

What happens when I write? Pupils' writing about writing

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Abstract This article presents pupils' awareness of writing as elicited through a metawriting task, in other words a task in which pupils from the third, fourth and sixth forms (grades) were required to write about writing. The analysis of the texts revealed the pupils' increasing ability to write texts focusing on writing and on the subject's relationship to writing. There are significant differences concerning the number of processes mobilised by the pupils to describe the writing process and the operations that take place within it. The increase in awareness is particularly salient in the case of planning during pre-writing. The pupils from the sixth form also mobilise a significantly higher number of processes concerned with the components of textualising (translating) and revising. The results for awareness of text and of reader do not present significant differences or any gradual increase. On the textual dimension, attention is given predominantly to the formal aspects of the texts, especially in the lower forms, while the emergence of other factors, such as genre, is still limited. As for the reader, this aspect of awareness receives the lowest number of associated processes when pupils write about their writing. The results revealed the dimensions and factors to which pupils in different school forms have conscious access when reflecting on their writing. The outcomes support the strategy of using metawriting as consciousness raising tool to increase pupils' writing skills.

Keywords Writing · Writing development · Metacognition · Language awareness · Metalinguistic consciousness

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Introduction

We use language to represent and communicate knowledge, to influence others' actions and decisions, etc. The knowledge content that language conveys can be anything, including language itself. In everyday life, people refer to language and make comments about it in many situations. At school, pupils learn about language as a subject, on two main dimensions: learning and improving their linguistic skills (listening, talking, reading and writing), and learning grammar, which allows them to describe and to refer to language elements in a technical way.

Everyday discourse about language is not analytical or descriptive, *id est*, it tends to be grammatical discourse to only a rather limited extent, if any. It emerges in association with examples of language use and it is full of emotion. At school, the formal discourse that accompanies the process of learning linguistic skills comes predominantly from teachers, through the instructions they give and their assessment of pupils' performance. Pupils' formal discourse about language is subordinate to the discourse of their teachers, mainly consisting of answers to the latter's questions. It is usually rather superficial as to level of description, since pupils have only limited capacity to perform deeper linguistic or discursive analysis. However, inside the classroom, alongside their answers to direct questions from teachers about language, pupils also produce an accompanying discourse that arises during the process of learning linguistic skills and contents, namely reading, writing, and grammar. This discourse reveals pupils' difficulties, attempts and achievements in a personal, and often emotional, way.

In this paper, we intend to answer the following guiding questions: Can this discourse be given a more central place in the process of learning language skills? What does it reveal about the concepts, skills and difficulties of pupils in relation to writing and the writing process? We may consider the possibility of including this kind of discourse within the range of strategies founded in metacognition (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Brown, Armbruster, & Baker, 1986; Dinsmore, Alexander, & Loughlin, 2008; Flavell, 1976; 1979; Kaplan, 2008; Kulikowich, Mason, & Brown, 2008; Lacon de De Lucia & Ortega de Hocevar, 2008; Mason & Shiner, 2008; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). In Flavell's (1976) words, "metacognition refers to one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes or anything related to them" (p. 232). Metacognitive approaches have distinguished two salient dimensions of knowledge: declarative knowledge about knowing, in general or concerning a particular field (e.g., reading or writing), and procedural/control knowledge, *id est*, the knowledge that makes it possible to put into practice and control a particular skill (Baggetun & Wasson, 2006; Gombert, 1993; Kulikowich et al., 2008).

Ruttle (2004) emphasizes the contribution of interaction and shared discourse to children's development of metacognition: "Children's developing metacognition is expressed through a metalanguage, which is itself developed through shared constructions of meaning developed through classroom discussions and reflections" (p. 72).

In addition to being associated with metacognition, this kind of discourse has been attributed an important role in learning about writing, with regard to the conference method (Ewert, 2009; Graves, 1983; 1984; Koustoli, 2005; Sperling, 1994;

Thompson, 2009) and to collaborative writing (Barbeiro, 2003; Peterson, 2003; Lowry, Curtis, & Lowry, 2004; Wolfe, 2005; Milian, 2005; Vass, Littleton, Miell, & Jones, 2008). Another dimension concerns verbalization about language, as an aspect of the subject's relationship to knowledge and specifically to writing and written language (Barré-de-Miniac, 2000; Morin, 2005). These will now be briefly dealt with in turn.

Through writing conferences, pupils produce discourse about writing. This discourse can refer to any of the elements involved in writing: content, language, text structure, purpose, reader, writer's intentions, graphic dimension, etc. Besides giving assistance in writing the text, the writing conference also helps the pupils to produce discourse about writing. This discourse strongly depends on the interaction with the teacher, being linked to the communicative situation in which it occurs, where the pupil, the teacher, and the text are co-present. It is not yet an autonomous and complete discourse produced by the pupil. However, due to its dyadic nature, as a dialogue between the teacher and the pupil, a writing conference can assist pupils in mobilising the concepts and the words that are required to produce a discourse about writing and about the written texts that they have produced.

A writing conference is a way of getting the teacher to cooperate on writing a text. Collaboration for writing is not limited to the teacher, however. Pupils can also cooperate with each other in several ways and at different stages of the writing process (Barbeiro, 2003; Lowry et al., 2004; Wolfe, 2005). Peer review is perhaps the most common type of collaborative writing activity among pupils: When the first draft is complete, pupils exchange their texts and each makes a revision of the other's text. They are asked to correct errors but also to give the author the result of their judgement as readers and suggestions for how the text could be improved. Among the benefits of peer reviewing, researchers have found that this strategy increases pupils' awareness of audience and develop learners' analytical and critical reading and writing skills (Cho, Schunn, & Charney, 2006; Storch, 2005). When presenting their corrections, comments and suggestions to the text author, the pupils need to produce discourse about writing and the written text they revised.

