



Teaching and Learning in Distance Education: A Study in A Tutorial Practice Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Distance Education (DE) constitutes a teaching modality rapidly expanding worldwide. It counts with a polyteaching team, often composed of a course content teacher, trainer, instructor and several tutors who work face-to-face at a Distance Education On-site Center or online in the Virtual Learning Environments (VLE). This research aims to propose principles, which guide the many different tutorial practices in DE. It is a descriptive exploratory study, with a qualitative approach, using as data collection procedures an online survey and a participatory research, carried out in two higher education institutions located in Brazil. Among the findings, it is observed that in the sample of 60 surveyed tutors there is a modal age of 26.7 years of age, with 3.2 years of experience as weighted average; 71.7% (43) have postgraduate degrees (specialization level); 61.7% (37) had participated more than two continuing education courses in the last two years. The surveyed tutors have a weighted average of 108.7 supervised students and 80% (48) of the tutors answer the student's solicitations within up to 24h. The tutorial practices mostly used by the surveyed tutors are inaugural lectures, 58.3% (35); seminars and conferences, 43.3% (26); study groups, 35% (21) and revision classes, 21.7% (13). The study concludes that the principles that should guide the tutorial mediation practice in DE are related to the establishment of affective and educational relationships with the student; the diversification of the tutorial practice; quick feedback to students' demands; monitoring of the activities of students and regular participation of the tutor in continuing education programs in distance education.

Keywords - Distance education, Tutor, Tutor practice, Pedagogical mediation.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Distance Education (DE) has advanced worldwide, either by the widespread use of Digital Information and Technologies Communication (DITC) or by the urgent needs that liquid modernity requires for all. This modality of education has shown such positive results that many of its strategies have been used in face-to-face courses, the so called blended learning or b-learning strategy.

However, the distance education concept is not new, since we found on March 20, 1728 the first official registration of the use of its application, when the US newspaper Boston Gazette published an advertisement for a course in shorthand by correspondence, using printed text and the post office as a means of communication between Professor Cauleb Philips and his students. However, some researchers argue that the letters of the Greek philosophers to their disciples, and the letters exchanged between the early Christians are examples of the first uses of distance education (Martins, 2013; ABED, 2015).

Nowadays, the consolidation of DE is contributing to reduce inequality and promote social justice, especially by providing access to higher education for adults who have been excluded from educational systems for various reasons, such as the geographic distance of educational institutions, professional activities and financial difficulties in maintaining the high costs of a face-to-face course, among others (Santo, 2014).

Indeed, the mass use of distance education has as allies the wide DITC development which, when used in the educational context, are converted into educational technologies, with their tools, empowering the pedagogical mediation process, operationalized by a polyteaching team as advocated by Mill (2012). In this perspective, polyteaching in distance education requires a multitude of teachers who work as content teachers, trainers, coordinators and tutors divided into online activities and in distance education on-site centers.

With these initial considerations as "background", the purpose of this article is to reflect on the following problem question research: what kind of pedagogical mediation tutorial practices can contribute to the student's learning in DE? The aim is to study the main successful tutorial practices implemented in the context

of distance education in two Brazilian higher education institutions, identifying its theoretical foundation and relevant approaches in order to propose principles that may benchmark the tutorial practices in different contexts.

The need to maintain the student of distance education stimulated and, above all, committed to the self-learning process lies with the whole polyteaching team, responsible for pedagogical mediation: content teachers, trainers, instructors, coordinators and teachers that work as tutors. However, the face-to-face or online tutors are often those who are in direct contact with the student, which is why their teaching practices need careful systematization.

The results obtained with committed students are numerous, as from the sense of belonging to the academic community, with involvement in courses curricular and extra-curricular activities, to dropout decrease level and the consequent financial gain and, not least, optimization of the resources invested in educational processes in DE.

In this way, it is urgent that we have principles to guide the many different tutorials practices by providing a didactic and pedagogical direction to teachers working in face-to-face or online tutoring in DE and, not least, able to maintain a high level of commitment of the students combined with a reduced dropout rate.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We found in Garcia Aretio (2001, p. 39) an opportune concept of DE by stating that it is “(...) a technological system of bidirectional communication (multidirectional) which can be massive, based on systematic and combined action of educational resources, with an organization and tutoring supporting, physically separated from the students, provide them an independent learning (cooperative)”.

