

Inventing PLEA: A Social History of a College-Writing Initiative at a Chilean University

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Syracuse University, on land of the Onondaga Nation, firekeepers of the Haudenosaunee.¹

There are currently several publications that trace the development of Writing Studies from their emergence (which we could locate in the late 90's) to today (Ávila Reyes, González-Alvarez, & Castillo, 2013; Molina & Quintana, 2016; Natale & Stagnaro, 2016) in Latin America. Some of these studies suggest that this development happened in permanent contact with traditions in North America and Australia. In fact, the approximate dates we usually identify with the emergence of the field coincide with the first publications by a notable Argentinian scholar named Paula Carlino, who was the first to perform comparative studies on writing practices in the United States, Canada, and Australia (Molina & Quintana, 2016). Later, Carlino co-edited *Writing Programs Worldwide*, with Chris Thaiss, Gerd Braüer, Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, and Aparna Sinha. These contacts and collaborations indicate the intertwining of academic and personal histories across borders and traditions (Donahue, 2009), which not always register in scholarly writing. These collaborators and their traditions have unequal standings, access, and power in global academia (Lillis & Curry, 2010). One consequence of such power imbalances is that when scholars located at the “margins” engage in broader (international, cross-border) scholarly conversations they are often read as emerging from and indebted to the “central,” hegemonic traditions (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 10).

By this, I don't mean to say that such learning and borrowing from other (perhaps more self-aware and longer standing) traditions and disciplines did not

happen. However, I would like to argue that rather than stemming out of other traditions (ones perceived as dominant or hegemonic), the Latin American tradition(s) engaged with them as a natural and necessary part of excellent scholarly work, which requires researching what others have found on the subject matter. It is precisely this teasing out of the local and the global and the tracing of the circulation and exchange of theories and concepts that I find most interesting.

I attempt to trace the social history of a writing program in Chile. Specifically, I focus on PLEA, the Programa de Lectura y Escritura Académica (Program for Academic Reading and Writing) of the Pontificia Universidad Católica (PUC) de Chile. Recent scholarship about Writing Studies in Latin America describes the kind of institutional and social contexts in which the study and development of instructional models around writing emerged in the region. However, the motivations, coincidences, and interpersonal dynamics that helped to shape this field—and particularly PLEA—in Chile are seldom accounted for, in part, because this development is fairly recent and, in part, because narrative accounts or social histories are disciplinary approaches in Writing Studies that generally escape the way this field defines itself in Latin America. However, through narrative accounts and social histories, I attempt to show how a local tradition grounded in French functional linguistics took up the Bakhtinian concept of genre; developed questions, lines of inquiry, and pedagogies around the problem of college writing; and found relevant echoes in North American WAC/WID scholarship and Systemic Functional Linguistics. This social history will also show how inspired grassroots work can produce powerful curricular and institutional transformations. Thus, a social history of PLEA can provide a view into the kind of academic practices, social dynamics, and communications across borders that shaped Writing Studies in areas other than the United States. I believe that such histories are crucial for understanding the different traditions, theoretical displacements, and (re)inter-pretations that configure the Writing Studies field on a transnational scale.

The development of PLEA and the study of writing at this institution continues to evolve since I began collecting data for this study. For the purpose of this article, I focus only on the initial years of this initiative: its creation, development of an early self-awareness, and implementation. In order to (re)construct this history, I conducted five interviews with people who played a role in the emergence and development of PLEA: Natalia Ávila Reyes, Christian Peñaloza Castillo, Soledad Montes, Natalia Leiva, and Riva Quiroga.² I also worked with Natalia Ávila Reyes' personal digital archive that consists of a series of Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint materials, and Adobe PDF files related to the development of WAC

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interventions in three different disciplines: Nursing, Civil Construction, and Engineering. These disciplines provided a variety of genres, including writing assignments, rubrics, lists of frequent errors in student writing, presentations for disciplinary teacher training, and minutes of agreements between disciplinary experts and writing specialists. Working with these different pieces of a puzzle involved that I move back and forth between interviews, archival materials, institutional documents, and other secondary sources in an attempt to construct a chronology and contrast my interviewees' assertions and interpretations with other available information about the particular location in time and space in which PLEA emerged.

I present this history with a sense of personal urgency because the individual stories that shape institutional accounts are fragile. Even as I tried to gather narratives and documents for recent events, I came across how dates and facts slip from memory and how records were irredeemably lost. The people whom I discuss here are my mentors; PLEA is part of my own training as a scholar and an important piece of the path that brought me to work in Writing Studies. The tradition in which this program inscribes itself—if such a tradition exists (see Tapia-Ladino et al., 2016)—is my own tradition, and by understanding it, I understand my own history as a researcher and scholar. Hence, the process of writing this social history has required that I constantly interrogate my own interpretations; search for corroborative support across the narratives of my different sources; and contrast these personal histories with other scholarly sources that might help me reconstruct the phenomena I aim to describe.

