Research Traineeships 2021 proposal

1. Title of the project

Raising awareness of writing skills: an inventory of intervention tools

2. Coordinators

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3. Project summary

Being able to write a clear, convincing, appealing text is a skill that takes a long time to master. In the course of their education programs, starting at primary school all the way up to university, children are expected to write progressively more complex texts in a growing range of genres, starting from short stories, through expository texts and opinion pieces to academic essays and research reports. Many education program devote considerable time on the development of these skills, either in dedicated courses or in *blended* formats, in which writing exercises and assignments are integrated in content courses. What tools can teachers use to facilitate this process?

Exercises and interventions that make developing writers more aware of their writing process and their writing skills work (Graham & Perin, 2007; Vandermeulen et al., 2020). When writers are conscious of the different steps in the writing process, they can plan better and manage their own writing process. Writers who know what their strengths and weaknesses are when it comes to the quality of their writing products, can focus their efforts on improving in certain areas, and develop strategies, for instance in how they revise their own texts.

There are a number of digital tools that can help writers in developing insight into their writing processes, such as key stroke logging software, which allows a writer to see how their text grows and changes over time (Inputlog, Vandermeulen et al., 2020). Other tools can be used to raise awareness about (differences in) the quality of writing products (e.g. Comproved, Bouwer et al., 2018). Of course, not all exercises that make writers more aware use software: paired sessions with writer-observer students in which a writer uses a think-aloud protocol as they write, peer feedback sessions and co-creating scoring criteria can all be done in low-tech classroom settings.

This project looks at two under-studied aspects of available tools: feasibility and participant evaluation. Most studies on intervention tools focus on the effect of the tool on learning outcome (e.g. Bouwer et al., 2018). Using certain tools and including exercises in writing classes must have an effect on the writing process and/or the quality of the writing product for them to be useful. But it must also be (relatively) easy for teachers to implement the tools, and students must *perceive* them to be useful, if they are going to be used in teaching practice.

4. Project timeline

In this project, the research assistant will create an inventory of existing digital tools (and potential low-tech alternatives) that aid in creating awareness of students' writing processes and skills. This inventory lists what is needed (e.g. licensed software programs, access to computers, audio recordings) for each tool. In addition, they also observe the use of these tools and conduct user evaluations for them: do

students like using them, do they perceive them to be useful? Tools that have a high degree of face validity may lead students to participate more actively, increase their motivation, and thus be more effective.

The initial inventory will be made at the beginning of the project (September). The observations and user evaluations in the form of online questionnaires will be made during and after classes in the course *Academisch Nederlands* (CIS, bachelor year 1, fall semester) in October and November. This will then be written up in the final month of the project (December).

The inventory made by the research assistant will be used in a number of ways. First of all, it will be shared with teachers through a publication and/or presentation (e.g. in a dedicated professional journal such as *Levende Talen*, or at symposia like *Het Schoolvak Nederlands*). Second, it will be used as the starting point for the development of a series of lessons in secondary school settings, in a DOT (Docentontwikkelteam, teacher development team). Finally, the overview will be shared and presented through the Tilburg Center of Learning Sciences to inspire teachers of academic writing at Tilburg University and beyond.

5. Research trainee profile

The research trainee for this project will do some desk research (for the initial inventory), but the largest part of their time will be spent collecting and analyzing data in class observations and through quantitative surveys, and summarizing these data in a practical overview and presentation. The research trainee can either be an excellent BA-student, an MA-student or a Research Master student. They should:

- Have an interest in language development and/or teaching
- Have some experience in setting up surveys and/or observational studies
- Be a fluent speaker of Dutch (necessary for the observations)