

A LOOK AT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF TESTING: THE CASE OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

Apart from the knowledge in the language and the skills that the writing task requires, students often experience some psychological problems that they have to overcome in order to achieve. This paper focuses on the cognitive and the affective implications of writing tests. The cognitive implications have three dimensions: The reflection process, the production process, and the interpretation process. A failure to cope with these three stages might cause the learner to show difficulty in engaging in the process of writing. The influence of affect on students' performances during writing tests can be seen through the following psychological states: egocentrism (keeping the individual away from a concern about audience), inhibition (causing the writer's memory to be inactive), anxiety (often resulting from the challenge that students have to overcome and the type of task proposed by the tester) and absence of motivation (causing students not to embark on a given task and invest time and energy in it). My suggestion consists essentially in discussing learners' reactions on the psychological explanations of their performances during a suggested task. This might prepare them to minimize the psychological problems referred to earlier.

Key-words: cognitive, affective, psychological, writing, composition, test, process, problems.

INTRODUCTION

English composition tests are among the tasks that most students fear. They involve them in a relatively complex process of creation which requires particular efforts and attention on their part. Apart from the knowledge in the language and the skills that this task requires, students often experience some psychological problems that they have to overcome in order to achieve. In order to provide more insight into the existing problems one needs to answer the following questions: What kinds of psychological problems do students meet before, and during the task of composing? What is the nature of each of them? How does one explain the occurrence of those problems? What can be done to minimize the existence of psychological problems before, during and after the task of composing? How can we best prepare our learners to handle the existing problems while composing? This paper aims to provide a psychological framework that can help to make connections between psychological problems and learners' performances and to make informed decisions about how to minimize the existing difficulties based on a psychological theory. Psychology being a relatively vast field entailing many different things, I have felt the necessity to circumscribe my reflection by focusing on recent developments in cognitive psychology and the affective aspects of learning. The article begins with a discussion of testing as a challenging task. It then studies some psychological problems related to testing English composition. This second section consists of four points: reference to the shift from product to process writing, a word on the cognition/affect debate, and a look at the cognitive and the affective implications of writing tests. The article ends with a suggestion for minimizing the harmful impact of psychological factors on learners' performances during writing tests.

1. TESTING AS A CHALLENGING TASK

According to Lyle F. Bachman (1990:20), '... a test is a measurement instrument designed to elicit a specific sample of an individual's behaviour.' Testing goes hand in hand with teaching. In order to avoid what is referred to as TBT¹, teaching should precede testing. For the specific sample of an individual's behaviour that test try to elicit are dependent on what has been learned during teaching situations. Consequently, it is admitted that the test content and testing techniques should not be at variance with the objectives of the course.

¹ Test Before Teaching

Testing always confronts the individual being tested with a problem-solving task. And it is the individual's ability to overcome the existing obstacles to achieve which provides the tester with information concerning the candidate's performance level. For, the existing obstacles challenge the person being tested. Overcoming a challenge requires effort, endurance and determination without which no real achievement is possible. However, this effort to achieve can be undermined by some psychological problems which prevent the individual from realising his potential. The importance of those psychological problems might vary according to the subject in which the individual is being tested.

2. SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS RELATED TO TESTING ENGLISH COMPOSITION

2.1. WRITING: THE SHIFT FROM THE PRODUCT TO THE PROCESS OF COMPOSING

Traditionally research focused on the end result of composing, that is, the product of writing. By product of writing one must understand an interest in the instances of writing and an analysis of the features of written texts. There has been a shift from this traditional trend to a much more modern view which lays emphasis on the process of writing. The interest of research is now in the learner writer at the detriment of the learner's writing. For Douglas Vipond (1993:9) quoting Susan Miller (1991:115), 'Process theory was important for the self-definition of composition studies because it helped stabilize what was until then a loosely connected set of practices'. Writing about the process of composing Tricia Hedge (1988:9) suggests that '... the most important insight that recent research into writing has given us is that good writers appear to go through certain processes which lead to successful pieces of written work.' She goes on as to suggest that the different stages writers go through range from thinking about what they want to say and who they are writing for, through drafting out sections of the writing, reviewing, revising to editing. Hedge characterises good writers as people who have a sense of purpose, a sense of audience, and a sense of direction in their writing. Good writing is, therefore, writing which conveys ideas clearly and effectively.

