topics

⁵ A1 = apprentice 1; A2 = apprentice 2 and so on.

covered in the classroom. This great exposure to LP was certainly very positive, since, due to her more communicative profile, the student could practice speaking a lot and, consequently, pronunciation. Although she had some language problems in English, these problems were resolved over a certain period of time during monitoring. Furthermore, in her speech, she presented some inconsistencies related to the gender (male and female) of the LP, which were being resolved as the monitoring took place.

As the Computer Science course at UGA was his original degree, A3 favored Exact Sciences subjects, such as Analytical Geometry, to study at UFSJ. With a highly analytical profile, A3 communicated in LP without many signs of linguistic complications, even though she did not take a position in the classroom, most of the time, on subjects he did not know or was not interested in. The main demands he made during his monitoring were of a linguistic nature, in which he, highly inspired by his strategic sense, delved deeper into grammatical content in order to increase his proficiency further. He was a student with a very committed profile, attentive to the linguistic demands of LP and the particularities of each subject he studied. It is also interesting to point out that he showed much interest in Brazilian Popular Music (MPB).

Of Mexican origin, A4 moved to the United States when he was four years old. Coming from UT, she had a particular predilection for subjects related to the artistic manifestations of Theater and Dance, which is why she chose subjects focused on Education and these areas within the scope of UFSJ. Although she suffered due to her origin and a lot of influence from Spanish in her speech, the way she interacted and exposed herself in the classroom was very positive for her linguistic advancement in LP. However, due to her more communicative profile, the student's speech was often quite accelerated, which essentially compromised communication, especially with native LP speakers. This aspect was worked on a lot in the monitoring.

Also, from the UGA International Relations course, A5 was strongly interested in the subject of Political Philosophy. It was possible to perceive, throughout the semester, its linguistic evolution in LP. At first, she sometimes appeared shy and introverted when it came to taking a position on the issues discussed in the classroom, demonstrating little linguistic input to express herself orally. A5 had a lot of difficulty inflecting the feminine and masculine genders of LP, which sometimes hampered his effective communication in the language. However, this aspect was well explored through monitoring, especially with reading activities of texts in LP, in addition to an oriented exposure to the language.

Student A6 was studying, at UT, the degree that corresponds, here in Brazil, to Literature (Portuguese and English). In this sense, she chose to study the subject of Education and Diversity at UFSJ precisely because she was very interested in gender issues. Due to the fact that her mother is of Portuguese origin (Azores), the student developed LP very quickly and demonstrated excellent command of the language, positioning herself in a very assertive and forceful manner in the discussions proposed in the classroom. She had the influence of Spanish in her speech as she also had Spanish ancestry. During the monitoring hours, A6 seemed quite confident in the proposed content, especially in reading and interpreting texts, including literary ones. Despite this, she demonstrated some difficulty with her writing skills, especially with regard to spelling. Thus, problems with punctuation and backticks, for example, were recurrent. Through the suggested activities, however, the student demonstrated much achievement in these aspects of greater attention.

After graduating in International Relations from UT at UFSJ, A7 preferred to study the subject of Education and Diversity, demonstrating a lot of aptitude and commitment to this topic. Highly engaged in social issues, such as politics, gender, and sexual diversity, the student argued masterfully about different topics within the classroom. His personality was more active in the sense of taking a broad stance in the discussions proposed in the PFP disciplines. This enthusiastic profile certainly contributed to his progress in PL, which, although previously presented some points of attention, such as some pronunciation issues relating to the typical accentuation of Brazilian Portuguese, for example, became less and less recurrent throughout the semester.

Another positive aspect is that before enrolling in the PFP, the student was already familiar with the Portuguese language and French, which justifies his inclination to learn foreign languages. In the tutoring environment, its main demand was related to accentuation in LP, which is generally an aspect that causes a lot of doubt among American students.

Organizational structure of monitoring

As mentioned previously, in addition to the regular Portuguese Language (LP) teaching subjects, led by teachers from different areas, part of the PFP's organizational structure comprises individual schedules for academic monitoring. The monitors' responsibilities included: regularly attending classes, assisting, as requested by each teacher, with classroom activities; assist students individually on established and previously scheduled days and times; adapt teaching materials developed by previous monitors and collaborate, under the supervision of the pedagogical coordinator, in the development of new materials; participate in monthly pedagogical meetings with other PFP teachers to report student progress and discuss guidelines; join a WhatsApp group with the pedagogical coordinator to share and discuss activities and materials prepared, in addition to offering socio-affective support when interacting with students.

The organization of the monitoring was divided as follows: monitor Larissa was responsible for 3 students, two from UT and one from UGA, while Daniel was the monitor for the other 4 students (two from UGA and two from UT). The monitoring was carried out from March to June 2023, lasting 1 hour/week per student.

