

Addressing the Textual Genre "Personal Letter" in Youth and Adult Education

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Abstract:

The aim of this article is to address the personal letter-writing process by students enrolled in Youth and Adult Education. We initially reflect about textual genre as writing-teaching strategy and, then, we specifically address the genre "personal letter". Our theoretical background was based on Antunes (2003, 2009), Cavalcante (2013), Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004), Marcuschi (2002; 2008; 2010) and Oliveira (2014). The research adopted a qualitative approach based on participant observation and on conversation circle. Research collaborators comprised 5 students enrolled in Youth and Adult Education: 4 women and 1 man. Results indicated that the personal letter-writing process, which followed the didactic sequence developed by Dolz, Noverraz, and Schneuwly (2004), enabled participants to acquire the necessary linguistic-discursive knowledge to construct the textual genre "personal letter", besides helping them to acknowledge and overcome their main difficulties during the personal letter-writing process.

Keywords:

Textual genres; Personal letter; Youth and Adult Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Whenever written text production is addressed in the classroom, it is possible seeing that students do not often seem happy to, and/or interested in, participating in such activities. However, textbooks present a large number of textual genres as pedagogical content to be assigned in the classroom.

Thus, this article presents the result of a research carried out during the school year 2016. The general aim of the herein presented study was to investigate how Portuguese Language teachers can help to improve the writing process in Youth and Adult Education courses through personal letter writing. Participants comprised 5 students enrolled in the 2nd segment (7th/8th grades) of the Young and Adult Education course held by a Municipal School in Mamanguape Valley (PB), who freely and willingly agreed to participate in the study.

The herein developed research adopted a qualitative approach based on participant observation research. All participant names mentioned in our study were changed into fictitious names to protect their identity.

The article initially deals with aspects concerning the use of textual genres as writing-teaching strategy, with emphasis to the use of genre “personal letter” in present times. Next, it addresses the use of the personal letter structure as a subsidy for other genres.

Finally, it presents personal letter-writing difficulties and strategies addressed in the research in order to enable “new” reflections about the use of genre “personal letter” to help to improve the writing and rewriting processes in Youth and Adult Education.

TEXTUAL GENRE USED AS WRITING-TEACHING STRATEGY

Based on the knowledge that textual genres are phenomena linked to our everyday life, and that they are the structures of oral and written communication, Marcuschi (2010, p. 22) says:

We rely on the basic assumption that verbal communication is not possible other than through the adoption of some *genre*, just as it is impossible to communicate other than through some text. In other words, we rely on the idea that verbal communication is only possible through the adoption of some *textual genre*.

However, presenting a brief definition of textual types and genres to students is an important procedure to be applied before working on textual genres. Thus, based on the definition by Marcuschi (2010, p. 23):

We use the expression *textual type* to refer to a sequence, which is theoretically defined by the *linguistic nature* of its composition (lexical and syntactic aspects, verb tenses, logical relations). Overall, *textual types* comprise approximately half a dozen categories known as *narration, argumentation, exposition, description, and injunction*. Next, the author defines textual genre: we use the expression *textual genre*, as a purposively vague concept, to refer to *materialized* texts we find in our daily life, since they present *socio-communicative features* defined by contents, functional properties, style and by characteristic composition. However, if on the one hand, there are only half a dozen textual types, on the other hand, genres are innumerable [...]: phone call, sermon, business letter, personal letter, novel, note, news report, lecture, cooking recipe, among others.

Based on this definition, there are textual genres everywhere, i.e., they exist in every communicative moment human beings participate in, whether it is verbal or non-verbal.

Therefore, the aforementioned definition allows us to see the importance of having proper interventions conducted by teachers in order to improve students' knowledge about the subject (textual genres). It must be taken into consideration that the main goal of these interventions is to approach the studied genre to the everyday life of students as much as possible, besides making them realize that different activities in their day-to-day life are always surrounded by a specific textual genre that, in a certain extent, is appropriate to each communicative moment they experience.

Consequently, reading comprehension and text production cannot be understood as a simple classroom exercise involving reading and writing, but as a set of factors involving this communicative event. According to Cavalcante (2013, p. 18):

It is necessary accessing different pieces of knowledge to understand and produce any text; not only the linguistic ones but also all other knowledge acquired through social coexistence, since they inform and enable us to act in several situations and events of the everyday life.

