

CHAPTER 13.

TWENTY YEARS OF RESEARCH
ON READING AND WRITING
IN LATIN AMERICAN HIGHER
EDUCATION: LESSONS LEARNED
FROM THE ILEES INITIATIVE

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Research on reading and writing in higher education has flourished as a field of study in Latin America for about two decades. Although some first-year writing courses were offered at universities in the 1990s (Pereira, 2006), various sources date the beginning of academic research on writing in higher education to the 2000s (Carlino, 2013; Navarro et al., 2016). The field is based on diverse theoretical and disciplinary traditions that conceptualize and approach reading and writing in different ways. This body of research corresponds to an emerging and interdisciplinary effort, which is characteristic of the so-called Mode 2 of knowledge production, that is, research based on contextualized and applied knowledge (Klein, 1996).

Alfabetización académica (Carlino, 2002) has been used as a term in the region to describe research on reading and writing in higher education (Navarro & Colombi, 2022), despite the fact that the discussion about the theoretical limits of this term is still open (Carlino, 2013; Lillis, 2021). The field has also experienced an accelerated process of professionalization, which is reflected in a growing number of *special issues* in academic journals in the region—eight published between 2016 and 2019—as well as local and regional conferences, and the creation of professional associations and international collaboration.

This chapter represents a disciplinary research effort in which we present three lessons learnt on reading and writing studies in Latin America, which are drawn mainly from the project (*Iniciativas de Lectura y Escritura en Educación Superior*). Led by Charles Bazerman between 2012 and 2015, this project brought together Latin American scholars on writing in higher education at various stages of their careers (Bazerman et al., 2017; Navarro et al., 2016). Although the original objective of the ILEES project was the mapping of reading and writing teaching initiatives in Latin America, its participants quickly expanded this goal to include the issue of the identity and disciplinary configuration of this emerging field.

This chapter brings together different contributions to address this issue. The literature on interdisciplinarity indicates that complex and applied objects of study, such as reading and writing, frequently arouse academic interest from various disciplines. This shared interest generates a process of hybridization of knowledge (Klein, 1996) that is descriptive of the development of the field in Latin America. Emerging interdisciplinary fields are characterized by the need to analyze and establish limits, which has been described as boundary work (Klein, 1996; 2000), that is, efforts to claim the disciplinary legitimacy of an emerging field through histories, genealogies, ethnographies, bibliometric studies, and others. For Maureen Goggin (2000), one of the main historians of the archive of academic journals on the discipline of American rhetoric and composition this type of work fulfills the function of legitimizing intellectual communities to secure them a place in academia.

As is characteristic of our field, this chapter is the result of interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers from Argentina, Chile, and Colombia. Each contributes the results of their research that started with the ILEES project but was later expanded on the basis of empirical data. The lessons, which are organized chronologically and by different areas of interest, allow us to reach conclusions about the development of the field and future projections after 20 years of intensive research activity in the region.

Lesson 1: “Studies on reading and writing in higher education are a disciplinary community,” by Natalia Ávila Reyes, reflects on the characteristics of the field through the first half of the 2010s based on patterns and networks, discourse analysis and triangulation with interviews. Lesson 2: “Studies on reading and writing in higher education are focused on academic settings and school genres,” by Elizabeth Narváez-Cardona, analyzes studies on reading and writing in articles published between 2003 and 2015 in an influential Colombian journal. Finally, Lesson 3: “Studies on reading and writing in higher education conceptualize reading and writing as social practices,” by Federico Navarro, compares and contrasts the conceptualizations of reading and writing in ten *special issues* published in the region between 2006 and 2019.

Overall, the panoramic view offered by this chapter on the disciplinary development of reading and writing studies in higher education contributes to the collective construction of meaning in our daily work as academics. As Goggin (2000) states, a more robust definition and identity of the discipline helps to promote its institutionalization, professionalization, and influence on public policies. In other words, its impact ranges from dimensions such as the awarding of scholarships, academic positions, and research funds, to governmental or institutional decisions on initiatives and policies for teaching reading and writing in higher education. In summary, promoting a better understanding of the development and configuration of the study of reading and writing in Latin America is essential to strengthen its future projections and scope.

LESSON 1: STUDIES ON READING AND WRITING IN HIGHER EDUCATION ARE A DISCIPLINARY COMMUNITY

Studies on reading and writing in higher education can be understood as a disciplinary community within the academic activity system. Interpreting these studies as part of a community, and not merely as a common area of study by academics from different disciplines, is useful for applying rhetorical and discursive analysis tools that allow a better understanding of their epistemological configuration in the region. Devitt (2004) argues that the concept of “discourse community” (Swales, 1990), although widely used in writing studies, is monolithic, since it puts discourses at the center as a cohesive element of the community. The concept of “disciplinary community” used in this chapter, on the other hand, tries to account for the group of people who make up these communities and who produce, among other things, discourses as means and products of their activity.

