

The Historic Evolution of Centres of Academic Writing

La evolución histórica de los Centros de Escritura Académica

DOI: 10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2017-378-359

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Abstract

The centres of academic writing which appeared in the English speaking world have become an example for universities all over the world. The main objective of these centres was to resolve deficiencies students found in their writing. Since the seventies academic writing achieved a new epistemic sense and started to be considered as the basis for the construction and transfer of knowledge. At that time, educational policies allowed academic writing a privileged place in the reforms, especially linked to a competencies model. The aim of this article is to describe the pedagogical evolution of academic writing centres and the programmes that were implemented. The focus will be on the two most successful programmes: Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in the Disciplines. The methodology used for this research is historical-descriptive. The results show that writing centres and programmes implement systems that foster the learning of writing and also provide necessary feedback resources to the students for their own writing work on various curriculum disciplines. In the Spanish sphere, the initiatives carried out in order to mitigate the writing difficulties of university students are just one-off, designed only with a remedial nature. It would be opportune for Spanish universities to reconsider the epistemic value of writing and the possibility of establishing centres of academic writing or implementing some institutional programmes to improve writing in the academic context.

Keywords: writing academic centers; Writing across the curriculum; writing across the curriculum; writing strategies, university.

Resumen

Los centros de escritura académica que aparecieron en el ámbito anglosajón, han sido un ejemplo que se ha transferido a universidades de todo el mundo. Dichos centros se crearon con el objetivo de “reparar” las carencias en la escritura que manifestaban los estudiantes. A partir de los años setenta la escritura académica adquirió un sentido epistémico y pasó a considerarse como la base para la construcción y difusión de conocimiento. En ese momento, la política educativa le concedió un lugar prioritario en las reformas, especialmente vinculado a un modelo de competencias. El objetivo del presente artículo es describir la evolución pedagógica de los centros de escritura académica, así como los programas que se llevaron a cabo. En particular este texto incide en dos de los que más han destacado, como son la Escritura a través del Currículum y Escritura en las Disciplinas. La metodología que guía esta investigación es la histórica-descriptiva. Los resultados muestran que los centros y programas de escritura implementan sistemas que tienen como objetivo promover el aprendizaje de la escritura y las habilidades necesarias para que el alumno sea capaz de retroalimentar el trabajo en las distintas disciplinas. En el contexto español, las iniciativas orientadas a atender las dificultades de escritura de los estudiantes universitarios son puntuales, con carácter remedial. Se considera pertinente, por tal motivo, que la universidad española, así como su profesorado, reconsidere el valor epistémico de la escritura, y la posibilidad de crear un centro de escritura académica o de implantar algunos programas institucionalizados para la mejora de la escritura en el contexto académico.

Palabras clave: centro de escritura académica, escritura a través del currículum, escritura en las disciplinas; estrategias de escritura; universidad.

Introduction

Although the importance of academic writing is well known for learning and creating new ways of thinking, neither universities nor lecturers have assumed responsibility for this (Álvarez and Yániz, 2015; Carlino, 2003; Castelló, 2014; Harper and Vered, 2017; Núñez, 2013a; Peña, 2008; Serrano, 2011; Vázquez, 2005). Academic writing has been considered as something that should have been learned at previous educational levels (Vázquez, 2005). Such poor institutional attention has had the consequence of writing not occupying a relevant place in the university curriculum (Harper and Vered; 2017; Serrano, 2011). We lack experience in centres for academic writing in our country (Núñez, 2013 a), and the

initiatives adopted have had a remedial approach (Castelló, 2014; Núñez, 2013 a). Most of the time, these initiatives have been nothing more than one-off proposals, (Montijano and Barrios, 2016; Vázquez, 2005) which have not been developed in a continuous or integrated manner in the disciplines. Nevertheless, the subject has received a different consideration in other parts of the world, existing great differences depending on the country. The United Kingdom and The United States have promoted several trends of study in writing at university (Álvarez and Yániz, 2015; Castelló, 2014; Castelló and Mateos, 2015; Molina-Natera, 2012; Serrano, 2011) and launched the first institutional programmes of academic writing (Núñez, 2013b). Later, others such as Canada, Australia and a few Latin-American countries followed this example (Carlino, 2003, 2004 and 2005).

