The Impact of Task Type and Group Size on Dialogue Argumentation between Students

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Abstract : Within the framework of socio-cognitive interaction, argumentation is understood as a psychological process that supports and induces reasoning and learning. Most authors emphasize the great potential of argumentation to negotiate with contradictions and complex decisions. So argumentation is a target for researchers who highlight the importance of social and cognitive processes in learning. In the context of social interaction among university students, different types of arguments are analyzed according to group size (dyads and triads) and the type of task (reading of frequency tables, causal explanation of physical phenomena, the decision regarding moral dilemma situations, and causal explanation of social phenomena). Eighty-nine first-year social sciences students of the National University of Rosario participated. Two groups were formed from the results of a pre-test that ensured the heterogeneity of points of view between participants. Group 1 consisted of 56 participants (performance in dyads, total: 28), and group 2 was formed of 33 participants (performance in triads, total: 11). A quasi-experimental design was performed in which effects of the two variables (group size and type of task) on the argumentation were analyzed. Three types of argumentation are described: authentic dialogical argumentative resolutions, individualistic argumentative resolutions, and non-argumentative resolutions. The results indicate that individualistic arguments prevail in dyads. That is, although people express their own arguments, there is no authentic argumentative interaction. Given that, there are few reciprocal evaluations and counter-arguments in dyads. By contrast, the authentically dialogical argument prevails in triads, showing constant feedback between participants' points of view. It was observed that, in general, the type of task generates specific types of argumentative interactions. However, it is possible to emphasize that the authentically dialogic arguments predominate in the logical tasks, whereas the individualists or pseudo-dialogical are more frequent in opinion tasks. Nerveless, these relationships between task type and argumentative mode are best clarified in an interactive analysis based on group size. Finally, it is important to stress the value of dialogical argumentation in educational domains. Argumentative function not only allows a metacognitive reflection about their own point of view but also allows people to benefit from exchanging points of view in interactive contexts.

Keywords : sociocognitive interaction, argumentation, university students, size of the grup

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