Consequently, the writing of a community can only be understood in relation to the activities and purposes that characterize it (Russell, 1991/2002). Texts emerge as rhetorical responses to situations that are common in the activity of this community, that is, as genres (Bazerman, 2004; Miller, 1984); therefore, the typical actions of a community can be inferred by analyzing those genres. As MacDonald explains, texts are not epiphenomena but the main source of information about the social practices of a discipline: “they help create communities, they act on us, they shape how we relate to each other as professionals” (1994, p. 9). Similarly, Devitt (1991) points to intertextuality as a practice from which the epistemologies of communities can be inferred.

Based on these premises, the results of three studies carried out within the framework of the ILEES project are presented in this section, which allow us to characterize the disciplinary community up until the mid-2010s. The data

that supports this section corresponds to 50 Spanish-language publications between 2002 and 2014 that were self-reported by Latin American academics in a survey carried out by the ILEES group from 2012 to 2015; a subsample of nine articles from the most recent period (2011-2014); and interviews with academics conducted by the same team in 2013 and 2014 (see Tapia-Ladino et al., 2016). The findings allow us to identify a common attribute of emerging interdisciplinary fields: the existence of two parent disciplines. On the one hand, there is linguistics and discourse studies and, on the other, a more diffuse field that includes educational sciences, educational psychology, and, above all, a well-established tradition in Latin America that is focused on the study and teaching of reading.

The first of these studies analyzes the bibliographic references in the 50 publications in the sample and seeks to describe emerging citation patterns and co-citation networks, that is, to group the authors cited into clusters that can account for differential epistemological orientations (Ávila Reyes, 2017a). First, when analyzing the influence of different authors in the sample (that is, those authors who were cited in more articles), there is a greater influence of non-Latin American authors (62%) and the presence of a wide range of authors, including linguists (Bathia, García Negroni, Halliday, Parodi, Swales), academics mainly dedicated to the study of reading (van Dijk, Kintsch) or discourse (Arnoux), early literacy scholars (Ferreiro), and a smaller group of academics, of varied traditions, who are dedicated exclusively to the study of writing in higher education (Bazerman, Carlino, Lea, Russell). As might be expected, when breaking down the analysis by sources cited, most of the highly influential sources are not studies on writing, but linguistic or cognitive works that provide conceptual tools for the research (Ávila Reyes, 2017a).

These results are not difficult to interpret. A study on the intellectual influences present in the American journal *College Composition and Communication* identified a similar pattern when studying intervals of around 14 years of publications (Phillips et al., 1993). It found that the newer the field, the greater the influence of other well-established disciplines, such as linguistics or literature. In the early years (1950-1964), linguists such as Kenneth Pike, Noam Chomsky, and Otto Jespersen are widely cited; however, their presence declines in the following period (1965-1979) and disappears altogether in the final period, which is contemporary to the study (1980-1993). Coincidentally, many authors that are currently prominent in the field were cited for the first time during this last period. In sum, a particular theoretical core of the discipline required several decades before emerging in the citations. In both cases, it seems that, at least in its beginnings, the “new” discipline remains attached to other disciplines that provide conceptual tools for the problem being studied.

In the early 2010s, the field of writing studies in Latin America seemed to still not have a clear core group of authors and remained in a diffuse stage, consisting of authors close to the two parent disciplines that shared the aim of the study of writing in higher education. These two groups emerged by carrying out an analysis of co-citation networks, through which it was possible to identify two large clusters of references that are cited by the same sources: one group is more homogeneous, comprised almost entirely of authors from the linguistics field, and the other is more disperse, including authors on discourse, psychology, initial literacy, sociology, cognitive studies, UK academic literacies, and American rhetoric and composition (see Ávila Reyes, 2017a).

Based on the same group of 50 texts, the second study identified a subsample of the nine journal articles published most recently by academics from Argentina, Chile, and Colombia. An in-depth discursive analysis was carried out to identify the discursive characteristics of the citations. This analysis showed that the articles that cite the linguistic tradition more tend to refer to Latin American authors in the introduction, mainly to give recognition or credit (Erikson & Erlandson, 2014) to other authors who have studied writing in higher education, but they retain a theoretical or conceptual framework of foreign authors, who are frequently English-speaking and generally attached to a recognizable theoretical tradition, such as English for Academic Purposes or Systemic Functional Linguistics (Ávila Reyes, 2018). In contrast, the more hybrid group of research related to teaching and learning does not present a well-defined pattern of local and international citations.

The two studies mentioned above show, firstly, the existence of citation patterns and, secondly, practices or ways of using those citations that reinforce the idea of two traditions of studies on reading and writing in Latin American that coexisted towards the middle of the last decade. The third study (Ávila Reyes, 2017b), then, asks if there are differential discursive ways of constructing the discourse in each of these seminal clusters. To answer this question, different discourse analysis techniques were used on the aforementioned sample of nine Latin American articles.

Indeed, different rhetorical patterns were found in both groups. For example, most of the articles closest to linguistic traditions use introductions that establish their research niche by proposing a gap in research problems previously identified in the community (MacDonald, 1994), through rhetorical structures close to those described by Swales (1990), which include, for example, reviewing previous research to point out a gap.

