

Toward European convergence: work projects in university teaching

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Abstract

Introduction. This article collects part of research developed in a university classroom, whose object was to verify the usefulness of an innovative methodological proposal—Work Projects—carried out at the University of Cordova, with students in their second year of Teacher Education (Preschool).

Method. This is qualitative research in an interpretative paradigm and with an ethnographic perspective (McMillan & Schumacher, 2005), since we respect natural contexts—in this case, the classroom—as an analysis and research unit. We choose ethnographic research because it begins with the researcher's presence in the field for a long time, her interaction with participants, respect for the natural setting where the action takes place, and because it is not a pre-determined design. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2001: 224) show, it is a 'funnel' structure which is defined in an emerging way as the action develops. We use five tools to collect information, applied in a sequential, complementary process. These are: (1) a Verbal Scale; (2) Semistructured Interview with two professors from the first year of the program; (3) Researchers' Diary; (4) Focus group and (5) Questionnaire with open answers.

Results. Having nominal data available, we apply the technique of content analysis, and establish molar analysis units, which we identify with main dimensions of our research. Later, these units are divided in smaller categories, after doing a triangularization process and reaching an inter-judge agreement. Finally, we provide tables and graphics, which show us evolution of verbal interactions expressed by three focus groups. We also provide the results of the questionnaire as answered by all students from the research classroom.

Discussion and Conclusion. We highlight the sociocognitive approach, produced among participants as they are doing their work project. We can infer the beginning of an intersubjectivity space where individuals' prior positionings move closer and there is progress toward shared proposals. Students perceive that work projects help them acquire professional competencies, increase their level of motivation for learning, and make it easier to reach knowledge of a functional, practical and global nature.

Keywords: European Space of Higher Education, Innovation in Higher Education, Research Methodology, Cooperative Methodology, Work Projects in Higher Education.

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