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Original
paper

*Reformulations: verbal aid
or didactic tool? A case study in
a specialized classroom*

Extended summary

Reformulations, as part of the scaffolding process, are complex mechanisms playing a central role in language learning. Scientific research recognized reformulations as one of the main aspects of interest, especially in the field of mother-child interactions. However, fewer studies have been fully devoted to the role of reformulations in the school context. The present paper aims to explore to what extent reformulations are intended for and used within this particular context. Our objective is to document the use of reformulations in special needs classroom and the related teachers' representations, in order to highlight what are the components that should allow reformulations to be considered useful tools of didactic reflection.

As our study is realized within the school context, we have approached the reformulation as the object of the didactic analysis: in fact, oral language is a tool for learning contents and a source of knowledge, demanding different children's specific types of expertise. In the classroom, reformulations appear as multifunctional processes employed by teachers in order to valid or to value a production, to propose a more adapted formulation of an assertion, to make possible the progression of children in acquiring discursive competencies, according to the linguistic levels corresponding to their development. Reformulations involving teachers and students during different interactions in heterogeneous classrooms constitute an interesting topic of investigation, especially from a pedagogic perspective and within the context of special needs education. In this specific setting, reformulations can be viewed as a sort of language adaptation of the adult to the production of the child: by the present study, we intend to explore the different forms of the reformulations that appear in special needs classroom interactions.

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We have used participant observation and recordings of children's and teachers' talk in two special need classrooms. In addition, we have administered a questionnaire to teachers in order to collect their representations about the use of reformulations during their teaching activities.

Our analyses highlight a plurality of types and functions of reformulations: in particular, we have identified forms of auto- and hetero-reformulations, and different requests of reformulation. In the analyses of data, two main aspects appear salient in the relationship between teachers and students: the first one concerns the function of the reformulation to maintain the communication in the classroom; the second aspect is related to the function of the reformulation as a way to offer a resource allowing students to perform a specific action.

The results of the study show that reformulations play a crucial role in ensuring the didactic relation between teachers and students having difficulties in oral expression. Reformulations are useful in providing an opportunity of expansion of children's communicative capacities and in improving their awareness in language use.

The study of the reformulations' representations and of their uses in classroom shows to what extent reformulations are didactic tools. Teachers should consider reformulations as useful ways to adapt their language to the pupils' production and to overcome some difficulties in the context of special needs classroom activities.

Key words: scaffolding, reformulation, didactictool, specialneedclassroom.

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