

# The arts of joint attention : training and care at the University<sup>1</sup>

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#### **Resumo:**

O objetivo do artigo é analisar as dificuldades enfrentadas por estudantes universitários com a escrita acadêmica, bem como possibilidades de seu exercício em ecossistemas baseados na atenção conjunta, com características de reciprocidade, sintonia afetiva e invenção. A pesquisa teórica toma como referência os estudos de Yves Citton, Isabelle Stengers e Vinciane Despret, dentre outros autores. O trabalho de campo utiliza o método da cartografia e foi realizada numa oficina de escrita que ocorreu durante a pandemia de Covid-19, em formato remoto, com três estudantes de graduação. Fez-se uso de diários de campo, além do dispositivo de escrita de cartas pelos alunos no final da pesquisa. A análise foi desenvolvida a partir dos analisadores que surgiram no decorrer da pesquisa. O estudo analisa a oficina como prática de cuidado e de atenção a si e ao outro, sugerindo que a atenção conjunta é uma arte a ser cultivada. Conclui que o trabalho em oficina, mesmo no formato online, favorece processos de atenção conjunta e indica que, para o enfrentamento dos problemas de escrita dos estudantes, a universidade deve experimentar estratégias de ensino e aprendizagem para além da aula baseada na transmissão unilateral de informação, bem como ecossistemas atencionais mais atenciosos.

Palavras-chave: Atenção conjunta. Ensino remoto. Formação. Oficina de escrita. Pandemia.

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## Las artes de la atención conjunta: formación y cuidado en la Universidad

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#### Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es analizar las dificultades que enfrentan los estudiantes universitarios con la escritura académica, así como las posibilidades para su aprendizaje en ecosistemas basados en la atención conjunta, con características de reciprocidad, sintonía afectiva e invención. La investigación teórica toma como referencia los estudios de Yves Citton, Isabelle Stengers y Vinciane Despret, entre otros autores. El trabajo de campo utiliza el método de la cartografía y se llevó a cabo en un taller de escritura celebrado durante la pandemia de Covid-19, en formato remoto, con tres estudiantes de licenciatura en psicología, participantes de un equipo de proyecto de investigación. Se utilizaron diarios de campo, además del dispositivo de escritura de cartas por parte de los estudiantes al final de la investigación. El análisis se desarrolló a partir de analizadores que surgieron durante la investigación. El estudio analiza el taller como una práctica de cuidado, de atención a uno mismo e al otro, sugiriendo que la atención conjunta es un arte por cultivar. Concluye que el trabajo en taller, incluso en el formato online, favorece los procesos de atención conjunta e indica que, para el afrontamiento de los problemas de escritura de los alumnos, la universidad debería experimentar con estrategias de enseñanza y aprendizaje más allá de la clase basada en la transmisión unilateral de información, así como ecosistemas de cuidados más atentos.

**Palabras Clave**: Atención conjunta. Enseñanza a distancia. La formación. Taller de escritura. Pandemia.



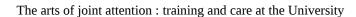
# A escrita como agenciamento: explorando linhas de minoração

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#### Resumo

Quais frequências sensíveis podem ser mobilizadas em processos de escrita? Duas linhas desdobram-se dessa questão, formulada no contexto de um Mestrado Profissional em Terapia Ocupacional: a insuficiência da língua escrita para nomear e dar passagem a dimensões da experiência trazidas para o âmbito da pesquisa, que carregam algo de indizível, e a insegurança perante o que se nomeia como escrita acadêmica. Refletiremos um processo vivido em uma disciplina desse programa de mestrado, atravessado pelas experiências da pandemia, do distanciamento social, do ensino remoto e do desafio de, em meio aos quadriculados da tela, fazer emergir um encontro entre corpos. A partir de exercícios de escrita foi possível criar intimidade entre escritoras e texto, fazer advir linhas de minoração que geraram deslocamentos naquilo que aprisionava a escrita e o pensamento e dar relevo à força da experiência na formulação das questões de pesquisa.

Palavras-chave: Ensino Remoto. Exercício de escrita. Mestrado Profissional. Terapia Ocupacional.





### Introduction

### Attention problems, writing problems

When we propose to discuss the problem of attention in the university, the attention of students immediately comes to mind. Several studies point out the poor concentration of students during lecture classes and the change in study practices with the use of new technologies, including the problems of the functioning of attention in reading academic texts with the massive use of computers, tablets and smartphones (HAYLES, 2007; 2010; SANCOVSCHI, 2010; SANCOVSCHI AND KASTRUP, 2013; DADICO, 2017; MUNIZ, 2019; WILMER, H. H., SHERMAN, L. E., CHEIN, J. M, 2017). It is usual to understand that attention is a condition for learning and that early couplings with digital technologies alter students' performance and attentional regimes, producing effects on the formation.

While recognizing that attention is conditioned by technological devices, with impacts on study practices and, consequently, on academic training, attention (or the supposed lack of it) is generally understood as an individual problem and as an (in)competence of the students themselves. In this paper, we propose to put the issue of attention back in the university, including in the discussion the teacher's attention, in order to think of the teacher-student relationship involved in training as a problem of joint attention. Joint attention is between teachers and students, but it is also crossed by everything that constitutes the university: the classroom, tables, chairs, books, notebooks, cell phones, the organization of space and time, group dynamics, pedagogical strategies, information, affections, etc. We took as a basis the ecology of attention approach, by Yves Citton (2014), understanding university education spaces as attentional ecosystems composed of human and non-human agents, articulated in a network of diverse and coexistent attentional gestures. According to this approach, joint attention involves situations of co-presence and assumes characteristics of reciprocity, invention, and affective connections.

