
Epistemology of written composition: Thought, metacognition and writing in the productive process

Epistemología de la composición escrita: pensamiento, metacognición y escritura en el proceso productivo

书面作文的认识论: 思想元认知与创作过程中的写作。

Эпистемология письма: мышление, метакогниция и письмо в процессе работы

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Abstract

This paper presents advances in the epistemological discussion emerging from the relationship between thought and written production. Besides, some principles alluding to the teaching practice and the student's role are suggested, where reference is made to the teaching of written production as a reflective, permanently interactive process, which requires time and space to promote the expression of thought. In this sense, it concludes onto the significance of a theoretical construction that locates the written production in a researching context inspired by thought itself.

Keywords: thinking, written composition, metacognition.

Resumen

El presente artículo presenta avances de la discusión epistemológica que se conforma sobre la relación entre pensamiento y producción escrita. Además, se sugieren unos principios alusivos a la práctica docente y al rol del estudiante, donde se hace referencia a la enseñanza de la producción escrita como un proceso reflexivo, de interacción permanente, que requiere tiempos y espacios para favorecer la expresión del pensamiento. En este sentido, se concluye sobre la importancia de una construcción teórica que sitúe la producción escrita en un contexto investigador inspirado en el propio pensamiento.

Palabras clave: pensamiento, composición escrita, metacognición.

概要

本文介绍了关于思想与书面作品之间关系的认识论讨论的进展。此外,还建议了一些涉及教学实践和学生角色的原则,其中提到写作教学是一个反思过程,一个永久的互动过程,需要时间和空间来促进思想的表达。从这个意义上说,我们总结了将书面作品置于受个人思想启发的研究背景下的理论建构的重要性。

关键词:思想,书面作文,元认知。

Аннотация

В данной статье представлены достижения в эпистемологической дискуссии о взаимосвязи между мышлением и письменной речью. Кроме того, предлагаются некоторые принципы, касающиеся практики преподавания и роли студента, где говорится об обучении письменной речи как рефлексивном процессе постоянного взаимодействия, который требует времени и пространства дляощрения выражения мысли. В этом смысле, в заключении говорится о важности теоретической конструкции, которая помещает письменное производство в исследовательский контекст, вдохновленный собственным мышлением студента.

Ключевые слова: мышление, письменное сочинение, метакогниция.

Introduction

This paper presents a theoretical review concerning the relationship between thought and written production, which emerges from research and specialized documents produced in the humanistic, and educational fields, as well as in other disciplines between years 2014-2022. From this point, an epistemological discussion of this topic is formulated and reference to written production is made as a reflective, permanently interactive process that requires times and spaces to promote the expression of thought; items that are systematized and analyzed during the research process of the doctoral thesis entitled "*Metacognición y habilidades de pensamiento en el proceso de composición escrita durante el primer ciclo escolar*" [Metacognition and thinking skills in the process of written composition along the first school cycle]. This paper is intended to express the core aspects dealt with in this research, among other questions of semiotic nature.

While sundry statements concerning the thought-learning relationship have been subjected to discussion for decades —Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner—, an insistence on this topic is manifest, with arguments that substantiate the essential link with thought conducive to enhance learning. Likewise, they state the possibilities to pose more relevant solutions when thought is used to understand the situations and experiences connected to written composition, and specifically to the complexity of producing written texts. In this sense, Swartz et al. (2017), purport that effective thinkers are those who "reflexionan sobre el tipo de pensamiento que realizarán antes de realizarlo y mientras lo llevan a cabo ejecutan diversas actividades de reflexión, a menudo combinándolas entre sí, con el fin de lograr sus objetivos" (p.17). Regarding thought and written production, these statements suggest a deep and permanent discussion, on the topic in the educational spaces, but also in the areas of art and humanities, in order to understand the relationship between thought and written production. This is the place for the intention to understand some fundamental conceptions such as the assumption of composing texts autonomously and reflectively or recognizing that the written composing is subjected to individual rhythms, where cognitive, linguistic, and affective aspect are involved and in turn depend on the prior literacy experiences and the sense awarded to writing in the context where the communicative situation is developing.