In another kind of collaborative activity, pupils cooperate during the entire process. Each participant or co-author is called upon to present proposals, to explain them and to negotiate them with others. In this process of negotiation, they construct a discourse of argumentation about language correctness and about the textual adequacy of various suggestions. The metalinguistic and metadiscursive dimensions emerge in the pupils' oral exchanges, running through the different decisions that the participants make during the process of producing a specific text (Barbeiro, 1999; 2003; Camps, Guasch, Milian, & Ribas, 2000; Jones, 2003; Lowry et al., 2004; Madigan, 2007; Romeo, 2008; Storch, 2005).

In both cases (writing conferences and collaborative writing), the discourse about language and writing is conveyed through the oral mode. There is a face-to-face conversation with the teacher or with colleagues about the (portion of) text that is being constructed or has been constructed.

The subject's relationship to writing comprises different dimensions: the subjects' investment in writing, their opinions and attitudes towards writing, their conceptions about writing and learning to write, and their ways of verbalising about

writing (Barré-de-Miniac, 2000; Cardoso, 2009; Graham, Berninger, & Fan, 2007; Madigan, 2007; McCarthy & García, 2005; Romeo, 2008). We can gain access to these dimensions by directly observing subjects' behaviour in situations where the relationship to writing emerges, but also by examining the subject's discourse itself. The latter option focuses precisely on the subjects' ability to produce discourse about writing and acts of writing. The individuals (the pupils) can talk and write about writing, about their perceptions relating to the learning-to-write process, and the procedures they adopt while performing writing tasks.

The interaction that characterises the face-to-face conversations can expose the pupils to metalinguistic discourse, adjusting it to the particular situation and the specific referents that the interlocutor has access to. The writing mode has its own potential: It brings to bear a higher level of autonomous thought and discourse, confronting the pupils with the demands of meaning construction, and it gives the pupils the time to reflect upon language in order to construct the meaning they want to express.

There is a particular constellation in which students express their positions through the writing mode: metawriting, which can be defined as "writing about writing" (Joyce, 2002, p. 24). When using writing instead of talking to express their thoughts about writing, pupils activate the resources and requisites of writing as a mode of representing and communicating knowledge. Compared with the oral mode, namely face-to-face conversation, written discourse is usually presented as more organized and reflected. It does not depend on direct and simultaneous interaction with others. The authors must produce a written text that will be presented later, as a product, to a reader. It will exist in the reading situation autonomously, that is, by itself, with the purpose of conveying the writer's ideas, who will not be present in order to clarify these to the reader.

Joyce (2002) adopts a metawriting strategy to get college students to overcome the grammatical and mechanical problems arising in their compositions. According to his proposal, the teacher selects one error that recurs frequently in the student's work and then instructs the student to write a one-page essay comparing and contrasting three sources that provide guidance on the established use of the convention transgressed by the selected error (Joyce, 2002, p. 24). As this Joyce (2002) says, the intention is that the student should dig "as deep as necessary into the topic to come away with a thorough understanding of not only how the usage works, but also why, and even consider the current debate that may surround that particular usage" (p. 24). By reading about the error, by mobilising and contrasting different sources as part of the process of generating content and, above all, by writing a new text about it, the students become increasingly aware of the specific problem.

The scope of metawriting can be enlarged to other dimensions of learning to write. It can be used to elicit pupils' thoughts about writing experiences; or it can reveal the personal relationship they establish with writing and specific writing tasks. Pupils' writing about writing and writing tasks, as a specific textual genre, can be a means to develop their consciousness about the processes and the operations they carry out when performing writing tasks. Metawriting can also increase pupils' awareness of the features of the texts they produce and about the events and functions that mark texts' lives in a particular situation or activity. Furthermore, if

pupils have access to other pupils' positions about writing, they can acquire awareness of some aspects that are also present in their own writing, having found them explicitly revealed in the texts of their companions/classmates. Consciousness may be awakened through the words of others. Similarly, they can discover different ways to perform writing tasks after having found these described in the words of their peers. The potential of such descriptions or discourse about writing issues does not arise only from the fact that they are made explicit. Indeed, much of this potential derives from the observation that metawriting tasks confront pupils with the problem of thinking and constructing written discourse about writing.

As for the teacher's point of view, metawriting tasks can reveal their pupils' level of consciousness about writing on several dimensions. They can shed light on the domains that pupils focus on when considering writing, the problems they face, and the strategies and operations they carry out. They can also reveal the feelings they experience during the writing process or, afterwards, when the written product is fulfilling its function. They can also give access to how pupils represent themselves as writers and to their expectations concerning writing or a particular written product, etc. Teaching writing implies not only teaching the mechanical and conventional requisites of texts but also giving pupils the opportunity to construct a personal relationship to writing involving all these aspects. The teacher can gain knowledge about these from the metadiscursive productions of the pupils he or she teaches. In order to analyse and categorise the pupils' discourse about writing, it is important to establish some points of reference which will make it possible to situate his or her pupils with regard to their relationship to writing.

There are particular questions that arise when pupils' metadiscursive competence about writing is investigated: Which are the domains that become salient in pupils' representation of writing? Which are the components or operations of the writing process that pupils explicitly consider when describing it? How does their ability to write about writing develop from the first form (grade) on?

The answers to these questions can help teachers frame the role of metawriting as a tool with which to develop their pupils' abilities as writers.

Data and analysis

In this article, we present the results of an analysis of a corpus of texts produced in a metawriting activity by pupils in basic education (primary, ages 6 to 10, and post-primary, 11 to 15, in the Portuguese school system).

