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DISTANCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING TEACHERS-TUTORS

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INTRODUCTION

The present work aims to discuss the challenges of teacher training policies in the face of the expansion of distance courses, in particular, the training of teacher-tutors who work in the pedagogical mediation of this teaching modality and in direct contact with the course students through through the VLE – Virtual Learning Environment.

Among several issues that arise for contemporary educational policy, teacher training assumes a considerable part of the agenda of the Brazilian State. And, even more, for the distance modality, when a systematic reflection about the central role that teacher-tutors assume in the educational process demands investigations and discussions about the protagonism of these subjects in distance education.

In the context of the actions initiated aiming at the initial and continuing education of teaching professionals, Almeida (2005, p. 3) highlights that:

> [...] The training of educators has become "one of the essential cornerstones of any attempt to renew the educational system", which helps us understand the importance that this theme has acquired in recent decades, in the midst of global efforts to improve the quality of education. of teaching. In educational reform processes, it is, therefore, placed as a central element.

In Brazil, in the last fifteen years, there has been a continuous and vertiginous growth in the number of enrollments in distance higher education, with great emphasis on teacher training courses and, in particular, Pedagogy courses. In the midst of this process, Neder (2005, p. 56) defends that "education must be thought and managed in the context of globalization, electronic automation and post-modernity".

Just to highlight this growth, based on data presented annually by the Census of Higher Education in Brazil (MEC/INEP),

in 2000, we had 1,682 enrollments in the distance education modality. In 2005, there were already 114,642 enrollments, 369,766 in 2007, reaching the mark of 1.2 million in 2014 (around 16% of total enrollments in higher education). To give you an idea, in the last 10 years, distance courses have grown 24 times in number of enrollments.

In the distance modality, a new teaching proposal is presented, in which learners become autonomous subjects in the learning process through the methodology of "learning to learn". (BELLONI, 2003) Hence the importance of the figure of the teacher-tutor, because, according to Maia and Mattar (2007), in this process of autonomous learning through the Virtual Learning Environment, the pedagogical mediation of tutors in forums, chats and in the feedbacks of the activities developed and posted by the students throughout the school period, it contributes to their instigation, aiming at online interaction and the fulfillment of the didactic sequences, in addition to working, the tutors, in the interpretation of the visual and multimedia material.

From this general context, the objective of this research was to investigate the training of tutors for distance education, taking the case of the Licentiate Degree in Pedagogy offered by UNIVESP – Virtual University of the State of São Paulo.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND PURPOSES FOR RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

Based on the understanding that tutors of distance education courses have become a new category of education professionals, with the aim of instructing and training without, however, being teachers or treated as such, the following question was established. of research: how was the initial and continuing training of tutor-teachers of the EaD Pedagogy

Project at UNIVESP?

During the period in which this research was developed, we sought to: a) carry out a survey of scientific production in books, periodicals, theses and dissertations on the training of tutors; b) investigate the procedures for the selection of tutors to be hired to serve the centers in which the course in question was carried out; c) discuss the training process offered to them during the work.

In view of this first survey, it was possible to observe that a significant part of this production on tutoring and distance education relates more to the description of work procedures and the pedagogical practice of tutors, and little to the training of teacher-tutors. However, based on the same bibliographic reference, it was also possible to assess that an effort is being made to investigate the training of tutors, having as a reference the consolidated production on the initial and continuing training of teachers.

In the continuity of the survey, it was possible, among the bibliographic findings, to select books, articles and theses whose focuses keep identity with the theme of interest of this work, bringing elements for the formation and the professional work in focus, that is, the teacher-tutor.

The UNIVESP Pedagogy course studied here was aimed at practicing Basic Education teachers. Admission took place through a selection process carried out by VUNESP (Fundação para o Vestibular da Universidade Estadual Paulista).

The course was organized in 21 poles, providing a total of 1,350 places, being developed in faculties and institutes of UNESP (Universidade Estadual Paulista "Júlio de Mesquita Filho), spread throughout the territory of the state of São Paulo. Organized under the blended mode, with 3,390 hours, the course was planned for students to carry out 60% of the distance activities, online,

through the electronic learning platform over the internet (AVA), and 40% in face-to-face activities, in weekly meetings at the poles.