Thus, it is necessary showing the importance of this communicative event to students as initial activity at the time to present the subject to be studied in the classroom (OLIVEIRA, 2014, p. 33), [...] since language only makes sense when it meets users' interest (in this case, the students) and is linked to facts associated with the social world they belong to.

Accordingly, we understand that teaching textual genres only makes sense to students when they understand that the acquisition of this knowledge materializes in the form of personal and professional fulfillment in the environment they live in.

Teaching textual production becomes an extremely relevant activity when other events are taken into consideration at the time to help improve students' writing. With respect to textual genres, Marcuschi (2010, p. 19) states that:

Besides resulting from collective work, genres contribute to the ordering and stabilization of day-to-day communicative activities. They are socio-discursive entities and unavoidable forms of social action in all communicative contexts. [...] In addition, they are highly malleable, dynamic and plastic textual events. They are paired with sociocultural needs and activities, as well as with technological innovations, a fact that is easily perceived when one takes into consideration the number of textual genres in place nowadays in comparison to pre-written communication societies.

However, genres evolve to account for communication events that happen throughout our existence, thus enabling people to understand each other while communicating and interacting with their counterparts.

According to the National Curriculum Parameters of the Portuguese Language – PCN (BRAZIL, 1997) 5th to 8th grades –, “the mastery of oral and written language is essential to enable effective social participation, since it is the way individuals communicate, get access to information, express themselves and defend viewpoints, share or build world views, and produce knowledge.” Consequently, teachers’ responsibility to enable knowledge increases, since these professionals need to make students understand how rewarding knowledge acquisition is by integrating it into their life experiences.

Accordingly, the use of textual genres as instrument of study to help develop students’ reading skills becomes feasible when it is focused on elaborating and understanding texts that involve language practice. As Antunes (2009, p. 59) advocates:

Studying genres would enable students to understand how the elaboration and understanding of a text result from the conjunction of factors internal and external to the language; external because they are anchored in a social situation involving a language practice.

Bronckart (2001) apud Marcuschi (2008) also addressed the use of genre as object of a study focused on communication events between participants:

Texts are legitimate objects of study; the analysis applied to their organization levels enables working on all aspects of most language-related issues. The author also says that genres are adaptation and participation instruments adopted in social and communicative contexts (BRONCKART, 2001 apud MARCUSCHI, 2008, p. 22).

The aforementioned statement is understandable since genres are continuously adapted to different communication needs in order to better meet the communicative purpose of the one using it, i.e., genres emerge, or improve, as society modernizes itself.

According to Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004), “genre is an instrument”. In addition:

Instruments mediate and shape different activities, besides representing and materializing them. In other words: activities no longer present themselves just at the time they are implemented. In a way, they exist, regardless of implementation, in the instruments that represent and, therefore, signify them. Thus, instruments become the privileged place where behaviors are transformed: exploring their possibilities, besides enriching and transforming them, are also ways to transform activities linked to the use of such instruments (p. 20-21).

However, before producing a text based on a previously selected genre, students must understand - before conducting any activity - the importance of such learning as a concrete reading and writing process focused on broadening their knowledge and on making it useful to their daily lives.

That being said, the daily practice of writing is able to make students feel more confident about the production of written texts, besides increasing their skills and aptitude to talk about a given subject.

We also need to teach our students that genres are not contents only linked to, and found in, books, they are the means we use in our day-to-day lives. Even without being aware of it, we constantly make use of this extremely valuable communication instrument in our environment.

Marcuschi (2002) makes a rather interesting observation about the - as he puts it - misplaced way the expression “text type” is used in textbooks and in our daily lives when we refer to a given “textual genre”. According to the aforementioned author:

When someone says, for example, *‘the personal letter is an informal text type’*, this individual does not correctly use the term *‘text type’* and should avoid this type of speech. The personal letter one writes to his/her mother is a textual genre, [...]. Thus, overall, a text is typologically varying (heterogeneous). An example of it lies on the personal letter, which may present narrative sequence (tells a story), argumentation (advocates for something), description (describes a situation), among others. (MARCUSCHI, 2002, p. 25).

Based on this interpretative axis, we understand that textual genres are composed of textual types, i.e., textual types compose the sequential structure of textual genres, as mentioned in the citation above, since in a single textual genre can comprise more than one textual type. Depending on the genre in question, one textual type can stand out among others.