The DE definition proposed by Garcia Aretio (2001) evokes key concepts for distance education, namely, the unequivocal existence of a pedagogical mediation process with the technological learning resources, considering students and teachers developing their educational activities in distinct times and places. In fact, these fundamental concepts underlie much of the DE Brazilian legislation, including the Decree Law n. 5.622 / 2005 establishing the Brazilian guidelines for DE (Brazil, 2005) and the resolution of the National Education Council - CNE n. 01/2016 with national guidelines and standards for offering distance programs and higher education courses (Brazil, 2016).

Indeed, literature indicates that the success of distance education is in the dialogic relationship established between students, tutors and teachers, often in dispersed geographic locations and different times; however, mediated by DITC, supported by an educational institution prepared to meet the demands resulting from this educational process (Prete, 2009; Faria & Lopes, 2013).

In this perspective, DE is not about an educational fast food where the student "helps himself" with something ready and finished. Since the dialogic relationship made possible with the DICT advancement allows effective interaction between teachers, students and tutors, even in different times and geographical areas, either in isolated places or in the chaotic urban areas, as stated by Moran (2008).

The didactic and pedagogical mediation in DE is carried out by what Mill (2013) appoints as a polyteaching team. Often, there are specialist professors (also called author or content professor) with the task of structuring the content, the teaching methodology, the format of the classes, the courseware, choosing the technological interaction tools to be used and also being responsible for the design and its online implementation. In order to help them in the pedagogical mediation process, the specialist professors often count on the support of teacher educators, trainers and a large numbers of tutors who work as professors responsible to conduct the teaching mediation with the students, either face-to-face at Distance Education On-site Center or virtually on the learning environments (Martins, 2003; Nunes, 2013).

The role of the pedagogical mediation performed by the tutor has been further enlightened by Bernal (2008), upon highlighting the guidance task focused on the student's feelings in order to listen, to motivate and help them in their growth. As well as the academic role focusing on the student's cognitive processes - the way they learn and build their knowledge - and last but not least, the institutional role in preserving and promoting the institution's values, principles, and ideals, as well as its political-pedagogical project.

Following the same approach, Maia & Mattar (2007) consider that the tutor performs several simultaneous roles, including:

a. Administrative and organizational role in assembling the virtual class, dividing it into groups and clarifying course goals and expectations. Also clarifying rules, assignment deadlines, and assessments, on top of monitoring students' level of access to course materials, their assignments, and meeting deadlines.

b. Social role in promoting integration between classmates, encouraging introductions and participation by the most introspective students. Being in charge of thank-you messages, prompt feedback, and keeping a friendly and lighthearted environment. This gradually fosters a sense of belonging to a community of the students they counsel.

c. The very counseling role, since DE students tend to feel as left to their own luck, being it up to the academic counselor to stimulate them via constant feedback and encouragement. Individual support and guidance to students reinforces learning, and are crucial elements for success in DE.

d. Pedagogical mediation role in the development of additional assignments, encouraging research, posing questions and evaluating answers, connecting remarks, coordinating discussions in forums or chat rooms, summarizing key points in discussions, fostering group participation in a supporting learning environment, assessing students' performance as an instrument for reflection on their counseling practice.

e. Technical support role, i.e. helping students who may have difficulty in using the technology tools used in the course.

Santo (2014) invites us to consider the complexity and importance of the tutor's role in DE, suggesting that the academic background of such professional behooves rethought. This author points out that, in addition to their knowledge intrinsic to the subject matter they counsel on, it is essential that they are familiar with the epistemological framework of distance education, in order to empower them to implement tutorial practices that promote significant learning by students.

Distance education theoretical frameworks assume that both polyteaching teams and students should have an active role in the process of knowledge construction. The professor and tutors must point the directions, presenting several possibilities for the student in order that they may become able to navigate through the available sea of information selecting what is relevant for developing the desired competencies.

For pedagogical mediation, we may understand the way in which the contents and themes are discussed in order to facilitate the process of teaching and learning. Thus, mediation is necessary in any education mode, whether in face-to-face education or DE, since all the information needs mediation in teaching and learning contexts (Brod & Rodrigues, 2013).

The geographical distance between the student and teacher makes the pedagogical mediation in DE a challenge, since it requires different pedagogical strategies from those commonly used in face-to-face classes. However, we must recognize that DICT has provided many different tools capable of guiding the professor through the mediation process in educational cyberspace. According to Belloni (2015), DICT provide unprecedented possibilities for interaction, since they allow to "combine the flexibility of human interaction with the independence in time and space, without losing the speed" (p. 64).