In our view, this way of posing the problem leads to understanding the attention involved in university education as an art and as a practice of care. To this end, we take as reference the studies by Vinciane Despret and Isabelle Stengers (2011, STENGERS, 2015; 2018) and Jean-Philippe Lachaux (2013), who propose thinking attention not as a competence but as an art, and its learning not as a training but as a cultivation. Attention is an art because it depends on a ritual to promote the possibility of care and welcoming, creating the occasion for it to happen.





It is also a question of dosage, in the sense of what the Greeks called pharmakon. Depending on its use, its preparation and its dosage, it can be medicine or poison, it can care and nourish, or poison. Giving or paying too much attention to something is not in itself an act of care. Even too much care can asphyxiate and suffocate. The boundaries between attentional relations that watch over and control and those that care are in constant weaving. They are not rigid, they are not given. They are constituted in a situated way, in each relationship.

The cultivation of attention is, from the beginning, relational and, at the same time, aims at relationality. It is also in this direction that Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) states that, in the work of thought, to care for someone or something is always to create relationship. How, then, can the thoughtful exercise of the arts of attention in formative processes contribute to cultivate and expand networks of relationality, engagement, and involvement?

Stengers (2015) stresses that "to pay attention" has the double meaning of paying attention and being careful. Understood as care, attention takes on a double inflection. First, it is a work: one must learn to care, to cultivate, to imagine, to probe, and to pay attention to connections between what we usually consider and perceive separately. However, if there is a work that connects and puts into relation, we do not know beforehand what will be worthy of care and attention. Paying attention includes, then, giving and offering time, slowing down, and noticing what, in the encounter with the other, opens up between the urgencies. This attentional act of repairing and welcoming unfolds as a gesture of care. It enables and nurtures the constitution of a caring relationship. To pay attention is also to shelter, to constitute refuge for regeneration and resurgence. It is to suspend in order to begin again. Secondly, the arts of attention imply resisting the judging position vis-à-vis the other as well as exercising a detachment from moral imperatives. One does not ask whose fault it is. Finally, it is worth remembering that the notion of caring should be taken here as distinct from caution - "be careful!" and that caring relationships should not lead to a supposed static, homogenizing harmony or equilibrium, but can entail tension, friction, and controversy. A caring relationship does not aim to smooth out differences or eliminate them.

## 1 The writing

Such statements, which speak of an ecology of attention practices, guide our investigation into situations that present themselves today at the university, as is the case with student writing. Problems and difficulties with the writing process at the university are narrated by the students themselves. It



The arts of joint attention: training and care at the University is not uncommon to hear that the psychology course demands the production of a lot of writing in tests, papers, and reviews. For the students, this demand is sometimes excessive and exhausting. From the professors' point of view, the impression is that, increasingly, "students don't know how to write". Errors in Portuguese, badly worded paragraphs, little or no proofreading, difficulty in expression. Traces of a new generation marked by digital technologies and the abbreviated language of social networks? Signs of the insufficiency and crisis of literacy? Indications of a mode of expression in gestation, which collides with the writing required by the academy? The loss of meaning of this writing for the new generations? Effects of a university education that seems to be too abstract, disembodied and devitalized? Marks of the recent encounter of other knowledges with a university predominantly guided by Eurocentric, capacitating, colonialist and racist perspectives, which devalue and subjugate forms of expression centered on orality and corporeality? These are some of the questions that demand our attention, and others could be added to them. What does the "problem" of writing in the university put under analysis? What does it make us think about the formative processes in higher education?

In Brazil, the formative role of writing has been highlighted by researchers such as Luiz Antonio Saléh Amado (2019), Rosimeri de Oliveira Dias (2019), Carmen Debenetti and Maria Elizabeth Barros de Barros (2019). We can also highlight the research conducted by Lilian Veronese (2021): a university professor, Veronese describes her students' suffering when faced with writing and the difficulties of expression through this medium. Based on this observation, she creates a laboratory for writing with her students as a training strategy. Adriana Marcondes Machado (2020), in turn, reports her experience with the use of addressed writing (with letters) as part of extension activities at the University of São Paulo (USP). Such activities were part of strategies to train professionals and work teams who worked in public schools; Child and Youth Psychosocial Care Centers (Caps IJ); nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), among others. According to the author, this work served as a powerful tool to mobilize thought and action in the midst of the feeling of impotence often experienced by the teams. The unpredictability of the final result (text), the strangeness experienced by the writing, the effort it demands, and the displacements propitiated by this exercise seem to allow the construction of "a knowledge accessed through itself, through its exercise. There is an effort of thought that allows one to reach a place that one does not know what it will be when this training is initiated." (MACHADO, HAHNE, FONSECA, 2021, p.28).

The objective of the present study is to analyze the difficulties faced by undergraduate students with academic writing, as well as possibilities for their learning in ecosystems based on joint attention,





with characteristics of reciprocity, affective attunement and invention. The field research uses the cartography method and was carried out in a writing atelier during the Covid-19 pandemic, in a remote format, with three undergraduate students - two from psychology and one from dance - participating in the team of a research-intervention project, The initial idea that came from the teacher/advisor and that had the engagement of the students and the atelier coordinator was that we could work on grammatical aspects of writing field diaries and transcriptions of recordings, but also to raise interest and pleasure in writing.