Koch (2014, p. 55) presents another definition of genre by stating that ‘all our productions, either oral or written, are based on relatively-stable standard forms of structuring a whole we call *genre*’ (emphasis added by the author). This definition is close to the ones previously mentioned by other authors. Based on the expression ‘discursive genres’, Cavalcante (2013) conceptualizes genres as follows:

They are social communication patterns that manifest themselves through texts according to specific enunciative needs. They are artifacts constituted in a sociocognitive way to fulfill the purpose of several social contexts. Thus, they are relatively stable, although their finishing was (and continues to be) historically constituted (CAVALCANTE, 2013, p. 44).

Thus, every new communicative situation demands a discursive genre capable of dealing with its utterances in order to meet the needs of different social situations experienced over time.

However, Marcuschi (2002) addresses genre as a social and historical practice to the human being. According to him: 'the idea that textual genres are historical phenomena deeply linked to our cultural and social life has already become trivial' (MARCUSCHI, 2002, p. 19).

Therefore, the teaching of textual genres should be seen as a writing production event suitable to each learning situation and capable of enabling students - in the current case, the ones enrolled in Youth and Adult Education courses - to learn and understand that such a genre may be useful to them in their daily lives.

TEACHING THE GENRE 'PERSONAL LETTER' AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION NOWADAYS

We cannot deny that, over time, personal letters have been losing space to other genres seen as faster and more usual, although some people keep on using letters as a means of sharing news, seeking solutions to their problems, placing orders, among others.

However, nowadays, some television shows aired throughout the national territory keep on using letters as a means of interaction between TV hosts and the target audience. For example, the Brazilian TV show 'Globo Rural' uses, besides e-mails, handwritten letters through which people living in rural areas search for information about pests attacking their crops, soil types suitable for specific crops, or about how to start a business, among others.

A local radio station in Mamanguape County (PB) presents a show called 'Life as it is', in which listeners send letters to their editorial office hoping to find a solution to their problems.

Thus, despite the advanced technology available nowadays, many people keep on writing letters, since they see these letters as a simple, although useful, instrument to communicate with each other.

It is necessary understanding that the personal letter, besides being a means to improve senders' writing in school text production processes, is also a textual genre able to develop the communication between distant people who want to share secrets with each other or obtain information from someone distant: certainly, personal letters written by one's own hand denote a sense of closeness between counterparts.

When it comes to writing personal letters, senders must be aware of the type of language they should use based on who their receivers are, since receivers are the ones who undoubtedly set the language level used in such communicative situation. For example, senders writing to an educational institution, or an authority, must use the formal language. On the other hand, senders writing to a friend, or family member, can use the informal language.

Writing letters may require both the sender and the receiver to have enough linguistic knowledge to know what type of language should be used, and how letters are structured, in order to enable, according to Cavalcante (2013), ‘communications to be carried out in a satisfactory way; otherwise, we would not be able to develop absolutely new forms of interaction or we would not be understood if it happened.’ (p. 44). It is essential keeping in mind that, in case the receiver replies the received letter, he/she becomes the sender, thus evidencing the real communicative purpose.

Therefore, the study conducted with Youth and Adult Education students based on the use of textual genres, besides helping them better understand the structure and functionality of personal letters, aimed at involving these students in real-life situations so they could reach satisfactory results in the writing activities performed by them.

THE USE OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEXTUAL GENRE ‘PERSONAL LETTER’ TO SUBSTANTIATE THE WRITING OF OTHER GENRES

Students and literate speakers, in or out of school, should know how to structure a personal letter. Although this genre is not often used nowadays, learning its structure allows readers to use such knowledge to address other textual genres such as memos, open letters, business letters and e-mails, since personal letters present standardized structure. According to Marcuschi (2002), letters, along with notes, work as a basis for e-mails: “The *e-mail* (electronic mail) generates *electronic messages*, whose predecessors were letters (personal, commercial, etc.) and notes. However, electronic genres are new genres with their own identities” (MARCUSCHI, 2002, p. 21).

Thus, the initial activity focused on acquiring satisfactory knowledge about the structure of a given genre should be, according to Antunes (2009, p. 58): “The detailed investigation about text composition structures, or about its compositional form; in other words, we would know the blocks composing a given genre, the forms they assume and their distribution sequence”.

It is done to help students recognizing the type of genre used in the text, besides knowing the structure to be used at the time to produce a given textual genre. In other words, teachers’ intervention in students’ writing process is undoubtedly important, since it allows these professionals to perceive students’ difficulties in the comings and goings of text rewriting, as well as to work together with them to remedy these difficulties.