Monitoring: the group and the individual

Learning a language can, at first, cause strangeness for students who are inserted in a culturally and linguistically different environment. When asked about their fears upon arriving in Brazil and, precisely, in the city of São João del Rei, the students reported feeling worried about the process of communication interaction. Therefore, we seek to make monitoring a safe and welcoming space, breaking down fears and fears when practicing the language.

The linguistic objective of PFP is to reach a higher level of LP, diagnosed through an oral proficiency assessment at the end of the program⁶. Thus, the structure of this assessment was the basis for organizing the monitoring, which, roughly speaking, checks the learner's level of proficiency through gradation of the following skills: narration (present and past), description, comparison, argumentation, and formulation of hypotheses.

⁶ OPI - Oral Proficiency Interview ACTFL- <https://www.actfl.org/assessments/postsecondary-assessments/opi>.

Each week, one skill was the focus (e.g. week 1 - narration; week 2 - description, and so on), so that there was a common 'base activity' for the whole group, maintaining a gradual cycle and, at the same time, time, as a way of standardizing work, providing similar learning opportunities for the group. From the 'base activity', specific needs, raised through class observations and conversations with teachers and the coordinator, were worked on with each individual.

The narration activities in the present included, for example, reporting the routine in Brazil and comparing it with the routine in the USA, describing personal and colleagues' daily activities. In narration activities in the past, students narrated lived experiences, such as activities carried out on weekends, trips, and comments on a recently read book or film. Description activities included places visited, childhood memories, and, sometimes, images, which not only elicited descriptive aspects but also resumed narration in the present and past, for example, in a cyclical process of review and guiding towards the next objective: comparison, which in turn, resumed description and directed it to argumentation, through questions that encouraged critical thinking, problematization, and hypothesizing, skills characteristic of higher education.

The practice of conversation was constant in the monitoring sessions and covered a variety of subjects, mainly with regard to culture, literature, politics, and social and current issues in the country. To stimulate speech and develop critical thinking, subjects that were reported by the Brazilian media were selected and included in the monitoring. Printed news was taken from well-known sources in the country, such as *O Globo*, *GI*, *O Estado de São Paulo*, *Veja*, *Estadão*, *UOL*, *Revista Piauí*, among others, and the student chose one at random without knowing what the theme and ideological bias of the article were news vehicle. The student read aloud and was instructed to mark the words that were unknown to him. When the reading finished, the student expressed doubts regarding the vocabulary. Soon after, he summarized the content of the news.

Subsequently, questions were asked that aroused criticality regarding the subject discussed. One technique that we used with this type of activity, and which proved to be quite effective, was to record the oral production, with the student's authorization, and then listen together with them, inviting them to analyze their speech and jointly seeking solutions for aspects that could be improved. Through this technique, the student becomes more aware of their limitations and also their needs and potential.

Above all, the monitoring allowed learners to clarify doubts and receive detailed explanations and contextualized examples immediately. A4, for example, being of Mexican origin, had some pronunciation problems. Portuguese and Spanish are two Romance languages that share a common origin, Latin, and, therefore, have several similarities that can facilitate learning Portuguese but also make it difficult due to significant differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical rules, and everyday use. The student had difficulty pronouncing words with the consonants /s/ and /j/; with the vowels /e/ and /o/, which are more open in Spanish than in Portuguese; with diphthongs that are more frequent in Spanish than in Portuguese and do not have a crescent formation and with silent letters, such as /h/.

Thus, with A4, it was necessary to develop activities that improved his pronunciation since the interference affected the intelligibility of his speech. A list was made containing numerous words that were related to the difficulties mentioned, such as “home”, “sun”, “work”, “earth”, “today” and guitar”. Afterward, the student repeated the words out loud and slowly, paying attention to phonetic differences, intonation, emphasis on syllables, letter sounds, and accentuation patterns. This procedure was carried out for weeks.

This survey of specific difficulties in the Portuguese and Spanish relationship was possible thanks to the fact that the monitor was knowledgeable and spoke Spanish. Furthermore, during conversations, it was noticed that she spoke very quickly, confusing fluency with speed of speech. Another specific activity was reading sentences out loud at a slow pace so that A4 could hear what she was saying. We noticed a significant change in his oral production in a few weeks, which became clearer.

Another activity developed specifically with A2 and A3 consisted of a table of synonyms. A word was said, and they had to write at least 5 synonyms. The objective was to enrich the linguistic repertoire, especially for description, and check how many words they would be able to associate. In some cases, they managed to exceed the 5 words required. The next challenge was to work with antonyms. The strategy was the same: the word was said using a table, and they wrote the antonym words. This time, the minimum established was 03 words. This activity also helped them to start using them more frequently, avoiding repetition.