In this proposal, we were interested in following in a situated way the joint face of attention in the formative processes of the atelier, considering attention as an art necessary to think and live carefully with the other (BELLACASA, 2012). Joint attention occurs when the attention of the other affects the orientation of my own attention. According to Citton (2014), joint attention is delineated in a situation of co-presence, and has as its characteristics reciprocity, the effort of affective attunement, and improvisational practices. It was initially understood as occurring in a face-to-face situation, with a limited number of people in co-presence. Aware of the other's presence, people interact and produce attentional interferences on each other. By including the problem of affective attunement, we recognize that joint attention is not a strictly cognitive process, but involves nonverbal exchanges and a sharing at the level of affections. Tuning in is neither given nor guaranteed, and there is always a work of reciprocal adjustment between the speech of one and the listening of the other, micro gestures of sympathy, encouragement, caution, and comfort. Revealing a subtle attention, such micro gestures seem to be fundamental in relational exchanges, sometimes more than the content of what is said, or even the argumentative rigor. The intonation of the voice, the pace of the conversation, a smile or a gesture of confidence affect the connections. Since none of this can be planned in advance, one must be willing to escape routines and be open to the risks of improvisation (CITTON, 2014). Considering that there can be an attention to the plane of affections, the concept of joint attention takes on a new scope. It is no longer defined in an intersubjective or triangular way (subject-object-subject), but by the connection in the collective plane of forces and affects, configuring an attentional rhizome. In this direction, Citton (2014) speaks of a thousand sheets of attention, in superimposed layers, co-present, with variable regimes and intensities.

Under such a focus, the concept of joint attention expands and gains importance to think the field of relationships and compositions between teachers and students as attentional ecosystems (CALIMAN, PRADO, 2019; CALIMAN, KASTRUP, CÉSAR, 2020). The question that arises is: what ecologies of attention are we practicing in the learning processes in public universities? What



The arts of joint attention: training and care at the University does the experience of teaching-remote put under analysis, regarding the importance of joint attention in formative processes and how it can be gestated and sustained? In the situation of online classes and group activities during the covid-19 pandemic, the experiences of sharing and producing knowledge were mediated by digital technologies and the Internet. In this ecosystem, how do I experience reciprocity, in which the other's attention affects and directs my own attention and vice versa? How to access and be guided by affective connections? How to live the alternation of roles between those who speak and those who listen? In a pandemic context, in Brazilian soil, with a specific group of students and in online meetings, what did the experience of writing and sharing make possible? What does it teach us about the relationship between attention, learning and care in the university?

## 2 Learning and remote education in the midst of the pandemic

The proposal of the writing atelier was outlined in the midst of the experience of the COVID 19 pandemic, in the middle of the Brazilian health-political crisis, in the paradoxes that cross the city of Rio de Janeiro and in the psychology undergraduate program at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. It emerged in a research group, whose investigation focuses on the accessibility of students with disabilities at the university. The research uses the cartography method (PASSSOS; KASTRUP; ESCOSSIA, 2009; PASSOS; KASTRUP, TEDESCO, 2014) and holds Aesthetic Encounters to create conditions for sharing experiences between students with and without disabilities. Some of the scientific initiation students met in the remote supervision meetings and had never been together face-to-face. At first, the experience with remote teaching, research and extension emerged as a possibility and even as a necessity, in the "while" of the pandemic. It was necessary, to sustain the importance of staying at home, not losing sight of the fact that this was not a guaranteed possibility for all people. In any case, we shared an expectation that remote teaching was provisional, temporary. Universities, students, teachers, families, with greater or lesser conditions, tried to find and create ways to live this experience, with the challenges it imposed.

After a certain time on the screens, an exhausted body - mortified by the excess of stimuli, by the scarcity of time for elaboration, by the political setbacks, by the pandemic experience and all the inequalities intensified by it - strives to remain seated in front of the cell phone, the computer. Of course, we are not talking about a mortification that started with the pandemic. Nor is this mortification experienced in the same way by all those who live in Brazilian universities, be they public or private. For some layers of society, the relationship with academic knowledge is insistently



KASTRUP; CALIMAN; GURGEL

violent, silencing and disqualifying. The pandemic helped to give visibility, at the same time that it intensified the inequalities and violence that make up Brazilian history. In this context, how to cultivate strength? Vitality? Breath? Refuge? Immersed in the ecosystem of remote teaching, concerns about education that already inhabited us have been taken up, relocated, and updated: how to teach in remote areas, under the conditions imposed by the pandemic and the current crisis? How to guide students, teach, conduct a research and extension project? How to create collective spaces in which learning also becomes mutual caring? How to constitute meaningful formative experiences, aware of the colonialist and capacitating face of the university??

#### 2.1- The writing of field diaries and the cartographic method

The scientific initiation students have as one of their activities the writing of field diaries of the cartographic research. The diaries make up the research notebook, which is organized annually and consists of important material to ensure the continuity of the research, which often goes through changes in the team. During the pandemic period, it was possible to notice that the diaries contained many mistakes in spelling, punctuation, nominal and verbal agreement, exchange of capital and small letters, etc. Several texts were sent without proofreading, which sometimes compromised their understanding. Besides grammatical issues, sometimes there was the difficulty of writing in an embodied way, not bureaucratic or protocol, a model learned in high school, aiming for the National High School Exam (ENEM). Was it a lack of care? A lack of attention? Marks of schooling processes in which, for various conditions, this care with writing cannot be cultivated? Expressions of other forms of writing? What would each of the students be living in this pandemic moment? What would be their living conditions, their studies, their work? We explicitly asked them to revise their writings, but it didn't work out. The suggestion of one student revising the text of the other did not work either. How to proceed in front of this situation?