According to Hedge, most researchers in the field agree on the idea that writing is a complex process with a number of operations going on simultaneously. Consequently, the task of writing raises many issues two of them I address in the context of this reflection: What

kind of behaviour do writers involve in before and during writing? How do they get going, how do they keep going and what causes the 'blocks' that they experience when trying to write? I feel that the answers to these questions will provide the reader of this paper with more insight into some factors which influence learners during the process of composing.

Obviously the idea of a total commitment of the writer in the process of composing clearly stands out. This commitment entails more interest in issues related to the understanding of the psychological phenomena that are likely to occur before and during the writing task. For, without a clear-cut idea of these phenomena, teachers might not be well-equipped to help their learners to achieve. Moreover, teachers' ability to anticipate psychological problems learners are likely to be confronted with before and during the process of composing increases the chance to train good writers. The relevance of this view calls for a provision of answers to the following questions: How does one raise teachers' awareness of the psychological dimension of testing English composition? What strategies can be used to prepare our learners to cope with the potential psychological problems during English composition tests?

2.2. COGNITION OR AFFECT: DECIDING ON A PSYCHOLOGICAL FOCUS

Humans are generally referred to as thinking and feeling individuals. This explains the dichotomy of cognition and affect. This dichotomy has been at the core of most reflections about human psychology. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century psychological studies set more field to affect. The advent of behaviourism gave a new orientation to these studies with more interest in the cognitive dimension of psychology and a consideration of humans as problem-solvers who go through some thinking processes. Should one separate affect from cognition or should they deserve equal weight while addressing psychological issues? What are the implications of this separation?

Lev Vygotsky quoted by Susan McLeod² considers the separation of affect from cognition as a major weakness of traditional psychology. His position is rooted in the view that it makes the thought process appear as autonomous, segregated from the fullness of life, from the needs and interests of the individual. Vygotsky therefore suggests that cognition be viewed in concert with affect. I totally share this view in so far as putting the affect in the background

² McLEOD, Susan, H. 'Some thoughts about feelings: The affective domain and the writing process' in *College Composition and Communication*, 38 (1987): 426-435.

might deprive developments in the field of an interest in some relevant manifestations of human feelings and their impacts on human behaviour. Moreover, thinking processes that lay at the core cognitive psychology might result from some feelings developed by individuals. Drawing on this position my reflection on the psychological dimension of writing tests will involve both cognitive and affective considerations. I feel that such an approach to the study of psychological phenomena that occur during the administration of writing tests is likely to provide the reader of this paper with the extent to which cognitive and affective elements combine to explain learners' performances.

2.3. THE COGNITIVE IMPLICATIONS OF WRITING TESTS

Cognitive psychology is a branch of psychology investigating the way animals and humans acquire, process and store information. With their concern about the way in which the human mind thinks and learns, cognitive psychologists have had a particular influence on the study of the process of writing. They show interest in the internal processes that the writer goes through with a focus on the way the mind works to process information and in the problem-solving approach based on information-processing. As McLeod³ sustains, Flower and John Hayes provided one of the most (if not the most) influential studies in education and learning. Their ideas, which are widely implemented in process-oriented classrooms, enlighten us on the cognitive difficulties students writers often have. Vipond⁴ rightly goes along with this view when he indicates that 'As writing theorists, researchers, and teachers directed attention to the cognitive processes involved in various phases of writing (prewriting, drafting, revising) and to different levels of social and cognitive development that students bring to writing tasks, they turned to the work of cognitive and developmental psychologists.'

Cognitive models of written composition suggest that any composition task involves the individual's mental structures and representations. Hayes (1996) draws on the Hayes and Flower (1980, 1981) model to suggest a model which consists of three main elements. The reflection process (incorporating the planning process) involves the activity that operates on an internal representation in order to produce another internal representation. This involves information for working out a plan to write the text. At this stage the learner generates ideas, organizes and evaluates them. This dual representation is vital in so far as it determines the learner's ability to pursue the process of composing. For, a learner who is unable to achieve

³ Op.cit.

⁴ Op.cit. (p.9)

this dual representation will not be able to move to the production process (incorporating that of translating). This process starts from the internal representation and produces writing. It involves text production (putting words on paper). The interpretation process (incorporating that of reviewing) generates an internal representation from linguistic entries. At this stage the writer improves what has been written.

