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Intellectual Orientations of Studies of Higher Education Writing in Latin America

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This study contributes to understanding the initiatives, programs, scholarship, professional networks, and organizations concerning the teaching of writing that are rapidly developing across Latin America. Writing scholars are emerging from a number of disciplinary bases (particularly languages and linguistics, education, and humanities) and are situated in no single department. Similarly, influential authors represent a variety of theoretical approaches. The lack of common journals as well indicates that no core scholarly identity has emerged. Further, the lack of journals with broad geographic reach indicates limited opportunities for regional communication. All these clues indicate an emerging field that is looking in multiple directions, in ways that seem to be reaching beyond disciplinary and institutional locations, but which has not yet formed its own communicative structure.

Cette étude se propose de contribuer à la compréhension des initiatives, programmes, systèmes de bourses, réseaux professionnels et organisations consacrées à l'enseignement de l'écriture dans l'Amérique latine, l'ensemble de ces dispositifs ayant connu un rapide développement. Les étudiants qui apprennent l'écriture universitaire sont issus d'un grand nombre de secteurs disciplinaires—en particulier les secteurs des langues, de la linguistique, de l'éducation et des humanités—et ne sont pas regroupés dans un département unique. On note également que les auteurs qui influent sur le champ présentent des approches théoriques diverses. L'absence d'une revue qui serait commune indique aussi qu'il ne s'est pas encore constitué un noyau qui serait fondateur d'une identité intellectuelle partagée par les universitaires concernés. De plus, le manque d'une revue à large portée géographique signale que la communication entre les différents secteurs géographique est limitée. Tous ces indices montrent qu'il s'agit d'un domaine émergent, qui s'oriente vers de multiples directions, vers des voies qui peuvent être atteintes au delà des spécificités disciplinaires et géographiques, mais qui n'a pas encore constitué une structure de communication qui lui soit propre.

1. Introduction

The teaching of writing has not traditionally been part of higher education in Latin America, but in recent years programs and research in both L1 and L2 reading and writing have grown rapidly in individual countries and across the region. In Latin America, as in much of the world, the teaching and support of academic writing in higher education has little prior professional or institutional infrastructure, little scholarship, and few academic networks. However, in recognition of the need for writing development in first language (Spanish and Portuguese) and second language (primarily English) new initiatives are being developed from Mexico south to Argentina and Chile. Motivations range from inclusion of new student populations and educational reform, transforming learning from reproducing authoritative information to active student engagement in disciplinary epistemic practices, to promoting democratic participation and advancing competitiveness in global research communities, global economy, and other information age imperatives.

In support of these initiatives, programs, and scholarship, professional networks and organizations are rapidly developing across the region. Academic networks in Latin-American countries focusing on all levels include the UN-

ESCO Chair on Reading and Writing in Latin America (*Cátedra Unesco para la lectura y la escritura en América Latina*, <http://www.unesco-lectura.univalle.edu.co/>), and “Networks for Transforming Language Teaching” (*Redes para la Transformación docente en la enseñanza del lenguaje*, <http://encuentrolenguaje.univalle.edu.co/ques.html>). The Redlees Network on Reading and Writing on Higher Education (*Red de Lectura y Escritura en la Educación Superior* (<http://www.ascun-redlees.org>) was created in Colombia in 2006 particularly to focus on literacy in higher education levels. In Argentina, GICEOLEM (a collective founded in 2005) brings together research faculty from three public universities for research and teacher training on reading and writing in all subjects (see <https://sites.google.com/site/giceolem2010/>). These and other developing networks testify to the growth of engaged professional communities.

This growth has drawn on resources from both within and beyond the region, to develop a unique configuration appropriate to local needs, institutional dynamics, and intellectual traditions. Understanding this growth is useful both for educators in this region engaged in building such initiatives and for contributing to a more general understanding of the growth of higher education initiatives. While there have been some preliminary attempts to document the growth of writing studies and writing programs globally (most notably Thaiss et al, 2012, but also the two prior volumes from this series, Bazerman et al., 2010; Bazerman et al., 2012), there has yet been no regional survey of developments in Latin America. The current study provides a preliminary map of the disciplinary and intellectual resources being drawn on as writing initiatives develop in the region and how these intellectual resources and networks are positioning Latin American work with respect to global resources and are structuring intellectual communities within the region.