At first, the dilemma seemed to be between two alternatives: the teacher to revise or to keep the field diaries unedited. The first alternative seemed excessively laborious and, although it could guarantee the language in the norm hidden in the research notebook would be of little interest for the formation of those students, because they would not have participated and learned from the process of correction, rewriting and reformulation. The second alternative would also bypass the learning, because, although it would configure an apparently respectful attitude towards written and oral language and the formative processes and contexts of those students, we wondered if it would not be



The arts of joint attention: training and care at the University an important part of higher education to experiment learning situations that would allow a better elaboration of writing, creating conditions for its communicability and transmission.

In order to work with the cartography method, it is necessary to write the field diaries with so-called embodied writing, not abstract writing. Such a distinction is inspired by the opposition proposed by Pierre Vermersch (2000) between abstract speech and embodied speech. Abstract writing is detached and traditionally hegemonic, and is valued as a policy and model of academic writing. It is produced by researchers who seek to place themselves from the point of view of an outside observer, attempting to conduct an investigation from nowhere. In another direction, cartographic writing is embodied writing, from within experience. It seeks to access a pre-reflected dimension of the research experience that is not always easy to describe. The regular exercise of writing field diaries, which are discussed in supervision, aims at learning to pay attention to oneself and to make explicit gestures and aspects of experience that may have been unknown until then. It is not always easy to learn to write with the experience of a situated body that takes its place in the writing. There is the challenge of deconstructing the politics of abstract writing and, in its place, developing inventive writing that asserts its role in a research-intervention. There was also an additional challenge to be taken up by the atelier: to cultivate a writing that produces worlds of its own and shared, in the academic context, in a moment in which this experience would be lived in the remote mode.

Faced with the dilemma initially configured (the teacher to revise or to keep the field diaries unedited), we outlined a third way. We planned a writing atelier, coordinated by one of the authors of this article. The coordinator would not be someone who corrects, controls and judges, but who accompanies processes and leads an inventive writing practice, in a shared process of joint attention and care.

## 2.2- The invention and dynamics of the writing workshop

In February 2021, we began to plan meetings to be held with that small group of scientific initiation students. We decided to have two-hour long meetings, divided in two moments. In the first moment, we proposed experimentation activities with writing, organized based on mottos, which could be texts, images of paintings, photographs, videos or songs that would serve as triggers for the writing process. Based on the mottos, the students were invited to write prose texts in a freer and more inventive style. The goal was to loosen the restraints and the fear of writing linked to the politics of abstract writing, taking risks and venturing into an embodied writing, to be shared with the group.





In the second moment, there was the work of revising the texts that were placed in the research drive, in docx format: field diaries, reports, interview transcripts, etc.

Initially, the idea was to read aloud as a group all the texts produced and then make observations and comments about possible passages that could be rewritten and improved. The reading aloud ended up being limited to the prose texts, because they are shorter. For the field diaries, the solution we found was for the coordinator to read them before the meetings and, using the google docx review tool, highlight passages and leave comments next to the text - emphasizing what worked well, where there were doubts in understanding, and suggestions. The students had access to the comments before the weekly meeting, when they were discussed as a group. At this time, students could ask questions about the comments if they wished. Later we will return to the issue of revising texts, care strategies, and the use of written comments.

At first we had four participants, but shortly after the beginning of our activities one of the students had to withdraw due to the impossibility of reconciling schedules. Thus, we had the constant presence of three students. The proposal was that the work would last for two months - eight meetings. We agreed that at the end of this period we would evaluate the possibility of extending its continuation - which we ended up doing. The 8 meetings turned into 17, the last one being a moment of closure and evaluation of the process. The work took the format of a cartographic research-intervention and all the meetings were registered by the coordinator of the atelier in field diaries. These diaries became the field research material of the present study, as well as the planning of each meeting, the texts produced by the students from the mottos, and a final report in which they analyzed the effects of the work in each one. The students' research field diaries were not included, nor were the proposed revisions. It is also important to emphasize that at the end of the writing of this text, which brings some of the results of the work, the authors shared a preliminary version with the students, which was discussed and revised according to their suggestions.

In line with the cartography method, which aims to follow processes (POZZANA and KASTRUP, 2009) through a concentrated and open attention (KASTRUP, 2009), the themes to be worked on were defined meeting by meeting. In a first moment, they were thought keeping in mind that the students did not know each other and the atelier coordinator. To this extent, mottos were proposed that would allow them to write without feeling uncomfortable or overexposed. In short, the choice was guided by a certain prudence of experimentation.

The first motto consisted of choosing a personal object to recount a memory - a way to introduce themselves to each other. A book, an object from the house, something of affective value,



The arts of joint attention: training and care at the University a curious or everyday object. The second motto was an excerpt from the book The Perfume by Patrick Süskind. The protagonist of the book, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, is a person with an above average olfactory ability, which soon turns into an obsession for smells and the production of perfumes. The selected excerpt described smells in detail. The idea was to make a dive into sensory experiences, which could lead the group to other ways of perceiving the world. The third motto was to work with the description of known places, without saying what place we were talking about: it would be a way to talk about places we have visited and revisit them in a moment of social distance.

As the group formation movement took place, the choice of mottos was increasingly guided by the questions that the participants posed before, during, or after the atelier activities. For example, issues related to racialization came up in the speech of two participants, who questioned us about what is good writing, who can write, and who is read. The importance of valuing popular, Brazilian, and black culture, the tiredness and sadness with the pandemic, the anger with the extreme right politics, and missing the people we were far from were some of the themes that came up in the meetings. When preparing the next meeting, the coordinator tried to remember and resume these threads that had appeared and, from there, to elaborate propositions that could be woven together.

