


Didactic initiatives based on peer review and oriented toward the teaching–learning of thesis writing at a graduate level*

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Abstract

Objective: To analyze two didactic initiatives based on peer review and oriented toward the teaching–learning process of thesis writing at a graduate level: a virtual seminar and face-to-face writing groups. Specifically, to explore the possibilities and challenges associated with peer feedback tasks from the participants’ perspectives. **Method:** In this qualitative research, electronic questionnaires were analyzed and in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with 16 participants. **Results:** The following categories were identified: a) the access to different perspectives, b) the control of theses, c) the focus of feedback, d) the challenge of time, e) digital technologies, and f) the relational issue. **Debate and Conclusions:** These types of studies help promote a writing pedagogy at a graduate level, which is necessary for the advancement of theses and the culmination of graduate studies.

Keywords: writing, groups, feedback, seminar, thesis.

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*Article translated to English

Introduction

In recent years, the number of Latin American studies focused on writing at a higher level (Navarro, 2017) and the initiatives at a postgraduate level have multiplied. In addition to the publications that describe the thesis genre to guide their textual production (Cisneros-Estupiñán, Olave García, and Rojas García, 2014; Cubo de Severino, 2005; Cubo de Severino, Puiatti, and Lacon, 2012; Domínguez-Gutiérrez, Sánchez-Ruiz, and Sánchez de Aparicio and Benítez, 2009), a wide variety of alternatives have been developed to accompany postgraduate students in the process of theses writing. The bibliographical comparison enables us to notice different pedagogical interventions worldwide: didactic strategies typical of seminars or thesis writing workshops whose leaders are expert teachers (e.g., Arnoux, et al., 2005; Carlino, 2008; Delyser, 2003); writing groups (GEs) focused on the process of thesis writing (eg, Aitchison, 2009; Colombo, 2013, 2017; Colombo and Carlino, 2015; Rodas-Brosam and Colombo, 2019; Wilmot, 2018), and actions of supervisors and directors (e.g., Denholm & Evans, 2007; Difabio de Anglat, 2011), particularly their feedback (e.g., Basturkmen, East, & Bitchener, 2012; Li & Seale, 2007). Although a large part of the registered studies are conducted in face-to-face training contexts, initiatives have recently begun to emerge in virtual training environments (Álvarez and Di Fabio de Anglat, 2018; Difabio de Anglat and Álvarez, 2017; Kozar and Lum, 2015; Márquez-Guzmán and Gómez-Zermeño, 2018).

Beyond the differences between these approaches, most highlight the importance of feedback on the writings. In fact, in recent years, pedagogical proposals have emerged at a postgraduate level, which suggest expanding the sphere of interference of these practices beyond the supervisor/student dyad (e.g., Aitchison and Lee, 2006). Accordingly, it is proposed to open participation opportunities for students through devices that enable them to interact with peers, such as group supervision, study groups, or reading/writing groups. In these spaces, students would exercise the practices of revision and discussion of draft texts; therefore, they would have the opportunity to improve the texts and their habits as writers.

Several authors (Boud & Molloy, 2012; Bozalek, Mitchell, Dison & Alperstein, 2016) suggest that especially at a higher level, unidirectional feedback practices should be abandoned in favor of dialogic feedback approaches focused on horizontal relationships. Indeed, the results related to the implementation of different initiatives in postgraduate courses support this position since they reveal that peer review activities, under certain conditions, allow for the analysis of epistemological, textual, and life experience dimensions related to the process of thesis writing (Aitchison & Lee, 2006). As Zhang, Yu, and Yuan (2018) suggested, peer feedback can increase audience awareness, provide scaffolding and social support, and promote self-regulation in the learning process. Similarly, a recent review of the literature on feedback and graduate writing (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019) indicated that text feedback promotes autonomy, awareness of authorial voice, confidence, critical learning, and authorial positioning among other characteristics of experienced writers. This

view is in line with the attention that has been given in recent times to peer feedback, particularly at a postgraduate level (Aitchison & Guerin, 2014; Álvarez, and Difabio, 2017, 2019; Chois-Lenis, Guerrero -Giménez, & Brambila-Limón, 2020; Chois-Lenis & Jaramillo-Echeverri, 2016; Yu et al., 2019). In fact, the review of writing teaching practices conducted by Chois-Lenis, Guerrero Jiménez and Brambila Limón (2020) marked peer review as the didactic strategy frequently used in different types of teaching proposals in Latin America.

