

Initial Teacher Education and Production of Didactic Material for Teaching Genres: An Experience with the "Game Rules" Genre

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Abstract:

This article aims at presenting a proposal for a formative itinerary with a view to elaboration of alternative didactic material to teach text-genres at schools. We defend the explicit and systematic teaching of text-genres through teaching tools (SCHNEUWLY, 2009) and the didactic sequences (DOLZ, NOVERRAZ e SCHNEUWLY, 2004). The genre didactic model (DOLZ e SCHNEUWLY, 2004) and the proposal of create a database with didactic material based on genres developed by Mendonça (2003) have been adopted in this work too. The experience reported here was lived in the context of a major degree in Letras at Universidade Federal do Agreste de Pernambuco located in the city of Garanhuns, in the Southern Agreste region of the state of Pernambuco. The results point towards a formative process which provided to the future teachers creativity and autonomy to produce authorial didactic material for text-genres teaching in Portuguese language classes.

Keywords:

Text-genres teaching; didactic sequence; formative itinerary.

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INTRODUCTION

A teacher’s work within the classroom implies, amongst other things, a process of decomposing the teaching object through various teaching tools. Said tools, according to Schneuwly (2009), may be classified into two big categories: the institutional tools and the specific tools. The last category may be split up into two subcategories: school materials and discourses elaborated by school about the teaching object.

According to Schneuwly, the institutional tools include the artefacts that are available in the school *locus*, but are not related to a specific school subject. Said category comprehends the technological artefacts such as whiteboards, computers and multimedia projectors. On the other hand, the specific tools are intrinsically related to specific school subjects, *i.e.* “make sure the presentation, the meeting and the interaction of the student with the object to be taught¹ [...]” (SCHNEUWLY, 2009, p. 33). This category comprehends didactic materials made specifically for language teaching (didactic book, handouts, pedagogical digital media, etc.) and discourses elaborated by school about the object to be taught, “the ways of saying it, of talking about it, of presenting it verbally through the lesson, of translating it into a question-answer dialogue, etc.”² (SCHNEUWLY, 2009, p. 33).

In this paper, we specifically interest in the development of teaching tools, such as alternative didactic materials, which favour the systematic exploration of the teaching objects within the classroom. From that comes our methodological choice for the didactic sequences (DOLZ, NOVERRAZ; SCHNEUWLY, 2004), once these tools, when well elaborated, shall be used “by the teacher to make possible for the student to meet and to study the teaching object or one of its dimensions”³ (SCHNEUWLY, 2009, p. 34).

This proposal came from the concern of some students about the inherently theoretic nature of the Major Degree in Letras’ course program in our university. Said course program, according to some students, still neglects something essential to teacher education: the knowledges to be taught. We believe that is the University’s role to propose a formative itinerary that makes possible not only the acquisition of scientific knowledge from the field of action, but also – and specially – articulate this knowledge to discussions about the teaching objects and the possibilities to teach it within the school. (DOLZ, LIMA e ZANI, 2000).

¹ Our translation. Originally: “Il s’agit fondamentalement des outils qui assurent la présentation, la rencontre et interaction de l’élève avec l’objet à enseigner dans la classe [...]”

² Our translation. Originally: “[...] les manières de le dire, d’en parler, de le présenter verbalement à travers la leçon, de le traduire en dialogue de type question-réponse, etc. [...]”

³ Our translation. Originally: “[...] utilisés par l’enseignant pour permettre à l’élève de rencontrer et d’étudier l’objet d’enseignant ou l’une de ses dimensions.”

That being said, this paper aims at: a) describing a proposal of a formative itinerary with a view to elaboration of alternative didactic material to teach text-genres; and b) presenting an alternative proposal for teaching the “game rules” text-genre. First, we are going to discuss the theoretical approaches that guided the making of the formative itinerary; then, we are going to describe the journey of elaborating the didactic materials; and last, we are going to illustrate our proposal with a didactic sequence for teaching “game rules”, created by two Major Degree in Letras’ graduation students.