According to the teaching strategy adopted, mediation may be performed by using various tools often available in Virtual Learning Environments (VLE). It may occur through synchronous or asynchronous communication, allowing the participation and dialogue between students and teachers (Souza, Sartori & Roesler, 2008). Therefore, several tools are used, such as chats, forums, video lessons, audio classes, podcasts and wikis among many others. It is up to professor to select the best tool in terms of his teaching goal, observing their peculiarities and the students access level of the resources used.

However, the authors Santo Cardoso, Fonseca & Santos (2016a, p. 15) help us to reflect that merely the use of DICT in distance education "does not exempt students the need to think and reflect on their learning", as they only provide potentiating tools of the knowledge construction process. In this way, caution is required to avoid just the transfer to the virtual environments of the strategies customarily used in face-to-face education, without a proper methodological adequacy to DE.

In this sense, Masetto (2015, p. 142) helps us to clarify the meaning of pedagogical mediation by stating that the professor:

(...) Although occasionally he still plays the role of an expert who has the knowledge and / or experience to communicate, more often he will act as a student advisor activities, consultant, facilitator, planner and facilitator of learning situations, working together with the student and seeking the same goals. In short, he will play a role of pedagogical mediator.

As we can see, the pedagogical mediation in distance education is conducted by a polyteaching team, with content professors, trainers, instructors and several tutors using various facilitating tools to make students capable of building and rebuilding knowledge. In addition to the technological tools, we cannot misperceive that the courseware also assists in mediation, since it is prepared in a dialogic form capable to lead to reflection by pointing to the student several possible paths.

In addition to the good use of DICT is necessary that professors and tutors be aware of the students interaction in VLE, since they have several tools enabling such monitoring, such as the activities accessed by the student, time they were online, pending issues and so. Santo (2014, p.36) recommends that "the tutorial practice needs to take time for this individual assessment of student learning route to check their development in the course and give them a feedback, when possible, invite them to an in attendance orientation at the Distance Education On-Site Center".

Tutoring in distance education is quite a challenge, since what works with an institution could be a failure in another, considering the different characteristics related to the pedagogic students in DE. Santo (2014) states that there are many different experiences with positive useable results, since they are contextualized with the local realities. However, there is no doubt that the tutorial students follow up in DE is something that needs to be prioritized by the institutions that offer virtual education.

As we considered the main approaches that discuss the tutorials practices in DE we found that all of them are unanimous in highlighting the role of tutorial mediation, especially to constantly listen to the students' needs and help them to overcome the motivational and intellectual barriers, reducing the feeling of demotivating pedagogical vacuum.

Furthermore, the tutor is considered a cornerstone in the process of teaching and learning in DE, and as part of a polyteaching team needs to interact with the other members of this collective work to keep the students active and, above all, committed to their learning.

III. METHODS

In order to verify the principal tutorial practices implemented in DE investigation was carried out in two Higher Education Institutions (HEI) located in Brazil. We chose a public university, participating of the Brazil Open University system, and a private university center, both duly acknowledged by the Department of Education and regularly accredited to offer DE.

Since 3 years ago, the researched public university offers an undergraduate course in DE, with about 300 students enrolled. The private university center has been operating for over 10 years in DE and has about 150,000 students enrolled, distributed in around 40 undergraduate and more than 80 post-graduation courses.

This research is configured as a social investigation in the humanities area, in the context of higher distance education. Considering that DE constitutes a theoretical field under construction, a qualitative approach was adopted once it allows to analyze social processes that are not well known, favoring the construction of new approaches, concepts and categories during the investigation, according to Minayo (2006).

Regarding to the field research typology, were adopted the concepts of Triviños (2006) and Gil (2007) with the following classification: a) the aims, it is an exploratory and descriptive study; b) as the data source, the research was supported both as a systematic literature review as well as a field research, operationalized through a survey and a participant observation and; finally, c) as to data collection procedures, the triangulation technique was used, through the online application of the survey and participant observation.

The survey was delimited to a random sample of 60 tutors active in both public universities and a private university center. The choice of these attended the criteria of opening by local academic management, access to tutorial staff and availability of tutors in voluntary participation of the investigation.

For survey application with tutors an online questionnaire was used, prepared with a Google Form tool, which enabled the rapid statistical compilation of data to the extent that the participants filled out the forms. The link to access the questionnaire was sent by electronic message to tutors, accompanied by a cordial invitation for their voluntary participation.

The questionnaire was organized considering the following main dimensions: professional characterization of the respondent tutors; identification of tutorials practices; perception level of pedagogical mediation process in DE; opinions and suggestions concerning tutorials practices.