Task

As part of a continuous training programme for primary teachers (PNEP—Portuguese National Program for Language Learning), the participant teachers developed a suggested activity for their pupils in which the pupils should reflect and then write a text about “what happens when I write”. The activity included several recommendations. First, the teacher should present an introduction to the task, in

order to focus the pupils' reflection on their own writing process. The teachers were instructed to be very open-minded about the hypotheses the pupils might present at this stage in order to centre the task. The guidelines for this phase included the following statement focused on the writing process: "When you write several things happen. Have you ever thought about all those things that happen when you write? What do you do? What happens before you start writing, while you are writing and after you have written?" In addition to the operations performed during the writing process, the statement also focused on the pupils' relationship to writing, the emotional dimension accompanying that process and the general level of the relationship: "How do you feel? Do you like writing? Why?" After this introduction, the pupils were to produce their text (a first draft) in response to the task.

Subsequently the activity should develop in two further phases: The pupils should exchange with the class the ideas they have put on paper and, at the end, they should rewrite their text, changing it, if they wanted to, and producing a clean copy.

Corpus and participants

The teachers implemented the task with students from the third and fourth forms. This made it possible to characterise metascriptural or metawriting competence at the end of Portuguese primary school (the first 4 years of schooling, forming the first cycle of basic education) but also to get a sense of evolution through comparison of the third and fourth forms. We then extended the comparison to the next cycle, including pupils from the sixth form in the study.

As we said above, the task included two moments of text production: the initial and the final versions. We only included those students who completed both productions in the study. In this article, however, the analysis will consider only the productions corresponding to the first version, the final version or the comparison between versions being left out of consideration.

The corpus under analysis includes 294 texts (110 produced by fourth-form pupils, 96 by third-form pupils, and 88 by sixth-form pupils). A 154 of the authors were girls, the remaining 140 boys.

The data were collected in state schools from the region of Leiria, a central region of Portugal that combines features of semi-urban and rural communities. In this region the majority of the jobs, *id est*, the jobs of the pupils' parents, are provided by a large number of small enterprises (in the commercial and industrial sectors), which are complemented by agricultural activity, and in the small towns by the administrative and service sectors. In total, the pupils came from sixteen schools; four of these are located in towns, and twelve in the surrounding villages. The large number of schools covered makes it possible for the study to reflect the variety of situations that we can expect to find in the region. The socio-economic status of the population is predominantly middle to lower class: The majority are workers in the small factories of the region or in civil construction who frequently also carry out some agricultural activity, followed by commercial workers and public servants (in health, education, and administration).

The main feature of the reading instruction provided to these pupils is the prominence of the handbook as the guide to reading activities. The handbooks provide exercises and small texts for the initial stages of reading instruction, which are seldom linked to the pupils' lives, and texts for higher grades, which are predominantly narratives, in many cases extracted from books of traditional and children's literature. Another prominent form of initial reading instruction is guided by exercises taken from schoolbooks. On the basis of these exercises, teachers implement activities for the recognition of letters and letter sequences at the word level (analysis) as well as activities of combining letters and letter sequences, namely syllables, to form words (synthesis). In spite of the guidance given by these handbooks for analysis and synthesis activities, there is no systematic approach based on a phonological perspective. As for more extensive reading activities, there has been an increase in book reading at school as a result of the official PNL programme (Programa Nacional de Leitura/National Reading Programme), which has made possible the acquisition of a larger number of books that have been put at the disposal of students in school classrooms and libraries.

As for writing activities, at the beginning of the continuous training programme, the predominant approach is a traditional one: The writing activities and assessment are focussed on the product, with the pupils individually writing their texts and delivering them to the teacher, who in turn returns them with corrections and an accompanying grade. When the data collection took place, the process components of planning and revision were still rarely implemented in a systematic way. This was one of the main achievements of the programme with regard to teacher activity. The other was the involvement of writing activities in the pupils' projects and the experiences that arose in the classroom or in the community which could make writing significant for children. As a result it became much more usual for there to be collaborative work during writing or diffusion of pupils' texts to other readers than the teacher, for example by making the texts available in exhibitions open to the school and the community and by publishing them on weblogs). However, when the corpus collection took place, this phase had not yet been reached. Consequently we do not expect any of this to emerge in the analysis; instead we consider that the results characterise the starting point of the programme.

With regard to school achievement, we retained in our sample, when collecting the texts, the full diversity of levels present in classrooms with the exception of cases of severe difficulty, corresponding to those pupils who are unable to construct a text autonomously (these cases would correspond to Level 1 of the ascending scale between 1 and 5, the scale in use in the Portuguese school system in primary schools). The corpus includes texts from pupils with school grades from Levels 2 to 5. We collected the grades (levels) that teachers had awarded to the pupils at the end of the second term for Portuguese language. In total, there are 13 cases (4.4%) at grade 2; 125 (42.5%) at grade 3; 101 (34.4%) at grade 4 and 55 (18.7%) at grade 5. The four different grades are present in all the forms included in the research and they have the same ordinal positions: The middle grade 3 is the most frequent, followed by grades 4, 5, and finally grade 2. Obviously, grades only rank the pupils inside a specific class or form (abstracting from the differences between teachers, when they are acting as evaluators). However, the range of grades alerts us to the

variety of school achievement profiles covered by the study, which reflects the general picture inside classrooms.

Text genre

The text genre adopted in the task presents some specific features that we must consider in order to grasp its role in this study and its potential for the learning process. First, let us recall that the main inductor used to give rise to the texts was “What happens when I write?” Consequently, this text genre implies operations of reflection and generalization over multiple experiences of writing. It is not a narrative of the specific writing process for a particular text. The pupils must activate the most salient features of writing tasks and the most common behaviours and feelings they experience during these tasks. However, particular experiences are not necessarily dismissed: These can be invoked to illustrate the general statements or can be used to state the specific requirements of particular writing tasks. The genre includes these two movements: from particular to general and from general features to particular requirements.