The articles linked mainly to teaching or learning problems, on the other hand, include introductions that do not define a specific academic community and, in fact, often resort to personal narratives, such as concerns as teachers or researchers,

or the “literacy crisis” (Russell, 1991/2002); what McDonald (1994) calls “anecdotal introductions.” This pattern is to be expected since, as mentioned previously, the analysis of co-citation networks identified both a homogeneous linguistic tradition and a more dispersed one. It seems, then, that for the Latin American community at the beginning of the 2010s, academic literacy corresponded either to an object of study of the language sciences, or to an incipient and interdisciplinary—and, therefore, epistemologically still diffuse—intellectual effort.

In addition, the use of subjective (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1997) and appraisal (Martin & White, 2005) markers regarding the cited sources, that is, words that express points of view and reflect the subjectivity of the speaker, are also identified. This data was triangulated with the analysis of interviews with key Latin American scholars, which showed that these disciplinary tensions in the study of writing were apparent by 2013.

Regarding the presence of critical evaluations in the articles, in general, the analysis shows a low level of conflict, meaning that explicit positions or the opposition of ideas is infrequent. The cases in which explicit evaluations were used allowed us to identify two articles with explicit disciplinary positions. The following fragments highlight these disciplinary positions.

Article 1: The method we propose in this article stems from a dilemma faced by a linguist who is also a professor of scientific writing.

Article 2: Linguistic and psychological investigations focused on the students. . . . In these works, teaching was not usually approached as a field of study but rather as a field of application of the knowledge generated in linguistics or psychology.

The first excerpt takes an explicit disciplinary position, in which it is “a linguist” who faces the object of writing, while the second specifically criticizes the situation where the teaching of writing is limited to being an object of another discipline. Thus, at the beginning of the last decade, there were still academic publications engaging in jurisdictional disputes (Klein, 2000), that is, they make an explicit controversy regarding who should be in charge of an object of study; in short, which discipline can best respond to a social need (Abbott, 1988). This clash of jurisdictional claims indicates that there are different discursive constructions that coincide with the inferred parent disciplines.

To further investigate this hypothesis, we triangulated the textual findings with the analysis of the interviews conducted with four informants from the countries in the study (Argentina, Chile, and Colombia; cf. Tapia-Ladino et al., 2016), who, when asked about the disciplinary location of reading and writing studies, offered testimonies of how different positions emerge.

Informant 4: In some cases, the research on reading and writing for teaching education is closely related to didactics and, sometimes, is unfortunately far removed from the theoretical bases.

Again, scholars engage in jurisdictional disputes; Informant 4 criticizes reading and writing studies close to didactics as “removed from the theoretical bases,” creating a tacit opposition to studies of a more linguistic nature, which would be closer to theoretical support.

Informant 1: Who is responsible? In other words, who and in what way is this teaching need addressed, which requires an interdisciplinary understanding and should not only be taught by linguistics and language teachers.

Informant 1 also engages in a more open dispute with linguistics specialists, claiming the need for an interdisciplinary approach that goes beyond the language sciences.

Informant 2: Language specialists are in charge of most of the actions, but I do not agree with that, I think their participation is necessary but insufficient. Others think it has to be the specialist in the area and I would answer that I do not agree with that either, their participation is necessary but insufficient . . . interdisciplinary cooperation is needed.

Finally, Informant 2 also proposes interdisciplinary cooperation, with the balanced participation of language specialists and university disciplinary areas.

This data allows us to identify a specific moment in the discipline, in the early 2010s, when the epistemological discussions that have led to the broad interdisciplinary perspective we share today began.

LESSON 2: STUDIES ON READING AND WRITING IN HIGHER EDUCATION ARE FOCUSED ON ACADEMIC SETTINGS AND SCHOOL GENRES

The ILEES interregional research project (Bazerman et al., 2017) included the collection of data through an online survey of colleagues in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela, which was carried out between 2012 and 2015. One of the sections asked the respondents about which scientific journals they wanted to publish their findings in. In Colombia, the respondents frequently mentioned a Colombian journal in the field of linguistics,

founded in 1972, which allowed us to characterize, among other aspects, articles published on reading and writing in higher education (Narváez-Cardona, 2017; research based on Navarro et al., 2016).

For this purpose, articles published between 2000 and 2015 were collected. The dates of the sample selection are based on the articles that document the emergence of studies and interventions on reading and writing in Colombian higher education in the early 2000s (Narváez-Cardona, 2016). Articles that were available online between 2004-2015 were accessed, and those published prior to that date were requested to the journal editor. Articles that met any of the following criteria were included: (1) articles on university, academic, and professional writing or university reading for L1 (Spanish); (2) articles on strategies and reading comprehension when linked to writing in disciplinary or professional subjects; and (3) articles on discourse analysis related to university or professional academic writing.