This study is part of the ILEES Project (*Iniciativas de Lectura y Escritura en la Educación Superior en América Latina / Initiatives on reading and writing in Higher Education in Latin America*, <http://www.ilees.org>). The larger ILEES project aims at developing a comprehensive, diverse, and inclusive map of research and pedagogy tendencies in teaching higher education writing in the Latin American region. The objectives of the project are to map out the development of the field through the identification of the centers of practice, as well as the existing and emerging academic networks, in order to a) identify and understand the dynamics and intellectual influences of the emerging field by having knowledge of the various initiatives in higher education in reading and writing in the regions, the forming networks, and the intellectual resources drawn on and produced, and to b) elaborate a website in three languages (Spanish, Portuguese, and English) to share data and showcase the sites of practice we have been able to identify.

2. Methodology

The research of the larger ILEES project mixes survey, interviews, and ongoing action research methods. Other publications will represent other aspects of the work. For the purpose of this chapter, we will limit our report to the part of the survey relevant to characterizing the disciplinary affiliations of the survey participants by making inferences from their institutional academic affiliations, authors who are nurturing their initiatives (teaching, researching, and publishing), and journals or other resources reported as highly consulted by the participants.

2.1 Survey

Through an online questionnaire, basic programmatic, institutional, publication, and intellectual network data were initially collected from Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Mexico; then later from Brazil, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela; and finally through open invitation to all Latin American countries. The survey was disseminated through snowball techniques, described below. Through these procedures we have invited 321 participants and received 118 responses. The number of invitations and responses by country are listed in Table 15.1. We have now opened up the survey to voluntary participation through our project website in order to keep track of unfolding developments, but this current study is based on data collected only by invitation, with collection finishing August 31, 2013.

Table 15.1. Response rates by data collection stage

	Countries	Sent	Responses	Rate
First stage	Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico	161	66	40,99%
Second stage	Puerto Rico, Venezuela	48	14	29,16%
	Brazil (Portuguese)	112	37	33,92%
Totals		321	118	36.76%

The online survey, designed and piloted in Spanish during summer 2012, is organized in four sections and contains 9 principal questions with open and closed answers. The first section collects information regarding institutional information of the participants. The next section explores information upon teaching initiatives known by the participants in their universities and in other institutions. The third section includes questions regarding authors,

journals, books, and databases used as resources by the surveyees, as well as publication venues from Latin America and Spain to publish their work. This section also collects titles of publications, oral communications, and research projects. Finally, the fourth section asks for the name of other scholars who might be interested in responding to the survey. This study focuses primarily on data from the third section, along with institutional data of the participants to identify academic orientations.

2.2 Distribution of the survey

The Spanish version of the online survey was initially distributed to L1 (Spanish) teachers of writing in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico. These initial countries were chosen because of the high level of activity in them among Spanish speaking countries as perceived by the team; this perception has been confirmed through the survey. A preliminary list of 20 scholars was created by the researchers based on their knowledge of the field (i.e., identifying scholars known by their publication and leadership in disseminating programmatic research and pedagogy projects). The preliminary lists created were sent to two scholars in each country to receive their recommendations before defining the final list for the survey. To that initial sample of four countries, at the end of 2012, we added Brazil, Venezuela, and Puerto Rico, using similar snowball techniques.

For Brazil, we translated the questionnaire into Portuguese. Also we extended the focus from L1 (Portuguese) to L2 (English as a Foreign Language) writing and accordingly added a question identifying which language the respondents worked with and whether this was L1 or L2 for the students. Because of the size of Brazil and the large number of universities, the initial survey sample was 30 for L1 and 30 for L2, and this number was extended by snowball recommendations which were part of the survey. Since September 2013, the online survey has been opened to voluntary participation for all countries in Latin America through the project website at <http://www.ilees.org>.