Concomitant to the survey application the participant observation also occurred, accompanying *in loco* the pedagogical mediation activities carried out by tutors in the researched institutions. The entire data collection process was conducted between February and August, 2016.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to understand and evaluate the tutorials practices implemented by tutors who work in different contexts of the two institutions selected. We sent an online questionnaire to a random group of 86 tutors, who develop activities in Distance Education On-site Centers located in Brazilian federal states of Alagoas, Amapá, Bahia, Ceará, Minas Gerais, Pará, Pernambuco, Santa Catarina and São Paulo. We obtained return from 60 questionnaires that make up the sample.

4.1 Professional characterization of the respondents tutors

Of the total 60 respondent tutors, 30% (18) belong public university and 70% (42) to the private university center. The weighted average age of the investigated sample is 32.9 years, and the modal age 26.7 years, that is, one that occurs most frequently in the sample. With regard to gender, the sample tutors presented a balanced profile, comprising 50% (30) men and 50% (30) women.

Regarding the type of tutoring in which they work, 71.7% (43) said they are in attendance tutors at the DE On-site Center; 26.7% (16) online tutors and 1.6% (1) carries out another kind of tutorial activity, such as DE On-site Center coordinator. According to the Brazilian reference for DE, a tutoring system must provide

distance tutors, i.e., working from the offering institution, conducting the mediation for students geographically dispersed beyond the present tutors, or, meeting the students at the DE On-site Center to assist them in their activities, answering questions, following the evaluations and face-to-face practices (Nunes, 2013; MEC, 2007).

In relation to respondents tutoring time experience in DE, the calculated weighted average was 3.2 years, proving to be a group that is reaching their professional maturity, even when considering 20% (12) veterans who work there over 6 years. The group consists mostly of 71.7% (43) tutors with postgraduate studies (specialization level) and 51.7% (31) with no academic background in distance education.

Even though most of the tutors surveyed do not have academic training in DE, we realize that they are engaged in searching for continuing education in this thematic, since 90% (54) took part in short courses in DE area, with minimum 20 hours in the last two years, and 26.7% (16) with over 4 courses in this same period.

This constant need to search in continuing education is highlighted by Santo Cardoso, Fonseca & Santos (2016a) to indicate that the formation of the tutor needs to consider different aspects of teaching and learning, beyond the methodological DE frameworks in order to provide them the necessary aid for the tutorial practice. Moreover, the legal framework of distance education in Brazil shows that education professionals need to have "specific training to work in this educational modality" (Brazil, 2016).

In the sample surveyed, the tutors have a weighted average of 108.7 students under their tutoring and 50% (30) of them have 20 working hours per week.

4.2 Tutorial practices

The frequency of access to the VLE of the tutor is crucial to the progress of distance education programs, since it is in this cyberspace that educational activities and communication between the institution with polyteaching staff and students are held. In the sample of surveyed tutors, 100% (60) of them access the VLE up to 3 times a week, and of these, we found 81.7 (49) with daily access.

Another critical factor in DE is the return average time of students' requests. Although this indicator has relevance to the entire institution, in pedagogical mediation of DE tutoring it is directly related to the students' feeling of belonging and their sense of reception. In this way, with the supporting tools provided by TDIC, the faster is the tutor return the better it is for the student (MEC, 2007).

In the sample of tutors investigated, the return time to students' requests is predominantly high, at up to 24 hours for 80% (48) of respondent tutors, as shown in Table 1, in accordance with the Abreu e-Lima & Alves (2011) suggest that "the rate of responses that do not leave the student without feedback for more than 24 hours" (p. 202). The authors note that it is necessary to clarify for students that in asynchronous interactions it is not possible to respond immediately to every request.

Table 1: Return time to student's request

Answer time	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency	Absolute relative frequency
up to 24h	48	80,0%	80,0%
24 to 48h	10	16,7%	96,7 %
48 to 72h	1	1,7%	98,3%
above 72h	0	0,0%	98,3%
I do not remember	1	1,7%	100,0%
	60	100%	

The monitoring of students' online activities, such as discussion forums, chats, submission tasks among others, constitutes one of the tutor actuation facets. The continued students' absence in such activities may be a strong indicative of impending abandonment, resulting either from the difficulties related to time management, understanding of the content, adapting the DE methodology, sense of isolation and even financial issues.

In DE, tutorial practice employs the most varied ways to communication with the student and, often, depends on local availability of DE On-site Center. However, the most common ways are the messages sent by VLE, e-mail, messaging applications, through social networks, in addition to the usual telephone contact.