SUBSTANTIATING THE PROPOSAL

Text genres are relatively stable forms of communication that create and mediate specific social situations. The scientific article, for example, has stylistic and visual characteristics of its own, which are easily recognizable for those inserted in the academic circle (font size, quotation format, indentations, etc.). These characteristics suit a clear communicative intention. Understanding text genres like this places us, at once, in two perspectives: Bakhtin’s, for whom the genres can only be as a socially recognized unit; and Vigostky’s, for whom the human activity is always mediated by cultural world objects – in the case of the text genres, the language is said object.

As the class is a text genre itself, it is necessary to accomplish that when you teach text genre, the everyday life genres will not be merely reproduced inside school, for they need to change in order to become school objects. Far from denying the continuity between the school and the variety of *locus* where text genres circulate, we still considerate the school as a specific communication *locus*. From the moment that a real-life text is brought to and analysed in a classroom context, it becomes “a variation of the reference genre, built in a teaching-learning dynamic to work in an institution whose primary aim is precisely that” (DOLZ, SCHNEUWLY, 2004, p. 69).

Although we understand the necessity and importance of putting the text-genres at the centre of the work in language at school, we shall take into consideration the fact that organizing teaching based on the isolate genres may be a big problem. Albeit the genres are reasonably established when it comes to their forms, they are “highly malleable, dynamic and plastic textual events” (MARCUSCHI, 2021, p. 1). Especially in times like ours, where the advance in ICTs brings along changes on the *loci* where the genres circulate, as well on the experience with the genre (which became more interactive through the multimodal support). The advances in technology also foster new language practices, which end up creating new genres or highlighting phenomena as “hybridation / intergenres intertextuality” (KOCH, ELIAS, 2006, p. 114), when a genre takes the form of another one considering the communicative purpose.

As the number of genres is practically endless (and the amount of possibilities of intergenres textuality, even bigger), the teaching of oral/written expression cannot be oriented toward the isolate genres. If it does so, we risk coming back to the scholar traditions of the essay or composition. Teaching oral/written expression should work systematically with genres in different orders, developing language capacities transferrable among genres within the same discourse order. When teaching genres as the *opinion letter*, the approach shall develop not only the particular characteristics of said genre, but also foster the ability to take a stand, sustain and refute arguments – which may be useful in other genres, such as the assembly, the debate or the critical review. Taking that into consideration, Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004) purpose the concept of *genre groupings*, as tools to organize the curriculum. The authors present five groupings: *storytelling* (organize experiences fictionally), *report* (organize experienced facts, situated in time), *describe actions* (regulation of behaviours), *argue* (sustain, refute and take a stand for an argument) and *expose* (changing various knowledge into text).

Said groupings coordinate a work oriented towards not only the appropriation of the individual features of a certain genre, but also the development of global language capacities transferrable among different genres (within a grouping or between groupings, once the classification of genres in each group is fluid itself). Those capacities shall be built while working with different groupings, represented by various genres throughout the school years. The concept of *groupings* makes the *progression* (organization of teaching over time in order to make it optimum) easier, as we can organize it from the groupings and not the isolated genres, guaranteeing a global vision of learning in different cycles (*intercycles progression*) and within each cycle (*intracycles progression*).

For the work with the text-genres to be effective and make possible the appropriation of each genre and the development of global language capacities, Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004) purpose, as an instrument to articulate progression, the *didactic sequence*, “a set of school activities organized systematically around a written or oral text-genre” (DOLZ, NOVERRAZ, SCHNEUWLY, 2004, p. 97). It is worth reminding that even it focus on a sole genre, the didactic sequence does not only favours appropriation of that specific genre, as its modular organization helps on taking the reflections throughout in the sequence to other genres within a grouping.

The didactic sequence, as defined by Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004), is made up of four steps. The first one is called *situation presentation*: in this step, students are faced with a very well defined (for the genre they will study in that didactic sequence) communication problem around which all the sequence will be oriented. For a didactic sequence to teach the genre *entry*, for example, students may be invited to create a glossary of expressions they use in their social media. The communication situation of the glossary creates the genre to be taught (*entry*), and all steps of the sequence peak when they produce the glossary with all its entries.