2.3 Analytic methods

The survey consisted of a mix of closed choice items that could be aggregated quantitatively and open field questions. After the initial round of data gathering from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, and Mexico a findings report was collected and examined by the team. The quantitative material was descriptively gathered, and the open field material was aggregated for: a) names of universities; b) names of the academic units to which the surveyees were affiliated;

c) influential authors (to which we assigned country of origin and theoretical orientation), books, databases, or other resources mentioned by the surveyees in the third section of the survey. The analytic report presented data by country and overall, to allow for comparison of trends in different countries. In this study we will present the overall results, and supplement that with some per country data. We present the quantitative data descriptively and do not attempt statistical inferences or test for inferential significance. Further details of the survey responses are available at the ILEES.org website.

3. Results

We present the results in four principal topics: academic units, influential authors, theoretical orientations, and journals or resources for reference and publication.

3.1 Academic units

Despite variation in the naming of the academic units from country to country and university to university, we were able to categorize the institutional department of the participants as listed in Table 15.2 and Figure 15.1.

Table 15.2. Reported Institutional Unit

Academic unit	Frequency	Percent
Language and Linguistics	46	39%
Education	25	21%
Humanities	19	16%
Not applicable/none	5	4%
University services	5	4%
Science	4	3%
Other (one mention)	3	3%
Hispanic or cultural studies	3	3%
Communication	3	3%
Directorates of research	3	3%
Speech Therapy	2	2%
Totals	118	100%

Overall, the most common disciplinary orientations of the academic units to which the surveyees were affiliated were Languages and Linguistics (39%), Education (21, 2%), and Humanities (letters, arts, and philosophy) (16, 1%), together comprising about two thirds of the sample. No other units had more than 5 percent of participants. While substantial numbers of people are located within a few departments, there seems to be no well-defined or clearly dominant unit in which writing specialists are housed (Figure 15.1).

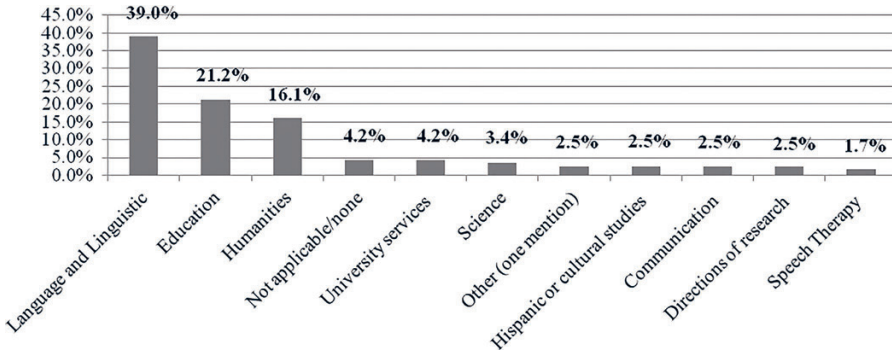


Figure 15.1. Distribution of academic units by percentage

When examined on a country basis, there are some differences (Table 15.3 and Figure 15.2). In Brazil, Chile & and Venezuela, languages and linguistics dominated while in Argentina 36% were in education and most of the others in non-academic or service units (45%); Colombia reported equal numbers in education and language and linguistics (30% in each). Also, in several cases respondents were affiliated to more than one academic unit. For statistical purposes, we decided to count only the first one mentioned.