Table 2: Ways to communication with the students

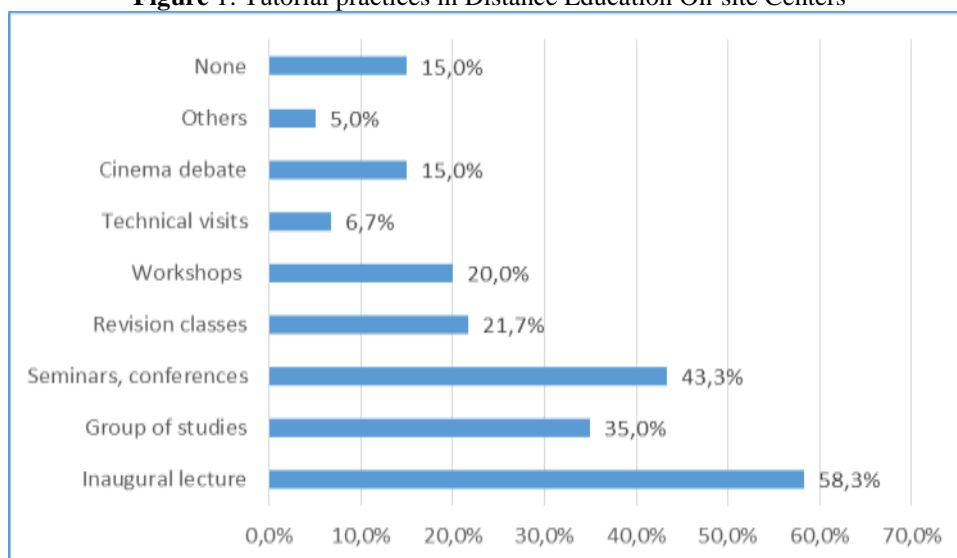
Way	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
VLE's message	30	50,0%
E-mail	44	73,3%
App messagers	35	58,3%
Social net	15	25,0%
Others (phone, SMS)	8	13,3%

By selecting a list of contact possibilities with students, the researched tutors chose simultaneously the following ways as most used: messages sent by e-mail, 73.3% (44); by messaging applications, 58.3% (35); and by the VLE, 50% (30). We observed that 13.3% (8) indicated other means used, such as contact by phone calls and SMS messages to students. See results presented in Table 2.

A case study of Santo, Luz, Soares & Cardoso (2016b) showed that the tutors from the DE On-site Center widely employed digital resources as favoring the practice of study, including a widespread use of WhatsApp messaging application. However, the tutors also used concomitantly the usual ways of communication, such as e-mails and SMS messages, adapting them to the student's profile.

We noted in Figure 1 that among the tutorial practices most used by respondents, the inaugural lectures, 58.3% (35); seminars and conferences, 43.3 (26); group of studies, 35% (21) conducting revision classes, 21.7% (13) are highlighted; even considering that 15% (9) of respondent tutors, unfortunately, informed that they do not develop tutorial practices.

Figure 1: Tutorial practices in Distance Education On-site Centers



Tutorial practices locally developed in DE On-site Center constitute additional opportunities for tutors to narrow the relationship with students and which should be carried out regularly since it is provided in both the Pedagogical Course Project (PPC) and institutional guidelines.

4.2 Tutor's perception about DE pedagogical mediation

In order to verify the perception of the investigated tutors about the pedagogical mediation in DE, 6 affirmative perspectives were prepared for the tutors to take a stand, considering the options: 1) TD - total disagreement; 2) D - disagreement, 3) NA / ND - I do not agree nor disagree; 4) A - agreement; 5) TA - total agreement and 6) NO - no opinion. The tutors answers compiled are highlighted in Table 3.

In the first affirmative, the researched tutors analyzed one of the key aspects of pedagogical mediation in DE, i.e. the aid provided to students to develop the self-discipline in the studies in order to achieve autonomy in their self-learning. The vast majority of tutors 85% (51), expressed agreement or total agreement with this principle, as part of their tutorial practice.

In affirmatives 2 and 3, the tutors reflected on the customization level of messages sent to their students, in order to transpire closer and inclusive relationship. In this sense, we realize that 90% (54) tutors fail to pay attention to this relationship level, when sending standards message to the students as a general reminder, preventing their individualization or customization.

Even considering that the investigated tutors have a weighted average of 108.7 students under their responsibility, the collective messages need to be elaborated so that students perceive these as being individually addressed, in order to give due necessary attention. In this sense, investigated tutors need to pay attention to avoid massive expressions that fail to express an individual pedagogical concern for the student.