The second step is called *first production*. It is very straightforward with its name: here, the students shall write a first version of their text, from the contact with the genre they had o the first step. The idea, here, is to mobilize knowledge students have about genres in the same grouping. Analysing this first production, the teacher can identify what are the biggest difficulties/necessities of the group, from which they can organize the third step: the *modules* – specific and various activities the teacher shall use to work systematically the characteristics of the genre in study. After all modules, is time for the fourth and final step: the *final production*, in which the students will not only consolidate their knowledge about the studied genre by systematizing its characteristics, but also self-evaluate.

In short, the didactic sequence presents itself as a tool to make teaching easier, for it foster strategies that may be easily adapted to every classroom’s reality, thanks to its modular structure.

THE JOURNEY OF ELABORATING DIDACTIC MATERIAL FOR TEXT-GENRES TEACHING

The idea of elaborating didactic material for teaching text-genres was born in 2016, within the “Didactics and Learning Assessment” course taught in the seventh period of the Major Degree in Letras at the (then called) Garanhuns Academic Unit (UAG) of the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco (UFRPE)⁴. Said course has a workload of 60h and aims at offering theoretical and methodological subsidies to help future teachers to reflect about questions around teaching, especially the aspects of Didactics and assessment in the curricular component Portuguese Language.

⁴ After a process of emancipation, the Garanhuns Academic Unit, from the beginning of 2020 on, started to be called Federal University of Southern Agreste of Pernambuco.

One of the recurring demands of course attendants is about what didactic possibilities – and teaching tools – make viable the work with an interactionist conception of language (*langue* and *langage*) in class. That is the reason why we purpose a formative itinerary that made possible for the trainee teachers the elaboration of didactic materials for teaching genres, leading us to the methodological option for the didactic sequence as a teaching device.

In the chart below, we enlist the genres present in the didactic sequences elaborated by students between the first semester of 2016 and the second semester of 2019, excluding the year of 2017 (in which the responsible teacher did not teach the course):

Chart 1: text-genres in the Didactic Sequences

| SEMESTER | GENRES |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| 2016.1 | News |
| | Opinion article |
| | Short story |
| | Scientific paper |
| | Adventure narrative |
| 2016.2 | Cordel (string literature) |
| | Opinion article |
| | News |
| | Interview |
| 2018.1 | Reader's letter |
| | Stage play |
| | Meme |
| | Travel journal |
| | Press photography |
| 2018.2 | YouTube profile description |
| | Tutorial |
| | Game rules |
| | Manga |
| | Movie synopsis |
| | Poem |
| | Script |
| | Meme |
| Travel journal | |
| 2019.1 | Meme |
| | Advertising |
| | Interview |
| | Seminar |
| | Travel journal |
| | Critical review |
| | Label |
| | Debate |

| | |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| 2019.2 | Fable |
| | Advertising |
| | Cordel (string literature) |
| | Repente (sung poetry) |
| | Digital banner |
| | Podcast |
| | Debate |

Font: Lima, Mariano e Xavier (in press)

The chart above reveals a bigger occurrence of written genres, adding up to 21⁵: next, genres that mix up various semiosis, with 9 occurrences⁶; and last, the oral genres, which added up to 8 genres only⁷. We believe that the predominance of written genres in the creation of didactic sequences may be related to the power of written culture in society and in scholar tradition. We attach the little occurrence of oral genres to the fact that orality is not yet taken effectively as a teaching object at schools (DOLZ, SCHNEUWLY e HALLER, 2004; ASSUNÇÃO, MENDONÇA e DELPHINO, 2013; CARVALHO e FERRAREZI JR., 2018).

The process of didactic material elaboration took place in six steps. In the first moment, we selected reference scientific texts about systematic and explicit text-genre teaching. One of the chosen texts was “Didactic sequences to oral and written expression: presentation of a procedure”, by Joaquim Dolz, Michèle Noverraz and Bernard Schneuwly.

After the reading and discussion of this text in class, it was time to choose the genre to base the creation of the didactic sequence. The students were organized in pairs and challenged to choose a genre not very used in the didactic material available nowadays (such as mainstream handouts / didactic books). This had the objective to unleash students’ creativity to create authorial didactic material that can explore other possibilities to teach oral and written genres in class.