For A6, a more playful activity was designed to train pronunciation with a focus on the production of meanings. He had difficulty pronouncing words with graphic and tonic accents. A list was made containing words of this type, such as “toxic”, “street vendor”, “subway” and proparoxytone words, and the student read it his way. Then, the monitor read the words, followed by pronunciation instructions. Then, the student was asked to explain the meaning of

each one. Some words were written with accents on strips of paper, and others that he didn't use very often. When choosing the strip at random, the student turned and pronounced the word. On the other side, there were other roles that commanded actions: making a sentence, conjugating the word (when it was a verb), creating a short dialogue, explaining its meaning, whether it was formal or informal, etc.

Some apprentices took to tutoring the demands of the regular subjects they studied (Education, Political Philosophy, etc.), more precisely, the difficulty in understanding texts in these areas of knowledge. As strategies to enable adequate understanding, the following resources were used: a presentation on reading strategies, research on unknown words (without using the English dictionary), and an oral report on what was read.

In this way, if previously this activity seemed to propose only a reading exercise, through these resources, it was possible to address other linguistic skills and expansion of the lexicon and orality, with the aim of also fostering the critical sense of these students. Even though the authors of the texts read by these students were not Brazilian (Michel Foucault and Sigmund Freud, for example), the linguistic appropriation of this type of content in LP also enriched these students' knowledge of the world.

Monitoring: construction of teaching identity

The concept of belonging is intrinsically human, reflecting the fundamental need we all have to connect with other people and the world around us. Belonging is not limited to just a feeling of being part of a group or community but encompasses a sense of identity, meaning, and connection that plays a crucial role in our lives.

In these notions of identification, the author, Daniel, found consonance with his teaching identity during his work as a PFP monitor. After completing his degree and passing his master's degree in Literature, he lacked this self-knowledge. When he started tutoring, he left his regular job aside and chose to dedicate himself to teaching PLE. It is often emphasized that all the teachers we meet throughout our academic career leave a mark on their identity. It's about the desire to become a professional as competent as those who crossed our path during our journey.

Through monitoring, more specifically as a Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PLE) teacher, it was possible to develop intercultural skills since the students were of American/Mexican origin. This contact with students enabled an intercultural exchange, and from this, the desire to expand knowledge became continuous. When he made a diagnosis about

their linguistic knowledge, in practice, his identity as an educator was consolidated. Teaching a language is a gradual and highly individualized process. Accompanying each student allowed him to reflect on the different methodologies. One methodology may work for a student, while another may not be as effective. This context confirms that there is no single approach to teaching and learning and that it is necessary to take into account several factors, such as the student's prior knowledge, motivation, and emotional health, among others.

Thus, we understand that the true essence of language teaching lies in the ability to inspire students to incorporate language as part of their identity, use it as a tool for intercultural understanding, and see it as a means of connecting with the world.

Final considerations

Teacher training is a continuous and multifaceted process that aims to prepare teachers to deal with the complex challenges of the educational environment. In this context, monitoring emerges as a space for agentic teacher training when future educators have the opportunity to play an active role in their own training and professional development. During this process, we had the chance to work directly with foreign students, develop activity plans, apply teaching strategies, and understand how the process of learning a foreign language works.

This practical experience is essential for understanding classroom dynamics, class management, and adapting to student needs. Furthermore, monitoring promoted critical reflection on our teaching practice. We learn theories and concepts in real situations, constantly evaluating our approach, seeking improvements, and adjusting teaching strategies.

Collaborative learning is another essential aspect of the monitoring carried out within the PFP. Teamwork allowed us to exchange experiences and ideas, discuss our strategies, and understand the needs of each student. Above all, it helped us develop confidence and expand our capabilities to act, increasing our repertoire of pedagogical practices and strategies for dealing with teaching dilemmas and problems.

In short, monitoring is a crucial component of teacher training, as it combines theory and practice in a meaningful way. It provides future teachers with a solid foundation of practical experience, promotes critical reflection, encourages collaborative learning, and promotes the development of agency. Therefore, recognizing and supporting the importance of monitoring in teacher training is fundamental, especially in PLE teaching.

Our experience shows that insertion into PLE teaching can happen casually, without prior guidance. Many teachers, whether in initial training or already graduated, begin working in this area without having specialized training. Therefore, professional ethics must be oriented towards (self) awareness of the specific demands of this area of activity. Language teaching, by nature, involves issues relating to conflict and (re)negotiation of identities, power relations, interculturality, and stereotypes, among countless other elements, which require the PLE teacher to understand the language far beyond the structure, considering the social and cultural context of students, as opposed to their socio-historical context. Echoing other researchers who defend the need for regulation and institutionalization of the area in Brazilian universities, we argue that this specialized training can begin with monitoring.

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