Yet, an approach with a semiotic clue is provided here onto some theoretical constructs that pose this relationship, which implies recognizing and dealing with thought, thinking skills, written composition, cognitive processes and sub-processes underlying written composition and metacognition, as key elements having an effect on the relationship. Besides, some suggestions to tackle the topic from a pedagogical, generally humanistic and particularly literary side are given.

Therefore, when conducting the review of some theoretical elements, it is necessary to have resource to the essential contributions by Vygotsky to the thought-language relationship, who highlights the written language, the significance of writing and the indication of a differential approach from a socio-cultural perspective, to establish how contextual variations determine the construction of different written productions. In this sense, some recent research and academic contributions in the last years end up underlining such relationship. Notwithstanding, authors such as Guzmán (2018a) and Tolchinsky (2015) assert that the relationship between thinking and writing has not been sufficiently studied so far.

This perspective coincides with the assertions by Gutiérrez and Díez (2017) who consider that *"ha incrementado el interés de la investigación sobre cómo mejorar los procesos de composición escrita, lo que se debe al elevado porcentaje de estudiantes que presentan dificultades para escribir textos coherentes, organizados y adaptados a distintas situaciones comunicativas"* (p. 44). It is also worth mentioning that recent research find it vital to transform the teaching and text production practices in such a sense. Hence, studies conducted by López et al. (2019) refer to early intervention being effective for written competence learnings. In the same line are Coker et al. (2016) after their observational study on instructional writing practices who recommend to look at the components of the writing process, especially in institutionalized writing.

Then, after this theoretical review, it is suggested that despite the high number of studies available, some of them focused on analyzing the cognitive processes involved in the production of a text, it is necessary to encourage more dissertations on text construction, which implies a crucial drift both in the educational and the literary realms. That is why Valencia and Caicedo (2015) propose the relevance of reviewing the studies that detail interventions aimed at teaching metacognitive strategies to improve the written composition processes. The reasoning proposed so far give special weight to the foundations required to intervene from within pedagogical practices, with top priority on factors such as teacher mediation to support upon questioning and thinking about the construction of a text or the reflection on how to achieve such construction within a process involving key elements such as the cognitive sub-processes of planning, texting, reviewing and rewording. Also, metacognition in relation with writing comes up granting particular significance to the process leading to reflect on and learning to self-regulate one's own actions entailed in creating a written text, mainly a literary one.

Bearing in mind the foregoing ideas, the views set out to discuss the topic cover two sides, the first one is centered on delving into thinking in order to ascertain how this becomes a tool to elaborate and transform written production. After that, it is important to deal with written production as an opportunity to strengthen thinking, highlighting the importance of promoting the construction of own written productions created for a communicative purpose or intentionality, adjusted to the writer's needs or interests. Consequently, upon considering the complexity of this topic, emphasis is needed concerning the implications of attending to these categories under a trans-disciplinary approach.

Principles referred to the relationship between thought and written production

These principles are: attention to thinking, written production as a creative process derived from thoughts and prior experience in diverse contexts; interaction and written production as a reflective, permanently interactive process.

Attention to thought

Obviously there is an epistemological discussion covering differences in conceptual proposals, but also allows to recognize views keeping some particularities. In the proposal by authors like Ritchhart et al. (2014), Maldonado (2015), Larraz (2015) and

Justo de la Rosa (2015), appear recurrent terms such as mental activity, abilities, experiences, prior knowledge, problem solution, decision-making and new knowledge; perspectives that account for a given work of thinking.

In the conceptual proposals about thought, some specific features are pointed out. First, in reference to thinking as a structured activity, it is said that *"el pensamiento es una actividad mental estructurada y determinante de nuestro comportamiento que nos permite la solución de nuestros problemas y los de los demás"* (Maldonado, 2015, p. 202). Besides, this author explains that the capacity of thinking is based on prior acquisition of knowledge, determined by a system of beliefs, cognitive styles and mind models, and he adds that this set of knowledge referred to a specific problem is structured differently according to the kind of proposed problem. From this perspective, thinking is conceived as a set of ordered actions proposed to carry out different activities in our daily life.