The centres of academic writing from Great Britain and The United States have adopted a variety of forms. As they grew in both quantity and quality, the terminology to define them evolved from 'laboratory' to 'clinic' and finally to 'centre' (Waller, 2002). This evolution was also reflected in the teaching methods (Boquet, 1999; Carino, 1995; Harris, 1990; Waller, 2002). It has become clear that the first methods of work in those laboratorios somehow shaped today's centres of writing (Waller, 2002). The variety of terms and teaching styles has made it difficult to establish the origin of the centres of writing to an specific date (Carino, 1995). It has also made the task of compiling information relatively easy since the seventies. However, little has been written about these centres before that time, therefore making the recovery of data more complicated, (Boquet, 1999) with the information found to be inaccurate.

Despite difficulties, the development and progress of the centres has been significant. Over little more than a decade hundreds of centres of writing have been established (Harris, 1990). This new institutional framework allowed a definitive boost to the programmes of academic literacy in universities . Finally, the increase in the number of centres has occurred at the same time as the acknowledgment of their key value in the development of programmes of writing. Nowadays, many of these institutions are responsible for launching projects such as "Writing Across the Curriculum" (WAC) and "Writing In the Disciplines" (WID) (Carlino, 2002). This article offers an historical revision on how academic literacy has been approached over history in the centres of academic writing.

The centre of academic writing

One of the most relevant definitions of the centres of writing is that provided by Stephen North (1984), who describes them as a space that writers use to talk about writing. This definition implies putting people, student writers first, offering a clue to where the attention and process of transformation lies. Moreover, we can sense a dialogic and interactional aspect. Writing, seen as a social process (Cassany, 2016; Molina-Natera, 2012; Peña, 2008), enables the exchange of ideas and bestows the possibility of 'talking' and communicating. It is also interesting the observation of North, (1984) when he dates the origin of academic writing centres far beyond the seventies, despite the fact that most of the investigation about these centres focus on that time.

The seed of current organisations, according to North (1984), dates back to Ancient Athens. Socrates, in the city market, used to offer free continuous dialectics to visitors, pursuing their learning. The philosopher tried to generate a change in the person through interaction and union of different points of view. This example illustrates how, in the same way as Socrates sought to achieve learning and intellectual change in the visitor, the centres of academic writing try to do the same for their students through a social and collaborative process of writing.

Waller (2002) provides another parallelism when she establishes a direct relationship between the literary societies of the XVIII century and the centres of writing of the XX century. The author suggests that various characteristics of those societies are reflected in the definitions of the centres of writing. Both of them criticise the emphasis that universities place on intellectual and learning by memory, relegating to a second place debate and discussion. Both in XVIII century literary societies and in XX century writing centres, students move to the foreground and work collaboratively with their colleagues and teachers.

Since the ideas of North (1984) and Waller (2002) on the centres of writing and their origin, it becomes evident an important antagonism between them and present day educational institutions. As opposed to the focus on words and to hierarchical order of the latter, the centres of writing promote democratic learning and teaching, focusing on the student. Whilst universities place the emphasis on merely learning by memory, with exams, essays and taking notes, (Guzmán and García, 2014) the centres place the value on experience, activity and reason in

order to form knowledge. To sum up, a new concept of learning takes places in centres of writing. Work revolves around the student (Cooper, 1994; Grimm, 1996; North, 1984) and the process, more than on the result or the product. (North, 1984).

When students enter the world of university they face the serious problem of academic writing (Núñez, 2013b).

This is a subject for which they have not been prepared in previous educational stages (Vázquez, 2005), nor they will be at university (Peña, 2008). The centres of academic writing try to provide an answer offering a different assistance for alumni (post-graduates and under-graduates), lecturers and faculties through different programmes (Carlino, 2002; North, 1984; Núñez, 2013 b). Among the great variety of services offered we can find tutorials, workshops, libraries, assessment of writing, telephone help lines, writing competitions, internships for tutors, conferences, seminars, programmes of writing, etc. (Carlino, 2002).