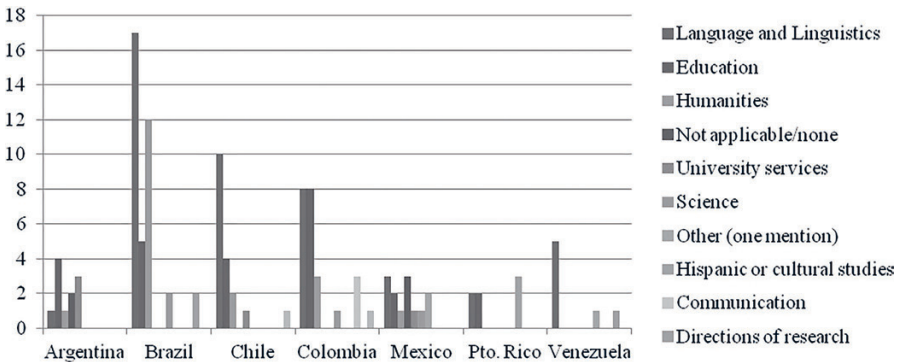


Figure 15.2. Distribution of academic units by country

Table 15.3. Categorization of academic units by country

Academic unit	Argentina	Brazil	Chile	Colombia	Mexico	Pto. Rico	Venezuela	Total	Percent
Language and Linguistics	1	17	10	8	3	2	5	46	39%
Education	4	5	4	8	2	2	0	25	21%
Humanities	1	12	2	3	1	0	0	19	16%
Not applicable/none	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	5	4%
University services	3	0	1	0	1	0	0	5	4%
Science	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	4	3%
Other (one mention)	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	3	3%
Hispanic or cultural studies	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	3%
Communication	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	3%
Directions of research	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	3	3%
Speech Therapy	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	2%
Totals	11	38	18	24	13	7	7	118	100%

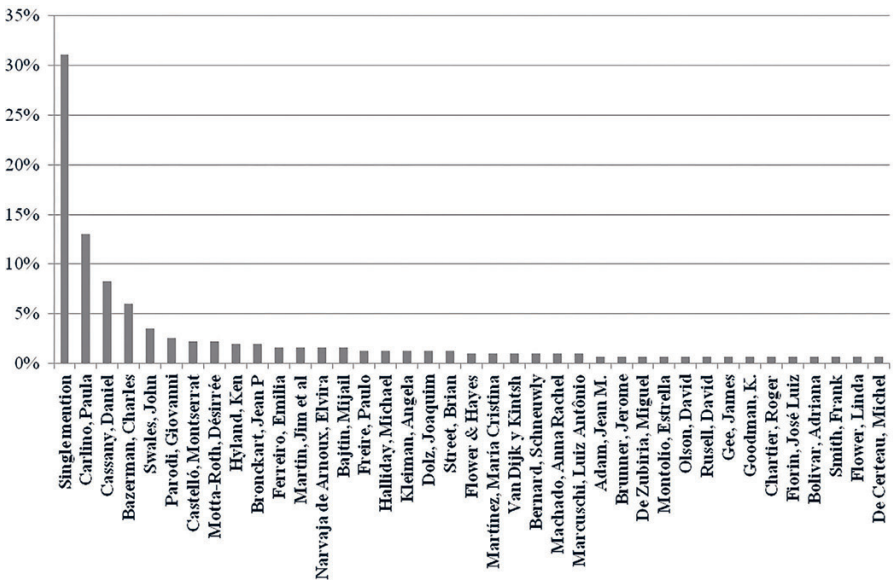


Figure 15.3. Distribution of influential authors by percentage (N=315)

3.2 Authors

The first striking thing about the authors that were viewed as influential was there were very few authors that were widely shared. In fact, 31% of the total mentions are authors that were mentioned only once, whereas only four authors received 10 or more mentions (equivalent to 30,8% of the total of N=315). Figure 15.3 presents as a percentage of the total all the reported influential authors that received 2 or more mentions. When these influential authors are categorized by theoretical and methodological affiliation (see Table 15.4) and by geographic region of origin (see Figure 15.5), the wide range of influences is even more evident.

3.3 Theoretical Orientations

The categories in Figure 15.4 were determined by examining the work of the authors cited twice or more as influential, and developing these categories based on our knowledge of the field and the content of their published work: school, origin, and language.