As concerns the perspective of thinking related to a set of skills, some contributions are acknowledged. Justo de la Rosa (2015) indicates that thinking skills are the base and springboard to develop other cognitive skills of higher complexity level; he so posits that *"el pensamiento es una actividad mental que precisa de varias habilidades interrelacionadas"* (Justo de la Rosa, 2015, p. 6). Likewise et al. (2016) consider the need to understand thinking *"como un conjunto de habilidades, ya que esto subraya dos elementos que consideramos clave [...]: que el pensamiento se puede aprender (y enseñar); por lo tanto, es mejorable a partir de la práctica"* (p. 96). In the same line, Larraz (2015) accepts that *"pensar implica manejar un conjunto de destrezas o habilidades cognitivas para gestionar los conocimientos en función de las aptitudes e intereses de la persona"* (p. 28).

In addition, this view allows to see the special relevance given by the authors to the set of skills of a person from the prior experiences and to be acquired along the life, which makes thinking to appear as a construct in constant search for answers to feats showing up in the surrounding world. To appreciate this reference to thinking in relation to skills also implies to observe another attribution conflicting with the view of thinking skills as rigorous linear process, with growing complexity as the task demands. That is why Ritchhart et al. (2014) incite to conceive thinking as a dynamic, interwoven, non-sequential process, and propose that the idea of conceiving thinking in a hierarchical order that evolves systematically from a level to another is problematic, because it ignores its own process, its complexity and its content. Also, they criticize those proposals listing a series of verbs under a complexity level related to what thinking means.

It is observed that the perspectives of the mentioned authors coincide in the idea that thinking skills are a continuous construction that allow not only to understand the surrounding world, but also provide a solution to problems to be faced; and differ in a fundamental aspect: conceiving thinking as a sequential process organized in levels.

Another aspect to consider is the conception of thinking as a creative activity. Guzmán (2018b), grants special importance to creative activity, where prior knowledge makes up a crucial basis. Also, from the perspective of thinking as a creative activity, it is relevant to highlight the proposal by Ritchhart et al. (2014), upon interrogating themselves how the creation process runs, of which he details that in the act of creating *"las ideas se ponen a prueba, los resultados se analizan, los aprendizajes previos se utilizan y las ideas se sintetizan en algo que es nuevo, al menos para el creador"* (p. 29). These characteristics are a portion of text creating.

In this sense, gathering the proposed perspectives, it is possible to say that thinking is a mental activity where a set of abilities occur, though not necessarily sequentially according to complexity level. Therefore, thinking is a feat that involves multiple options, it aims at making decisions, problem solution, and promotes the construction of new knowledge, which in turn depends on previous knowledge and individual experiences in different contexts. In the academic field, we cannot ignore that thinking is located in a singular, partially determined context.

Text, thinking and new experiences in different contexts

Insight into the complex practice of producing written texts and the role of thinking in this task gains great relevance in our study. In the academic field, it is more and the need to analyze written composition is increasingly apparent. Such process is studied from several viewpoints and it is notable that different disciplines account for the genesis and process of construction in the framework of linguistic, communicative, affective, socio-cultural and cognitive elements.

Hence and Rienda (2015) holds that written composition ought to be understood as *“el complejo proceso intelectual que va desde los primeros ejercicios, en los que los alumnos redactan frases sencillas, hasta la página en la que logran expresar libremente sus ideas y estampar el producto de su imagination”* (p. 74).

Construction in the writing process goes through a gradual advance from the simplest expression up to the most structured expression, with a meaning for the writer and a level of meaning for the reader and addressee of the text. In this writing construction process, the metacognitive strategies allow a more reflective eloquent writing. From this perspective, Jiménez et al. (2018) refer the meaningful value of applying metacognitive strategies within educational spaces, with which students are expected to achieve internalization and dominion that will be replicated into the quality of their written compositions they produce.

The epistemological review also highlights some authors who consider thinking as a core concept of written production. This way, Salgado (2014) emphasizes that some thinking structures can be shaped by writing, since as the task of writing texts becomes deeper, it is possible to find *“la configuración de un pensamiento distinto, con mayor capacidad analítica y una conciencia reflexiva que permite determinar con precisión no solo el significado de las palabras, sino también las relaciones entre los constituyentes de esas estructuras complejas”* (Salgado, 2014, p. 45). In this very same line of thought, assigning a relevant role to thinking, Santos (2014) admits that writers are able to structure their thinking in the creation of texts and announces that any creation imbued by imagination allows to get over what is customary in their context. So, it is stressed how the process of written text construction impinges on the process of construction of the written text in the reinforcement of thinking, which indicates that if said relationship is understood, it is possible provide a foundation to the elements related to the cognitive and communicative development that set the basis for a higher academic, social and cultural development.