Despite the fact that several investigations have focused on feedback and initiatives for the development of writing at a postgraduate level, we did not find works that have considered the perspective of students on different pedagogical initiatives focusing on the revision among peers of intermediate writings in the thesis writing process. Therefore, this work focuses on the participants' perspective regarding the possibilities and challenges associated with two didactic initiatives based on peer review.

Methodology

This qualitative research used as data collection techniques in-depth interviews and an electronic questionnaire of open questions administered within the framework of two pedagogical initiatives aimed at the teaching– learning process of thesis writing: face-to-face writing groups (WGs) and a graduate virtual seminar.

Regarding the face-to-face WGs, three WGs were put into operation in April 2015. Each one constituted three doctoral students from different disciplines of Social Sciences and Humanities (i.e., Education, History, Psychology, Philosophy, Sociology), who belonged to different research teams, were enrolled in various doctoral programs, and did not share the same thesis director, for the most part.

The WGs were formed after inviting former students from a doctoral seminar called "Doctoral writing workshop: situated approach." The seminar was held at the School of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires from mid-2013 to mid-2014. It took 36 face-to-face hours and was dictated by the coordinator of the WGs and another teacher. The joint review and peer review activities assiduously addressed in this space served as the basis for framing the work to be carried out within the WGs. Similarly, since five of the nine people interested in being part of the WGs had not taken this seminar, two plenary meetings were held wherein former students shared their experience in the seminar and the guidelines for giving and receiving comments in the WGs were revisited. Moreover, when the groups were formed, it was verified that there was at least one former student of the seminar in each one of them so that he or she could guide his or her colleagues through the process of framing revision tasks. Then, each group met fortnightly or monthly (according to the choice of its members) to share ongoing drafts of texts produced based on their doctoral research in a structured (since

the meetings are held over time) but informal setting (not institutionally framed). That is, attendance at the meetings did not respond to a request from a thesis director or to any requirement of postgraduate programs (credits or certifications were not received as it usually happens with seminars, courses or workshops). The meetings were developed more and more independently.

Furthermore, this research focuses on one of the editions of a completely online postgraduate seminar of 90 hours, in which one of those responsible for the research has served as a teacher together with another expert colleague. This edition was held from October to November 2017 at the School of Philosophy and Letters of the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo and was aimed at professionals from various postgraduate careers in Social and Human Sciences (four attended with training in Education and four in Letters). Those who started the seminar had to have written at least one chapter of a Master's or Doctorate thesis, which ensured that advanced students would participate. This workshop with eight students was organized in three stages:

- First stage: a forum was offered for students to introduce themselves and another to reflect on the writing process and the actions of giving and receiving feedback. Students were also asked to complete diagnostic instruments to understand their profiles as academic writers and their backgrounds in research.
- Second stage: in groups of two members formed by disciplinary affinity, the students reviewed their own chapter and that of the pair for three weeks according to the Situation and Communicative Interaction Model, the Event Model, and the underlying Textual Model (Cube of Severino, et al., 2012). To do this, the students used documents shared on Google drive and the forums on the university's Moodle platform. At least two types of instructions were proposed: on the one hand, reading the chapter and pointing out achievements or inadequacies in relation to each model; on the other hand, a more general reflection on the chapter's achievements or inadequacies.
- Third stage: the students revised their own chapters for two weeks based on the comments received. During this period, they interacted via email with their thesis directors and expert teachers. Finally, they completed final evaluation instruments, among which is one in which they ponder over different aspects of the dynamics of the seminar.