With this development the relevance of cognitive psychology for the writing process clearly stands out. Composing is not just writing some symbols on some paper. It entails more. Therefore, a learner who is unable to experience the mental processes involved in the process of writing is likely not to be able to achieve in a composition test. When one considers all these mental processes, one clearly understands that the task of writing stands as a challenge for learners. The degree of seriousness of this challenge varies according to whether learners are being trained or tested. During training sessions opportunity is offered to learners to resort to the teacher or to ask their peers for help. Attention can be given to trainees who meet particular problems at a certain stage of the writing process. The task becomes harder in the context of a test. A failure to clearly understand what is expected from him might cause the learner to show difficulty to engage in the reflection process. No representation can take place when a learner is experiencing an internal struggle trying to have a clear-cut idea of the content of the task. In case the learner meets no real difficulty at the stage of the reflecting process the production process might confront him with the inability to translate his ideas into a written text. This failure might be caused by the fact that the learner is not equipped with the language repertoire needed for the performance of the task. Engaging in the interpretation process might not be possible for a learner who shows serious limitations in the appropriate use of the language. No improvement of a written text is possible unless the writer can realize the existence of deficiencies and find ways for compensation.

As can be seen testing writing confronts learners with a serious challenge. However, the relative clarity with which the problem is stated contrasts with the difficulty to find effective strategies that can help overcome it. Advocating a more flexible approach to testing writing which entails finding ways of helping learners to overcome difficulties at the different stages of the writing process would threaten the essence of the test. Ignoring the existing problems would turn the test into a punishment session depriving learners of the opportunity to achieve and enjoy self-realization. The dilemma caused by this situation provides theorists in the field of testing writing with a framework for constructive developments.

2.4. THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION OF WRITING TESTS

As McLeod⁵ explains, theorists in the field of psychology agree more or less on the existence of non-cognitive aspects of human activity which may be labelled 'affect'. Though they have not come to a clear-cut description of that domain, theorists' use of the word 'affect' includes feelings, attitudes, beliefs, preferences, tastes, emotions, moods, motivation, to name but a few. According to Pierre Daco (1973:452), 'Our affectivity is all our psychic reactions in life. It is therefore a fundamental aspect of human psychology. Affectivity includes our instincts, the tendencies of our unconscious, our thoughts ... It guides our actions. It determines our emotions, our moods, our passions. Affectivity is therefore a vast psychological field, and is then exposed to many troubles. Internal conflicts, complexes, nervosas, psychoses, rejection, are affective reactions.'⁶ The affective domain overshadows most (if not all) human activities. Most reactions (positive or negative) result from affect. Even though teaching and learning are primarily concerned with acquiring knowledge, no educational context can ignore the affective domain. For whenever one tries to do without it, experience teaches us that one cannot but realize its influence on both behaviour and performance.

An individual's performance (poor or good) during a composition test is partly dependent on the affective state in which he finds himself. What affective states are generally observed during composition tests? What causes them? What are the effects of those affective states on learners during the process of writing? What can be done to minimise the occurrence of those affective states during composition tests? These are as many questions to which we need to provide answers in order to enlighten our potential readers on the relevance of our commitment to the study of the place of affective factors during writing tests. Many affective factors influence learners' performances, making it unrealistic to try and cope with them all in the context of this paper. Consequently, I chose to show interests in the ones, I feel, deserve more attention.

⁵ Op.cit.

⁶ « Notre affectivité est l'ensemble de nos réactions psychiques devant la vie. Elle est donc un aspect fondamental de la psychologie humaine. L'affectivité groupe nos instincts, les tendances de notre inconscient, nos pensées ... Elle dirige nos actions. Elle détermine nos émotions, nos humeurs, nos passions. L'affectivité est donc un immense domaine psychologique, et est dès lors sujette à de nombreux troubles. Les conflits intérieurs, les complexes, les névroses, les psychoses, les refoulements, sont des réactions affectives. »

2.4.1. EGOCENTRISM IN WRITING AND THE IGNORANCE OF AUDIENCE

According to Douglas Vipond (1993:10), ‘Piaget’s notions of egocentric and decentred (sociocentric) speech have been especially fertile in composition studies because they can be related to rhetoric’s traditional concern with audience.’ He goes on as to explain that, in Piaget’s terms, writing teachers want their students to be aware of audience. The concept of audience has been addressed by such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle. Despite Plato’s idea that the good rhetorician will suggest the type of speech appropriate to the type of soul, Aristotle’s method of matching type of discourse to type of audience has been by far the most influential throughout the history of rhetoric, including modern composition studies. Fred Pfister and Joanne Petrick (1980:213)⁷ do not depart from Plato and Aristotle when they rightly recommend that writers conduct an audience analysis. They have their students conduct the audience analysis according to four groups of questions:

- What does the audience consist of? (Age, education, class, occupation, value, etc.)
- Audience/subject questions (What does the audience know about the subject? What is its opinion?)
- Audience/writer question (What is my purpose for writing for this particular audience?)
- Audience/form questions (given my purpose, what is the best way to achieve it with this audience?)