With regard to the purpose of the centres of academic writing, it should be highlighted that the objective is not only to assist students with specific tasks, but help them to become efficient writers (Cooper, 1994; Waller, 2002). On this topic, North observes that “in a centre of writing the objective is to ensure that the writers, and not necessarily their texts, are the ones who change through instruction” (1984, p.438). In order to achieve this, they work towards two different but complementary goals. On one side, to enable students to discover how to write in a more productive and efficient way, on the other side, to fulfil the specific intellectual and rhetorical requirements for each discipline. The student may draw on the centres of writing and receive support at any time in the process (Carlino, 2002), obtaining help and assessment at the beginning of the essay, after presenting a draft, after receiving feedback from a teacher who has advised a revision of the work, in order to correct and edit completed essays, etc. Tutors co-operate with writing students, adapting to their needs and worries, helping them to discover and explore their own ideas. (Cooper, 1994; Waller, 2002).

The Evolution of the centres of academic writing

Carino states that “the centres, in their origin, were a much more varied and complex phenomenon than what has been depicted in the discourse

on them” (1995, p.104). Despite the fact that many centres have become consolidated, this has not been the general trend in their evolution (Waller, 2002). Even if one does not consider ancient history as suggested by North (1984), but more recently, centres of writing appear in the 1920’s in the form of laboratories, with a restorative (Boquet, 1999) and assisting function. The term ‘laboratory’, undoubtedly, refers to the scientific and experimental aspects of writing. Therefore, work was orientated towards those students who should improve their basic writing skills through mechanical and repetitive exercises in order to correct those deficiencies. Tasks focused on perfecting the formal aspect of writing, revolving around method and instruction. In this way, the writing laboratories started to take on what professors did not want to do, the grammar (Boquet, 1999), turning then the laboratory into a negative concept (Waller, 2002). Only struggling students or those with difficulties were attended to (Grimm, 1996; Waller, 2002), which could be seen as a punishment by the students.

As time passed, a change took place, shifting the emphasis from an assisting function to a more palliative and remedial one (Waller, 2002). Several historical events promoted this transformation. Amongst them could be highlighted the economic recession of 1930, which caused as a consequence a great influx of new students to the educational institutions. Later, the influence of psychology and medicine on education shifted the term ‘laboratory’ to ‘clinic’ (Waller, 2002), accentuating the psychological aspects of writing. Afterwards, during World War II, the goal was to educate British Army agents in a short period of time (Carino, 1995; Waller, 2002). Once the war finished, a great number of veterans attended the centres (Bazerman et al., 2005; Boquet, 1999; Waller, 2002). Finally, the civil movement should be highlighted, which influenced educational policies between the last part of the 60’s and the beginning of the 70’s. The crisis in literacy added to this (Russell, 1994; Waller, 2002).

During the last decades of the twentieth century important processes of democratisation developed, which ended dictatorships in different parts of the world. Education was not excluded from these changes. Demonstrations took place which demanded a more open, participative approach to higher education (Carrillo, 2015). Specifically in the United States, such democratising policies led to students from underprivileged backgrounds entering university for the first time (Bazerman *et al.*, 2005; Waller, 2002). A great number of alumni who had not received an

adequate basic preparation entered university along with students from disadvantaged areas, war veterans and athletes (Bazerman and Russell, 1994; Waller, 2002). Facing this new wave of students from minorities, universities struggled with difficulties which they hoped to overcome thanks to the work of the centres of writing. In this way, these students found the opportunity to correct their poor educational background (Grimm, 1996; Núñez, 2013b).

An important educational crisis broke out in the United States in 1970 due to the low levels of literacy of the population (Russell, 1994). The National Commission for Excellency on Education collected alarming data about illiteracy amongst adults in their report of 1983, '*A Nation at Risk*' (Berglund, 2002). An educational reform of great scope was urgently required. In this context, literacy became the key objective (Lankshea and Knobel, 2008). During the decade of 1970 to 1980 a high number of centres of academic writing were created (Núñez, 2013b). It is for this reason that many publications and pieces of research consider this the period during which centres of writing became more profesional (Waller, 2002). At this time a definitive leap in terminology occurred, the beginning of the use of the word "centre" (Waller, 2002). From this moment to the present day this is the denomination used.