The didactic support material consisted of films, documentaries, lectures, etc., broadcast by Fundação Padre Anchieta, on the digital channel UNIVESP TV; textbooks by subjects, prepared by UNESP professors; and a physical library, with titles specially chosen to meet the different subjects provided for in the course curriculum.

With this institutional organizational design, the course had a central coordination, headquartered in São Paulo, and 54 course advisors – a technical name for designating tutors, one for every 25 students. Each of the centers had a professor-coordinator, a professor at UNESP, responsible for monitoring the course in loco and for supporting advisors and students.

The selection of tutors, in this course called "subject advisors", was also carried out by VUNESP, according to a public notice published for this purpose. In this research, we were interested in the training offered to these tutor-teachers, course advisors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The selection of tutors for the course was carried out by VUNESP in January 2010. 3,227 candidates enrolled in the 21 units of UNESP, centers in which the course was offered, being qualified 359 and, in the end, the course was developed with 54 tutors.

In the initial design of the course, it was stated that the training and profile of tutors must basically meet three criteria:

- a minimum education level – a degree in a pedagogy course, with a specialization or master's degree in education being desirable;

- desirable experience in early childhood education or elementary school;

- Basic computer skills: Windows, internet, Office (Word and Excel).

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However, when the public notice was drawn up, by decision not made explicit in any of the documents investigated, another focus was imprinted on the qualification of candidates for tutor-teachers. The minimum training, which before must have been a degree in a pedagogy course, became an undergraduate degree in any higher education course, and the desirable experience in early childhood education and elementary education was not considered, and the public notice stated that a minimum of six months of experience in higher education was required. We emphasize that this fact is extremely relevant, as the profile of the teacher-tutor to be selected has completely changed in relation to the initial project.

The UNIVESP Pedagogy blended course had the inaugural class on March 1, 2010. Shortly after the hiring of tutors, in the period before the beginning of the course, and throughout the first semester of 2010, the qualification began tutors/advisors of disciplines, through actions in workshops and pedagogical meetings.

In these workshops and meetings, tutors/advisors of disciplines brought up common issues for discussion, such as the initial dropout of students, apparently provoked by the expectation that distance learning could be carried out with less effort, complaints from students regarding the amount of tasks that were being evaluated, the deadlines given for the accomplishment of the activities, among other causes.

Along with these questions taken to the qualification meetings, issues related to the use of the electronic platform (AVA) in their different work fronts, the content of the disciplines, the quality of the didactic support material, the difficulties encountered and the facilitating aspects in the course development. In this regard, it is important to highlight that the teaching and learning process in distance education occurs "indirectly in space and time".

Hence the relevance of the role played by tutors in the mediatization of didactic-pedagogical work:

> To mediate means to choose, for a given context and situation of communication, the most effective way to ensure it; select a medium most suitable for this purpose; in function of this, to conceive and to elaborate the speech that constitutes the form of covering the substance of the subject or matter to be transmitted. (ROCHA-TRINDADE, 1988 apud BELLONI, 2003, p. 63)

And also, according to Behrens (2000, p. 73), in distance education, it is necessary "[...] to change the axis of teaching to choose the paths that lead to learning. In fact, it is essential that teachers-tutors and students are in a permanent process of learning to learn."

In this sense, too, the role of the teacher-tutor goes beyond the pedagogical issue in monitoring the didactic sequences by the course participants. As highlighted by Uzun and Torres (2012, p. 2077):

> [...] the teacher-tutor plays different roles, they are: organizer of the virtual class, definer of rules, supervisor of student learning, coordinator of access time to material and activities; finally, the tutor plays a pedagogical role, but also an administrative and organizational role. It is up to the teacher-tutor to stimulate the learning of his students and, in addition, to instruct them so that he can study in this teaching modality; [...] has primarily a pedagogical and intellectual function, which involves the elaboration of various activities, encouraging research, questioning, evaluating responses, listing comments, coordinating discussions, in short, summarizing the main points and to develop the general intellectual environment of the course, promoting the construction of virtual learning communities.

Returning to the aspects discussed in the aforementioned workshops and meetings, it

was observed, through the manifestations of the tutors themselves and the evaluation of the general coordination of the course, that the training actions could be organized through a specialization course (post-graduate course). lato sensu degree), in order to compose a set of knowledge to be worked on in modules. With this provision, we sought to offer tutors/advisors of disciplines the opportunity to have a well-qualified continuing education that, in the end, would formally provide them with a certificate of specialists.