The school does not only teach the genres of the outside community. The school also needs to create its own text genres. The genre adopted in this study can be classified as a school genre. It makes explicit pupils’ consciousness about writing and writing tasks taken as objects of knowledge. It makes it possible to take the knowledge that the pupils express in their texts as a basis for exchanging ideas and concepts with the teacher and the class. In this way, pupils can confront their ideas, strategies, and feelings related to writing with the ideas, strategies and feelings of others, and eventually discover other dimensions or ways of performing writing tasks.

This genre is not limited to school life, however. It also links up with identity genres, namely those genres that express a personal relationship with a field of knowledge or domain of life. The two dimensions of learning and identity are associated. Personal identity is more solid if we find a rich process of possibilities and choices in it. One of the aims of the study is also to contribute to delimiting this genre and its potential as a learning tool and concomitantly as a tool for pupils to construct their identity as writers.

As for the dimensions distinguished by Barré-de-Miniac (2000), this text genre primarily relates to verbalisation modes about writing procedures. However, the other dimensions (investment in writing, opinions and attitudes, and conceptions) are not discarded and can emerge in pupils’ texts.

Analysis

We analysed the corpus of texts collected with regard to different dimensions: the length of the texts, which may be seen as a measure of the writers’ ability to produce discourse about writing; and the processes mobilised in the texts, which express the pupils’ representation of writing, that is to say the different dimensions and components of writing, in their discourse about writing.

To measure text length, we considered the number of words. We adopted a purely graphic criterion, by observing the visual unit of the word as it appears on the written page.

However, the central unit of the analysis was not the word, but the clause, which according to the SFL approach is the basic representation of processes, with their participants and circumstances. We therefore segmented the texts into their clauses, in order to capture the processes present in the pupils' texts. The number of elements inside the clause, and other syntactic units such as the T-unit (Hunt, 1965; 1970), can vary. Text length can result from the accumulation of syntactic units (clauses, T-units) with highly different quantities of elements and syntactic complexity (Beers & Nagy, 2009). Our analysis therefore included the ratios of words to clauses and clauses to T-units.

In the next step of the analysis, we assigned each of the processes to different dimensions of writing—the writing process, the writer, the text, and the reader—by establishing which of these elements each clause's process referred to. The identification of these four elements, except for the separation between the writer and the writing process, was inspired by Hyland (2002), who organizes the various approaches to teaching and researching writing according to their focus on the writer, the text or the reader. He includes the writing process in the writer-oriented approach. Of course, the dimension corresponding to the writing process strongly implies the writer. However, we have chosen to separate out these two dimensions: For us, the writing process includes the actions and operations that take place during the different phases of writing (prewriting, writing post-writing), while the writer dimension covers subjective aspects, such as reasons, attitudes, likes and dislikes, behaviour, level of knowledge, etc.

On the text dimension, we considered formal elements and meaning, but also structure and genre. As for the reader dimension, we included those processes referring to text delivery to a reader (the teacher or others) and to text reception, id est, to what happens or should happen when the text reaches the reader. Since there were different groups of pupils (third, fourth, and sixth forms) involved, we submitted the results for each indicator to a statistical analysis of variance (one-way) in order to establish significant differences between the groups.

Results and discussion

The quantitative results relating to text length and number of processes will be presented first (Table 1). Then we will present the assignment of the processes to the writing dimensions (Table 2). We will combine the quantitative salience of occurrences with a presentation of the pupils' points of view about the issues under focus.

Average text length increases from the third to the sixth form. ANOVA (one-way) reveals a statistically significant difference ($F = 96.422$, $p = .000$). Multiple comparisons (with the Scheffé test) reveal significant mean differences between all the groups.

Table 1 Text length (no. of words), processes (clauses) and T-units

Form	<i>n</i>	Words <i>M</i>	SD	Processes <i>M</i>	SD	T-units <i>M</i>	SD
3rd	96	62.7	29.1	16.2	6.2	8.3	2.8
4th	110	91.0	37.7	22.4	8.5	11.0	3.7
6th	88	133.1	36.0	34.6	9.7	15.1	4.3

The number of processes is also a reflection of text length. This, too, presents a gradual increase ($F = 119.293$, $p = .000$, with significant contrasts between the three groups). The same happens with T-units ($F = 79.397$, $p = .000$). When we consider the ratio of words to clauses or the ratio of clauses to T-units we also find a significant gradual increase for these indicators of syntactic complexity and, simultaneously, a growth in the number of information elements included in these syntactic units (clauses and T-units). The ratio of words to clauses increases moderately (from 7.6 in the third form, and 8.5 in the fourth form, to 9.0 in the sixth form); this is statistically significant ($F = 7.345$, $p = .001$). The ratio of clauses to T-units also shows a moderate increase (from 2.0 in the third form, to 2.1 in the fourth and 2.3 in the sixth form). This contrast is significant with respect to the differences between the sixth form and the two other levels.

In sum, these results show that, from the third to the sixth form, pupils develop an increasing ability to produce longer texts and consequently to mobilise more and more processes and elements when they write about writing.

We must now look inside their texts in order to grasp the dimensions that come out in their representation of writing. Table 2 presents the distribution of the processes with regard to the various dimensions of writing.

With regard to the writing phases, 46.7% of the total number of clauses locate the corresponding processes at a certain phase of the writing process, while 53.3% adopt a global approach (not included in Table 2). The distribution of processes is: Prewriting = 1,186 (16.8%); Writing: = 1,232 (17.4%); Post-writing = 638 (13.7%). Table 2 presents the distribution of the results for each form.

The statistical analysis shows significant differences between the groups on the writing process dimension (Prewriting: $F = 98.650$, $p = .000$; Writing: $F = 24.422$, $p = .000$; Post-writing: $F = 9.133$, $p = .000$). The differences between the means of the third and sixth forms are in each case significant.