Throughout the meetings, we also took as mottos photographic images from the project Imagens do Povo (People's Images), of the Observatório de Favelas (Slum Observatory), with an excerpt from the book As Intermitências da Morte (Intermittences of Death), by José Saramago; the short film Kitbull, by Pixar; the musical work 4'33", by John Cage, and an excerpt from the book Nós & Eles, by Bahiyyih Nakhjavani. From these, there was the weekly exercise of inventive writing, at the same time that the group experience was being built. Joint attention, in its characteristics of reciprocity, affective harmony, and invention, became a daily experience in the formation of those students.

## 3 The workshop walks on a razor's edge

Little by little, with the exercise of cartographic writing, embodied and affective, and being together attentively, it was possible to realize what were, for the students, the problems around writing. These problems were linked to the formative experiences at the university, to the pandemic, and to life in general. Writing, formation, and life were not dissociated. In turn, in the workshop we also tried to do an exercise of sharing thinking and writing, in its inseparability from living. In a meeting, one of the students said that she found it easy to talk, but had difficulty writing. In her view,





this was a difficulty that was aggravated in her relationship with a teacher, who made harsh criticism of her texts. "She didn't know how to read me". The student affirmed her desire to be able to write without sticking to the "rigid" standards of academicism. Another student also said she had similar experiences at university to her colleague.

One of the participants (João) constantly expressed the desire (and challenge) to write in a way accessible to lay people - common people, and manifested a deep discomfort with a closed academic writing in itself. His speech called the group's attention to the political dimension of writing: the way we write defines who will be able to read us, for whom the text reaches. He was interested in developing writing that could reach people outside the university. He showed concern with the connective power of writing, that is, the possibility of putting apparently distant worlds into relationship. Another student (Karina) talked about the shame of sharing what she wrote, stating:

I have already exposed my difficulty in expressing out loud something that I have done and that I have written. This happens when I take an exam and finish it right away. I have to wait for some other students' exams that take the attention away from mine and ultimately decrease the likelihood of mine being read, evaluated, judged with me standing there when the teacher has just looked into my eyes.

The shame in expressing oneself in the university ecosystem seemed to be an affection that pervaded the group. Shame appeared linked to the figure of the professor, who occupies a hierarchically superior position, which inextricably articulates knowledge and power. The teacher, and also the colleagues who seem to know more than Karina, are beings who pay attention to her academic performance, evaluate, identify and judge weaknesses and mistakes. Another participant expressed that she was embarrassed even to speak up in college classes and meetings. When she was with friends from church or elsewhere, she did not experience this problem, but in college she was "very afraid of making mistakes, of talking nonsense". When she shared this experience with the group, her speech seemed halting, as if it feared being judged by us, even in that more favorable ecosystem marked by less hierarchical relationships and sharing.

We were walking on a razor's edge. The group was aware of the two directions of the workshop: on the one hand, to learn how to better use the writing standard. On the other hand, learning to write from within the experience. The coordinator set the tone: "we will bring tips, technical pills, but, on the other hand, explore the opening for writing. After all, to write well you need to read and write. And to write, perhaps you need to experience this process from another place, a place where pleasure overcomes criticism and suffering" (field diary).



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This razor's edge - between the learning of the cultic norm and the taste for the experience of writing - presents the relational and attentional dimension of the problem of writing in the formation of university students. Accessing writing from another place (in which pleasure overlaps with fear of criticism and suffering) involves a work of joint attention. In conducting the workshop, how to intervene, teach and guide without bureaucratizing, without reproducing and reinforcing the feeling and the fear of "messing up" generated by sharing something (in speech or in writing)? Without producing disqualification and silencing? How to sustain rigor in the formative spaces without plastering the forms of expression? How, as teachers, can we displace ourselves from practices of control, judgment, abstraction, individualization, and isolation? What places do we want to access and build with academic writing? What is the place of shared care and attentive listening in this process?

The question that arises is how to cultivate practices of joint attention and care in everyday learning process, instead of attention practices focused on control and judgment. Perhaps this is another way of understanding the razor's edge of learning experienced in the atelier, which requires us to think and live with care (BELLACASA, 2012). The articulation between attention, care and learning leads us to analyze certain practices of teachers and researchers who, in the name of education, perform gestures of control. But is every gesture of correction a moralizing and domination practice? And, on the contrary, when our attention to the other and to the formation process is translated into genuine care?

In the first meetings of the atelier it was not possible to do the second part of the program - reading, commenting and correcting the students' diaries and texts, in an ecosystem of co-presence and joint attention. However, with time and from another place and another attentional attitude, the correction became possible as a formative action. In one of the meetings, the coordinator asked the students if they had managed to revise their texts. They said they didn't have time and that they usually left things to the last minute.

In principle, then, we could say that the initial problem remained the same. However, with more care and attention, we tried out a new arrangement for the practice of correction. The coordinator proposed to read the texts in the drive and give written suggestions in the text itself, in the form of comments. In the next meeting, they could discuss these suggestions together. In these moments, it became possible to talk about digital tools for spelling and grammar correction that could be used, to talk about the use of commas, the linking of ideas in shorter and more direct sentences, and also about



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the strengths of each person's writing. Correcting and commenting, in this ecosystem, became acts of joint attention and care for what each person shared in their writing.

In the next meeting, one of the students (Layla) said that she saw the coordinator's suggestions in her text and got tense because there were "many". The coordinator asked her if she was bothered and said that if they were together, in person, they could both sit in front of the text and read and comment on it. As this was not possible, she made comments and markings on the text, but with the fear of sounding like a "fourth-grade 'aunt', highlighting the students' mistakes" (field diary). The fact that she was afraid of producing this effect triggered an attention to her ways of doing things. How, then, to do it differently, with greater care? Two other students said that they did not feel uncomfortable with the suggestions; on the contrary, they welcomed the formative gesture and thought based on it. We can say that, at this moment, they didn't feel embarrassed, at least not to the point of shutting up or withdrawing.