In the fourth affirmative, the participating tutors positioned themselves in relation to a desirable tutorial practice, i.e., sending regular reminders to students regarding to activities, work, deadlines, etc. In this sense, 86.7% (52) tutors expressed agreement or total agreement, as these activities are part of their function.

The fifth affirmative, invited respondent tutors to reflect on the tutorial practice when a student fails to carry out the activities, that is, if they would allow him to self-organize and retake normally the course activities. The research reveals 58.3% (35) tutors disagree or completely disagree with the affirmative; however, an alarming 30% (18) expressed agreement or total agreement.

Table 3: Tutor’s perspectives about some pedagogical mediation aspects in Distance Education

Pedagogical mediation perspective	TD	D	NA/ND	A	TA	NO
1. It is for the tutor to help DE’s student in the development of self-discipline in the studies in order to achieve autonomy in their self-learning.	-	8.3% (5)	6.7% (4)	50% (30)	35% (21)	-
2. When composing a collective message to students, I develop it so that everyone realizes it is general information, avoiding the need for individualization or customization.	5% (3)	3.3% (2)	1.7% (1)	53.3% (32)	36.7% (22)	-
3. I use standard message templates as a general reminder for students.	-	10% (6)	13.3% (8)	58.3% (35)	15% (9)	3.3% (2)
4. I consider it as part of my job to send regular reminders to students about their activities, jobs, events and deadlines.	-	8.3% (5)	5% (3)	41.7% (25)	45% (27)	-
5. When a student fails to carry out the activities, I prefer to allow him to organize himself and normally retake the course activities.	15% (9)	43.3% (26)	6.7% (4)	28.3% (17)	1.7% (1)	5% (3)
6. The telephone contact with the student is invasive and it should be avoided by tutoring, because I understand that it is necessary to respect the time of each subject.	15% (9)	41.7% (25)	11.7% (7)	18.3% (11)	6.7% (4)	6.7% (4)
N = 60						

Note: TD - total disagreement; 2) D - disagreement, 3) NA / ND - I do not agree nor disagree; 4) A - agreement; 5) TA - total agreement and 6) NO - no opinion.

When a student ceases to carry out his activities in DE, it is for tutors to analyze the possible reasons for this and provide support so he can self-organize and return to regularity. Deliberately allow student with pending activities to self-organize may result in motivational discouragement and, often, potential dropout.

The last affirmative was related to the telephone contact with the student, by arguing that it is something to be avoided as it is invasive and disrespectful of timing of each subject. More than half of tutors, 56.7% (34) showed disagreement or complete disagreement with this statement; however, an alarming 25% (15) showed agreement or total agreement.

Santo et al (2016b) point out that the phone calling, as additional interactive tool, helps to bring the students closer by providing additional pedagogical security made available by the tutoring group.

There is no doubt that we have several ways of communication with students, which may be used simultaneously, as indicated in Table 2. The telephone contact constitutes an effective way, since it reveals a special attention by the tutor with the student. So, when considering the frequent students isolation in DE, all the media, including the telephone, should be widely used to keep him active.

V. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR TUTORING MEDIATION IN DE

When evaluating the various educative models implemented in DE, we realize that it is not possible to establish an operational handbook for carrying out the face-to-face or virtual tutorial mediation.

However, even considering the Institutional Policy Project and the Educational Course Project, all the DICT used and implemented methodologies; interaction between every single actor should be prioritized, favoring the integration of different media, supports and languages, as expressed in Brazilian national guidelines and standards for DE (Brazil, 2016).

From the data obtained in both the survey and participant observation allows us to propose some guiding principles for the implementation of tutorial practices models in DE, as described in Table 4. However, we emphasize that we do not claim to exhaust them, as we recognize that it is a theoretical field under effervescent construction.

Table 4: Guiding principles for tutorial practice in distance education

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Effective and educational relationship with the student.2. Diversification of the tutorial practice.3. Quick feedback to students' demands.4. Monitoring the students' academic activities.5. Tutor regular participation in continuing education programs in DE thematic. |
|---|

The first principle that a tutorial practice model of distance education should consider is the establishment of an affective pedagogical relationship with the student. This was evidenced in the tutor's suggestion provided in the survey, to declare, for example, "(...) education is the distance, but the reception must be humanized and professional, so that the student feels safe and welcome through constant and enduring presence of his tutor. Education is the distance, but the tutor should be very present (participant tutor)".