The mastery of the genre ‘personal letter’ help students to develop skills to produce other genres such as memos, letters of request, open letters, business letters, and e-mails. Thus, in order to improve their writing skills on a daily basis, students need to understand that the act of writing is seen in several communicative functions involving their community, as shown by Antunes (2003, p. 47-48):

If we pay attention to people’s lives in literate societies, we find that writing is a constant form of action in the multiple activities they perform - at work, in the family, at school, in social life in general - and, more broadly, it is used as record of their scientific, historical and cultural heritage. Thus, every writing has a functional purpose, i.e., it allows the implementation of some socio-communicative activities among people and is inevitably related to the different social contexts these people act in.

Therefore, writing is an instrument that assumes a wide variety of functions involving communication between people. Besides being used to make invitations, warn people about things, ask for help, as well as to write letters, notes, medical prescriptions and culinary recipes, among other functions, writing allows people to interact with each other in a more effective way in order to build better relationships, regardless of the social environment both counterparts are inserted in.

Thus, we herein reinforce that knowing the structure of a text to be written or read is extremely important, since a certain genre may not present one of its properties or be written in the format of another genre. However, this text can be recognized by readers, since they already know how this genre is structured. According to Marcuschi (2002, p. 30):

For example, a personal letter remains a letter, even if the author forgets to sign her name at the end of it and only says at the beginning: ‘Dear Mom.’ An advertisement can be developed in the form of a poem or as a list of products on offer; what really matters is that it divulges the products and encourages customers to purchase them.

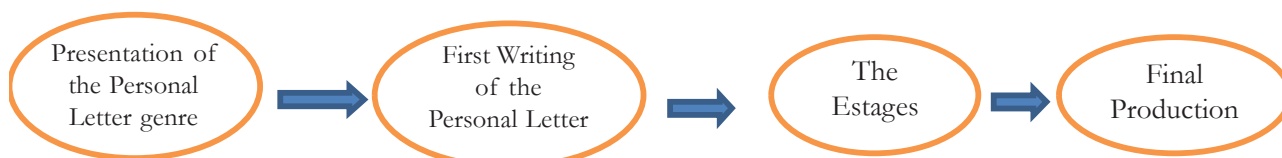
We expect that Youth and Adult Education students, who participated in the personal letter-writing activity, may be able to understand the distinct functions that a textual genre is capable of exercising in their daily lives. According to Marcuschi (2002, p. 35): “it is possible saying that working with textual genres is an extraordinary opportunity to deal with language in its most diverse authentic uses in the everyday life because everything we do linguistically belongs to some genre”.

In other words, the aforementioned author states that nothing we write or even speak, escapes the classification of a particular genre since all activities we perform in our daily lives emerge from a given genre.

THE POSSIBILITY OF WORKING WITH THE GENRE 'PERSONAL LETTER' IN YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION

First, we present the schematic design involving the steps to be followed to fulfill this purpose. This proposition results from a research carried out with 7th and 8th graders in Youth and Adult Education, to whom we applied a didactic sequence – most participants recorded excellent results.

SCHEMATIC DESIGN OF THE PERSONAL LETTER-WRITING ACTIVITY



Introducing the genre 'personal letter'

This stage consists of showing to Youth and Adult Education students, preferably to the ones enrolled in 7th/8th grades, how the personal letter-writing activity shall be developed. In order to do so, the teacher may, for example, invite the students to participate in a Conversation Circle, which is an open space where participants are invited to take part in meetings held and elaborated by the teacher: on the occasion, the teacher shall introduce the textual genre to be worked on.

During these meetings, the teacher shall present a brief history of the use of letters in communicative practices mediated by writing. Then, he/she shall hand out copies of personal letters to the students, so they can understand the structural composition of this genre, which is organized as follows: place and date, greeting and vocative, content display, farewell, and signature. In addition, the teacher shall explain that personal letters are associated with people who hold close relationships with their counterparts, such as husbands and wives, girlfriends and boyfriends, friends and family members. The informal language is used in most of these letters due to such close relationships between counterparts.

This activity can hardly be applied in a single meeting. Depending on the number of lessons the teacher teaches in the investigated class, the activity can take at least two or three meetings to enable students to prepare themselves as best as possible to participate in their first personal letter-writing activity.