Current development and situation of the Centres of Academic Writing

Since the 70's the growth of centres of academic writing has been remarkable (Núñez, 2013b). With the objective of remedying the general dissatisfaction regarding the teaching of Reading and writing, institutions with different methodologies and spaces were created (Waller, 2002). This quick boom meant that, very often, the organisation of the centres was slightly chaotic at the beginning. During the first decade of expansión, the centres had a massive amount of students but, at the same time, extremely low investment and defficient training of teachers (Waller, 2002). Writing laboratories focused on instruction and method. Later, they started to have their own space, now placing the emphasis on the development of competencies and encouraging students to write about their own interests, in a collaborative and social way. "Students moved away from listening to their tutors to talking about writing to créate their own pieces" (Boquet, 1999, p.467).

A decade later after the first centres appeared and given their quick expansion, the International Association of Centres of Writing was created. A great number of national and international associations who support and spread the work of the centres of writing belong to it (Núñez, 2013b). The association promotes the development of directors, lecturers and staff of the centres by organising meetings, publications and different professional activities. The publications with greatest international impact are 'The Writing Centre Journal', with articles on research and theoretical questions, and the bulletin 'Writing Lab Newsletter', which collects articles on practical experiences, information and revision of materials.

Nowadays, the centres of academic writing attempt to move away from the original remedial approach (Carlino, 2005; Grimm, 1996), therefore many of them put into practice comprehensive institutional programmes to develop writing in all areas and academic disciplines, not only in specific areas of language and humanities (Waller, 2002). The most frequent models used for such programmes are, on the one hand, those developed through the curriculum (Writing Across the Curriculum –WAC) and, on the other, those which work in the disciplines (Writing In the Disciplines- WID). The priority of the centres of academic writing is to be considered as spaces in which all the members of the educational community, not just students, find a place to reflect (Waller, 2002).

However, in spite of the satisfactory progress that the centres of writing have enjoyed in the English speaking world and more recently in Latin-American countries, this has not been the norm in our country (Castelló, 2014; Núñez, 2013 a). The few universities that have their own centres are The Autonomous University of Madrid, The University of Alcalá, The University of Cádiz, The University of Navarra and Pompeu-Fabra University.

The Centre of Writing of The Autonomous University of Madrid provides face to face tutorials, online linguistic services for queries, workshops and other resources. These services are offered to undergraduate and post-graduate students. The School of Writing of the University of Alcalá offers support, resources, workshops and courses in writing. The Centre of Writing of the University of Cádiz describes itself as a complementary and efficient learning space for the development of writing, offered to students who struggle with this subject (students who speak Spanish as a second language and those with hearing difficulties), which also co-operates and supports the activities organised by the university that contribute to the development of writing abilities. It is

particularly interesting the Centre of Writing of The University of Navarra. This centre, integrated within the university, offers tutoring and advice, seminars, specific training and writing resources and diagnostic tests. In the case of the tutoring, they offer two differentiated modules in order to give a specific service: Tutoring for the transition stage (first year of university) and tutoring for undergraduate students. Finally, we come to the Centre of Redaction of Pompeu Fabra University. It is worth highlighting that this centre, as opposed to the previous ones, does not have a face-to-face service for the students. It is set up as a virtual centre that offers various virtual programmes such as writing techniques, text modules, assessment tests and resources.

Apart from these exceptions and despite the existence of abundant investigation in the area, the incursion into this field has been rather timid. Núñez (2013a) carried out an extensive comparative analysis of academic literacy in the area of Latin America, noting that Spanish universities offer one-off programmes and workshops in the subject of academic writing, but not integrated in the disciplines, with the remedial approach dominating. Montijano and Barrios (2016) arrived at similar conclusions. They affirm that although these workshops offer useful knowledge on bibliographic searches and rules for quotes, students do not fully develop their written abilities because of the occasional nature of the activities. Evidently, the objectives of these programmes are necessary for the training of alumni, but it is true that the methods do not invite reflection. Likewise, the lack of systematization does not allow effective results (Montijano and Barrios, 2016).