The affection of tension was present in the group, but it was not predominant or unanimous. The attentive and careful guidance of the coordination did not eliminate the tension that a rigorous work of writing may require, but allowed its expression and sharing, making it a problem to be dealt with jointly, and not individually. Revision suggestions were marked in the body of the text, as well as comments indicating the reason for the suggestions (when some passage was obscure or ambiguous, for example). It is important to stress that the comments tool served not only to point out errors, but also to indicate particularly interesting passages, and expressions. The idea was to invite students to think about the effects (of meaning and sensation) produced by what they wrote.

This apparently small shift, from the emphasis on the error to the highlighting of interesting passages, constituted a formative gesture. From it, it was possible to realize that suggestions and corrections in writing were not an impediment or problem in themselves, but produced different effects depending on their connections with lines of care and respect or, on the contrary, of control and disqualification. This seems to hold true whether we are in face-to-face or remote teaching. "If we were together, in person, we could both sit in front of the text and read and comment...". This invitation describes a formative ecosystem very different from most of the encounters that those students had experienced in university teaching and that they had already shared in the group. In the remote mode, the proposal was that the coordinator would read the texts alone and send feedback that was received and read individually by the students. The way of reading, commenting, and talking about the text with the students was done jointly, in order to extend a gesture of attention and care.



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Of course, the remote ecosystem is quite different from the face-to-face ecosystem, because the group is present in another form of composition, delimited by the computer screen. However, even in the workshop in remote format, it was possible to see the constitution of a thoughtful and respectful meeting, allowing the students to feel at ease when sharing an experimentation of writing in another training relationship. After all, it was possible to have access to the university, to learning, and to writing from another place. This other place appeared in the words of the participants and in the reports they wrote at the end of the atelier.

In her written account, one of the students (Karina) stated that

The atelier wasm a refuge in my week. It was a part without bureaucracies, without the goal of being a college subject. We got to know each other better as a group, worked on various writings, touched on numerous topics, were able to listen to each other.

In the atelier, the "bureaucracy" of automated, inattentive and seemingly meaningless writing was replaced by practices of experimentation, which allowed for the emergence of improvisation and the unexpected, either on the part of the students or the coordinator. Although there was a certain regularity in the meetings and their format, the proposals were made in the form of "invitations" - just as the suggestions for revision in the texts were offered as "indications". In the same direction, another student (Layla) stated in her report: "we were a group of writers and listeners, we didn't evaluate each other, we allowed ourselves to create and share, and that was very good". The atelier was important in constituting the groupality of those students who were in the process of getting to know each other in the remote modality. The possibility of being in a group, of listening and being heard gained importance. One student (João) wrote in his account that,

Maybe, because of the possibility of giving vent to what I felt and having someone to listen to me, the atelier stopped being a place where I was to work/study and became a place I wanted to be, a place that I enjoyed going to and that recharged my energy after a day full of tasks.

The participants highlighted the group as a place of refuge, breathing, recharging energies, of listening and being listened to, of the pleasure of meeting. In one of the conversations in the group, one of the participants (João) came to say how important the space had been for him - it was one of the few places he really liked to occupy. He shared with us that, in all his life, this was the second place where he had felt really good and where he had the desire to be.





#### 3.1 - The exercise of attention to the other and to oneself in the atelier

In the coordinator's field diaries, the perception that the pandemic seems to call for redoubled care in training is present. The redoubled attention can be understood in two senses: in the first, as a care, a prudence in proposing mottos to prompt and inspire the writing; in the second, in relation to the attentional characteristics of online meetings.

In the pandemic context, which involves detachment and fear, many of us lived experiences of greater vulnerability, intensification of suffering and illness. Some of the students even reported this kind of experience in the atelier meetings and outside of them, sending private messages to the coordinator's cell phone. Thus, it was possible to understand that it was necessary to be careful when choosing the themes, so that they could, at the same time, allow an enlargement of thinking and feeling, but, at the same time, preserve the possibility of the students choosing what they would like to write about and/or how they would like to write it.

In one of the proposals, five images were offered for each person to choose one, which they would write about. The options were: the painting Loving the Sun, by Mel Kadel; the photograph A Young Man With His Pregnant Wife In Washington Square Park, by Diane Arbus; the painting New Kids In The Neighborhood, by Norman Rockwell; the photograph The Rosebud Garden of Girls, by Julia Margaret Cameron; and the photograph *Circus*, by André Kertés. In this meeting, one of the participants - young and black - said that he would like to write about Norman Rockwell's painting, but that he didn't want to talk about sad things, because he was already too discouraged. The painting in question depicts two black children near a moving truck being watched from some distance by three white children. The tension of the scene is evident. The white children lean forward, without approaching the black children, as if they wanted to see, without risking a contact with them. They want to see from a distance, without getting close.

The remote meetings demanded a different attentional effort to access non-verbal aspects of language, such as body movements - including hands and feet - changes in face and eye coloration, intonation, rhythm and volume of the voice. In online meetings via video calls, a significant part of these aspects of each participant becomes inaccessible to the others. We cannot know if the other is swinging their leg or twisting their hands in their lap, for example. Other characteristics can also be less accessible, because they are so subtle and delicate that they depend on the quality of the Internet connection and the camera, such as noticing if the other person's eyes are misty. For affective attunement - one of the aspects of joint attention - to occur, it takes more attention to those non-verbal aspects that we have access to through screens. When our meetings started, the coordinator asked



The arts of joint attention: training and care at the University people to keep their cameras on whenever the internet allowed. This way at least we could see each other, since we did not know each other personally. They agreed. We noticed, however, a peculiar dynamic, which was recorded in the field diary.