The data analyzed were extracted from two instruments applied as evaluation tools by the participants of the WGs and the students of the seminar. First, the transcripts of 9 in-depth individual interviews of approximately one hour each were addressed. Second, an electronic written questionnaire with 20 open questions were answered by 7 out of the 8 seminar students. Both instruments sought to weigh different aspects of each pedagogical initiative (WGs and seminar), including the participants' perspectives on the feedback

received and given. Although these are different instruments, the data has been comparable since in both cases, the participants' perspective (9 from the WGs and 7 from the virtual seminar) on the relevance of each initiative and the actions of giving and receiving feedback were investigated. The names of the participants in both instances were changed to maintain data confidentiality.

Data analysis was performed in different stages. First, the data from the interviews was read in-depth together with the members of the GWs, and the responses of the postgraduate seminar students to the written questionnaire were analyzed. A possible category was defined for the different fragments of the interview transcripts and the written answers of the questionnaires. As the reading progressed, new categories were created or the fragment under analysis was included in a previously defined category. In this case, the said fragment was compared with the fragments already located in the said category, seeking to identify the features that defined it, to later refine it into subcategories or combine it with others. This procedure allowed for the creation of a series of categories that comprise the different fragments analyzed. Subsequently, emphasis was placed on those that presented fragments of both the transcripts of the WGs' interviews and the answers to the questionnaire applied to seminar students. Finally, what happened within each of these categories was compared to establish similarities and differences between the participants' perspectives in both instances.

Results

The analysis enabled us to identify six categories: access to different perspectives, follow-up of the theses, focus on the feedback, challenge of time, digital technologies, and relational issue. Each is characterized below, including references to the interviews and questionnaires analyzed.

Access to different perspectives

The perspective with which the peer reviewer reads the writing is positively valued. In general, the difference between the perspective of the peer and that of the author of the thesis, either due to an affiliation to different research groups or a belonging to different disciplinary fields, is one of the main factors affecting the improvement of the reviewed draft. Indeed, 13 of the 16 participants in both instances stated that a positive characteristic of the peer review is that they were able to access "views," "perspectives," or "readings" different from their own, which offered different opportunities.

First, the perspective of the peers, when it differs from one's own, leads to rethinking the research and/or modifying the writing itself at different levels (from the frames of reference

and the methodology to the textualization). For instance, according to Vera, accessing the vision of her colleagues at WGs was somewhat advantageous since she obtained “a different reading that also adds up” because it emphasized things that those who were “in the same logic,” as her director or colleagues in the research team, take for granted or do not usually see. According to this participant, the WG “points you to things that are new” (Vera) or, as Ana mentioned, offers “an additional perspective, not so contaminated.” Along the same lines, Diana stated that her classmates’ comments “are usually extremely rich because they come from other disciplines and if they were from your same discipline, they would see things that you don't usually see” (Diana); a matter that, according to Leonel, “activated” in himself “new perspectives towards the subject.”

Second, this new look at the thesis seems to allow authors to rethink their own piece of work and own writing, as illustrated by the following statement by Ailén: “My colleague’s opinion made me rethink the style of my academic writing.” Similarly, Pedro stated that he had learned at the WG when “reading other ways of writing,” and Leonel mentioned that the peer review led him to look at his “own performance as a writer.”

Finally, by performing peer review, “one learns to write for broader audiences” (Alina) since they can evaluate how their writing is received by those who do not belong to their own field or discipline and try to rework it to make it more effective. This is illustrated by the assertion of Ailén, who affirmed that “my colleague’s perspective contributed to consider how a professional from another discipline perceives my academic writing (...) so that someone who does not know how I write and who has no knowledge about the topic of my thesis can interpret my writing.” In short, the access to different perspectives or positions offered by the activities of peer drafts review was evaluated by most of the participants as positive.