At this stage, the teacher shall invite the students to do a shared reading. Subsequently, he/she shall investigate whether the students are able to recognize each part in the structure of such genre, the type of language used in it, the topic addressed in each letter. Finally, the teacher shall test them in order to see what they have managed to learn until that moment.

First writing of the personal letter

At this point, students will have the opportunity to write their first written text in order to show what they were able to understand about the textual genre 'personal letter'. It should be taken into consideration that, although the personal letter is an easily-understandable genre, many participants may have never written a letter to someone; thus, several issues with the potential to make it difficult for them to write this text may emerge at production time.

However, despite the difficulties some students may have, based on their acquired knowledge and ability, they will be able to produce a text that may not be the ideal one at elaboration time. Writing a perfect text is not the aim of the activity at this stage. What really matters is to make students understand the adopted theme and write the text based on what they learned about the features of the selected genre. It is worth highlighting that this stage will only be completed when students write their final text. Next section presents the third stage of our schematic design: The stages.

The stages

The stages comprise one of the steps in the text-production process, which is extremely relevant to the progress of the personal letter-writing activity because it enables teachers to apply their didactic-pedagogical intervention to help students identify writing issues that can emerge at the first personal letter-writing stage. The number of stages may change depending on students' difficulties during the text-writing activity. Thus, stages can be divided as follows:

1st Stage – Teachers shall analyze thematic content aspects, i.e., they shall check whether the students were able to understand the requested theme and properly write, or not, about what was supposed to be developed as a text-writing activity.

Another important aspect to be analyzed lies on the informativity level, i.e., whether the information conveyed to the receiver is understandable or not, in other words, whether the message passed to the one the letter will be addressed to is consistent with what was requested by the teacher. In addition, there are other aspects to be analyzed, such as the style and type of language used by the students, which may be formal or informal, although the informal language often prevails in this textual genre.

Finally, teachers shall develop intervention activities based on the difficulties they most often detected in the analysis applied to students' letters. In order to do so, they can select parts of the students' texts – by taking extra care to avoid exposing the authors - and write them on the blackboard before asking students to identify, together, where the problem is and how to solve it. After this step is over, teachers can develop many other activities in that direction. This stage can be concluded in 2 meetings.

2nd Stage – At this stage, teachers shall analyze the linguistic and discursive aspects of the personal letter written by the students. Linguistic aspects comprise issues concerning accentuation, punctuation, the use of uppercase and lowercase letters, spelling, digraphs, among other grammatical aspects that may be relevant or emerge during the text analysis.

Discursive aspects comprise textual cohesion and coherence, verbal and nominal agreement, pronominal placement, as well as connectives such as prepositions, conjunctions, verb tenses, and moods, among others that may emerge as the analysis applied to each text progresses. After the linguistic and discursive analyzes are finished, it is extremely important that teachers apply the didactic-pedagogical intervention based on text issues presented by students. They can be written on the blackboard, or in clippings transcribed by the teacher and passed on to the students, to enable them working as a group in order to identify and fix the inadequacies detected in each text.

Teachers can also make use of notes to indicate what students need to change in their texts without showing them how they should do it, since the aim of this resource is to allow students to identify the issue and understand that they really need to improve their writing. This stage may also be concluded in 2 meetings.

3rd Stage – The third stage refers to the first personal letter-rewriting activity. At this point, teachers shall intervene as motivators, since the rewriting process will allow students to redo their text by observing the issues that were pointed out in their first writing in order to fix them. However, this activity shall only be applied once teachers, along with students, have worked on the most relevant problems identified in each written text. Two (2) meetings will be enough to conclude this stage. Next section presents the last step of this sequence: The final production.

The final production of the personal letter

At this point, Youth and Adult Education students will have the opportunity to show whether they evolved, or not, in the stages of the didactic sequence they were subjected to. The final production is understood as the sum of everything the students have learned and put into practice based on the final written production of the textual genre ‘personal letter’. This written production can be used by teachers as a score-attributable activity based on the difficulty-overcoming level presented by students throughout the learning process.

Finalizing our activity suggestion

We would like to remind teachers that the herein proposed activity is just a suggestion sequenced by a didactic-pedagogical schematic design that shows how to work on the written production of personal letters in classrooms with 7th/8th-grade students enrolled in Youth and Adult Education courses. Our purpose is to help them improve their writing skills and

overcome their difficulties by giving them the opportunity to take part in a safe learning process based on the discovery and resolution of their own issues. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing that this proposition is not a prescription or method to be followed, each teacher can change it based on their needs, context and knowledge about Youth and Adult Education, Genres and personal letter.