"To be present" for tutoring is widely highlighted in the literature and we reinforce that this presence should not occur merely in a bureaucratic form, but in such a way that the student realize the tutor as someone who sincerely wants to help him achieve his goals. Certainly, tutors and students need to establish dialogic relationships that result in student's commitment to their self-learning process.

In this perspective, the study by Nunes (2013, p. 6) pointed out that 61% of the analyzed papers indicated to "motivate (participation, learning, critical thinking), to stimulate the commitment of the students in the resolution of activities, to cause the desire to learn, to calm the students facing times of difficulty" as duties inherent to distance education tutoring. In addition, the author points out that 50% of the papers researched added as tutor's assignment: "treat students with respect, empathy and understanding, be ethical, be humorous, be patient, have good interpersonal skills, create emotional bonds".

Freire (1996) reminds us that "teaching requires commitment," i.e., it is necessary to learn to read the signs that students provide and, in the context of DE, we need to interpret these due to their absence in discussions on VLE, or an inappropriate response in a discussion forum, or the absence from live assessments and other activities. Finally, the educational space which is established in DE tutoring is a "text to be constantly read, played, written and rewritten" (p. 97) and the renowned author adds that we will only have more possibilities of democratic learning when more solidarity exist between teacher and student in the treatment of this space.

The second guiding principle for DE tutoring emerging in this research is the necessary diversification of the tutorial practice. Understanding tutorial practice as the set of activities carried out under the tutorship aiming at the monitoring, guidance and students encouragement in DE. The research has shown that the vast majority of participant tutors develop tutorials practices in their DE On-site Centers, as noted in Figure 1. This was also evidenced in the suggestions offered by the participant tutors when one of them stated that "(...) is required to create new spaces, besides VLE itself, in order to facilitate periodic meetings to promote greater dynamics with the students".

Freire (1996, p. 86) reminds us that "teaching requires curiosity" and in the context of DE tutorship, the tutors and students attitudes should be dialogical, open, inquiring, who "assume epistemologically curious." Thus, tutorial practices should be pleasurable, intellectually stimulating and relevant to students to contribute significantly to their learning.

In this sense, tutorial practices should be diversified and attainable to count on student participation. In the research, tutors have implemented study groups, seminars, lectures, revision classes and even cinema discussion and technical visits. Such activities are very important, both for collective learning and to minimizing the feeling of isolation, or even abandonment, common among DE's students, as properly express the authors Maia & Mattar (2007).

The quick feedback to the student's demands constitutes a third guiding principle for a tutorial mediation model in DE. The self-learning gradually builds by student assumes feedback, providing them indications about the assertiveness of the path that they have taken, depriving them of it may result in insecurity and discouragement.

In the research carried out with tutors, we realize that the vast majority of respondent tutors are aware of the quickness feedback, since 80% (48) respond to requests from students within 24h. See Table 1.

The authors Abreu-e-Lima & Alves (2011) point out the pace and consistency of the feedback depends largely on the task and the proposed calendar, for example, a request for help to post a task in the VLE should not be answered 48 hours after the posting time, as this would be unhelpful. The authors also recommend for tutors to access VLE daily and organize their time to provide the feedback needed, explaining to students that in these asynchronous interactions it is not possible to respond immediately.

The fourth guiding principle for a tutorial practice model relates to monitoring student's activities, being intrinsically related to the previous principle. The guidelines and Brazilian standards for DE assume that it is for the tutor to carry out activities of "pedagogical mediation, with students, in the Distance Education modality" (Brazil, 2016).

Leaving the student adrift on educational VLE cyberspace may result in shipwreck, since if they do not do the study's routine activities this might be an indicative both of difficulty in time management as to lack of motivation and, in both cases, the tutors should be alert to carefully check the student's engagement level with the proposed activities. The survey revealed that 26.7% (16) tutors monitor online student's activities by mean of electronic spreadsheets, and 50% (30) through a computerized system provided by the institution.

Considering the high number of students per tutors, the authors Almeida, Pimentel & Stiubiener (2012) present a monitoring proposal through indicators that enable both as tutors and as managers to improve their actions, as summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 – Tutorial monitoring indicators in Distance Education

Activities	Indicators
Forums	Number of proposed forums, duration, and number of interventions made.
Chat	Number of chats, duration, tutor participation level, absences and delays.
Sending and receiving emails	Number of e-mails received and sent by tutor, tutor's return time to each message.
Reply to the students	Return time, considering publication date and time.
Correction of various activities	Time for starting the activities corrections; the average, minimum and maximum return time.
Publishing and updating information in VLE	Number of publications posted as the coordination requesting, the information update time.
Publication and availability of extra material	Number and frequency of published materials.