Prewriting is the phase with the greatest increase in the mean of associated processes. It goes from 1.5 to 3.3 (for the third and fourth forms, respectively) and rises to a mean value of 7.7 in the case of the sixth form. All these differences between groups are significant. Consequently, along with scholastic progress, the pupils show an increasing capacity to consider, and to include in their metawriting texts, the activities related to prewriting and the planning activities associated with it.

Writing phase and textualising (translating) activities also present a gradual increase, ranging from 2.6 (third form) to 6.6 (sixth form). The mean for the third form is closer to that of the fourth form (3.7), and the contrast between these two groups does not reach significance level. The writing phase and the textualising activities are complex components, which do not reduce to mechanically writing

Table 2 Processes associated with the various dimensions of writing

	Form					
	3rd (<i>n</i> = 96)		4th (<i>n</i> = 110)		6th (<i>n</i> = 88)	
	Sum	<i>M</i>	Sum	<i>M</i>	Sum	<i>M</i>
Writing process						
Prewriting-planning activities						
Generating	122	1.3	251	2.3	420	4.8
Organizing content	4	0	23	0.2	104	1.2
Preparing material	4	0	20	0.2	10	0.1
Drafting	–	–	6	0	6	0.1
Choosing	–	–	–	–	12	0.1
Controlling	9	0.1	9	0.1	23	0.3
Organizing task	3	0	22	0.2	42	0.5
Relation	–	–	31	0.3	65	0.7
Total of prewriting	142	1.5	362	3.3	682	7.8
Writing-translating activities						
Transcribing	40	0.4	97	2.3	124	4.8
Controlling	76	0.8	139	1.3	70	0.8
Correcting	17	0.2	4	0	–	–
Generating	3	0	57	0.5	118	1.3
Verifying	8	0.1	4	0	26	0.3
Evaluating	23	0.2	2	0	14	0.2
Collaborating	3	0	1	0	–	–
Reformulating	2	0	1	0	25	0.3
Organizing task	13	0.1	15	0.1	26	0.3
Organizing content	–	–	2	0	7	0.1
Using reference mat.	–	–	7	0.1	–	–
Choosing	–	–	3	0	–	–
Preparing material	–	–	1	0	13	0.1
Relation	69	0.7	67	0.6	155	1.8
Total of translating	254	2.6	400	3.7	578	6.6
Post-writing-revising and editing activities						
Verifying	62	0.6	171	1.5	240	2.7
Evaluating	24	0.3	8	0	48	0.5
Correcting	13	0.1	15	0.1	18	0.2
Generating	–	–	5	0	14	0.1
Reception	11	0.1	12	0.1	13	0.1
Reformulating	10	0.1	6	0	22	0.3
Copying	8	4	4	0	10	0.1
Illustrating	–	–	8	0.1	4	0
Organizing task	7	0.1	14	0.1	18	0.2
Collaborating	–	–	5	0	–	–
Relation	56	0.6	59	0.5	83	0.9

Table 2 continued

	Form					
	3rd (<i>n</i> = 96)		4th (<i>n</i> = 110)		6th (<i>n</i> = 88)	
	Sum	<i>M</i>	Sum	<i>M</i>	Sum	<i>M</i>
Total of revising	192	2	307	2.8	470	5.3
Writer						
Relationship with writing						
Sentiments	266	2.6	409	3.4	458	5.1
Like	128	1.3	263	2.4	231	2.6
Dislike	24	0.3	25	0.2	60	0.7
Behaviour	70	0.7	105	0.9	70	0.7
Object	37	0.4	51	0.5	150	1.7
Learning	31	0.3	59	0.5	65	0.7
Expression	–	–	8	0.1	89	1.0
Appreciation	11	0.1	18	0.2	15	0.2
Attitude	5	0.1	6	0	19	0.2
Frequency	–	–	–	–	5	0.1
Projecting the future	–	–	26	0.2	–	–
Total of writer	572	6.0	970	8.8	1,162	1.2
Text						
Formal elements						
Orthography	144	1.5	181	1.6	43	0.5
Calligraphy	62	0.6	28	0.3	20	0.2
Punctuation	36	0.4	47	0.4	18	0.2
Paragraph	–	–	9	0.1	10	0.1
Word order	–	–	9	0.1	–	–
Meaning						
Sentence meaning	10	0.1	16	0.1	4	0
Global meaning	2	0	9	0.3	4	0.2
Structure	–	–	16	0.1	7	0.1
Genre	8	0.1	57	0.5	43	0.5
Generic requirements	–	–	14	0.1	19	0.2
Total of text	260	2.7	386	3.5	168	1.9
Reader						
Delivery	8	0.1	1	0	1	–
Reception	30	0.3	31	0.3	45	0.5
Total of reader	38	0.4	32	0.3	46	0.5

down the results of the pupils' thinking. Pupils from the sixth form display a significant increase in the number of processes associated with these components.

In the case of post-writing, the number of processes is lower for all the groups in comparison with the other phases. However, we again observe a gradual increase

(ranging from 2.0, for the third form to 5.3, for the sixth form). As in the writing phase, the contrast between the third and fourth forms is not significant, with only the contrasts involving the sixth form reaching significance level.

The subjective dimension of the pupils' relationship with writing is present in their metawriting texts: Considering all the forms together, it emerges in 38% of the processes, with a gradual increase (ranging from 6.0 and 8.8 to 13.2, for the third, fourth and sixth forms, respectively). Statistical analysis reveals significant differences ($F = 36.720$, $p = .000$) among the three groups. The increasing number of processes associated with this dimension shows that it is possible to see the progression in school and writing development reflected in correspondingly more complex discourse concerning the pupils' relationship with writing.