Thesis support

Another aspect that several participants in both pedagogical initiatives marked as positive was the support received during the thesis process through the feedback provided by their peers. Thus, Alina mentioned that for her, the best thing about participating in the WGs was “feeling accompanied (...) because although one writes alone at home or at the institute, feeling that one is talking to another doesn’t make you feel so alone when writing, there is something to feel, although the reviewer is not there, he or she is present somehow. I do not know if you understand. I think it's that. That the best part is the company in the process, right? To feel supported in processes as lonely as the writing of a thesis. I think that in the thesis it is more noticeable because it is a very long writing process that implies a lot of effort.”

Similarly, another member of the WGs, Marta, affirmed that feedback practices among peers helped the scholarship holders not to be “so alone” since, according to her, when one is a thesis student “everyone is waiting for you deliver the thesis, but the process to get

there is done alone.” Consistently, Pedro stated that “many thesis students are alone and the only relationship they have is with the director” since they do not belong to “any program or project.” For him, exchanging drafts among peers helps thesis students since they are accompanied “not only through listening but with concrete work, with a practice.”

Regarding how to carry out this support process, Leonel, a student at the seminar, expressed that the online environment was for him “a surprisingly useful tool, especially given the fact that he can read and work on the document from any mobile device, at all times. And, at the same time, the creation of a ‘trustworthy’ interrelation that notably eliminates the feeling of “loneliness” that writing a thesis implies.” In short, whether in person or virtually, the exchanges carried out through peer review seem to provide an accompaniment appreciated by thesis students.

The focus of feedback

One of the aspects of the feedback that both the participants of the WGs and those of the seminar highlight refers to what [Basturkmen, East and Bitchener \(2012\)](#) called the focus of the comments. According to these authors, it is a dimension that includes four categories: content, formal requirements, cohesion and coherence, and accuracy and linguistic adequacy.

In the analyzed answers, the appraisals about the focus refer, fundamentally, to questions of structure or linguistic formulation of the text (that is: cohesion and coherence, accuracy and linguistic adequacy): 7 of the 16 participants expressed themselves in relation to them (2 from the seminar and 5 from the WGs). To a lesser extent, the comments refer to issues related to the research and its development, that is, to the content: 2 mentioned this topic (one from each training instance).

In relation to the questions of structure or linguistic formulation, Ailén explained that the feedback “helped to see that my writing in some situations was perceived as complex because I used long sentences even though they were generally written coherently” Pedro, for his part, declared that “in our writing group, we see issues of writing, structure, things that are or are not understood by the outside reader, if there is a need to elaborate more, issues that go beyond the questions of the research itself, of the subject itself, besides the fact that some authors can be contributed, some things that can be useful, but it is not the central thing, let's say”.

Some participants of the WGs even indicated that a contribution of this type of initiative precisely lies on the focus of the feedback received, which is characterized by focusing, as Pedro indicated, on the “style” or “logic of writing,” differing in this sense from the returns usually shared in research teams. In the latter, the focus is represented by the content. Thus, Marta declared that “if someone from the research group or my director reads my work, they are paying particular attention to the content or what we are saying. And in the

writing group there is much more, I don't know how to tell you, the aesthetic aspect of the text. Like phrases, style, those things that the groups of your specialty do not take into account because we normally discuss about teacher training and the meeting finishes while we talk about that. And in the writing group, as I was saying, there appear questions of style. They wouldn't appear anywhere else if it weren't for that group.”

However, one seminar participant, Perla, indicated that during the training experience she had received content-focused feedback. She, in fact, valued them very positively as they allowed her to make important modifications in her thesis, not merely in the chapter revised during the seminar. Thus, from her perspective, “my colleague’s feedback was a really significant contribution, she made me see the true ‘hermeneutic’ methodology and rethink the entire thesis, not just the chapter.” Likewise, in the WG, a participant reported that she had been asked for content-focused feedback, a type of feedback that was more difficult and challenging for her. As Diana expressed, “what happens is that when the comments they ask for or the returns have not only to do with structural or grammatical issues, or I don't know how to say it, but with content issues, that's where the plus appears, because of the effort that one has to make to be able to give a more or less constructive feedback, when feedback is not only requested in terms of structure or style, but also of content. That's where it seems to me that one needs to have a little more knowledge of the area.”