Although such writers as Douglas Park 1986)⁸ and Marilyn Cooper (1986)⁹, to name only these two, take a more or less different view objecting that the writer has no clear way to determine the relevance or weight of the information about the audience to the task at hand, the relevance of the idea of audience cannot be denied.

Egocentrism keeps the individual away from such a concern about audience. In ignoring the audience, the individual gives the impression of writing for himself. This, to a certain extent, can be referred to as a ‘written soliloquy’. Egocentrism stands as a psychological problem which explains the failure of some writers to produce a good piece of writing, the one which impresses the reader or the evaluator. In the context of a writing test the grade a testee has for

⁷ ‘A Heuristic Model for Creating a Writer’s Audience’, Cited in Douglass Vipond (Op.cit., PP.18-19)

⁸ Cited in Vipond (Op.cit., P.21)

⁹ Cited in Vipond, P.21.

his performance is generally dependent on the impact of the text produced on the rater. Egocentrism jails the individual's mind while leading him to express some narrowly developed ideas which might not be meaningful to the others. This narrow-mindedness wrongly drowns student writers in the illusion that what they think is what the others cherish. Such a dogmatic view of writing is not likely to help them improve. We need to free our learners' minds so that they can take account of their audience in their writing. With the relevance of this issue and what it entails for the training of potential testees, one cannot but wonder about the task before us.

2.4.2. WHEN INHIBITION IMPEDES PRODUCTION

According to Daco¹⁰, inhibition occurs when the energy needed by someone for the performance of an act is blocked by a psychological brake. The energy required for the activity is imprisoned. The psychological or motor act decreases or stops. The inhibited person shows his inability to overcome his apprehension. Inhibition is not always harmful. Some desires and actions have to be inhibited in order to adapt to a given situation. However, there is a danger when the number of inhibitions becomes abnormal turning inhibition into rejection. Education, Daco indicates, obliges the individual to experience a considerable number of inhibitions. The negative impact of inhibition on education at school lies in the fact that it often prevents learners from taking an active part in classroom activities, the immediate consequence being their poor performances. The teacher's attitude, the type of activities used, the general atmosphere of the classroom, and testing sessions are as many situations which can cause learners' inhibition.

Composition tests can cause learners' inhibition in many respects. A learner might be inhibited by the degree of difficulty of the task he is submitted to, making it impossible for him to have the least reaction. The learner might be eager to perform. But this eagerness can be blocked by his inability to overcome the obstacle caused by the difficulty of the task. The necessary language repertoire might be available to him. But this cannot be used because the energy needed to use it is blocked by his inability to achieve comprehension of the task. In some situations, inhibition is caused by the fact that the proposed task does not meet the learner's expectation. In this case, the mind feels betrayed and the immediate consequence of this betrayal is to cause the learner's indifference. Another situation leading to inhibition is

¹⁰ Op.cit, p.76.

when despite his achievement of comprehension of the task, the learner lacks the necessary language repertoire to express his ideas. The mind is disturbed and the individual is unable to have the least not knowing what to do and where to go.

As can be seen, inhibition is a real obstacle to learners' performances during composition tests. Composition does not consist in just providing answers to questions. In a composition task, the learner's memory should be constantly active trying to find ideas, organise them and express them in such a way that the final text can have a positive impact on the reader. This kind of activity requires that the learner be free from any situation which is likely to cause inhibition. The issue of the inhibition of learners during writing tests is relevant and deserves attention. This development has been helpful to have some insight into the extent to which inhibition can be harmful during a composition tests. However, my apprehension can be expressed in the following words: Given individual differences in our classrooms and considering the objectives of composition tests, how does one design a test so that the effect of inhibition can be minimized or avoided? Obviously, there is no ready made remedy. For some testees might feel comfortable with a writing test which causes the inhibition of the others. And what causes an individual to be inhibited is not necessarily harmful to another. What does one do then? There is an abundance of fertile land to be exploited but the tools needed to till the earth are still expected.