The project of this specialization course was prepared by the professors responsible for the general coordination of the Project and, later, presented to the Central Chamber of Postgraduate Studies at UNESP.

It is called "Teacher training for blended and distance education courses", with a workload of 440 hours, with 90 vacancies, free to students, especially aimed at the supervisors of disciplines of the UNIVESP Pedagogy course, it was scheduled to start on 16 /08/2010 and ending on 06/30/2013.

Course tutors/advisors were invited to enroll in the course. It is recorded that, although proposed and organized primarily for these professionals, there was no instruction that it was mandatory. Thus, not all of them signed up and there were dropouts during the first year.

The specialization course was organized into modules, focusing on the procedures for using the electronic and computer platform, interactive modes with students, motivational systems and content approaches of the disciplines that were offered by the distance Pedagogy course. It had a coordinator, a professor at UNESP, and a second coordinator, who could be called an auxiliary coordinator, who was in charge of the continuous monitoring of the course. Throughout each of the modules, the "tutor students" carried out activities and, at the end, a report or

analysis of what was dealt with in the module in question. The course ended at the end of 2013, and it was up to each student to present a monograph or course conclusion work.

It can be considered here that this specialization course evidenced the willingness of the coordination of the UNIVESP Pedagogy Project to offer qualified training to tutors/advisors of disciplines, in addition to the meetings and workshops initially proposed and which were maintained.

This fact highlights the importance of designing training for tutors that meets the contemporary context of learning through virtual learning environments, especially with the advent of NTICs – New Information and Communication Technologies. In the context of distance education, Masetto (2000, p. 141) observes that:

> The student, in a learning process, assumes the role of an active learner (no longer passive and repeater), of a subject of actions that lead him to learn and change his behavior. These actions, he performs alone, with the teacher and with his colleagues. A change of mentality and attitude on the part of the student is sought: that he/she works individually to learn, to collaborate with the learning of other colleagues, with the group, and that he/she sees the group, colleagues and the teacher as suitable partners, willing to collaborate with their learning.

And yet, adds Kenski (2003, p. 26-27) that the NICTs:

> [...] they are permanently in change, the permanent state of learning is a natural consequence of the social and technological moment we live. The current stage of this "technological society", based on the possibilities of articulation between different media for access to information and communication, is also characterized by the global articulation of the world economic market. [...] These changes are reflected on the traditional ways of thinking and doing education. Opening up to new education – resulting from structural changes in the

ways of teaching and learning made possible by current technology – is the challenge to be assumed by the whole society.

As it was previously noted, the scientific production on teachers for distance education is more related to the description of work procedures and pedagogical practice of tutors, and little to the training offered or to which they are submitted.

Although this production is not yet extensive, it is possible to consider that a theory on the training of tutors is under development, as mentioned above. From what was found on the training of tutors, it is possible and important to highlight the works or studies that were concerned with establishing contacts between the nature of teaching work and the nature of tutors' work.

From this production, the doctoral thesis by Abreu-Tardelli (2006) stands out, with a study on the transformation of the concept of work throughout history. It starts from the study by Engels and Marx (1876), entitled "The role of work in the transformation of the ape into man", having, also, as a source for this reflection, the work of Vieira Pinto (2005), pontificating with studies that refer to the teaching work faced by different forms of employment contracts and tasks to be performed, given the advances in electronic media.

The work "The concept of technology", by the philosopher Álvaro Vieira Pinto, was organized after his death, by his collaborators, in two extensive volumes, having as original material his writings on technology, its advances and implications in the thinking and actions of workers.

Also noteworthy is the work of Maria Elizabeth B. Almeida (2010), which deals with the transformations in work and in teacher training mediated by distance education technologies and discussed through the articulation between the experience of the professional in training and the theory that underlies to that training.

In the dissertation by Daniela Jordão Garcia (2006), an investigative study is presented on the role of the tutor/teacher (called in this work "technical pedagogical mediator") in distance continuing education courses for in-service teachers.