The challenge of time

The majority of participants in both types of initiatives (11 out of 16) stated that they had not encountered any challenges in carrying out the peer review tasks. Thus, only five of them indicated that, for them, time represented an important challenge when it came to reviewing the texts of their colleagues in the framework of the seminar or the WGs.

On the one hand, personal obligations of a different nature (work, family, social, among others) are described as obstacles to the possibility of fulfilling the commitments agreed upon at each training instance. Dafne, for instance, explained the following: “the delay I had was due to my occupations and work, family, and political obligations.” Similarly, Ailén maintained that the “main problem was time. It is difficult to reconcile courses, studies outside this course, thesis production, teaching work and family, but everything could be accommodated to finish the workshop in a timely manner.” Diana also reported that “there were chapters (of her thesis) on which I worked a lot and others that, due to lack of time and pressure, I had to deliver the thesis I did not get to show them to my peers and I would have liked it too.”

On the other hand, and beyond the problems of managing personal time, some participants indicated the difficulties that arise when trying to reconcile the availability of the different participants included in the working groups both in the seminar and in the WGs. In this sense, Ailén affirmed that “if there were delays it was perhaps because when working in groups, we had to make the times of the colleague's returns agree with the

feedback of the personal writing itself.” Similarly, Jorge, in relation to the meetings held in his WG, stated that a challenge is linked to “meeting and has to do precisely with making time, let's say.”

One of the participants of the WGs, Alina, explained that the close bond generated in this type of group configuration leads to the development of alternative review strategies in the face of lack of time: “It is not that people stop producing, is that you stop finding the time to use the review space and well that, you see, there, maybe it has to do with the group that one supports. Maybe it's like, you've gotten very used to the group so you know they read you at the last minute, or that if you tell them they send you an audio through WhatsApp, I don't know, I am giving you some examples. And we have done that in times of great trouble.”

Digital technologies

The relationship between feedback and digital technologies emerges in different fragments of the answers of 7 out of the 9 participants of the WGs and 3 out of the 7 participants of the seminar. Few references to technologies in the responses of the seminar participants is probably due to the fact that the topic of the use of digital technologies had been the subject of reflection in other questions that explicitly asked about this issue. Beyond the unequal number of responses between the participants of the two training instances, the contrastive analysis has made it possible to identify significant differences regarding the view of the relationship between digital technologies and peer feedback.

The participants of the writing seminar highlighted the advantages of the use of digital technologies (e-mail, shared document in Google Drive, and Moodle) for the specific work of peer review of writing. Mariana, for instance, indicated that “working on Moodle and Google Drive is very practical.” Specifically with regard to Google Drive, she considered that “when working in such detail with complex texts, the most useful thing is the use of editing tools such as Google Drive that keep participants in interaction and updated.” In this sense, she highlighted the practicality of the tools and, particularly, the potential of shared documents for the work of reviewing a writing.

Leonel, for his part, highlighted the advantages of the Moodle forum: “I appreciate the existence of the forum because doubts or personal expectations are shared and the forum helps to clarify all kinds of questions that do not find a specific place (when in doubt, I go to the forum to consult or read the queries and answers), and that also allows me a certain degree of informality.” In this case, for the participant, the forum was a space to share doubts and knowledge within an informal space. Similarly, Ailén made a general assessment of the tools, highlighting that the fact that she did not know her peers, an advantage given by virtuality, favored the level of criticism in her comments: “the online environment helps because since we do not know the person who performs the criticism, we understand that the opinion is made without prejudice and without personal considerations”

Contrary to what was observed in previous assessments, the participants of the WGs declared that digital tools and the environments provided are valuable only in specific situations, particularly in cases in which there is not enough time to agree on face-to-face meetings. Thus, Alina explained that "I have read people who were not in my review group at the last minute so that they could make it on time, to help, or people who had left the groups and then asked us for help, that is, they asked each one of us to read a chapter, to distribute them among us (...) these are things that we do virtually, let's say, in general, at most there can be a telephone conversation for some specific thing."