Table 15.4. Theoretical orientations of the influential authors mentioned twice or more (N=217)

Theoretical Orientation	Frequency	Percent
Academic literacy	41	19%
Rhetorical Genre Studies	21	10%
Genre Studies	8	4%
Critical Literacies / NLS	6	3%
Critical Genre Studies	7	3%
Critical Pedagogy	4	2%
Pedagogy	2	1%
Didactics	26	12%
Psychology of learning	14	6%
Psychology	2	1%
Cognitive Processes	8	4%
Psycholinguistics	4	2%
Linguistics	4	2%
Textual Linguistics	6	3%
Discourse Analysis	10	5%

Theoretical Orientation	Frequency	Percent
Corpus Linguistics	8	4%
English for Specific Purposes	17	8%
Systemic Functional Linguistics	9	4%
Socio-Discursive Interactionism	16	7%
History	2	1%
History of writing	2	1%
Total	217	100%

The theoretical orientations can be aggregated in three large groups, as shown in Figure 15.4, Languages and Linguistics, Education (including Psychology) and Rhetorical and Literacy studies. While the first two approximate the percentages of departmental or academic unit location of faculty (see Figure 15.1) the large percentage of rhetorical and literacy studies does not match departmental location.

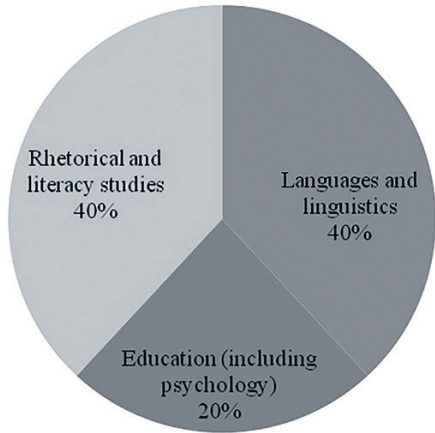


Figure 15.4. Aggregated theoretical orientations of influential authors

The aggregated 40% of influential scholars having a rhetorical and academic literacy orientation do not correlate with any institutional location reported by the respondents. While rhetorical and literacy studies may be construed as being in the humanities, they are not traditionally part of humanities departments in Latin America. But even if we so construe these approaches as humanities, they turn out to be the most influential, despite the humanities being only the third largest institutional home. So it appears that the study of writing seems to be drawing scholars in different directions than is traditional in their institutional affiliations.

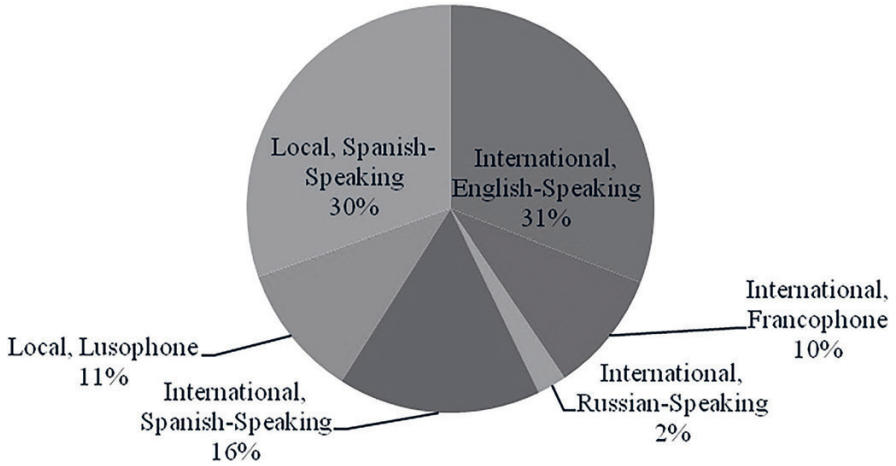


Figure 15.5. Geographic location of the influential authors

The geographic location of influentials identified is shown in Figure 15.5. There is an eclectic mix of local and international influences, drawing most prominently on scholarship in Spanish and Portuguese, totaling 57%, but with strong engagement with international scholarship in both English and French. Local scholars, either in Spanish or Portuguese, aggregate together a 41% of the mentions. However, a more detailed examination of the data on a country by country basis shows some interesting patterns.

In Portuguese-speaking Brazil, the influential Latin American authors (with a single exception of Emilia Ferreiro) were Lusophone and from Brazil. Similarly, in Spanish-Speaking Latin America, there was only one Brazilian or Lusophone influential (Paulo Freire). Thus there seems to be little influence between Spanish speaking and Portuguese speaking Latin America. The international influences from outside the region also show an interesting pattern. Scholars from Spain, such as Daniel Cassany, Monserrat Castelló, and Estrella Montolío are mentioned only in Spanish-speaking countries, and Francophone scholars such as Jean-Paul Bronckart are mentioned substantially in Brazil, with only occasional mentions in Spanish-speaking regions (all located in Colombia). It should be noted, however, that Anglophone scholars such as John Swales and Charles Bazerman as well as other international scholars such as Mikhael Bakhtin are shared across both Spanish-speaking and Lusophone regions.