Here, we assume that research in the field has focused on the circulation and production of discourse as text and as social practice to offer pedagogical contributions and applications. However, such research is not only conducted in school academic contexts (e.g., classrooms and subjects), but also incorporate the analysis of texts and scientific contexts (e.g., research groups and scientific journals) and non-academic institutions (e.g., civil society, labor, religious, community, or NGO organizations). Consequently, publications that deal with the study of reading and writing as texts or practices beyond university academic contexts were also taken into account as a selection criterion for the sample.

While the number of articles analyzed corresponds to a non-representative sample, the results are used to identify trends. 17.6% of the articles in the sample (29 of 165) published between 2003 and 2015 met the selection criteria.

During this time frame, there is evidence of variation in the number of publications, with an average of 2.2 articles published per year, the lowest frequency in 2009 (no publications), and the highest in 2010 (5) and 2012 (6). Regarding the total number of authors by country affiliation, it is observed that the journal has mainly published works by authors of Colombian affiliation (21), although there are also authors based in Argentina (4), Brazil (1), Spain (2), Mexico (1), and Venezuela (2). Of the total number of publications, 14 were produced by a single author, 14 through co-authorship between two or more authors of the same national affiliation, and one through bi-national co-authorship. The distribution of the type of articles published indicates a trend of more research articles (empirical works) (22), while reflective articles (essay type) (6) and literature review articles (1) are less frequent.

A content analysis was carried out on the “introduction” and “conclusions” sections, and, in the case of research articles, the “methodology” section was also

analyzed. The analysis of the introductions shows that the publications contribute to some of the following areas: a) teaching and learning of reading and writing in higher education (21), b) writing in postgraduate training (5), c) writing in professional contexts (2), and d) university teacher training (1). No publications were found that dealt with non-academic contexts. In addition, the topics of the publications were distributed as follows: a) analysis of textual and discursive phenomena (characteristics of people, *ethos*, authorship, intertextuality, audiences) in texts produced by students or in disciplinary genres (6), and b) analysis of the incidence of pedagogical interventions with students (5). Other themes identified did not receive a significant number of mentions: c) promotion of the teaching of reading and writing in the university curriculum (3); d) analysis of digital pedagogical initiatives (3); e) exploration of students' reading and writing practices (2); f) description of conceptions about reading and/or writing of teachers and/or students (2); g) literature reviews on reading (2); h) problematization of explanations about reading and writing difficulties in higher education (1); i) assessment of student' reading and writing practices (1); j) design and application of reading comprehension tests (1); k) analysis of classroom interaction in language courses (1); l) analysis of life stories of students as readers and writers (1); and, m) analysis of the incidence of pedagogical interventions with teachers (1). The relationship between the authors' country affiliation and the two themes most frequently identified in the introductions of the articles shows that Colombian authors focus more on the pedagogical dimension of reading and writing than on their textual or discursive description.

In the case of articles with empirical data, the analysis of the "methodology" section shows the following number of mentions in non-exclusive categories: a) textual analysis (qualitative and quantitative analysis of student writing, disciplinary or professional genres, or pedagogical materials) (13); b) content analysis of written productions or institutional documents (10); c) application of surveys or questionnaires (9); d) individual or group interviews with students or teachers (5); e) non-participatory observations (5); and e) reading or writing tests (3). The biographical, ethnographic, and historical methods only received one mention each. Educational levels or populations researched include undergraduate level (18) and much less so at the postgraduate level (5), professionals (2), or university professors (1). Populations of graduates or other social actors (e.g., internship coordinators, thesis tutors, directors of research offices) did not emerge from the sample, and in three cases the type of population was not a variable in the analysis.

Genres are mentioned in 14 articles in the sample of empirical studies. In these publications, academic genres for school purposes are treated as textual units of frequent interest (21 occurrences): written assignment (4), review (3), abstract (3), thesis (3), essay (2), written exam (2), essay-type exam (1),

concept map (1), bibliographic record (1), and oral communication (1). In 17 articles, the publications mention the following disciplines or professions (34 occurrences): linguistics and foreign languages (6), engineering (5), health and social services (2), recreation (2), medicine (2), humanities and arts (2), business education and law (2), education (2), economics (2), social sciences (2), science (2), human rehabilitation (1), Lacanian psychoanalysis (1), literature (1), law (1), and social communication (1).

Finally, the analysis with non-exclusive categories in the “conclusions” section shows a high number of mentions related to pedagogical-curricular results to guide interventions (20) and theoretical aspects of pedagogy and learning (15). Less frequent were conclusions or emerging implications of the analyzed sample to a) propose new studies (4) and b) open methodological debates on reading and writing research (5), or theoretical debates on aspects of language, reading or writing (2).

In sum, the sample seems to indicate that the publications correspond mostly to Colombian authors, and their themes and theoretical perspectives seem to focus on reading and writing within educational settings. On the other hand, authors of non-Colombian affiliation focus on themes such as the description of discursive and textual phenomena. This contrast seems to suggest that interdisciplinary studies in the field are necessary, therefore, alliances between research groups and co-authorship between different countries in the region would bring greater theoretical and methodological complexity to the studies.