Conversely, the centres of writing, with programmes focused on creating better writers and consequently better thinkers, concentrate on the person and the process, on the student who writes and knows through writing (Boquet, 1999). These programmes teach alumni new forms of writing, exploring new ideas, searching, selecting, analysing and critically appraising the information, as well as moving between different types of texts (Peña, 2008). Another aspect that should be highlighted of the centres of writing is their flexibility, as can be seen during their evolution. Therefore, they have become even more necessary in current society, between the Digital Era and the imminent Fourth Industrial Revolution. Due to fast technologic advances, the ways of reading and writing have changed drastically (Geisler *et al.*, 2001; Peña, 2008), and along with that, or as a consequence, the ways of knowing,

understanding and appraising reality. Definitely, the way of thinking is changing. Digital culture demands radical changes with respect to the culture of the printed word (Peña, 2008). This does not mean that the former has surpassed the latter but that different educational strategies will be required as different mental processes and abilities are implied, in accordance with the new contexts. The centres of academic writing can face this new reality.

The programmes of academic writing: Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing In the Disciplines

The two movements linked to the Centres of Academic Writing are “Writing Across the Curriculum” and “Writing In the Disciplines” (WAC and WID) (Carlino, 2002). Both programmes can be integrated in different ways and assume diverse structures according to the specific needs, situations, objectives and characteristic context of each institution. Hence, we can find among others ‘writing tutors’, ‘writing partners’ and ‘subjects on intensive writing’ (Carlino, 2004, 2005). Independently of the adopted model and format, what is certain for all programmes is that alumni, professors and faculties must be involved (McLeod, 1987). Despite their diverse origins, nowadays the centres of writing have evolved into the neuralgic centre of these programmes (Bazerman *et al.*, 2005), ‘senior partners’ (Molina-Natera, 2012, p.100), bringing advice, training and support to the whole university community.

The beginning of the movement “Writing Across the Curriculum” (WAC) is usually cited to have been in the United Kingdom, in the mid-sixties, as an answer to the crisis of literacy (Marinkovich and Morán, 1998). Russell (1994) names James Britton as its predecessor, as he promoted in the United Kingdom the trend of debating in the classroom and learning focused on the student, through group dialogue, expressive writing and co-operation between teacher and student. These ideas did not take long to reach the United States, especially because of the need to work on writing in all subjects, not only in English (Molina-Natera, 2012). In this way, they travelled to the North American world a decade later, losing their original essence (Marinkovich and Morán, 1998; Russell, 1994) but expanding with such an ímpetus that they currently exist in most of the universities of the United States.

The programme Writing Across the Curriculum takes on the idea that writing is essential for the intellectual development of students (Harper and Vered, 2017), as well as to increase their knowledge (Carlino, 2004). Its main thesis is the concept of a process of teaching and learning that gives the student an active role (McLeod, 1992). Another premise is that students can develop their writing in all disciplines during their entire academic career (Carlino, 2004), not just through isolated programmes (Harper and Vered, 2017). However, diverse areas of study require diverse ways of writing, and what is more, it can be found that when a student writes about a subject they commit more to it (Carlino, 2005). For this reason, although the programme “Writing Across the Curriculum” (WAC) included since its origin “Writing In the Disciplines” (WID), their methods separated in the nineties (Russell, 2002). This division supposed two different paths, not exclusive but complementary (McLeod, 1987), “learning to write *in* the ways the disciplines do (what we call WID) and learning to write *about* the subjects which study the disciplines (what was called WAC)” (Russell, 2002, p.310).

The programme ‘Writing In the Disciplines’ considers that every discipline has its own notions and practices (Bazerman *et al.*, 2005). Gottschalk states that “a programme of writing must work for, with and in the interest of all disciplines, the place in which language is integrated”(1997, p. 23). This model of programme focuses on the act of writing inside each area by the specialist professors of the subject. According to this view, it is not adequate that a specific course of writing prepares students to write appropriately on all subjects. Therefore, the movement “Writing In the Disciplines” co-operates in this task attempting to immerse the students in the specific academic discourse that each discipline demands (Bazerman *et al.*, 2005). This is what McLeod (1992) observed previously in the programmes of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), an epistemic and cognitive perspective which implies writing to learn, and another rhetoric view which implies learning to write in the particular disciplines.

However, the programmes “Writing Across the Curriculum” and “Writing In the Disciplines” are both transformative (McLeod, 1992) and Foster a renewal of the culture of university. They change the ways of teaching, learning and evaluating. Nevertheless, not only are processes transformed but also people, as these programmes require social writing (McLeod, 1992). Hence, the audience becomes a very appreciated

resource to take into account in the classroom, as it will provide the writer with the feedback they need through the process of writing (Leahy, 1994, cited in Carlino, 2004).