Within Spanish speaking Latin America there were some further local patterns, with some authors having greater influence (or even their only influence) within their home country, and each country having a distinctive profile of influences. In the Spanish speaking-countries at least some Span-

ish-speaking influentials from other countries in Latin America are mentioned in each case, with some having region wide prominence; for instance, the Chilean scholar Giovanni Parodi is mentioned by surveyees in Chile, Colombia, and Puerto Rico, and the Argentine scholar Paula Carlino is mentioned in all the Spanish speaking countries. Thus there appear to be among Spanish speaking countries both internal national influences and region wide Spanish speaking influence.

3.4 Journals, Websites, and Databases for Reference and Publication

Across the region and in all countries, there seems to be no single dominant resource that participants reported using. “Resources” were defined in the survey as journals, databases and websites the respondents frequently consulted in their practice. By far the largest number of identified resources (77 out of 297, comprising 25.9 percent), were mentioned only once.

Table 15.5. Resources (journals, websites and databases) frequently consulted

Source	Frequency	Percent
Other (one mention)	79	26.60%
None / no answer	18	6.06%
Lectura y Vida (IRA)	16	5.39%
Signos	16	5.39%
Reading Research Quarterly	11	3.70%
Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO)	11	3.70%
Applied Linguistics	8	2.69%
PRODEAC (Programa de desarrollo de habilidades de lectura y escritura académica a lo largo de la carrera)	8	2.69%
Not Identified	7	2.36%
Real Academia Española	7	2.36%
REDLEES / ASCUN	7	2.36%
The WAC Clearinghouse	7	2.36%
REDALYC (Network of Scientific Journals Latin America And The Caribbean, Spain And Portugal)	6	2.02%
Science direct/EBSCO-Host	6	2.02%
Signo y Señal	6	2.02%

Source	Frequency	Percent
Discurso y Sociedad	5	1.68%
Revista de Linguística teórica y aplicada (RLA)	5	1.68%
Textos (Didáctica de la Lengua y la Literatura)	5	1.68%
Dialnet	4	1.35%
Discurso (Blog F. Navarro)	4	1.35%
Journal of Writing Research	4	1.35%
Sage Journals	4	1.35%
Textos en context	4	1.35%
ERIC (The Education Resources Information Center)	4	1.35%
The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University	4	1.35%
Cátedra UNESCO para la Lectura y la Escritura en América Latina	3	1.01%
Elcastellano.org	3	1.01%
GICEOLEM (Grupo para la Inclusión y Calidad Educativas a través de Ocuparnos de la Lectura y la Escritura en todas las Materias)	3	1.01%
Infancia y Aprendizaje	3	1.01%
Lenguaje	3	1.01%
Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa	3	1.01%
Portal CAPES	3	1.01%
Revista Ibérica	3	1.01%
Written Communication	3	1.01%
Cervantes.org	2	0.67%
Discourse Studies	2	0.67%
English for specific purposes	2	0.67%
Escrituraylectura.com.ar (Escritura y producción de conocimiento en las carreras de posgrado)	2	0.67%
Journal of Second Language Writing	2	0.67%
Onomazein	2	0.67%
Revista Aled	2	0.67%
Totals	297	100.00%

Only 4 resources were mentioned more than 10 times: *Lectura y Vida* 16

(5.4%), *Signos* 16 (5.4%), Reading Research Quarterly (RRQ) 11 (3.7 percent), and Scielo 11 (3.7 percent), of these, only *Lectura y Vida* is literacy focused, and it has ceased publication as of 2010. *Signos* was founded in 1967 and since 2005 publishes research articles in Spanish on the fields of psycholinguistics, text linguistics, discourse linguistics, and applied linguistics, SCIELO is a website of open access portal for journals in all fields, and RRQ is a reading journal. 13 participants mentioned not using specific resources or did not provide responses (Figure 15.6).