Different proposals match the logic of identifying the written expression as a complex act that involves putting into play a significant amount of cognitive actions, because *“la expresión escrita se concibe como una habilidad cognitiva compleja que implica el desarrollo de varias capacidades y estrategias cognitivas que se desarrollan en una situación*

de comunicación para elaborar un texto significativo y funcional” (Gutiérrez & Díez, 2016, p. 265).

Likewise, more elements are apparent with an effect on the relationship between thinking and written composition. It is possible to mention the relationship between the cognitive and other components surrounding the hard task of producing texts, such as the contextual and linguistic aspects. In this respect, Hurtado (2016) suggests conceiving text production *“como un proceso de representación y comunicación, determinado por variables esencialmente cognitivas, lingüísticas y socioculturales. En este contexto, la escritura es ante todo un proceso de creación y producción de pensamiento, en un contexto sociocultural específico”* (p. 57).

With respect to the socio-cultural aspect that determine thinking and written production, Peña and Quintero (2016) consider writing as a social and cultural practice involving a series of cognitive processes *“ligados a las acciones e interacciones que los sujetos llevan a cabo dentro de comunidades discursivas particulares”* (p. 193). Thus, it is observed how written production is regulated by thinking, but its construction is also influenced by socio-cultural elements. In fact, the context is another element that frames written production when correspondence with reality is demanded by the conditions of text creation. Maybe thus we can achieve better practices in written text construction, which is also reported in the structure, content and function which texts were created for. From this perspective, Fernández (2016) affirms that being literate can be marked as a *“un privilegio social y cultural, cognitivo y emocional”* (p. 75). This author also adds that *“escribir es una actividad compleja que para su realización requiere reconocer las formas del discurso; y estas se analizan en los contextos donde se desarrollan los sujetos”* (Fernández, 2016, p. 75).

Written composition, a process of joint and permanent interaction process

It is important to understand that the process of the construction of learning on writing progresses in the course of permanent interaction, where this interaction derives from the relationship between the writer with texts, and with the mediators who come along with such exploration of text diversity. There we should observe and ask to discover how texts arise from a communicative need, which is in turn expressed differently depending on the characteristics of text genres, focusing on texts of artistic-literary nature.

Distinguishing the characteristics of writing requires, then, a permanent dialog to help enriching text construction. It is crucial that the written composition looks at the individual thinking and expressive differences, where enduring interaction is required in collaborative learning, where expressions, questions, doubts and knowledge about texts are shared.

Written production as a process

Written production becomes an opportunity to strengthen and develop thinking, as text creation allows developing the capacity to discover and reflect on the written piece, from which new knowledge is produced providing multiple learning. When the writer achieves a process of exploration and discovery on his/her own writing, situations are worked out concerning their own written text composition and deci-

sion-making concentrating on a space-time process. In this sense, time and special conditions are required mediated by the spaces to watch and talk about texts. In fact, as Salmon (2019) declares, guided written composition opens up spaces for reflection.

From this point emerges the question whether written production is an instrument that promotes thinking, it is necessary to express how to proceed to favor optimum times and spaces to construct texts, giving particular importance to the exploration and reflection on the process of text construction for oneself and others'. So, the teacher becomes a vital guide in the process of text production. According to Rienda (2016):

[...] el objetivo principal del profesorado respecto a la composición escrita es el de desarrollar la capacidad de expresión de los alumnos hasta llegar a conseguir un estilo personal a través de la expresión original y coherente de ideas, pensamientos, sentimientos y vivencias en un lenguaje correcto". (p. 893)

In all, apart from the arguments above, prior knowledge constituted from previous situations is required. Likewise, involvement in situations where the information proper to each model can be recognized and it is imperative to foster its development to go past the construction of original texts.