2.4.3. WHEN ANXIETY UNDERMINES LEARNER'S POTENTIAL

According to Daco¹¹, anxiety is '... a kind of internal uneasiness, vague and deaf. The individual has a deep feeling of insecurity, for no objective reason. He fears an imminent misfortune, an accident; his imagination describes to him some circumstances which are sometimes terrifying, circumstances that he cannot get rid of. The individual is therefore in a state of perpetual alert and shows a painful sensation of impotence in front of the dangers that he feels are coming to him.'¹² For McLeod¹³, anxiety is one of the most studied affective factors. It is characterized by tension (both physical and mental), worry and feelings of uneasiness. McLeod distinguishes two forms of anxiety: Trait anxiety and state anxiety. Trait anxiety refers to the habitual resistance of some people to the vicissitudes of life causing their

¹¹ Daco, Op.cit.

¹² Daco, *ibid.*, p.455 : « ... une sorte de malaise intérieur, vague et sourd. La personne éprouve un profond sentiment d'insécurité, sans aucun motif objectif. Elle craint un malheur imminent, un accident ; son imagination lui décrit des péripéties parfois terrifiantes sans qu'elle puisse les chasser. Le sujet est ainsi en « état d'alerte » perpétuel, et éprouve une pénible sensation d'impuissance devant les dangers « qu'elle sent approcher ». (p.455)

¹³ Op.cit.

anxiety under some circumstances. As for state anxiety, it stands for a more internal reaction to a particular circumstance. Despite the existence of many studies on anxiety issues, McLeod thinks that they sometimes fail to take account of the fact that the phenomenon under study is usually state anxiety. This paper takes a different path by specifying from the beginning my particular interest in state anxiety though, I feel, trait anxiety should not be put in the background.

In the context of writing tests anxiety often stands as a serious obstacle to learners' achievement. The explanations to this situation are twofold. First, as testers generally use writing tests to challenge their learners' ability to produce good texts, most testees are anxious fearing to produce a text that does not meet the expectations of the tester. A writing test is different from a grammar test, for example. In a grammar test learners have to show their ability to appropriately use the rules they have learned. This does not cause much anxiety for testees who have a certain control of the grammar of the language do not have to worry about how the tester will react to their production. The situation is totally different in a writing test. Here, many factors can come into play during the rating of learners' performances. The rater's mood, his personal feelings and opinions about the issue being addressed, his apprehensions, his preferences and interests, these are as many elements which might influence the rating and which justify testees' anxiety. Secondly, anxiety can be caused by the type of task proposed by the tester. A learner might not feel at ease with a task which expects him to write about an issue he feels uncomfortable with. For example, a learner who has been advised by his parents not to get involved in political issues might feel terribly annoyed to write about an issue which, he feels, can get him into trouble.

Anxiety factors should not be neglected in the context of writing tests. These factors often influence the image that teachers have of their student writers. They lead teachers to provide judgements and take decisions which do not always reflect reality. For a student writer who is a potential good writer might not be achieved because anxiety factors have undermined his ability to perform during the test. Anxiety factors should be given more considerations and treated consequently. Therefore, all initiatives that can help minimize their effects on students' performances are welcome.

2.4.4. WRITING AND MOTIVATION: THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION

In education, and classrooms in particular, the term motivation refers to what makes a person want to learn. Marion Williams and Robert L. Burden (1997:120) suggest a definition of

motivation, which is essentially cognitive. "... a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal (or goals)." Despite this definition which fits within a social constructivist framework, motivation has an affective component. It refers to the internal states that lead to some attitudes towards learning. Motivation can be either extrinsic or intrinsic. There is extrinsic motivation when the only reason for carrying out an activity is to gain something outside that activity. Motivation is said to be intrinsic when the reason for doing something lies within the activity itself. From these two definitions one clearly sees that the affective dimension of motivation is concerned with intrinsic motivation. Considering the context of my paper the issue which needs to be addressed now is what motivates students to write. In case a test proposed to students does not motivate them to write, one wonders about how the absence of motivation prevents them from embarking on a particular task and from investing time and energy in it.