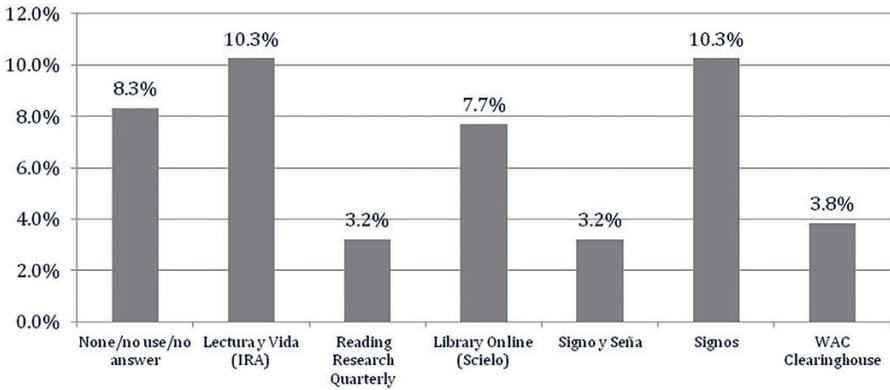


Figure 15.6. Distribution of resources mentioned more than 10 times

The largest number of responses for journals that the respondents would desire to be published in were for single-mentioned journals (45 out of 243 responses, or 18.5%) or none or do not know (43, or 17.7%). One journal, *Signos*, stood out as a preferred site for publication for work on writing research with 23 responses (9.5% of the total responses and about 20% of respondents, representing 6 Spanish speaking countries). No other journal received 10 or more responses.

Four journals were listed by 8 or 9 respondents (3.3 or 3.7% each). *Lectura y Vida* (mentioned by respondents in four countries) was so listed although it was no longer publishing. Three of the four preferred journals were mentioned only in their country of Publication: the Brazilian *Revista Brasileira de Linguística Aplicada*, the Colombian *Lenguaje*, and the *Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa*. Finally, 8 of the 9 mentions for the Colombian *Magis* were in Colombia. Thus only the linguistic *Signos* and the discontinued *Lectura y Vida* seemed to reach across the region in any substantial way as a favored publication venue (Figure 15.7). It should also be noted that in Brazil there were no mentions of Spanish-Speaking journals and in Spanish-Speaking countries there was only one mention of a Brazilian journal (*Linguagem em Discurso*). Thus there appears to be a strong pattern of local publication

with only two journals (only one of them still publishing) reaching across the Spanish-speaking region, and almost no publications crossing the language divide.

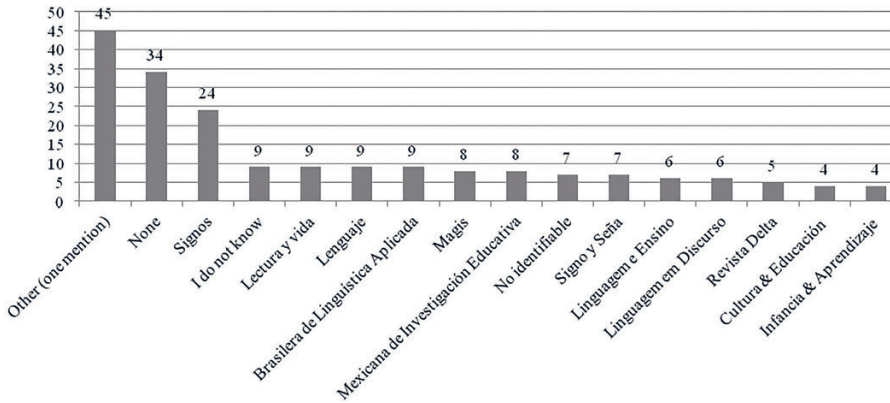


Figure 15.7. Frequency of preferred publishing journals

4. Analysis

First, we would like to comment on the numbers of respondents. Our response rate of over 36% overall is good, especially given the length and complexity of the survey instrument. We also have reason to believe, based on the team's insider knowledge of the region, that we have gotten good saturation of information, with reporting on most initiatives and scholars in the field. In fact, because we attempted to be inclusive in our initial invitations and snowball extensions, we suspect that many of our non-responses were from people who felt they did not participate fully enough in the field to have anything to report. Thus our self-selected respondents may reflect closely the emergent shape of the emerging field, with still small numbers of participants located in a few pockets of work. Our further mapping of the region may confirm this suspicion.