The next step consisted in analysing five from ten exemplars of the chosen genres, based in some criteria stablished previously. From this analysis, the students could learn deeply the genre and then define its teaching dimensions from a didactic genre model (Dolz and Schneuwly, 2004), which is not characterized by fixed and immutable standards. On the contrary, it is fed back for it is susceptible to influences of various genres theories and to the variability of the social practices that determine the functioning and the genres’ regularities. Therefore, we understand that the elaboration of said model cannot do without a careful reading and detailed analysis of an authentic, representative and wide *corpus* of the genre to be brought into the classroom. That analysis shall be made in such way that we can draw a definition of the genre and identify, for example, its linguistic regularities, composition, communicative purpose and the social *locus* where it takes place.

To help students in this process, we adapted the genre-based Didactic Material Database (BMD) proposed by Mendonça (2003). In the chart below, we reproduce the chart used by students to analyse the genre exemplars:

⁵ Travel journal (3), opinion article (2), cordel (2), news (2), reader’s letter (1), short story (1), scientific paper (1), adventure narrative (1), YouTube profile description (1), tutorial (1), game rules (1), movie synopsis (1), poem (1), script (1), critical review (1) and fable (1).

⁶ Advertising (2), meme (3), digital banner (1), label (1), manga (1) and press photography (1).

⁷ Debate (2), interview (2), seminar (1), stage play (1), repente (1) and podcast (1).

Chart 2: Orientations to genre analysis and elaboration of didactic genre models

| |
|--|
| 1.TEXT-GENRE IDENTIFICATON |
| Genre: |
| Collection date: |
| Collection place: |
| Discourse Domain and/or Circulation Context: |
| 2. GENRE ANALYSIS (In what support was the genre published? How this support is characterized? Who is the target audience of this genre? Under what circumstances is the genre produced? What are the social places of production? With what purpose is the genre produced? What is the genre’s layout? Are the genre’s language structures simple or complex? Is there a language standard?) |
| 3. APPLICABILITY TO TEACHING |
| What themes can be explored? |
| What communicative projects are possible? |
| What possible topics in metalinguistic reflections does this genre raise? |
| What language ability (or abilities) is (are) mobilized by this genre? |
| What possible interlocution situations or “simulations” are possible for text production, using the various literacy practices outside school as a reference point? |

Adapted from Mendonça (2003)

After deep understanding of the chosen genres, the students (organized in pairs) started creating their didactic sequences, taking into consideration the communicative project, the teaching-learning objectives, the didactic resources and strategies, the content to be taught and the language abilities to be developed. The students should also write a little didactic text about the genre to turn in to the teacher.

The next step consisted in socializing the produced didactic materials in an extension event⁸ in the university, called Portuguese Language Teaching Didactics Seminar (SEDELP)⁹.

The final step is publishing the sequences in a digital repository and in a compilation¹⁰. To exemplify the developed materials for teaching genres, the following section presents one of the sequences produced by two students in the second semester of 2018 and based on the “game rules” text genre.

THE WORLD’S GAME, THE GAME IN THE WORLD: A PROPOSAL OF DIDACTIC MATERIAL FOR GAME RULES TEACHING AT THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

Games, whether physical or electronic, are part of the students experience and shall encourage collaboration or competition relationships among individuals.

The “game rules” text-genre has a lot of specificities and teaching situations worth taking to the classroom context. Besides the fact that it mobilizes ludic and educational dimensions, working with game rules in the classroom systematize the ability to regulate behaviours within social groups, that the students already know from their experience in the school or family ambient. Thus, the work with the game rules exert “functions based on living together, respecting the other and self, [which] shall go along

⁸ This event is part of the Research Centre in Discourse and Teaching (NUPEDE/ CNPq)’s extension project.

⁹ At first, the event would occur in face-to-face Poster sessions at the university. Due to the COVID-19 pandemics, however, the last sessions have taken place online.

¹⁰ This last step was not yet consolidated. The sequences are still being systematically reviewed and formatted for further publishing.

the students throughout their lives (...), related do the world perception [and] in relation to the culture” (PARANÁ, 2008 apud RACHWAL, 2018, p. 7-8)¹¹.