According to Tolchinsky (2019), you must consider the generation of spaces and times to dialog on the different types of texts, delve into what they express and on the author's intentions, asking questions, explaining what details or characteristics appear in the observed texts and from there, to profile text structures embodying the ascertained elements. In short, this is all about deciding and acting on the type of text desired, how you want to write, to whom you write and why you want to write, all in a sequenced organization.

Written production as a reflective act

Intertwining of the diverse elements making up text composition it is particularly important to consider the reflection during the constructive process, so as to be aware of the implications of writing, learning to self-regulate the actions leading to the creation of a written text. In this respect, Swartz et al. (2017), propose that self-regulating skills are necessary *"para que los individuos resuelvan problemas, y así poder llevar a cabo con éxito tareas complejas"* (p. 105).

This complexity reflected in the composition of texts requires a reflective process centered on giving guidance to help to understand the written piece. Therefore, mention is to be made on moments of individual work for self-reflection and moments for collaborative work to think as a group on written production understanding that reflection must take place in text constructing permanently will allow more awareness on the regulating actions leading to written text production.

This way, any pedagogical action requires promoting reflection on the text to enable discovering, relating and transforming what has been expressed in writing. Thus, reflection is a tool for knowledge and text analysis; it also aids in acquiring awareness on how text production is developing, which places us in a key question that Bermeosolo (2019) refers concerning metacognition, this is, the awareness or knowledge of one's own thinking and how one learns: *"las personas dan cuenta de comportamientos meta-cognitivos cuando hacen algo para ayudarse a aprender y recordar (metamemoria, en un uso más restringido). Tales comportamientos incluyen también conciencia de las propias*

limitaciones y la capacidad de planificar para aprender mejor” (p. 245), which refers to meta-writing, to be defined by Jiménez et al. (2018) as *“el proceso por el cual el escritor es consciente de qué escribe y cómo escribe; y sabe remediar fallas utilizando estrategias metacognitivas”* (p.307).

In the same line of thinking, Swartz (2018) considers that the term metacognition causes a certain apprehension to those who believe it promotes a technical, complicated procedure that, in their feeling, cannot help to clarify writing. He explains this is not necessarily accurate, and suggests to refer to this topic as a prompting on how to think about thinking, focusing more on the meaning than on the term itself.

In this sense, it is clarified that more than a term, the indispensable is to achieve awareness on how it is thought. Consequently, written composition demands reflection in order to stop to think about what, for what, why and how the construction of the text is carried out, which facilitates to appreciate the process of text elaboration and to converse whether what was made achieved good results or whether any difficulties were found in the construction of the text. As Otin (2018) expresses *“la escritura transforma al lenguaje en un objeto sobre el que reflexionar y hablar”* (p. 49).

Written production and thinking development

The outlook onto written composition as an opportunity to strengthen thinking and conversely thinking as an element to be able to organize and rethink over written production, requires to conceive it as an object of knowledge on which to reflect in two sides. On one side, clarifying how thinking intervenes in written production and, on the other, to understand how writing drags out thinking processes, so that we may uphold an interrelation that is doubly enriched.

In this respect, we may start from the foundations provide by Vygotsky (1985), quoted by Serrano (2014), who expresses that *“el lenguaje y el pensamiento se encuentran completamente entrelazados en la vida humana, forman, junto con la atención y la memoria lógica, un sistema de relaciones interfuncionales que caracterizan a la conciencia humana”* (p. 100). In this course of ideas, he affirms that the mastery of language modifies the forms of mind operation, as far as the language emerges from the combination of pre-verbal and pre-intellectual thinking. Hence the significance of understanding the complexity of written composition when declaring that it is permeated by socio-cultural aspects and provides a vital space to the cognitive process, as conveyed by Núñez and Reyes (2016) *“actualmente, se concibe a la producción escrita como una actividad de construcción de significados que se estructura alrededor de un proceso cognitivo y que debe responder a condicionamientos de diversa índole”* (p. 51).

From the metacognitive view of text production, Gutiérrez and Díez (2017) propose that *“la escritura requiere la intervención de procesos cognitivos de alto nivel como son: planificación, producción y revisión, regulados por otros de carácter metacognitivo que se ponen en práctica para elaborar la producción de un texto”* (p. 44). These authors highlight the cognitive operations put to work when the writing act is on, since text construction is dependent on these, so it is important to stop at this point to watch what these operations are.