Always at the moment of writing, the students closed the cameras and, when their texts were ready, they opened the cameras again. They would read the texts and see the reactions of their classmates. One by one, we opened the microphone to give feedback, to comment on the texts, to say words of praise and encouragement. However, the moment of writing was a moment of being alone together, a turning in on oneself that passed through the disconnection from the screens. Being with the camera closed, at those moments, did not mean a lack of involvement with what was being proposed.

This attention to oneself appears then as another layer of joint attention. Attention to the self never seems to be guaranteed, whether in the face-to-face or remote formative ecosystem, but it was observed in the remote workshop ecosystem. It is interesting to note that, in the remote environment, the camera is an object that strongly interferes in the games and attentional connections. It is not a neutral element and for this reason we asked, at the beginning of the workshop, that the students always keep the cameras open during the meetings, unless the quality of the internet connection did not allow it. In this framework, it was interesting to observe the immediate and almost spontaneous gesture of the students to turn off the camera at the moment of writing. It should also be noted that such gesture attests to their active participation in the construction of that ecosystem, seeking to create conditions for a more present and concentrated writing to access experiences, memories, and affections. This gesture also attests to a less hierarchical composition, more shared and distributed between the coordinator and the students, in which the fear of breaking the rule and making mistakes seems to have been, at least momentarily, put out of the game.

We pick up on the student's (Karina) statement that "the atelier was a refuge in my week. It was a part without bureaucracies and without the objective of being a college subject". From this excerpt, it is possible to see that the atelier is perceived as having a functioning that breaks with a bureaucratic university logic, which demands from the student only the gesture of paying attention, focused on solving problems and fulfilling tasks pre-defined by the professors. It is necessary to recognize that, in our daily tasks, not infrequently we, teachers, also function in an automated way, responding to demands and with our attention on alert for the fulfillment of our own tasks, without any pause or deceleration.

In the case of the workshop, the mottos, as aesthetic propositions that summon affections, invite us to break with this attentional attitude focused on the task, forcing an interruption in this mode of





functioning. The speed, which characterizes attention focused on action, gives way to a decelerated temporality, a time of resonances, while attention is redirected from the outside to the inside. This deceleration appeared in the written account of another student (Layla), entitled "a time of the coffee break, a time of meeting, a time of expression".

We can say that writing is like a process of invention that creates, at the same time, the written text, the one who writes it, and the world itself (GURGEL, KASTRUP, 2019; 2021; GURGEL, 2015; 2019). We evoke the concept of co-emergence by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch (1993) to understand a process of invention devoid of any foundation, either in the subject or in the object. From such a perspective, we can think that text, writer, and world emerge from writing practices. The one who writes acts upon a material (in this case, the computer, but also with paper and pen,

in order to produce something visible (the text). However, the one who writes acts and suffers while producing his text, since the act of writing also throws its effects on him. The writer does not precede and guide the writing, but is constituted in it, in a same movement.

#### 3-2 Being at ease and "letting your guard down"

In one of the first field diaries of the atelier coordinator, the question arises: "What could happen in a group, in a writing atelier created in the online format?". To start with this question suggests an important uneasiness in the conduction of this work: to assume the not knowing and the unprecedentedness of an experience to be built together with the students, the online, the computer, the cell phone, the writing, the texts, the pandemic, the space-time of each one in a moment of deep crisis and destabilization. There was a desire to make writing happen, which went hand in hand with the feeling that "in times of pandemic... certain care needs to be redoubled" (field diary). To the desire to do a careful writing, was joined a cartographic curiosity that questioned, at first, what relationship each of the participants, in their lives, had built with writing. After all, what was the problem with writing? Making it possible for this question not to be solitary (and hierarchically answered) by the atelier coordinator, by the scientific initiation supervisor, nor by a previous knowledge about academic writing demanded special attention to what connected those students to the atelier proposal. What could make sense for them there?

Accessing this connection was not a simple task - it was necessary to weave a relationship between and with the group - a groupality. In a certain sense, we access this connection when we also put ourselves in connection, through joint attention. Sharing and welcoming a text, a problem, a



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For the sharing to happen and for it to be possible to comment on the students' texts, it was necessary that everyone was "at ease" and this quality of presence proved to be rare in the relationships that those students maintained and wove with the professors and groups at the university, with whom it was not possible, to use an expression of the students, "to let their guard down". Thus, being at ease with each other, letting down one's guard, appeared at the same time as a working direction and a condition for the joint making of the workshop to happen. As it appears in the field journal: "The intention was to create an environment in which people would feel more comfortable to talk about themselves, to share their texts and comment on the texts of their colleagues. It demanded a careful being together". How, then, in the writing atelier was this careful being together designed? With what gestures and affective tones was this ecosystem being generated?

Right after the first meeting of the workshop, in a conversation in the orientation group, the students stated that they liked the coordinator very much, saying: "She is very attentive". This sentence, in the context in which it was enunciated, indicated a perception of attention, interest and care directed to them and that, in turn, seemed to summon the students' attention and care towards the joint work. This attentional resonance gave shape to what we define here as the challenge of joint attention, of the exchanges of attention, of shared attention in the formation and experimentation of a writing that also becomes writing of the self and of the world - of attention as a gesture of openness that supports the affective, joint, and inventive dimension of the formative processes. An attentional sharing that seemed to make it possible to be at ease, generated in the composition of many experiments and gestures. Being at ease resonated in its multiple meanings: confidence, resourcefulness, uninhibition, expansion, absence/decrease of constraint, comfort.