Unlike the previous dimensions, the text dimension, which concerns the text as a linguistic product, does not present increasing presence across the groups. This is mainly due to the high frequency of form-oriented elements in the texts from the third and fourth forms. There are still significant contrasts ($F = 7.571$, $p = .001$), between the means of the fourth and sixth forms, but the global values of the sixth form for this dimension are the lowest (1.9). The main decrease between these two groups occurs in the domain of orthography. While the third and fourth forms have similar means (1.5 and 1.6, respectively), the occurrence of processes associated with this domain is strongly reduced in the case of the sixth form (0.5).

Finally, the reader dimension presents the smallest number of processes in the pupils' metawriting texts. The means are very low (with a maximum of only 0.5) and there are no significant contrasts between the groups ($F = .850$, $p = .428$). The reader is an extremely relevant factor in the process of decision-making that takes place during writing. Consequently, the results present a challenge to increase pupils' awareness of the reader in order to make their writing more reader-oriented.

In the next sections, we will take a deeper look inside the pupils' metawriting texts in order to capture the most salient domains and elements in their awareness of the four dimensions, namely the writing process, the reader, the text, and the reader.

The writing process dimension

The writing phases and components

The results for the three writing phases show that the pupils' increasing ability to produce longer texts about their writing shows up in their capacity to write about the specific moments of the writing process. Global statements about writing are not abandoned, continuing to be relevant and frequent in pupils' discourse, but are accompanied to an increasing extent by an ability to focus on particular aspects. This progression is particularly evident in the case of prewriting activities, whose presence increases across the groups, from the third to the sixth forms.

Prewriting, writing, and post-writing are temporal boxes that pupils fill with operations and activities when writing. What is the composition of the activities that the results reveal for each of these moments?

Table 2 includes the activities that are assigned in the pupils' texts to each phase. In each, there are some activities that predominate. This is the case of planning activities, such as generating and organizing content in prewriting, translating, and controlling during writing, and verifying in post-writing. Generating and verifying, which are operations predominantly associated with planning and revising, respectively, are also referred to in association with translating activities.

Besides referring to the activities included in the different writing phases, a salient number of pupils also express the relationship they establish with the specific tasks performed in each phase. Statements of this kind are more frequent in the case of writing/translating activities and in the texts of the sixth-form pupils. In contrast, they were not found in relation to prewriting/planning activities in the texts from the third form.

The recursive nature of the writing process

We have just referred to the fact that pupils associate generating and revising with the writing phase, too, besides their predominant association of those activities with prewriting (planning) and post-writing (revising). In the case of generating, some pupils from the fourth and sixth forms also refer to this activity in association with post-writing (see Table 2, above). These occurrences, although not very frequent, are evidence for the recursive nature of the writing process.

The sub-processes of generating and verifying accompany the activity of giving rise to the text on the page. Alongside its presence during the prewriting activities of planning, generating continues to be required in order to deal with the challenge of shaping text at the point of utterance (Britton, 1978; Mayer, 1999), id est, the writers face the challenge of continuing the text until it reaches its end. Indeed, the reference to content generation during writing phase does not mean that the pupils, in referring to it at that moment, are not also considering it in association with planning. Some pupils simply state the occurrence of this sub-process during the text-writing phase (1), others link it to the continuity of what has already been written (2), and still others express an awareness that the generating process does not end during the prewriting activity of planning (3):

(1) ... during text writing I think about what I will write [*durante o texto penso no que vou escrever*] (Pupil 101, fourth form);

... the ideas appear as I am writing [*as ideias vão surgindo à medida que escrevo*] (Pup. 106, sixth form);

... as I write a lot of ideas appear in my mind, it seems that there are always more ideas reaching my mind [*enquanto escrevo montes de ideias surgem, parece que há ainda mais ideias a chegarem ao meu pensamento.*] (Pup. 164, sixth form);

... as I write, I remember more ideas that didn't occur to me at first [*enquanto escrevo, vou-me lembrando de mais ideias que não me tinham surgido ao princípio*] (Pup. 175, sixth form);

(2) ... when I am writing I think about what I will write later [*quando estou a escrever penso no que hei-de escrever a seguir*] (Pup. 086, fourth form);

... when I am writing I think about the story, and I am always thinking about what comes next [*quando estou a escrever penso na história e estou sempre a pensar no que vem a seguir.*] (Pup. 187, sixth form);

(3) ... and I make up the rest of the story as the time goes on [*e vou inventando o resto da história ao longo do tempo*] (Pup. 022, fourth form);

... I think about the characters, what they do, where they live, what they eat, then I write, but of course I add some other things [*penso nas personagens, o que fazem, onde vivem, o que comem, depois escrevo mas é claro que acrescento mais coisas.*] (Pup. 080, fourth form);

... and I check if I can add other things [*e vou vendo se posso acrescentar mais coisas*] (Pup. 114, fourth form);

... then I try to have more ideas [*depois tento ter mais ideias*] (Pup. 118, fourth form).

The generating process that takes place in association with writing does not necessarily stop when the text reaches what was intended to be the last line, as these students remark:

(4) ... After writing, sometimes I think about other ideas just coming up that would also be excellent ideas to put in the text, but at this point I don't put them in the text [*Depois de escrever ponho-me a pensar que teria também uma ideia acabada de surgir excelente, mas não emendo!*] (Pup. 163, sixth form);

... when I have finished writing (at the end) I do the correction and still continue the story in my head [*quando já acabei de escrever (no fim) eu corrijo e continuo a história na minha cabeça*] (Pup. 199, sixth form).

In the case of the verifying process, the writers need to pay attention to the correctness of what they put on the page. In pupils' texts, sometimes this is expressed in terms of checking what is being written, and sometimes it is expressed in terms of verifying the successive words or sentences that have just been written. The operation of verifying what has already been written is not deferred until the whole text is complete. It accompanies the process of translating and composing. Sometimes, the writers pause in order to read and verify the correctness of what they have just written, as some pupils say:

(5) ... and I must read from time to time to see if I have to improve anything [*e tenho de ir lendo de vez em quando para ver se tenho de melhorar algumas coisas.*] (Pup. 005, third form);

... while I write I reread what I have written previously [*enquanto escrevo releio o que escrevi atrás*] (Pup. 200, 6th form);

Verifying can imply correcting some words or reformulating particular passages. Sometimes, this process goes beyond verifying the correctness of particular text passages during the writing phase and mobilises a more general evaluation of the text already written. Consequently, in pupils' texts, alongside verifying, we also find reference to the operations of reformulating, correcting, and evaluating prior to the final revision.