DIFFICULTIES PRESENTED BY YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION STUDENTS IN THE PERSONAL LETTER-WRITING ACTIVITY

At this research stage - after the first personal letter-writing activity - and as a development of the aforementioned stages, our aim was to identify the main difficulties presented by students who participated in the proposed activity based on the comparison between their initial and final texts. It was done to see whether students writing skills significantly changed, or not, throughout the development of this project. According to Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004, p. 102), 'the analysis of students' oral or written productions guided by well-defined criteria enables accurately evaluating their knowledge status and difficulties'.

In this case, besides being attentive to students' difficulties, teachers shall keep in mind that the adopted criteria must be clear and objective to favor the learning process.

So far, we have noticed that, despite the commitment and dedication of these students during the first personal letter-production stage, the emerging writing issues were increasingly visible and worrying, since these students will be joining High School very soon.

We also noticed that texts other than the herein analyzed ones presented many 'issues', which were identical to the ones identified in our study.

The withdrawal of some students was also a relevant aspect of this writing activity. They claimed that they did not know what to write and said that: *'I'm not in the mood and I don't have the patience to do it'*; or as Pedro said, 'Dude, forget about this writing stuff, let's do something else ...'. Thus, statements like these are in line with what Antunes said (2003, p. 45):

The writing activity is, then, an interactive expression activity (*ex-*, 'outwards') focused on the verbal manifestation of ideas, information, intentions, beliefs or feelings we want to share with someone else in order to interact with him/her in a certain way. Therefore, *having what to say* is the prerequisite for a successful writing activity.

Therefore, if someone has a hard time dealing with words to the extent that he/she cannot develop a sentence or expression to inform something, and if this individual is not interested in learning how to do it, he/she will not be able to communicate with someone else by means of well-written texts.

We were apprehensive when we concluded this stage, although we expected that students would be able to duly understand and improve their written-text skills during the

herein proposed activity. Our expectations were based on the hypothesis that the elaboration and application of exercises focused on such issues would enable students to perceive where they failed and, based on such perception, they would be able to rewrite their texts by taking into consideration the necessary changes required by it. Thus, according to the PCN (BRAZIL, 1997, p. 66), they would become ‘competent writers able to revise and rewrite their own text until it shows satisfactory results’.

Writing Strategies Applied to the Personal Letter-Writing Activity in Youth and Adult Education

After analysing all texts and detecting issues in students’ initial production, we realized that what had been discussed about the genre ‘personal letter’ was not enough to make students understand all the features of this genre. Therefore, we herein present some propositions of activities that were carried out with students in order to improve and, simultaneously, enhance their knowledge for future written text productions.

Module 1 – In this module, we reinforced the structural aspects composing the personal letter, because after we analyzed the initial text written by each student, it was evident that, overall, they had a hard time organizing each aspect of the genre. According to Antunes (2003, p. 54), each stage has its specific function and the condition of the final text depends on how each of these functions was respected. Thus, we explained to students the need of talking a little more about the genre ‘personal letter’. In order to do so, we presented some activities that could help them better understand how the genre ‘personal letter’ is structured.

However, before delivering the letters back to the students, we thought it would be better to start our reflection by addressing the elements that make up the structure of this textual genre. In order to do so, we used parts of students’ texts which presented issues of that order. We initially selected some excerpts and presented them in an exercise developed to enable the whole class to participate in the correction process. We emphasize that all the excerpts exposed on the blackboard had their authors’ names changed into fictitious ones to protect their identities.

At the end of this activity, we distributed a copy of a personal letter to them in order to reinforce the points they needed to improve. The aim this activity was to enable students to compare their first productions in order to identify their issues and no longer make the same mistakes in their first rewriting.

Module 2 – In this module, we addressed contents associated with the linguistic aspects of the produced texts such as accentuation, punctuation, uppercase and lowercase letters, and orthographic inadequacies. We began by drawing students’ attention to punctuation and accentuation issues. As in the previous modules, we also used words taken from their own texts. First, we selected some words presenting accentuation issues such as *remedio*, *aniversario*, *ola*, *esta* (V. de ligação), *otimo*, *saida*, *ta*, *ai*, *convida-la* and *acontecera* (medication, birthday, hello, is/are (linking verb), great, exit, ok, there, invite her, will happen).

