Chapter 9
Multimodal Narratives as a Tool for In-Service Teachers in an Online Professional Development Course

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ABSTRACT
This chapter presents how multimodal narratives were employed as a self-reflection tool within an online professional development program for in-service teacher training at Universidade Aberta, Portugal during two editions of a pedagogic practice course. The chapter includes the aspects that raised issues and those that trainees performed correctly. This is done in three stages: beforehand, upon initial contact with multimodal narratives, and after providing feedback to trainees. The most relevant issues were in aspects directly required to enrich the narrative. Aspects related to multimodal narrative structure and features were completed successfully. It is recommended that future attempts to employ multimodal narratives in this context adapt learning resources and pedagogic support practices by employing formative feedback and continual support during the trainees’ process of exploring and exploiting multimodal narratives.

INTRODUCTION
The “Pedagogic Practices Seminar” course took place at Universidade Aberta (UA), Portugal, in the second semester of the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 school years, as part of an online training program for the in-service professional development of teachers. This was a formal, non-graduation program.

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The trainees were active non–higher education teachers who aimed to qualify for recruitment group 550 (Computing) of the Portuguese Ministry of Education.

The goal of this course is for students to develop scientific and pedagogic skills for creating and developing pedagogic projects in computing education. They must identify, reflect upon and solve learning issues, combining pedagogic and research components to improve their practices and their professional development. Hence, it is important to provide trainees with knowledge of research techniques that enable them to develop those competences, one of them being multimodal narratives (MNs). MNs are typically documents that describe chronologically, in a self-contained and multimodal way, what a teacher and students do and say in a given context of teaching and learning (Lopes et al., 2014), incorporating multimodal data. They are drawn up in accordance with the guidelines of a protocol defining three stages of implementation: data collection, preparation of the MN and validation. In this way, a MN is a self-contained and concise document that can be analyzed later, avoiding the difficulty of dealing with multiple data sources (ibid.). MNs are indeed tools in support of teaching and professional development, since they help teachers understand their decision-making process and the intent of their actions (Lopes et al., 2010). They enable teachers to observe the actual events within their classes (sometimes distinct from their initial perceptions or recollections), and they facilitate the identification of which pedagogic strategies were most effective (ibid.). They hold the potential to help improve teachers’ professional development (Lopes et al., 2014).

There were several learning activities in the Pedagogic Practices Seminar course. The contact of trainees with MNs took place in the third, fourth and sixth topics of the course, which involved the trainees in reading about their use and then creating several MNs related to episodes in their current professional practice.

The initial contact with the MN technique was in the third topic.

This chapter identifies which aspects raised the most significant issues upon first contact as well as those that were correctly performed by the trainees, over two editions of this course (2015/2016 and 2016/2017). The same analysis was done after providing formative feedback (which was provided only in the 2016/2017 edition).

In both editions of the course, the trainees’ initial contact with MNs was challenging, both regarding its initial use and its improvement.

Four categories were analyzed, referring to essential aspects of a MN: Category 1 – Presents the essential aspects of a MN; Category 2 – Presents a well-structured MN; Category 3 – Narrating an episode with its essential aspects and Category 4 – Enriching the MN. Most issues occurred in categories 3 and 4, i.e., the aspects that detail and enrich a MN.

In categories 1 (Presents the essential aspects of a MN) and 2 (Presents a well-structured MN), which are related to MN structure and features, even though several issues emerged, these were infrequent and/or solved after providing feedback (2016/2017 edition only). Therefore, the results suggest that in both editions (2015/2016 and 2016/2017), the students understood the importance of the MN and satisfactorily identified the main features of a MN.

It is also possible to conclude that formative feedback is essential for students to identify, reflect upon and improve their processes for creating a MN. This arises from observing that trainees of the 2016/2017 edition, who had the opportunity to improve their assignments after receiving feedback, managed to overcome and understand their shortcomings in executing a MN.
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