In turn, the results show that the empirical papers (22 articles analyzed) stem from an educational model focused on academic genres for school purposes. The analysis of the “methodology” section shows that the publications tend to use textual, qualitative, and quantitative analysis of student output, disciplinary or professional genres, or pedagogical materials. It could be suggested that empirical papers in this sample have a methodological influence from textual and applied linguistics and that they could be studying genres as products rather than as social practices.

Therefore, studies could be improved by incorporating a theory of genre based on the rhetorical genre studies (RGS) approach. Within RGS, activity systems theory helps to explore typical routines or interactions when reading, writing, and conversing within or between contexts (Russell, 2010). Indeed, activity systems is a useful theoretical and methodological category to explain genres, not only as textual units but also as networks between human interactions that are woven into communities, groups, and organizations. These interactions involve contradictions that arise from the social division of labor; that is, different participants who are pursuing a common objective and simultaneously seeking to fulfill personal aims while accessing—or not—resources within a collective activity (Russell, 2010).

This approach could be useful for conducting research in the region that adopts the concept of genre as a form of human interaction and intersubjectivity, beyond the material characteristics of textual products, which already seems to be a strong tradition in the region (Navarro et al., 2016). Genres stabilize and mediate human interactions over time and also promote change (Miller, 1984). Therefore, they are expectations and, at the same time, mental conventions and interactive and intersubjective material products used to anticipate and respond within certain limits (Andersen et al., 2014).

Finally, the findings suggest that academic genres for school purposes frequently emerge as textual units of analysis and are mainly associated with their formative dimension in various disciplinary and professional fields. The absence of publications outside of school and academic contexts (e.g., civil, labor, religious, community organizations, and NGOs) in the sample analyzed may also signal the need to study reading and writing in non-academic and non-school settings. This data also suggests the need for new research that focuses on exploring reading and writing in different disciplines and professions, not only in its school dimension (e.g., professional contexts), and that, in addition, incorporate the analysis of textual units and the routines or interactions pertaining reading, writing and conversation through which these textual units “travel” in the intersubjective context of collective human activities.

LESSON 3: STUDIES ON READING AND WRITING IN HIGHER EDUCATION CONCEPTUALIZE READING AND WRITING AS SOCIAL PRACTICES

Studies on reading and writing in higher education in Latin America constitute a relatively recent and heterogeneous field of interdisciplinary teaching and scientific research practice. It is an interdisciplinary field where diverse theoretical traditions and scientific sub-disciplines converge. It is a relatively new field because its institutionalization in journals, associations, and congresses only began less than two decades ago (Navarro et al., 2016). Finally, it is a heterogeneous field because the previous factors bring together diverse conceptualizations and methodologies in their approach to reading and writing.

It is interesting to consider this heterogeneity of views on reading and writing within the field, and to contrast them chronologically throughout their development in the region. To achieve this objective, the different ways of conceptualizing reading and writing are analyzed in 85 articles in 10 special issues published by Latin American scientific journals in the last two decades: *Signo & Seña* (Argentina, 2006); *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa* (Mexico, 2013); *Signos* (Chile, 2016); *Grafía* (Colombia, 2016); *Ilha do Desterro*

2016); DELTA (Brazil, 2017); Lenguas Modernas (Chile, 2017); Signo y Pensamiento (Colombia, 2017); and Íkala (Colombia, 2019; two issues). As these are special issues in indexed journals, several of which have great influence in the region, the relevance of the selected articles is ensured; at the same time, the corpus in the study shows an important geographic (five countries) and temporal (14 years) distribution.

This analysis is based on a recent study (Navarro & Colombi, 2022), which investigates the ways in which reading and writing are understood through the content analysis of research published in special issues of scientific journals both in Latin America and Spain. The results show six theoretical constructs to systematically conceptualize the object of study of the field: *products, processes, learning, practices, programs, and teaching*.

First, reading and writing can be understood as textual and discursive *products*. These fixed products are approached through quantitative and qualitative linguistic analysis in normative, lexical-grammatical, discursive, and multimodal aspects (e.g., Oteíza, 2017, published in the special issue of *Lenguas Modernas*). The studies draw on the traditions of textual linguistics, corpus linguistics, systemic-functional linguistics, discourse studies, and genre analysis. Sometimes the analysis is complemented with surveys of writers and a description of the contexts of circulation of the texts.

Second, reading and writing can be understood as text production and comprehension *processes* that allow the generation of those textual products. The studies are based on psycholinguistics or educational psychology and focus on individual subjects (usually students). Exercises, tests, and exams are used to measure different variables (memory, comprehension, writing strategies, eye movement), sometimes with experimental designs (e.g., Parodi & Julio, 2016, published in the special issue of *Signos*).

The focus on reading and writing as a process is linked to the problem of *learning* within the framework of educational psychology, which is the third construct identified. In particular, the epistemic potential of reading and writing to facilitate student learning is of interest. Instruments such as content assessment tests and cognitive or linguistic skills are used, together with measurement of text quality, to make inferences about the underlying learning processes (e.g., Rosales and Vázquez, 2006; published in the special issue of *Signo & Señal*).