However, all the participants of the WGs who, as previously mentioned, held different face-to-face meetings for a prolonged period of time, agreed that these face-to-face meetings cannot be replaced by virtual instances. Most of them indicated that the disadvantage of carrying out the review exclusively virtually would be the lack of "intimacy" that occurs face-to-face. For instance, Alina expressed the following about the dynamics in the group: "It generates a relationship between the reviewers that later makes the review flow different. The fact that they know that it is not only a matter of what you are writing for the thesis but of what is happening to you, how you are doing, how is the relationship with your supervisor, I don't know, if you are getting stuck in something. All those things that are the ones that are often discussed when the work of revising the text is finished. I don't know if they would happen if we didn't get together."

The members of the WGs also indicated that face-to-face meeting enables the possibility of discussing and having a more fluid "back and forth" with the person who has commented on the text. From these face-to-face discussions, in addition, new perspectives or ideas arise. In this sense, Victoria said that "there are times that in orality, I don't know, in such an instantaneous exchange other things occur (...) for example, it can be expanded more because... I don't know...Let's suppose I'm reading the text and I have a doubt as to why they put the reference or something. At that moment I don't call the author, I mean, I don't know, I don't take that audacity, maybe it's wrong, but I say 'no, maybe he's doing something else' and I'm left there with that doubt. On the other hand, when we review it together, I can ask directly 'Hey, why did you write this here?'. And maybe that feedback instantly makes me think of another comment. It seems to me that the exchange is faster. But also, sometimes there are things that are lost if we don't get together, like it's very distant".

The relational issue

Most participants with both types of experiences (4 of the 7 students of the seminar and 5 of the 9 participants of the WGs) referred to the importance of caring for the other when giving and receiving feedback. For many participants, the trust established between the participants played a fundamental role so that the feedback between peers could constitute a tool to develop the thesis writing. According to Leonel, for instance, this would occur only if a certain "intimacy" or "trust between the writer and the occasional reader/commentator"

was developed. Similarly, Vera, a member of a WG, raised the issue of “building a certain trust, of getting to know each other.” Marta stated that in her WG, no one had felt bad about the feedback received because “it was always given within an environment of trust.”

Consistently, Dafne and Marisa, students of the seminar, remarked that, at first, they approached the task of commenting on their peers’ texts with some misgivings since they were afraid of “hurting” or “emotionally assaulting” their colleagues by providing feedback. However, according to Marisa, this would not happen if there was a “fluid and well-intentional interaction.” In this regard, Victoria mentioned that in a WG, the person giving feedback should take into account that “that author is also learning and offering feedback while caring for the other person,” that is, “taking care not to hurt the susceptibility of the other.” To do this, according to Ana, “you have to be careful not to put yourself in that role of evaluator, but rather in the role of a collaborator.”

In addition to the care that should be taken when commenting on the texts of others, the participants emphasized the importance of having an “open, positive and accepting” attitude (Leonel) and being “predisposed” (Nelson) or “having a good predisposition to listening to others and receiving any kind of comments” (Juan). Or, also, in Victoria's words, “be open to listening to the opinion of others, of other readers, so that he or she doesn't feel offended if someone highlights something for him or her.” In short, whether at the time of giving or receiving comments, most participants in both types of initiatives highlighted issues related to caring for the other. Thus, these questions of the relational sphere seem to influence the future of peer reviews and the feedback received.

Debate

The analysis of the possibilities and challenges associated with peer review activities carried out in the framework of a virtual seminar and three WGs allowed us to identify six categories: access to different perspectives, thesis support, the focus of feedback, the challenge of time, digital technologies, and the relational issue.

In the first place, most participants declared that the peer review of drafts was useful to them since this type of activity allowed them to access different perspectives within the writings. This seems to be due, at least in part, to the fact that, within research groups or disciplinary fields, the importance of certain authors, approaches, or concepts that an external view can question is naturalized. In fact, several investigations mark the usefulness that WG participants perceive with respect to accessing different reading perspectives to improve their texts (Ferguson, 2009; Galligan, et al., 2003; Grant, 2006; Rodas Brosam and Colombo, 2019; Rose and McClafferty, 2001).