Thanks to the theoretical input of the centres of academic writing and the programmes WAC and WID, a new concept of writing has appeared, not as an individual and intrapersonal process but as a social (Molina-Natera, 2002) and interpersonal practice. The task in these contexts is founded on the concept of learning as a collaborative phenomenon (McLeod, 1992).

The relationship between writing and thought in the programmes of academic writing

Although the phenomenon of academic literacy is in the current times a central element of educational policies, it can be noted that it was not until the 70's that the concept occupied the forefront of people's attention. Nowadays, the competence in written communication has become fundamental in education and takes a role of special relevance due to its communicative, social and epistemic functions (Álvarez and Ramírez, 2006; Carlino, 2002 and 2004; Cassany, 2016; Molina-Natera, 2012; Peña, 2008; Serrano, 2011). The importance of written competence resides primarily in the fact that, along with reading ability, it is considered indispensable for the acquisition of other learning and capabilities. Such abilities are considered crucial to produce and transform knowledge and develop thinking (Carlino, 2004; Peña, 2008). It is here where the centres and programmes have the most potential for action.

Ong describes in detail the relationship between writing and thought. In his own words, "more than any other particular invention, writing has transformed human consciousness" (1982, p.81), becoming "the technology that has moulded and impelled the intellectual activity of modern man" (p.86). Similarly, Lynch (2016) states that this technology constitutes one of the highest achievements in the history of humankind and has meant a new way of accessing knowledge. Finally, Álvarez and Ramírez declare that "written language expands memory and communication" (2006, p.29), and note that the reflective activity that is implied by the training of writing has the purpose of helping students to transform and renew knowledge and not just the mere production and redaction.

The independence of thought and language has had great repercussions in the process of the teaching of written competencies. Though history, the act of writing has revolved around linguistic and grammatical aspects, as can be seen in the first laboratory centres (Boquet, 1999; Waller, 2002), losing in the process the potential for writing as a generator of thought and ideas. However, the experience of the centres of academic writing nowadays, as well as that of the programmes of “Writing Across the Curriculum”(WAC) and “Writing In the Disciplines” (WID), provides a radical transformation in the ways of teaching written competences, even in its definition. The centres and programmes sustain that the act of writing does not only fulfil a communicative function (Carlino, 2004). This means that the written ability is not only seen as a means to transmit ideas, but that a great value is placed on its epistemic potential (Álvarez and Ramírez, 2006; Carlino, 2002 and 2004; Scardamalia and Bereiter, 1985; Serrano, 2011). Writing is a valuable tool to learn, transform and form knowledge, not only to express and demonstrate what the student knows (Peña, 2008). This approach of the centres and programmes on the act of writing tries to establish a method to develop thinking.

The role of tutors and students in the programmes of academic writing

The lecturers, professors and students are the architects of the implantation of the programmes “Writing Across the Curriculum” (WAC) and “Writing In the Disciplines” (WID). Cooper (1994) performs a comprehensive analysis of the functions and role that the tutors and students must assume in the centres of academic writing but, nevertheless, the examples are also applicable to universities that work with the programmes WAC and/or WID and do not have specific centres.

Firstly, the tutor becomes the guide in the long process of teaching that is implied in writing. One of their main goals consists in motivating students, who, at the same time, become active agents (McLeod, 1992) and conscious in their own process of learning. The students learn to assume responsibility for their own decisions, to detect errors and to express themselves coherently. In this process it is essential to take into account the informative needs of the different audiences (Álvarez and Ramírez, 2006; Carlino, 2004), focusing on organisation and meaning in the pieces, not only on the grammar and spelling aspects.

It is necessary to highlight that the tutors, given their role of guidance, cannot modify or correct the essays of the students (Núñez, 2013b; Waller, 2002). Hence, the tutor puts to one side their role in correcting to become a reader who provides feedback to the student (Carlino, 2002 and 2004; McLeod, 1992) by means of dialogue, considering previous knowledge and interests. Through this communicative process, the tutor must be capable of diagnosing problems in writing, checking information, listening to students and offering them the necessary strategies and support, so they can correct and improve their pieces themselves (Carlino, 2002). In this way, students become responsible for their own process of writing.