Fourth, reading and writing can be understood as *practices* or forms of participation in family, community, educational, and professional settings. This construct is especially heterogeneous because it integrates both critical and sociocultural perspectives, with an interest in what people do and value in context, as well as cognitive perspectives, with an interest in implicit and declared individual conceptions and their relationship with classic sociodemographic traits

(sex, age, school level, and academic performance). The construct draws on new literacy studies, critical sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, critical pedagogy, as well as educational psychology, and combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies (e.g., Zavala, 2019; published in the special issue of *Íkala*). This construct shares some aspects with reading and writing as individual learning (cognitive perspectives) and as educational designs for social transformation (curricular perspectives).

Indeed, reading and writing can also be understood as *programs*, which is the fifth construct identified. The focus of interest shifts from students to higher education institutions to describe and evaluate the impact of curricular teaching devices, sometimes problematizing aspects of access, permanence, and university graduation. The studies analyze curricular designs and educational materials and interview officials and teachers, as well as providing theoretical support for the proposals (e.g., Moyano & Giudice, 2016; published in the special issue of *Grafía*). This construct shares interests and perspectives with the notion of reading and writing as practices, but it is also linked to the currents most interested in didactics and the ways of teaching and evaluating reading and writing.

Lastly, reading and writing can be understood as *teaching*, which is the sixth construct identified: specific and local interventions or activities in classroom dynamics, with a focus on teachers. Techniques and strategies for teaching, assessment criteria and methods, didactic sequences, and teaching experiences are described and evaluated in their impact and theoretical solidity, based on theories of teaching, learning, and development (e.g., Pontara & Cristóvão, 2017; published in the special issue of *DELTA*). Theoretical influences include sociodiscursive interactionism, language didactics, educational linguistics, language and second language teaching, genre-based didactics, and educational psychology.

These six constructs not only share adjoining theoretical spaces, but also, research frequently focuses on one of them, but with a broader perspective that enables coexistence with the other ways of conceptualizing reading and writing and triangulation of various data. For example, characterizations of genres (products) inscribed in sets of communities and broader activities (practices), or rather analysis of didactic interventions (teaching) based on their impact on learning, or on the quality of written texts. This heterogeneous coexistence is part of the identity of the field of the study and teaching of reading and writing in Latin America.

Next, the distribution of these six ways of conceptualizing reading and writing over two decades of special issues on the subject is analyzed. With the support of the qualitative analysis software nVivo Pro 12, a manual content analysis was performed, and the 85 articles of the corpus were classified according to prioritized construct and year (Figure 13.1). Introductions to special issues were excluded from the corpus since they do not constitute research with original contributions.

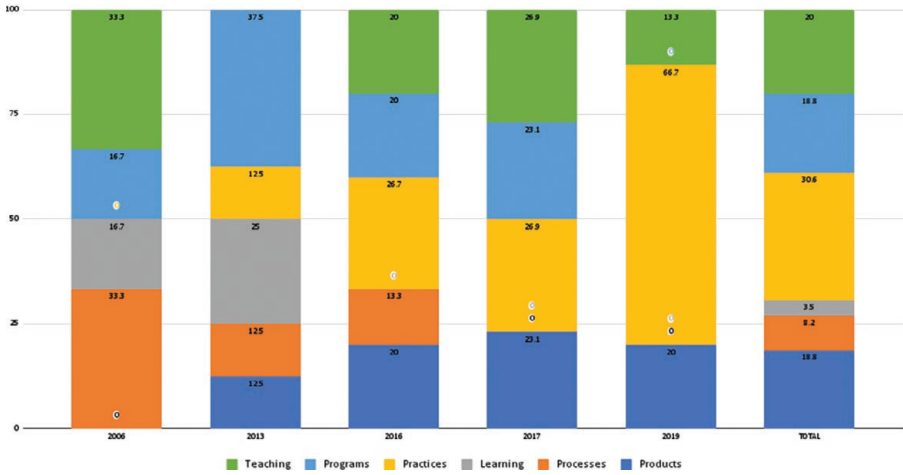


Figure 13.1. Six ways of conceptualizing reading and writing in special issues of Latin American journals (percentage per year)¹

Most of the research papers (30.6%) focus on reading and writing practices. This construct has consistently gained predominance during the last five years, growing from 0% in the first special issue of 2006, to 12.5% in 2013, 26.7% in 2016, 26.9% in 2017, and 66.7% in the last year of the period studied. At the same time, two linked constructs show an important presence: programs (18.8%) and teaching (20%), although their distribution over time is variable in both cases.

On the other hand, the constructs on reading and writing linked to an individual cognitive perspective on reading and writing (as processes and learning) are not only less predominant (8.2% and 3.5%, respectively) but also have lost share in recent years. Indeed, the study of learning mediated by reading and writing appears only until the special issue of 2013, while the cognitive processes of reading and writing are present until the special issue of 2016, and then disappear completely. For their part, the studies that address texts as products (18.8%) show a medium level of interest, which fluctuates over time.