Most students write because they have good reasons for performing. Though these reasons are manifold, I'll base on only two of them in order to provide some enlightenment on the extent to which motivation is essential in the context of writing tests. First, student writers can feel a particular pleasure to make it possible for other people to read their text about a given task. This internal pleasure drives and sustains their effort to achieve in the test. A student who does not feel any pleasure to produce a text might not be motivated to embark on a given task and invest time and energy in it. Secondly, confidence can explain students' motivation to write. A student who knows he has a lot to say about a given issue and is equipped with the necessary tools is more likely to perform than the one who is hesitant about what to write. The fact that a given task provides an opportunity for a student to believe that he is capable of applying effectively the writing skills he knows makes him confident and increases his motivation to demonstrate those skills in the context of the test.

3. MINIMISING THE OCCURRENCE OF HARMFUL PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES DURING ENGLISH COMPOSITION TESTS

My suggestions derive from some classroom activities carried out with my own students¹⁴. These activities consist in organizing some training sessions which offer the opportunity to collect some reactions from learners. The analysis of the collected reactions has often been

¹⁴ First year students at the department of English of the University of Cocody-Abidjan where I am currently teaching writing to learners of English as a foreign language.

helpful to achieve comprehension of some psychological phenomena that occur during writing tests. The knowledge and the awareness of these phenomena lead me to consider ways of minimizing their negative impacts on learners' performances during writing tests.

A writing task for training student writers

Write a paragraph in which you describe your ideal wife or husband.

An informal interview of my students has revealed the following reactions which, to some extent, explain their performances (poor or good).

1. Some students say they have never dreamt of marriage.
2. Others think one cannot talk about an ideal wife or husband.
3. Some say they do not feel like writing about the issue because of what they experienced with their parents.
4. Others say they fear to provide ideas which are not in harmony with the rater's.

How does one explain these reactions? How does one relate them to learners' performances? First, students who say they have never dreamt of marriage are not psychologically prepared to write about it for they feel they have no good reasons for doing so. They lack the intrinsic motivation that can drive and sustain their effort to write about marriage. Secondly, testees who feel that the ideal wife or husband is not of this world are not likely to feel concerned with this issue. This lack of concern explains their inability to achieve in this test. Thirdly, students who have had some bad experiences about the relations between their fathers and their mothers might have developed some psychological states which prevent them from achieving. Finally, the idea that the rater's conception of marriage might be different from theirs makes them anxious. And this anxiety explains their poor performances.

Suggestion

My suggestion consists essentially in training my student writers to minimize the impacts of psychological problems on their performances during writing tests. First, I expose the collected reactions to my students explaining them what they mean and their implications for students' poor performances during writing tests. Secondly, I ask students to propose some

writing tasks the completion of which, they feel, might generate less psychological problems. Here, they should only consider the psychological problems revealed by their reactions to the informal interview. Finally, the suggested tasks are discussed in order to provide more insight into the extent to which they can help minimize the psychological problems referred to earlier. This session of shared experience prepares the students to face writing tests being aware of the possibility to meet some psychological problems that they must minimize or overcome if they want to achieve.

CONCLUSION

This article showed particular interest in the psychological dimensions of writing tests. The main concern was to provide a psychological framework that can help to make connections between psychological problems and learners' performances and to make informed decisions about how to minimize the existing difficulties based on a psychological theory. The reflection carried out indicates that the psychological problems related to writing tests fall under two main categories: Cognitive and affective. Cognitive problems have to do with learners' inability to cope with the three stages of the writing process: The reflection process involves the activity that operates on an internal representation leading up to another internal representation; the production process starts from the internal representation and produces writing. The interpretation process generates an internal representation from linguistic entries. Affective problems have to do with four main psychological states: Egocentrism and the ignorance of audience, inhibition which impedes production, anxiety which undermines learner's potential and absence of motivation which is concerned with the fact that the learner has no good reason for writing. The relevance of the existing problems has led to my suggestion which stands in the following stages: The organization of some training sessions based on the completion of writing task, the collection of students' reactions on their psychological states during the test, the explanation of the implications of the psychological problems referred to for learners' performances, and the proposal by students of some writing tests which might help minimize the psychological problems.

Despite the relevance of the problems raised and the suggestion provided, I still have the apprehension that more is left to be done. I therefore suggest, for further reflection about the issue, that emphasis be laid on learner contribution to the solution to the psychological problems that they meet during writing tests.

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