The writer dimension

The writer dimension includes the subjective aspects that mark the pupils' relationship with writing. What are the main aspects that the pupils consider on this dimension? Table 2 includes the frequency of the most salient aspects that mark the pupils' relationship with writing.

The sentiments experienced by pupils during writing become salient in the texts. Positive feelings (feeling good, well, happy, inspired ...) are mentioned, as are less positive ones, such as being nervous, which occurs at the different moments of the writing process.

The majority of the clauses referring to likes or dislikes correspond to the aspects that the pupils say they like, such as writing in general (largely the most frequent), or specific aspects such as particular genres (stories), writing tools (pen, pencil, computer), or writing situations (writing alone). The dislikes also refer predominantly to writing in general.

In their texts, many pupils reveal an awareness of the writing constraints that relate to behavioural matters. To paraphrase these, they say that while writing they are or should be attentive and concentrated and not talk with classmates.

Reference to writing as an object of thought is a discourse device frequently used to introduce the text by answering the question presented in the assignments (Have you ever thought about all those things that happen when you write?). The answers correspond both to affirmative ("I have already thought...") and negative ones ("I have never thought... until now").

In the pupils' discourse, writing is often associated with learning. It is part of the learning process at school and it is also a learning tool, oriented in first place to writing improvement itself (as a means to overcome pupils' errors and difficulties), to word learning (as a means to learn new words) and also to such general processes as thinking and reasoning.

Finally, we should mention the increasing occurrence of "writing as expression" revealed in the data. This concept does not occur in the texts of the third form, has limited occurrence in the fourth form and then in the sixth form shows up as a very useful concept for pupils to express their relationship with writing. It allows pupils to express thoughts and ideas, feelings and emotions. It makes it possible to open one's heart.

The text dimension

The dimension that concerns text shows up in pupils' texts mainly in their concern with respecting the linguistic system of rules and in reference to the features of different text genres. Their concern with linguistic surface elements emerges in association with the operations of checking and verifying language correctness. Table 2 includes the number of clauses assigned to each domain of correctness. Overall, there is a progressive decrease from the third to the sixth forms in the number of clauses associated with surface correctness. Orthography emerges as the major domain of concern. Most of the references to the text itself concerned only its

surface appearance (orthography, calligraphy, and punctuation). There were also some reference to word order and sentence meaning.

In addition to surface elements relating to form and meaning, the text as a global unit also imposes constraints on structure and content. The references to the constraints of text structure emphasise the macro-categories of introduction, development and conclusion, or the beginning, the middle and the end of the text or, in a still more general way, only refer to the need to think about or to pay attention to text structure. Although not very frequent, this kind of statement appears in some texts from the fourth and sixth forms.

The text must have a global meaning, in other words, it must be internally coherent and purposeful, in order to be a communicative unit. Some pupils specifically state that they must check if their text makes sense. However, their discourse does not make explicit the criteria that they apply to check consistency. The pupils have difficulties in explaining the conditions for text comprehension. This is consistent with the perspective presented in Beal (1996), who concludes that primary school pupils have difficulty in projecting the implications for the reader of what is expressed in their texts. They are guided by the meaning they attribute to their own texts, which is supported by their status and knowledge as authors. They do not abstract from this status and knowledge to see the implications for the reader of what is literally stated in the text and of what should be included in order to promote text comprehension.

The story is the text genre to which many pupils have recourse in their texts about writing, since for them writing is mainly writing stories. However, some pupils mention a variety of genres (stories, compositions, letters, postcards...), and some of them show awareness that different kinds of genres impose different text constraints:

(6) ... It all depends on the type of text that I am asked to do. If it is about a landscape, first I imagine and then I describe what I have imagined. [*Tudo o que acontece depende do tipo de texto que me pedem para fazer. Se for com paisagem, começo por imaginar e descrevo o que imagino.*] (Pup. 180, sixth form).

The story itself has many subgenres (fiction, real, adventure, legend, romance, horror ...) and each of them shapes the content and the text patterns that the pupils must activate.

(7) ... When I write comedy stories, I think that I must make something funny. When I write love stories, I think I must include romance. [*Quando escrevo histórias de comédia, tenho que pensar que tenho de fazer rir. Quando escrevo histórias de amor, tenho que pensar que tenho que lá ter romantismo*] (Pup. 024, fourth form).

The reader dimension

Unlike face-to-face conversation, writing does not require the presence of the text's intended addressee. However, the reader is implied in written communication as the

receiver to whom the text will be delivered and as the individual that will have the task of reading and comprehending the text. From another point of view, the reader is the individual that may or may not like the writers' text. Moreover, in the school context, the teacher as a reader has the power of assessing the pupils' work.

Concern about the reader's reception of their writing is present in the texts of pupils from all the forms, although they are few in number and no increase is found across the groups. On the other hand, formal constraints (namely calligraphy) emerge as requisites whose purpose it is to make reading and reader comprehension possible. Besides calligraphy, another aspect that is mentioned as requiring a check of comprehensibility is the order of the words/elements. The completeness of the text is also mentioned, but from the reader-teacher's perspective, that is, some pupils reported the need to verify whether all the elements of the task given by the teacher are present in their texts.