In sum, the main finding of this research is that the studies of reading and writing in Latin America have gradually installed at the center a conceptualization of their object of study understood as social practices. In a complementary manner, the field is supported by views interested in the teaching of this subject, the related curricular programs and the textual products derived from these practices.

¹ The total percentage (right column) is not an average of the annualized distribution but of the distribution of the total articles. The years 2006 and 2013 only represent one issue each, while the more recent years represent two or three issues each.

The predominance of the conceptualization of reading and writing as practices is functional to a heterogeneous field, just as it was defined in the beginning: social practices necessarily integrate in the same theoretical construct other views of interest, in particular, on the texts, teaching, and curricular initiatives. In this sense, understanding reading and writing as practices allows researchers to link different dimensions and data sources. In addition, the conceptualization of reading and writing as practices can have effects on the other constructs, for example enabling genres to be understood through their role in the community or for the study of learning processes to be mediated by social interaction.

In addition, the parent disciplines that make up this interdisciplinary field have traditionally been interested in educational processes, in social groups that are largely integrated into higher education, and in the specific uses of discourse. From this point of view, the social practices construct enables a common space for communication and exchange between researchers with diverse academic backgrounds.

It is no coincidence, then, that along with the development of the field during the last two decades, the conceptualization of reading and writing as social practices is predominant today and enables the development of a field that addresses the relations between written language, education, and society.

CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of the 21st century, the study of reading and writing in higher education constituted an emerging interdisciplinary field in Latin America, with disciplinary disputes and hybridizations similar to those of other interdisciplinary fields in their early days, such as genetics or molecular biology (Ceccarelli, 1995).

In this chapter, we have tried to show how reading and writing has been understood and investigated in higher education and what transformations have occurred over the last 20 years. On the one hand, according to Lesson 1, during the 2000s and until the mid-2010s it was still common to identify two very clear parent disciplines in research, and jurisdictional disputes even occurred between the same academics' talk on this issue. Similarly, according to Lesson 2, studies during the first 15 years of the discipline in Colombia suggest that academic genres for school purposes frequently emerge as textual units of analysis and mainly pertain to their pedagogical dimension in various disciplinary and professional fields. Lesson 3, on the other hand, shows us that the diverse constructs around writing coexist over time, but that in recent years the conceptualization of reading and writing as social practices has emerged strongly in the region.

Together, these findings lead us to assume that the regional literature on reading and writing studies in higher education has been slowly moving towards

a shared broader approach. More than simply a closed epistemological option, the emergence of the concept of practices can be understood as a response that allows integrating linguistic and textual dimensions with a social perspective. However, our data also suggests that academics in the field maintain an interest in academic and school settings that could be extended in the future to other contexts (e.g., work, civil society, community, and non-formal education). Thus, given the current context of increased academic and scientific production, Latin American writing studies would benefit from more systematic literature reviews to identify new gaps and sustain epistemological debates to continue shaping the disciplinary status of the field.

In this regard, it is useful to return to a question posed by Bazerman, together with the ILEES team, about the status of regional scientific development in relation to the multiple uses of references to international scholars found in the analysis of the ILEES project up to 2014:

The attention to scholarship from other regions and from multiple theoretical orientations can be a great strength, but it would be useful to see how these resources are being used in the Latin American region. Are the approaches from outside the region entering into a complex multi-sided discussion, in which Latin American scholars as equals are contributing new perspectives and fresh research, even as they are learning from what has gone on in other parts of the world or are the Latin American scholars only applying external approaches to local data and conditions? (Bazerman et al., 2017, p. 297)

To address this question, we need to rethink what it means to contribute to knowledge “as equals.” In an influential essay published ten years ago, Donahue (2009) posits how the risk of perceiving the American development of writing studies as a role model can lead to a colonialist model of exporting this knowledge. Indeed, Donahue supports the idea that the American field “is not the sole source of writing theory in higher education” (p. 236). While Donahue calls for reorienting the authority discourse towards an “equal trade” model, the question persists as to what would be the contribution of Latin American studies in this dynamic of egalitarian exchange.

A second topic to consider is the authority with which we create our disciplinary claims. As a point of comparison with the American tradition, two decades ago Bazerman (2002) published an interesting discussion on the disciplinary status of what was then starting to be called writing studies. At the time, the study of writing seemed to be scattered and fragmented across university disciplines. Since it was not recognized as a separate discipline—such as sociology,

psychology or mathematics—the study of writing seemed to have no real home: “writing is also a fundamental matter of the constitution of our world—but the organization of research and of the university itself remains consistently blind to this fact” (Bazerman, 2002, p. 33). In this text, Bazerman supports the jurisdiction of American studies of rhetoric and composition on this subject and their authority to provide an institutionalized response to a complex phenomenon, while valuing the importance of pedagogy in this task:

Only the relatively young field of composition has paid primary attention to writing, but our core attention has tended to be narrow: on students and classes in a few courses in Universities in the United States over the last several decades, with particular attention to the underprepared student. . . . Of all disciplines, composition is best positioned to begin to put together the large, important and multidimensional history of writing. We are the only profession that makes writing its central concern. (2002, p. 33)

Almost ten years later, Bazerman (2011) refines this idea by reflecting on his own previous research. We see an important nuance in comparison to his 2002 text, that is, in the search for disciplinarity in writing studies, there is a clear risk of reducing the complexity of our object of study by opting for methods or types of data that seem more “acceptable” according to a certain disciplinary canon:

If we choose the path to disciplinarity of narrowing the acceptable data, method, or theory, we are in danger of misunderstanding or even distorting the processes, practices and products of writing. . . . We should choose a path that finds discipline in our questions and goals, allowing us to draw on the resources of many disciplines. (Bazerman, 2011, p. 9)

This idea seems well-suited for interpreting our findings. The studies of reading and writing in higher education emerge in Latin America to a large extent as an academic response to a social need, linked both to the phenomena of university expansion (Chiroleu & Marquina, 2017) and to the adoption of student-centered pedagogical and curricular models. In this response, from the beginning of the 2000s to the mid-2010s, studies prevailed with a view on writing as a predominantly linguistic product, with well-defined problems, bibliographic discussions, and theories. However, there was an emerging need to address a more complex issue, even though the first studies tended to narrow the object of study in order to better fit previously recognizable traditions. A second more eclectic and hybridized group, which brought together traditions

of great importance in the region (such as critical discourse analysis and reading studies), tried to account for a broader picture, but without much conceptual or disciplinary clarity. These tensions coexisted with calls for interdisciplinarity, that is, for the expansion of the object of study towards a more complex model of writing that, by the middle of the last decade, had not yet materialized.

On the interdisciplinary dynamics of writing studies, Bazerman continues:

Yet each of these disciplines reduces the phenomena we are concerned with, providing monotonic accounts, and, even more seriously, monotonic approaches to the teaching of writing. If our research is narrow, our teaching and learning will follow on narrow paths. Some of the best teaching of writing has been informed by an intuitive eclecticism, addressing social, psychological, textual, and rhetorical issues as they come up in a practical way. . . . Our disciplinarity should be guided by the complexity of our subject rather than the limits of a small range of methods. (2011, p. 10)

We are interested in highlighting what Bazerman calls “an intuitive eclecticism” to answer the question about the development and use of theory by the Latin American community. Current developments in the field in Latin America, effectively born out of a hybrid and interdisciplinary approach in the early 2000s, which was driven by applied concerns typical of Mode 2 knowledge production, show a strong interest in the linguistic phenomenon, as well as in the local character and social practice of writing (see, for example, Ávila Reyes, 2021). This “intuitive eclecticism” has led scholars of the Latin American tradition to emphasize cognitive or sociolinguistic phenomena; indeed, much has been said about “sociocognitive” studies (Parodi, 2008) in seminal works in the region, and terms such as “mestizaje” (Motta-Roth, 2008) or “blend” (Bazerman, 2016) have been coined.

For this reason, the results of Lesson 3 are not surprising: while six writing constructs of different nature coexist in the same group of special issues, towards the end of the 2010s an emerging construct of social practices predominates, which appears to be broader. By the end of the decade it seems to be consensus on the fact that the examination of individual texts and cognitive processes should be complemented by activities and practices. This finding reflects the complexity of writing as claimed by Bazerman in 2011 and was not a pervasive concept in the region a decade earlier.

Finally, Bazerman points out that the main benefits of “disciplined interdisciplinarity” in writing studies lies in the possibility of accessing new questions and objects of study that allow the construction of theory based on empirical

data. At the same time, the development of this theory provides the scaffolding for new areas of study: “The more I was able to articulate the theory, the more new kinds of inquiry I pursued” (Bazerman, 2011, p. 18).

Accordingly, one of the most salient reflections in our review of data on academic production in studies of reading and writing in Latin American higher education is the need to generate local theory. Indeed, we are currently investigating complex objects of study, using varieties of frameworks to unpack them, but our theoretical benchmarks for accomplishing this task remain overwhelmingly foreign. This geopolitical logic of knowledge production (Canagarajah, 2002; Lillis & Curry, 2010) puts Latin American academics at a disadvantage to “export” theories on equal terms, in Donahue’s (2009) terms.

For this reason, the development of an informed interdisciplinary field, with its own development that can be understood today as a cohesive disciplinary community, must urgently focus on the local production of theory on teaching, learning, and the nature of writing. This starts with reading and citing our own authors (Navarro, 2022), and by continuing to generate epistemological discussions through, among others, comparative research and transnational co-authorship. Towards the end of the 2010s, the studies of reading and writing in higher education in Latin America are no longer an emerging field, but a multifaceted—yet consolidated—disciplinary community, clearly oriented towards a set of problems and an object shared by the academic community. Jurisdictional disputes are no longer relevant, but rather we should focus on new discussions about the nature of our interdisciplinary knowledge.

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