Note: adapted from Bentes (2009, apud Almeida, Pimentel & Stiubiener, 2012)

There is no doubt that DICT can contribute enormously in the collection of such indicators and, most often, the VLE provide such data to users. However, we realize that only a few tutors consult the analytical data provided by the system, preferring to keep their own electronic spreadsheet control, despite the enormous data integration effort for it. Fortunately, the tools related to the so-called learning analytics are booming, being able to provide relevant subsidies for monitoring student activities in VLE.

As appropriately stated by Santo (2014) it is not possible get a script or even ready formulas for monitoring students in DE, "actually we have several experiences with very positive results that might be exploited, since contextualized with the reality of their institution" (p. 37). The author concludes that such monitoring constitutes something that should be prioritized in DE programs.

The fifth and final principle that may guide a tutorial practice model in DE is related to the regular tutor participation in continuing education programs on the DE subject. The research showed that tutor respondents have been attentive to their continuing education, since 90% (54) took part in courses in DE thematic in the last two years, with a minimum duration of 20h. Note that 26.7% (16) tutors had participated in 04 or more courses, resulting in an excellent average of 02 courses per year.

The tutor participation in continuing education programs is an opportunity to improve and, above all, reflect on his tutorial practice. In fact, it is not coincidence when Freire (1996) reveals that teaching requires a critical reflection on the practice, since it is "critically thinking the today or yesterday practice, it is possible to improve the next practice" (p. 39).

Additionally, guidelines and standards for DE in Brazil point out that tutors must have specific training to act in the distance (Brazil, 2016) and Santo et al (2016a) emphasize that the tutor's formation should provide him with the necessary methodological and pedagogical background for acting on the educational cyberspace.

In the research, the two investigated institutions are very attentive to the implementation of continuing education programs related to DE. For example, the public university provides two online courses for all tutors and the approval in such courses is one of the prerequisites to begin the activities as tutor. The private university center surveyed also offers a specific virtual program for teaching, with several courses available for tutors throughout the year.

Although it is not our intention to provide a finished script for tutorials practices in DE, a model guided by the principles discussed above has great chance to succeed; especially when contemplating: a) the establishment of affective and educational relationship with the student; b) the diversification of the tutorial practice; c) quick feedback to demands of students; d) monitoring the students' activities and, e) regular participation in continuing education programs on the DE thematic.

VI. CONCLUSION

The objective proposed for this study was to verify the main successful tutorial practices implemented in the context of DE in two higher education institutions, identifying theoretical foundation, relevant approaches in order to propose principles that may mark out the various tutorial practices in different contexts.

We realized that DE constitutes a field of study under effervescent construction, especially with the educational opportunities provided to connect in cyberspace both teachers and students, separated in different times and places. In this context, the polyteaching team is responsible for pedagogical mediation, using various tools provided by DICT.

In the context of Distance Education On-site Center, tutors are those teachers who have direct contact with students and their tutorial practices need special attention, as they can help to keep inspired and committed students or make them feel increasingly isolated and unmotivated.

The research carried out in a group of 60 tutors, with a modal age of 26.2 years and 3.2 years of experience, has shown that the most commonly used tutorial practices are the inaugural lectures, 58.3% (35); seminars and lectures, 43.3% (26); group of studies, 35% (21) and revision classes, 21.7% (13). The surveyed tutors are aware of the contact with the students, since 81.7 (49) of them access the EVE daily and 18.3% (11) up to 3 times a week. Furthermore, although on average they have 108.7 students under their tutorship, 80% (48) tutors respond to students requests up to 24 hours.

The analysis of the survey data allowed the proposition of 5 (five) guiding principles for the tutorial practice in DE pedagogical mediation, although recognizing the specificities of each institution. The principles are related to: 1) the need to establish a genuine affective and educational relationship with the student. 2) Implementation of various tutorial practices with local activities in DE On-site Center, in order to promote the students' feeling of belonging. 3) Quick feedback to students' demands, respecting the times required for asynchronous communication. 4) Online monitoring of student activities, in order to identify any delays or infrequency, resulting in demotivation and abandonment and, finally, 5) the tutors' active participation in continuing education programs, in distance education, to constantly reframe their practice.

We acknowledge that this research is not an end in itself; since it opens up other research possibilities in the field of tutorial practice, such as seeking to identify the best practices that contribute to increase students' commitment and self-study in DE. It would also be appropriate that the principles outlined in this research are investigated in other higher education institution, with different contexts, as inductors to a satisfactory tutorial mediation practice in distance education.

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