The concern about the reader's understanding may be translated into a revision strategy. This concern, emerging during the writing process, is referred to by a sixth-form student in the following words:

(8) ... I write a text with other people in mind. Sometimes when I write a text I ask myself "Will other people be able to read it?". [*Eu faço um texto a pensar nos outros. As vezes quando faço um texto faço essa pergunta para mim próprio "Será que os outros conseguem ler?"*] (Pup. 174, sixth form).

The question emerges ("Will other people be able to read it?"), but the criteria that would favor reading/comprehension by the reader and that should guide the revision operation are not made explicit. These limitations on the part of primary school pupils, in addition to conforming to the view of Beal (1996) referred to above, also support the position of Kellog (2008). This author, in his model of macro-stages in the cognitive development of writing skill, argues that it takes many years of practice (over two decades) to achieve the stage corresponding to knowledge-crafting. According to the model, only at this stage the writer is able to combine in working memory the representations of the three components of writing, the author, the text and the reader ("... the writer is able to hold in mind the author's ideas, the words of the text itself, and the imagined reader's interpretation of the text", p. 5). Raising the awareness of the audience presents a challenge for students and should lead us to search for strategies that enhance the representation of the reader during writing. Kellog (2008) claims that one way to free short-term working memory to deal with higher-order processes is to reduce the load on it. In relation to content, this can be achieved when pupils write about topics they know well. This strategic approach "provides a scaffold to support the writers to allow them to devote a higher degree of executive attention to the juggling of planning, generating, and reviewing" (p. 15), and eventually to activate the reader's representation. Dray, Selman, and Schultz, (2009) argue that, as with language skills, awareness of audience, in the broader context of social awareness, should be part of developing skills in writing learning. Similarly to what Kellog (2008) refers to as the content domain, writing for real audiences that pupils know well and about problems they experience in their own lives allows them to activate a reader representation that will enable them to take account of the characteristics of this

reader during writing. According to the perspective of this text, we might add that this strategy will also allow students to make explicit, through talking or writing about writing, the choices that they made with regard to the prospective reader.

Besides comprehension, reader reception includes other dimensions, namely like or dislike. During writing or before delivering the text to the reader, the writers are uncertain about their readers' reactions, mainly whether they will like their text or not. They hope they will.

The readers that the pupils mention in their texts vary between the teachers and an indefinite reader. The first is largely predominant in the third form. The teacher is definitely viewed as the reader of the texts that the pupils write and the reader whose opinion, evaluation and liking is relevant. This is congruent with the occurrence of some mentions, mainly in the case of the third form, of the act of handing in the text to the class teacher. The teacher is still referred to as the texts' reader in a great proportion of the fourth-form texts. However, there is an increasing number of occurrences in which the reader corresponds to an indefinite or vague entity ("the person", "the people", "somebody"). In the texts from the sixth form it is this indefinite reference to the reader as a vague and imprecise entity that predominates.

Conclusion

Not only can pupils talk about writing, in conference with teachers or in collaborative writing, but they can also write about writing. They can do so early in the process of learning to write, as our results confirm. The four dimensions that we have considered in the analysis (writing process, writer, text, and reader) show up in the texts that they produced in response to the metawriting task examined in this study.

The pupils from the third form were able to include in their texts reference to various operations they carry out and to the feelings they experience during writing. In most cases, they already express a position about writing, concerning their likes and dislikes. The formal requirements of written language are salient in their texts, reflecting their specific concerns about orthography and calligraphy. As for the reader dimension, the texts from the third form reveal that for them writing is almost exclusively teacher-oriented.

These dimensions and aspects remain present in the texts of the pupils from the fourth and sixth forms. However, these pupils produced significantly longer texts about writing. This quantitative difference reflects the mobilisation of a greater number of processes that describe what happens during writing, in each of its phases, revealing a higher level of awareness within this group of the operations involved in the text construction process. There is also a gradually widening span of aspects focused on by the pupils, extending to genre on the text dimension and to the field of self-expression with regard to the subject's relationship to writing. Finally, another type of process concerns the presentation of the diversity and variety associated with the different writing genres and situations. Making explicit this variety reveals the pupils' awareness of the features of each genre and the constraints of each writing situation.

The results reveal that this metawriting task can capture pupils' consciousness about writing. Furthermore, the differences between subjects from the same form, and the differences between the forms, point to the action that the teacher can adopt in order to increase pupils' awareness of the operations that can take place during writing, consciously exploring these operations as part of the activities of learning to write. They also draw attention to the potential of making the dimensions of their relationship with writing explicit (as happened in this writing task) and discussing these with pupils.

The challenge is to deepen awareness beyond such rather inexplicit descriptions as "First, I think, then I write, and finally I correct my text". Through discursive interaction but also through writing activities, the teacher can explore the iceberg that hides under each of these words and the multiple and complex relationships among them. In gaining even deeper metalinguistic and metadiscursive consciousness, the pupils discover the various factors that influence their choices during writing. These factors can come from different domains: those related to the writer, to the process of text production, to the text requirements, or to the reader. The pupils must deal with all these fields in order to develop their writing. The teaching of writing must give pupils the opportunity to discover the role of all these factors in writing.

Metawriting makes this meta-dimension salient. As a teaching strategy, we can see it as a way to solve the gap between writer, process, text, and contextual approaches. All the fields we have mentioned are present in the metalinguistic awareness that is revealed by metawriting or writing about writing. During the writing process, pupils activate criteria and arguments in order to make decisions about what they are going to write or about what to revise in their texts. These criteria and arguments come from text genres, but also from process conditions (time and resources available to perform the writing task) and from considering the intended reader.

The meta-dimension is the third dimension of writing, the one that allows pupils to make decisions and choices while writing. It acts during the writing process, but if adequate solutions are to be achieved, it must be fed by knowledge about text (genres) and knowledge about context. Metadiscursive strategies can elicit pupils' knowledge about these factors, and metawriting, specifically, is a powerful way of taking a snapshot of pupils' conceptions about writing.

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