It is also important to consider the text by Luis Henrique Sommer (2010), which seeks to raise questions for the debate on initial teacher education, in which he presents significant national data on distance education, strong illustrations on the subject and the position of the CONAE (National Conference on Education) on this training. It also brings the analysis of João Mattar (2010; 2011; 2012) about what the tutor's work is, exposed in his blog, among them, the text "Meu medo de EaD" (My fear of Distance Education) (2010).

Mattar's blog brings, in addition to the text (post) referred to by Sommer (2010), two others on the topic: "O nightmare of distance education" (2011) and "The terror of distance education... it is the MEC" (2012), which emphatically address the tutor's work, the treatment given to them by the institutions in which they work and the position they occupy in these institutions.

From this literature and other searches in MEC data, newspaper articles and other easily accessible sources, it was possible to infer what we describe below.

Initially, it must be noted that the term tutor is, in some programs, projects and/or institutions, replaced by professor, and it was possible to assume that the type of employment contract established between the educational institution and the professional suggests such a name.

And besides, it is worth mentioning here that the UAB – Universidade Aberta do Brasil – establishes as mandatory for its teachers/tutors the training in an online course,

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available on the MEC's electronic platform. The professionals carry out the steps and are evaluated in each of them. At the end of the course, they are able to work at the UAB, and it is not possible to categorically state whether such training is satisfactory or adequate. Just register as it is offered.

UNESP, which is a state Higher Education Institution, therefore, public and with university autonomy, is still debating the offering of undergraduate courses through distance education. As for extension courses and lato sensu postgraduate courses, according to the documents analyzed, the discussion seems to be over. But in relation to undergraduate courses, even if blended, such as the UNIVESP Pedagogy course, the discussions were intense.

For the approval of the Degree in Pedagogy in an agreement with UNIVESP, the discussions held in the central collegiate - CCG (Central Chamber of Graduation), CEPE (Teaching, Research and Extension Council) and University Council (the highest decision-making body of the university) – were extremely polarized, for and against, winning the proposal that the course must be offered, as it actually happened.

UNESP offered tutors/advisors of disciplines a specialization course that was proposed as part of training for work, as described above. Not initially foreseen, this specialization course was proposed and organized based on the situations brought by tutors/advisors of disciplines to training meetings and workshops. We consider it to have been the right decision, as a means of guaranteeing the qualification (training) and continuous updating of tutors, questioning the teaching practice in the context of distance education.

In relation to private institutions, there are records that tutors can be treated as teachers, although it is not explained how this occurs

in relation to continuing education. Among the findings on the qualification of tutors, an institution stands out in which the tutors of their courses must already have a previous qualification and previous experience when they apply for the job, and the selection takes place through verification of this experience. in the candidate's Lattes CV.

Regarding labor issues, Tardelli's thesis (2006, p.38) comments on a research she carried out on the Superior Labor Court website, in which it was intended to verify the existence of processes related to the work of distance education teachers, focusing on verifying the legal nature of the relationship between the "teacher" and the educational institution that hires him. There was only one sentence in which the institution was ordered to pay labor compensation to five professionals who had been hired without a contract, showing, as the author points out, that the issues and working conditions of distance education teachers are recent in our society.

It is also worth mentioning the organization of the National Association of Distance Education Tutors - ANATED, which is presented as follows:

> We are the entity that represents associated tutors throughout the national territory, with the main objective of strengthening, organizing, encouraging and disseminating the tutor's work in scientific and academic communities and in society itself. Our work consists of studies and research that support the training and performance of the face-to-face and distance tutor, ensuring even more quality to all distance education. Come with us to collaborate in the construction of policies and guidelines that make the tutor's work even more recognized and valued. (ANATED, 2012)

Mattar (2011) refers to the 1st National Meeting of EaD Tutors, organized by ANATED, in 2011, with great participation of coordinators and directors of Higher

Education Institutions, in addition to guests from MEC. It is noteworthy that the only tutor invited to speak officially at the Meeting was the president of the aforementioned Association.

We concluded, therefore, that the training of tutor-teachers is a matter and object of interest of several institutions and social actors, not only being a topic that concerns institutions that offer distance courses, but, especially, the Ministry of Education, articulator and proposer of public education policy. After all, these courses, for the most part, are training teachers. Based on the study reported here, it is possible to affirm that the training of tutors who work in distance education is still a great challenge for contemporary educational policy, and is even a political project that cannot be postponed.

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