Similarly, whether with face-to-face meetings or through exchanges online, feedback between peers seems to open up support spaces for thesis students. In line with this, several works indicate that the activity of giving and receiving comments on drafts can help combat

feelings of loneliness and isolation related to the thesis writing process (Aronson and Swanson, 1991; Colombo, 2015; Colombo and Pug, 2015; Ferguson, 2009; Grant, 2006; Grant and Knowles, 2000; Larcombe, McCosker, and O'Loughlin, 2007; Moore, 2003). Meanwhile, in the large area of Humanities and Social Sciences, this feeling of loneliness tends to be more common since postgraduate students usually carry out their research on their own, without even regularly attending work spaces such as laboratories where they could meet colleagues or superiors (Deem & Brehony, 2000).

Regarding the so-called focus of the comments, the participants agreed that the feedback mostly referred to the linguistic structure or formulation of the text (that is: cohesion and coherence, accuracy and linguistic adequacy) and, to a lesser extent, to the content. This finding is consistent with the research results of Basturkmen et al. (2012), who indicated that the most frequently highlighted aspect in the teachers' comments on thesis chapters is linguistic accuracy.

Furthermore, both the participants of the seminar and those of the WGs have considered that time represents a challenge for peer review. On the one hand, they have highlighted the problems of the personal agenda and the organization of time, in addition to the difficulties in making the agendas of different team members compatible. In this sense, the appreciations that the participants of the seminar and those of the writing groups indicate about time seem to match the findings of previous investigations. Thus, in a study on students' perspective in the individual and group activities proposed in a thesis writing seminar, Alvarez and Difabio (2016) highlighted, as in our study, that students face problems with organizing time for both individual and group activities. Regarding individual activities, the students indicated incompatibilities among the times related to students' life, those related to the cognitive maturation required by the activities of analysis and textual production, and the formal times stipulated for the delivery of each activity. In relation to group activities, they highlighted the difficulty in coordinating the availability of the members of the group.

Regarding digital technologies, while the participants of the seminar positively valued the role of the applications in the peer review of the writing, the participants of the WGs only did it when it was difficult for them to meet in person. Otherwise, they said they preferred face-to-face meetings since face-to-face exchanges would allow for the generation of significant spontaneous comments.

Finally, regarding the time of giving or receiving feedback, the majority of the seminar participants and the WGs highlighted issues related to caring for the other and being attentive to the ways in which feedback is given. These results are in line with research indicating that the relational sphere seems to influence the course of peer reviews and what the authors do with the feedback. In fact, the analysis of the literature carried out by Chang (2016), which revealed two decades of research carried out on peer review indicated that

there are several works that have shown the impact of the emotional support in terms of the use that is given to feedback.

Conclusions

In this work, two didactic initiatives were addressed, a virtual seminar and three WGs, aimed at writing postgraduate theses based on peer review tasks. In both cases, the possibilities and challenges associated with this type of task were analyzed from the point of view of its participants. We worked with data from electronic questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Our findings reveal that the instances of peer review seem to constitute, according to thesis students, a propitious tool to be able to advance with the thesis writing process and, at the same time, learn the legal practices associated with the investigative task.

Although the dynamics that occur within the WGs and the seminar are different, peer review is a relevant contribution to the participants of both training instances. In line with those of previous research, our findings reveal that pedagogical devices aimed at the development of postgraduate students' academic writing are necessary for their learning process and to contribute to the completion of their theses. Although the results of the experiences presented in this work cannot be generalized, they have the potential to offer contrasting parameters for the design and evaluation of similar initiatives that focus on the close relationship between writing and knowledge production. In this way, didactic and political actions oriented toward the development of a writing pedagogy at a postgraduate level would be promoted, which, ultimately, would help increase the completion rates of postgraduate programs.

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