Game rules is a textual genre classified within the order of *describing actions*, whose social communication domain is the one of instructions and regulations. It mobilizes the language ability to regulate behaviours mutually (SCHNEUWLY; DOLZ, 2004). Some of its characteristics, according to Rachwal (2018), are:

- Use of the conative function of language, as it prescribes actions to be taken in order to accomplish the proposed objective (p. 22)
- Use of verbs in imperative mode or infinitive form (p. 22);
- Preference for short and clear instructions, organized into topics;
- Takes the real addressee (even if it is idealized within a certain age group) to set up the text’s complexity level, in order to instruct clearly about the game.

Considering the usefulness of the didactic sequence model to initial teacher education, as it fosters strategies to achieve an optimum mother tongue teaching-learning process, we purpose this example of a didactic sequence for teaching the “game rules” text-genre. This material was produced as an evaluation activity for the course “Didactic and Learning Assessment”, taught at the second semester of 2018 by Gustavo Lima the (then called) Garanhuns Academic Unit of Federal Rural University of Pernambuco (UFRPE – UAG).

Our selection criterion for this specific genre is based on the analysis of the curriculum of Garanhuns and Caetés cities, made by Diniz and Lima (2017). Both cities are located on the Southern Agreste region, in which is also located the Academic Unit where this proposal was born. Said analysis¹² verified that genres from the order of *describing actions*, for the middle school, were the least worked among all other groupings – they were systematically worked with in a single unit of one school year only. Therefore, we decided to provide teachers from the region adjacent to the Academic Unit with an instrument to remedy this curriculum deficiency, when it is a necessity based on the students’ abilities, expectations and necessities. Those are the criteria from which the curriculum shall organize itself in order to be different from the school program (centred and organized around the contents).

The didactic sequence you are about to read was thought to use in a 7th grade class. It is made up of ten moments, which comprehend the four steps described by Schneuwly, Dolz and Noverraz (2004) – *situation presentation, first production, modules and final production*. These moments shall be two-hour long each. The creation of this material aimed at giving students elements to reflect about and systematize the “game rules” text-genre. Specifically, this didactic sequence aimed at: a) helping on production of new game rules to existent games; b) stimulate students’ creativity and ability to articulate, through language, the regulation of behaviours; and c) provide literacy events to socialize the acquired knowledge.

On the first moment, that comprehends what Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004, p. 98) call “situation presentation”, the teacher presents some games to the students and asks them to play these games, in groups or pairs. The selection of games for this activity shall take into consideration the social

¹¹ The inserts in square brackets are our own and aim at making the original text’s cohesion a little better, as its lack of connectors make the understanding a little difficult at certain points.

¹² Research developed within Federal Rural University of Pernambuco’s Scientific Initiation Program (PIC – UFRPE), from 2016 to 2017, about grouping and progression on the curriculum of two cities in the southern Agreste region of Pernambuco state, in Brazil.

practices and preferences of the students, so they are used to play the presented games.¹³ After playing the games, the students shall systematize the written rules of the games they just played. This is the *first production* (DOLZ; NOVERRAZ; SCHNEUWLY, 2004). After this first production, the teacher shall make clear that, at the end of the didactic sequence, they would be able to rewrite these texts, creating new rules to existent games, and their texts would be shared with the school community in a game salon.

On the second step, the *modules* begin to explore systematically and in various ways the characteristics of the game rules genre. The modules proposed here are suggestions raised from the standard characteristics of the genre – they can and they must be adapted by the teacher, taking into consideration students' learning capacities and necessities. On the first module, the students – divides on the same groups as the previous class – shall play again the same games from the previous class, but this time following the official / institutional rules of the game. At the end of the matches, in a conversation circle, the students must compare the game experience following to the rules they know (used on the first step) and following the official rules.

On the second module, the students (once again distributed in pairs/groups), will read adapted game rules in the form of plain text. The students shall play the game following those adapted rules and discuss how hard/easy it is. The focus here is to show them the importance of topics on the structure of the genre. Next, the student are supposed to organize the plain text in clear and easy to read topics.