Nevertheless, whilst theory and practice of writing usually diverge in traditional contexts of learning, theory and practice; they converge in an interdependent relationship in the centres of academic writing and in the programmes “Writing Across the Curriculum” (WAC) and “Writing In the Disciplines” (WID) (McLeod, 1992). The tutor not only teaches to write but also, simultaneously, how to form knowledge. In this approach, the process of writing has more value than the final result. As North states (1984, p.438), “the importance of the centres of writing consists in transforming alumni into better writers, not in producing better texts”. On the other hand, learning to write, as any other learning process, implies the risk of making mistakes. Thereby, the centres of writing are suitable spaces for students to trial, rehearse, experiment and enjoy themselves in a context free from the examining gaze of the experts and to feel they are really supported during the whole process.

Conclusions/Discussion

The centres of academic writing were originally created for remedial purposes. However, their historical evolution has allowed them to distance themselves from that image, occupying nowadays a privileged place in the educational system from which the whole community can benefit. The designations these centres have received are varied and reveal their evolution: laboratory, clinic, and later on, centre (Waller, 2002). Each of these denominations shows the ideas that have prevailed within the concepts of teaching and learning, the roles of instructor and student, the relationship between them, the methods of teaching, and ultimately, the link between the centre of writing itself and the university.

Taking into account that educational institutions have traditionally emphasised the communicative function of writing, relegating to the background the importance of of this competence as an intellectual and learning tool (Peña, 2008), this study gives evidence to the fact that Spanish universities cannot continue ignoring this problem. In this respect, although it is true that there are universities in our country which have their own centres of writing, most of the institutions offer one-off courses and workshops to improve the written competency, as extra-curricular courses. In general, such courses have no connection with the disciplines and mean an extra expenditure for the students who wish to improve their writing, having particularly negative repercussions on those students with limited economic resources.

Also, the incorporation of Spanish universities to the EEES has meant a radical change regarding the rules which regulate official courses, as well as for aspects related to design, development and assessment of the results of students (Montijano and Barrios, 2016). In this sense, García and Guzmán (2016) performed an exhaustive analysis on the need to rethink academic literacy at university to face the new subjects, TFG and TFM. Both of them constitute an instrument to ascertain the results of learning achieved by the student when they complete their university training and which becomes evident through their academic writing.

Certainly, our institutions must invest on quality educational experiences. University must echo the potential that writing production has to develop thinking and better learning. Undoubtedly, returning to the subject of the conceptualisation of academic literacy, writing competences should be conceived as a continual process (Johnson, 2003) which never stops, which needs constant training and perfecting and does not imply an immutable condition which can exist or not (Carlino, 2005). People always have time to improve their own writing. The techniques to carry it out exist, so we should not dismay.

The purpose is not that university trains professional writers, but that it enables students to be capable of generating rigorously scientific knowledge in a particular discipline. In other words, educational institutions must reconceptualise the written competency as a tool to operate with the knowledge (Carlino, 2002). Another necessary change in Spanish institutions is to carry out a major transformation in the assisting and remedial approach of the current courses of writing. Alumni attend when they encounter the problem. However, the interesting thing

would be to have institutional programmes or centres which support the student throughout their university training and even when it is finished.

Likewise, the social component of writing cannot be forgotten (Cassany, 2016). In this sense, the centres of academic writing hold a special importance, as they can provide a long trajectory of critical research and inquiry. These centres have enough capacity to change the traditional view of academic literacy and to show to both alumni and professors how enjoyable writing to know can be, provoking a change in attitude in students and academics.

It is necessary to revise the ideas that university, professors and alumni have about written competency, through centres of writing or by the means of institutional programmes. Writing should be considered a valuable tool to learn and relearn the disciplines. The centres and programmes of writing that are mentioned throughout this article suppose a new way of viewing the role of writing in higher education. Nevertheless, “academic writing does not reside in the classroom of a professor or subject, it transcends them and belongs to a new institutional requirement” (García and Guzmán, 2016, p.36). It is for this reason that, in order to be able to launch and put into practice these programmes, a commitment both personal and of the whole university institution will be necessary.

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