This field is emerging out of a number of disciplinary bases (particularly languages and linguistics, education, and humanities) as well as institutional service locations and is situated in no single department, though in some countries there are different mixes of academic and service units. Similarly, there is a disciplinary and theoretical spread in the authors seen as influencing the field, so there is no crystallization around a single or small number of approaches. On one side, the variety of academic units and theoretical orientations of influences could mean a healthy eclecticism, but on the other side it could also reflect dispersion, and lack of cohesive networks over common

interests and approaches. A deeper investigation into the work of individual scholars to see whether they are eclectic or within theoretical and disciplinary silos might help us interpret the situation more fully.

The lack of common journals, and particularly journals that reach across the various perspectives to address the multiple approaches to writing, however, indicates that the field may not have yet emerged with a core scholarly identity and with common discussions. Further, the lack of journals that have broad geographic reach across the field indicates limited opportunities for regional communication. Certainly there seems a strong linguistic divide between scholars whose first language is Portuguese and those whose is Spanish, as indicated both by the lack of orientation to each other's journals and by the lack of orientation to each other's leading scholars. Further, while they seem to share an interest in Anglophone scholars, the Portuguese speakers orient to European Francophone scholars and the Spanish speakers to European Spanish scholars, with little crossover.

All these clues indicate an emerging field that is looking in multiple directions, in ways that seem to be reaching beyond disciplinary and institutional locations, but which has not yet formed its own communicative structure in journals. There appear to be in recent years an increasing number of conferences that have an expanding place for writing, though these are within organizations of different scope. For example, The International Symposium on Genre Studies (SIGET) was created in 2003 in Brazil aiming at exploring the relationship between genres and the many human activities that they engender. The symposium meets every other year in Brazil, but it draws a number of other scholars from within Latin America and from other regions. Many of the participants are particularly interested in using genre approaches to understand and teach writing. Another academic network in Latin America is The UNESCO Chair on Reading and Writing in Latin America, which deals with the fields of teacher training and research into reading and writing at all educational levels. Within its regular congresses an increasing number of papers are specifically focused on the teaching of writing. Similarly, the International Reading Association has been holding biannual meetings on reading and writing at all educational levels; although the papers at this congress have been predominantly focused on reading and on primary and secondary levels, some work on writing and particularly higher education writing has been presented. Finally, in Colombia the nationally sponsored REDLEES Network on Reading and Writing on Higher Education (*Red de Lectura y Escritura en la Educacion Superior*) since 2006 has been holding events aimed at improving reading and writing in all Colombian universities. Because of the uniqueness of its focus on writing in higher education, it has become a de fac-

to region-wide meeting place for Latin American higher education writing.

As yet these developments have not yet led to a region-wide focused set of conferences or organizations with writing or higher education reading and writing as a central theme. Nor has it led to a journal or set of journals creating a core place to find and publish articles on higher education reading and writing.

What is most promising is that there is attention in each country to local scholars who are emerging as intellectual leaders in the field and that a small number of scholars are beginning region-wide attention, indicating some common approaches. Nonetheless, the lack of focused publication and conference venues to support interchange stands in the way of developing further intellectual coherence of the field. More detailed study of the conference programs in the recent past and as they emerge in near future can also tell us in greater depth what the dynamics of intellectual growth in the field are.

Similarly, 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?

A more detailed study of the uses made of external influences as well as of how internal communication emerges can in a more general way reveal much about how new scholarly communities form and how they draw on and relate to existing intellectual communities. The ILEES project will continue to document and study these processes as well as the emergence of practical programs and the relation of those programs to the emerging scholarly approaches.

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