As we reported in the previous topic, in the challenge of creating a favorable ecosystem for attentional sharing and comments on the research writings, one of the directions was to read the students' texts before the meetings and offer tips and comments that were sent along with the texts, to be read by them individually. In a certain sense, offering tips, instead of imposing a form of writing and textual construction, reverberated as a sign of interest and care for what was also offered as writing and expression. On the one hand, this attentional exchange demanded reciprocity; on the other hand, it was not symmetrical. In training and in the university, the attention of the teacher or, in this case, of the atelier coordinator, occupies a place that interests us. It is important to think here about the attention of the one who leads and its importance in the constitution of trust, but also of the



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university more broadly. As Stengers and Despret (2011) state, the university needs to open itself, move, relocate itself so that the other has a legitimate place and space.

#### **Final considerations**

In a book dedicated to the problem of women's place in the university, Vinciane Despret and Isabelle Stengers (2011) discuss the issue of democratization of access to the university. They understand that it is being effectively carried out in the universities of Europe, n the sense that they started to regularly receive new students: first the girls, then the youngsters coming from less favored classes, the immigrants, everything being done as if it was something "normal". They argue, however, that if there was a collective concern, it was not to receive those students - who were not "preformatted" to be there, as bearers of knowledge that would open other horizons, different from those of an academic elite. The concern was rather a concern for a possible "lowering" of the level of the university. The university tried to show that they were welcome, that their presence was "normal", because the university is democratic - but under pre-established conditions, on the condition that they would not change anything. In other words, they are welcome on the condition that they "don't make a case". In another direction, Despret and Stengers state that, in the context of democratization, we must dream of a university that calls its codes and routines into question, taking the opportunity to rethink what, in university knowledge, is likely to nurture the demands and questions of those who come from further afield. The challenge of producing and transmitting a living and relevant knowledge. How to escape both cynicism and nostalgia? How to escape the "every man for himself" that is the rule today? How can we learn to think together?

With all due differences, the situation of the Brazilian university is not far from the picture drawn above. In Brazil, one of the most sensitive points in the democratization of public universities concerns the admission of students through racial quotas, for students from public schools, and for people with disabilities. Besides going against the interests of the middle class and being the object of violent criticism in social networks and other spaces where opinion circulates, it has been common to hear professors in classes and meetings expressing concern about the falling level of the university, almost always mentioning the low quality of the writing of these students. The permanence and coexistence with the diversity of students in public universities has not been an easy task. With the advent of the pandemic, the diversity that characterizes the reality of these students became even clearer. In this context, the present study discusses attention in academic spaces, seeking to displace



The arts of joint attention: training and care at the University the emphasis on attention understood as an individual (in)competence, where the teacher performs the function of control, in favor of an ecological approach and the arts of joint attentio, which guides learning in the direction of a caring practice. Thus, it is also a university that is concerned with the arts of joint attention that we are talking about.

The challenges of cultivating attentional ecosystems in the university can, in a way, point a clue in the joint production of living and relevant knowledge.

It is in this direction that the arts of paying attention need to be cultivated, because being attentive to such concerns can produce in us another disposition, inciting an openness, a desire to approach and produce a knowledge connected to life. In a sense, inhabiting a pause full of turbulence created in the pandemic, occupying the ruin it makes visible (Tsing, 2015), without disregarding its ambiguities, has helped us forge other compositions and ways of thinking and living with. When we proposed to hold the workshop, we took it as a practice of experimentation. We did not know beforehand if the students would engage and what their effects would be. Our proposal did not oblige us to follow a pre-defined menu or a rigid schedule - which, we know, does not include the possibilities of performance of a good part of the university teaching staff. However, we believe that it should be shared in order to produce reverberations and feed the discussion about more democratic political-pedagogical projects in Brazilian universities today. The possibility of experimenting and improvising from the accompaniment of the process of the group and of each student was part of the initial proposal, and should not be considered a mere detail. These conditions seem to us particularly favorable for the construction of a work characterized by its own temporality, decelerated, in which the exercise of attention to oneself and to the other becomes possible. Under these conditions, it was possible to "let our guard down" and inhabit a desirable and desiring formative process. Returning to the idea that gives the title to this text, we can say that the arts of paying attention were cultivated in the atelier, through its weekly ritual of writing and sharing and the attentional gestures experienced there.

Thus, the atelier experience raises questions for us to think about teaching-learning practices in the university: what kinds of attention can and do teachers offer? What kinds of ecologies of attention do we build? What temporalities are demanded - and allowed - in our format of education?

And, furthermore, what do these practices produce: whom do they silence, whom do they tax as insufficient, with whom do they ally, and whom do they discard? In the sharing that took place in the atelier, it was possible to see that what predominates is not simply a gap in basic education, but capacitating practices of oppression and of subjection of the university itself.





It was through the action of writing that the students in the atelier inquired who could write, what it was to write well, and how to subvert the writing rules imposed in the university environment. The group potentiated new encounters - with other people, but also with the other that inhabits us - the one who can write, who might like to write. Group writing did not consist of a mere space of exchange between previously constituted individuals, but was a process of subjectivity production: we transformed ourselves. What is possible to emerge when undergraduate students get together to write, appropriating the academic space? When they break with capacitating and silencing practices by the very act of writing, of sharing their writing, of admiring their colleagues' writing in a favorable attentional ecosystem?

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