After exposing the words on the board, we showed them that every word in our language has a tonic syllable, although not all of them are accentuated. However, the ones pointed out in the analysis are accentuated; so, we asked them to pronounce such words and try to find out where the tonic syllable of each word was. We also explained that our language comprises the crasis, circumflex and sharp accents. After a brief time, students found out what syllables should be accentuated. Then, one of them headed towards the blackboard and accentuated the words properly.

We also explained that the feature known as punctuation is used to separate words and phrases in order to give them meaning and enable the reading-comprehension process. Next, we presented the following sentence, which was taken from Joseane's letter (lines 5/7): '*Meu querido Amigo Paulo como você esta Ficou melhor da Zica Graças a deus eu fiquenbe melhor [...]*'. (My dear Friend Paulo how are you Did you recover from Zica Thank god I did [...]). It did not take long for some students to see that a comma should have been placed right after Paul's name; as well as that there was a question mark missing between the verbs *esta* and *ficou*, as well as after the word *Zica*, for they said: 'this is a question'. Finally, they pointed out that there was a full stop missing after the word *melhor*.

With regard to uppercase and lowercase letters, we showed two other sentences from Joseane's letter (lines 9/11) '*Graças a deus [...]*' e '*[...] tar tomando algum Remedio Para Ficar melhor eu Fiquenbe Boa mas eu ainda sentor um Pouco de dores [...]*' (Thank god [...] and [...] taking some Medication To Get better I Got Better but I still feel a Little bit of pain [...]); and one sentence from Josu's letter (line 1) '*mamanguape em o Dia 13/06/16*' (mamanguape on the Day 06/13/2016). Based on these examples, we explained that the first word in a sentence should always present the initial capital letter, as well as people's names, names of places, book titles and names of disciplines, among others; however, capital letter should never be used in the middle of sentences, whose words are spelled with lower initial letter. Next, we asked them to identify words that were inadequately written and to correct them once more.

All texts presented orthographic inadequacies such as '*fiquenbe*', '*tar*', '*sentor*', '*Lir*', '*seos*', '*espolsa*', '*lembo*', '*trabalhado*', '*Sito*', '*bricadeira*', '*Thau*' '*isto*', '*Agente*', '*com*' (I got, to be, to feel, to read, your, to expel, I remember, working, I feel, game, goodbye, I am, we, with). After writing these words on the blackboard, and feeling the need of helping students to improve their writing skills, we presented an activity based on accentuation and punctuation matters.

Module 3 – In this module, we addressed contents associated with discursive aspects of the texts such as textual cohesion and coherence issues, since some texts presented lack, or inadequate use, of some connectives. We took excerpts from Beatriz's letter (lines 5/6) as an example: the use of the pronoun '*mim*' (me – used at the end of the sentence) instead of '*me*' (me – used before the verb), the contraction between the preposition '*de*' (of) and definite articles '*os*' and '*as*' (the) in the sentence '*[...] os nosso divertimento as nossa saída*' (the fun we have when we go out). We explained that cohesive texts are the ones presenting good

connection between its parts, i.e., their elements 'bind' to produce meaning. Thus, the lack of elements such as pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, articles, verb tenses and moods can impair textual cohesion.

The following excerpt was taken from Samarah's letter (line 3), which presented lack of conjunctions and resulted in the construction of a non-cohesive text: *'Hoje é uma data muito especial seu aniversário estou lhe mandando essa carta [...]'*. (Today is a very special day your birthday I'm sending you this letter [...]). Prior to make any questions, we addressed some conjunction types and when they should be used; after that, we exposed the sentence on the blackboard and asked students to find out which of the studied conjunctions could be used to give more emphasis to the sentence. After some time, they concluded that the explanatory coordinating conjunction *'pois'* (since) followed by the verb *'é'* (is) should be placed between the word *'especial'* (special) and *'seu'* (your); as well as the explanatory coordinating conjunction *'por isso'* (this is the reason why) should be placed between *'aniversário'* (birthday) and *'estou'* (I am).