For the third module, the suggestion is to organize the students in groups once again. In this step, the groups shall socialize the rules in topics, produced on the previous class, with the other groups. From that, the groups self-evaluate and refine each other's productions.

On the fourth module, the students – again, organized in groups – shall read the texts and circulate all verbs they find in it. If necessary, the teacher may review this grammar category. After that, the teacher writes down on the board the verbs the students highlighted and analyses them with the students, mobilizing questions such as:

- Whom (=what addressee) this verbs refer to?
- What are the likeness among these verbs? In what verbal tense are the actions?
- What do they express?

Those (and other) questions shall come, if possible, from the students' previous knowledge. From this systematization, students will notice that the genre “game rules” uses verbs in the present tense, imperative mode, usually in infinitive form. After this discussion, the teacher ask the groups to review the use of verbs in their productions and adjust whatever needs adjustment.

For the fifth module, the teacher hands out to the students versions modified by him/herself of the game rules produced by the students. Then, the teacher asks the students to play the games following these modified rules. Next, the students and the teacher shall discuss the idea of the game as social regulation, once the rules shall be discussed by the players before the game starts: for example, why not use different combinations for tic-tac-toe than horizontal, vertical and diagonal or grids with more than nine spaces? After this discussion, the teacher asks the students to create a new rule to insert in the game rules they already have.

On the sixth module, the students shall play the games following the adapted rules they produced on the previous class. If necessary, ask them to review the rules they created, from the difficulties they may found in the match (if there is any). When all groups have satisfactory authorial rules, the teacher

¹³ Some game suggestions are: tic-tac-toe, Mattel's UNO, Pokémon Trading Card Game, Hasbro's Monopoly and Super Mario World.

asks them to systematize, orally, the characteristics of the “game rules genre”. As they do so, the teacher lists these characteristics on the board so the students can register them on their notebooks later.

To the seventh – and last – module, the teacher will need a smartphone, a computer and a multimedia projector. Using these technological tools, the teacher shall present the game rules worked in the class in the virtual context (simulator or electronic game). Ask the students to play the games in the virtual ambient and next, discuss the differences between the written rules and the virtual rules. After the discussion, propose to the students that the game salon will have two versions of the game rules: one written, to be shown to the visitors; and one oral, to be used to guide the visitors to play the games. Ask the students to produce a banner with the written game rules and organise the information to be spoken at the presentation.

The ninth moment is for the *final production* (DOLZ; NOVERRAZ; SCHNEUWLY, 2004, p. 98): the groups socialize their written/oral productions with each other – an in-house version of what will be the game salon. The teacher shall seize this opportunity to make the last adjustments on the students’ productions. The students shall turn in a print version of their rules, along with the banner and the oral presentation in the game salon.

The final moment of this didactic sequence marks the Game Salon, in which the students will teach students from other classes how to play the games they are responsible for, using the rules they wrote. Making the didactic sequence peak in an authentic situation of use of the game makes visible, to the students, the mobilisation of the developed language capacities in real-life situations: the text-genre is still a *genre to teach-learn*, yet also being *genre to communicate*, therefore reinforcing the role of the school as one of the many *loci* where text-genres can circulate.

ENDGAME...

In an interface with the dimension of research and university extension, the formative itinerary with a view to developing didactic sequences is registered in a movement that aims at proposing the use of alternative teaching tools to contribute in developing and enriching teachers’ work within the classroom.

As discussed in the experience reported above, the steps of creating didactic material for text-genre teaching include reading papers; selecting and analysing exemplars of the genre to be taught; creating, sharing and making public students’ productions. Throughout this process, carried out collaboratively, key aspects to teacher education are involved, such as the operationalization of scientific knowledge to the didactic action; exchange of knowledge and experiences among the trainer teacher and the future teachers; continuous assessment of students’ learning and collective reflection about forward-looking didactic action.

To sum up, the challenge of asking future teachers to create alternative didactic materials for text-genre teaching has been, up to now, a viable methodological alternative towards to the construction of a paradigm for initial teacher education built on the discussion about teaching tools and the possibilities of teaching objects’ didactic transposition.

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