Planning is an organizing process, referred to the prior design done by the writer on what the writer intends to mean in the text and how to express it. This part of the process concerns the selection of a topic to generate the ideas that will later become the contents of the text. Besides, planning allows to think over possible ways of text

organization, so it is fundamental to recollect the previous experiences upon reading or writing other texts. Consequently, it is expected to record in writing what the text producer has devised. So a text is in elaboration intending to keep up relationship with the plan, attending to *“los propósitos y el contenido del texto, la construcción morfosintáctica, la ejecución gráfica de las letras, y la adecuación ortográfica [...]”* (Gutiérrez & Díez 2017, p. 44). In this elaboration process, review is a permanent task that allows to appreciate and reconstruct text composition.

It is reasonable to recognize that written production is not given as a lineal process, but conversely has the possibility to be modified according to the particularities and the reflective process the writer is achieving. Therefore, Camps (2017) indicates that the operations implied in writing are not carried out as a succession of stages, but allows reversibility to manage sub-processes and the involved operations, so the writers review and have greater control over what they are writing, according to the purposes they intend (p. 4).

Other perspectives on the relationship between written composition and thinking have been studied from psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology, where significant contributions are achieved extending the outlook onto the writing process; highlight the role of memory in metacognitive functions. To this respect, Tolchinsky (2015) mentions the diverse proposed models formulated

[...] desde la psicología cognitiva para dar cuenta de la relación entre los procesos mentales que el escritor moviliza durante la construcción de un texto y las características del texto resultante coinciden en que la composición escrita se nutre de estos dos tipos de representaciones o conocimiento, el conocimiento del contenido y el lingüístico (léxico, sintáctico y retórico), que requieren de memoria a largo plazo y memoria de trabajo para obtenerlos y gestionarlos. (p. 136)

from this perspective, you may state that cognitive processes are reinforced from written production from the very first school grades, the text producer may increase the capacity to recognize that this construction derives from a process of detachment from the text, it means, there is a distance between text and producer and it allows a new agent/reader may read and understand differently, and this helps to identify the importance of reflecting before and during the text production process. Si the text becomes a useful double-sided learning tool, both for the writer and the one who feeds on reading.

Conclusions

Based on the setting developed here, it is pointed out that written production is a chance to consolidate thinking. Therefore, approaching written composition as a process or permanent construction and reflection is an experience that presupposes coming about solving problems by the text producer, who looks for solution alternatives by him/herself or with others.

This discussion allows to explain that in the construction process it is important to highlight the situation where text production is proposed to facilitate expression forms. According to Tomasello (2019) *“el pensamiento ocurre cuando un organismo intenta, en una ocasión particular, resolver un problema y, para alcanzar su meta, no actúa*

manifiestamente, sino imaginando qué ocurriría si ensayara diferentes acciones en una situación” (p. 29).

This way, it is confirmed that accessing written production and promoting text production situations brings about significant cognitive corollaries in text production because the constructions emerging in the process imply putting thinking to motion which in turn allows writing organization.

Derived from the foregoing considerations, it is worth pointing out that the written production is one of the best opportunities to strengthen thinking, while it is necessary to observe that writing puts at stake many cognitive elements, such as perception, attention, memory, thinking skill and metacognitive strategies, where the conjunction of these elements on the thinking itself and on written production could be thought of as mutual complements.

However, it cannot be ignored that written production, despite requiring an internal process, is not an individual act; it is built from literacy experiences, in the encounter with others.. So, collaborative work enriches text construction and helps to perceive the social value of being a text producer, evidencing that writing occurs in multiple communicative purposes. Therefore, the preparation of written texts cannot be detached from social practices, individual motivations and interests, to achieve thus greater fascination and autonomy among text authors, when realizing that writing invites to imagine, to get in relationship with an ‘other’ that I meaningful and operated from intertextuality.

Finally, the foregoing considerations might guide the organization of better pedagogical practices. It is a discussion that helps to provide support to relevant proposals that are contextualized, respectful to difference and encompassing a comprehensive view regarding the fact that textual production involves multiple components that convey the complexity of the constructive process.

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