The inappropriate use of a particular connective can force the text to run out of cohesion, as it happens when the adversative conjunction *'mas'* (but) is misspelled as the adverb of intensity *'mais'* (more); however, this issue do not cause loss of coherence, since both words are phonetically similar, as it can be seen in the excerpt from Samarah's letters (06/07): *'[...] A gente passava cada momentos bons mais depois você foi embora fiquei muito triste. mais A vida é assim [...]'* (We had a very good time, but after you left I was very sad. but this is Life [...]); as well as from Bruna's letter (lines 3/4): *'Oi! Marta quanto tempo que nós não nos falamos nem lembro a última vez. Mais mudando de assunto [...]'* (Hi! Marta, how long we have not spoken to each other I don't even remember the last time we did it. But, let me change the subject [...]). Thus, all the activities proposed in the modules, just like the others, are capable of preparing students to write personal letters.

THE FINAL PRODUCTION: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

At this stage, we observed whether students were able, or not, to overcome their initial writing difficulties, which remained in the first rewriting process. We also observed whether new issues emerged, or not, based on the analysis of the final text written by each student.

The comparison between initial and final texts allowed seeing that Beatriz - one of our participant students - improved considerably since she was able to identify the main issues in the initial text version and tried to solve them in a conscientious way, although some issues remained. Overall, Samarah also improved her writing, since the activities carried out in the classroom enabled her to identify several issues in the initial text and try to solve them in a conscientious way, although some issues remained.

Based on the final text by Joseane, we can say that, despite her limitations, she was the one who improved the most among all students who participated in the personal

letter-writing activity. Thus, if the didactic sequence is well applied, the result is the overcoming of most issues in the written-text production process.

Based on the comparison between Josu's initial and final texts, as well as between his texts and the other ones analyzed so far, it is possible saying that he managed to improve in some aspects; however, maybe due to lack of better knowledge about reading and writing, he was not able to expand the content of his letter and just kept on repeating sentences with similar meaning.

Finally, based on the comparison between Bruna's initial and final texts, overall, she was the one who presented the least issues. It proved that she had more knowledge about the linguistic and discursive aspects of our language, and, for this reason, she made use of a language easy to be understood.

Therefore, based on the personal letter-writing activity developed with Youth and Adult Education students, we believe that the didactic sequence based on Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004) can be used as didactic-pedagogical strategy by Portuguese teachers working with this teaching modality, besides guiding them in the work with the genre 'personal letter' to help overcoming issues in texts written by them.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Youth and Adult Education is a modality that has been gaining space in, and recognition by, society as an indispensable means of educating individuals inserted in it, since such modality encourages citizenship and social equity.

Thus, the opportunity offered to individuals who were unable to learn and who, for some reason, stopped studying - but who nowadays are back in the classroom -, is not a favor but a duty, i.e., it is the redress against a social debt that has been long denied by country authorities.

The aim of the herein proposed subject - i.e., developing a writing activity with Youth and Adult Education students (7th/8th grades), substantiated by a didactic sequence based on the use of the textual genre 'personal letter' -, was to enable these students to improve their writing skills, since the number of issues associated with this content has significantly increased.

Therefore, the proposed intervention was based on the didactic sequence suggested by the School of Geneva (DOLZ; NOVERRAZ; SCHNEUWLY, 2004). First, we introduced the textual genre to be worked on by means of an initial writing activity; then, activities were implemented in the herein described modules that substantiated the preparation of exercises focused on enabling students to identify issues in their first written texts. Next, we asked students to perform their first text rewriting and, finally, to write their final texts. At this point, they had the opportunity to permanently solve some of the remaining issues found in their previous texts.

It is worth emphasizing that some students have considerably improved their writing skills when they received back their letters for rewriting. They perceived several inadequacies

which had not appeared in their final writing. Thus, the justification for this activity can be seen in the students' own speech. Samarah said: *'I know how to spell these words; I misspelled them because I was anxious'*; Joseane said: *'Teacher, I'm ashamed of myself! My letter does not have a single punctuation mark'*; Josu said: *'Dude! My letter was all mixed up!'*; and, finally, Bruna said: *'Teacher, we should perform this activity at least twice a year, so I am sure we would learn how to write in a proper way!'*

Thus, we believe that the text-writing/rewriting activity applied to Youth and Adult Education students has helped them improve their writing skills, although, for some reason, some of them were not able to accomplish what was proposed. However, the analyzes conducted in the present study were not exhaustive, nor can it be considered as complete and finished. If one takes into consideration the infinite number of information that can be further analyzed, it is possible saying that this topic remains open for further analysis based on other contexts and social actors involved in it.

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