However, let me address a few limitations. Because the participants I interviewed are people I care for and trust, I feel a responsibility to document this social history in a way that does not break my trust with such individuals. Thus, I have tried to be fair and respectful to the participants who worked to aid me in the creation of this project. For this reason, I have decided to omit the names of many collaborators whom I did not interview from PLEA because these individuals did not have an opportunity to contribute in a direct manner. Instead, I created spaces for the main actors involved in this history, so these individuals are noted, and their voices inserted in this text. But I resisted my impulse to insert long transcriptions from the interviews in the text. Finally, writing this article involved Spanish to English translations, so I attempted to preserve the tone and expressive quality of these translations. However, because I may fail at this effort, all original extracts from the interviews can be found as endnotes (in Spanish) throughout this article.

Social and Institutional Context

Several related social transformations took place in the Chilean educational landscape during the first decade of the 2000s: an expansion of the middle class and a broadening of high school education coverage produced an increase in access to the university (Neira, 2004). At the same time, in response to this expansion and diversification in the student population in higher education, there was a sudden growth in the number of higher education institutions. Indeed, this expansion in access to the university is documented often by publications dealing with the emergence and development of the PLEA writing program (Ávila Reyes, González-Alvarez, & Castillo, 2013; Sánchez & Montes, 2016). These changes are also discussed by Hernán Neira (2004):

Most of these new students have arrived at higher education due to an expansion of the high-school education coverage that reached 90% in 2000, in an average of 10 years. Though the wealthiest quintile is still the most relevant user of college education, the rise in student population is due mainly to the fact that the second, third, and even fourth quintiles are now candidates to university.³ (par. 10)

Now, broadening access to higher education and the increase in student population diversity all imply positive transformations, but the way this process unfolded in Chile is not altogether unproblematic. As Neira and other writers (Cruz-Coke, 2004; Redondo, 2005) suggest, these new students were not harmoniously integrated into the university system in a way that produced the equal access to education that would be expected from such an expansion. Rather, the response to this sudden growth in the demand for higher education emerged from actors that radically changed the logics and dynamics of the provision of education: “a generation of businessmen with the capacity to create universities, supported by power groups and access to capital,” according to Neira (2004, par. 8).⁶ These capitalists were not necessarily motivated by profit, but by an interest to promote their own conservative ideologies. Thus, most of these non-traditional students that arrived at the university did so on the “margins” of the system, so to speak.

Understanding the demands that emerged with the expansion of access to university requires a brief explanation regarding the larger context of Chilean higher education. Chilean higher education institutions can be grouped roughly into two groups: those that belong to the Consejo de Rectores and those that do not. The organization Consejo de Rectores de las Universidades Chilenas (CRUCH or Counsel of Rectors of Chilean Universities) was created in 1954 and was designated to

coordinate the work of universities in the country, with the purpose of generating standards and guidelines for the excellence of higher education research institutions. Traditionally, it grouped the most prestigious public and private universities across the nation, including the two oldest Chilean universities: Universidad de Chile (founded in 1842) and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) (founded in 1888). During the 1980s, the military dictatorship promoted the expansion of the educational system by encouraging the participation of private investors in this sector. Thus, numerous private universities and technical education institutes emerged (González & Espinoza, 2011). A limited number of these new universities, since then, have developed into prestigious institutions in the higher educational system. However, a number of these institutions have failed as educational projects (Cruz-Coke, 2004). This failure translates in the incapacity to obtain accreditation, and even proving incapable to prepare their students for national standard examinations (Rodríguez Ponce, 2012).

Hence, while the expansion of access to higher education in Chile was a fact, the inclusion of social and educational differences associated with this transformation is, in great part, a myth. While the numbers reflect positive change in terms of broader access to university across socio-economic groups, in practice, students from lower-middle classes seldom share the same classrooms with students from more affluent socio-economic backgrounds. Students from the fifth quintile usually attended traditional universities (members of the Consejo de Rectores), but students from other quintiles accessed mostly the newer private universities. Thus, the particular ways in which this transformation of higher education was experienced at the Universidad Católica can be explained by these differences and other institutions in terms of institutional histories and composition of student bodies. Universidad Católica is, after all, a member of the Consejo de Rectores, a traditional university attended—at the time—by a majority of affluent students. According to Ávila Reyes (2017):

About the diversification of students that arrived to the University...though that expansion did take place in Chile, it's a bit thorny to say that it was very high. Well yes, the expansion in Chile was of something like the 1000%...Crazy! But from that percentage, the number that made it into the Universities of the Consejo de Rectores was very small. So yes. [...] Católica did grow. A lot! When I did my undergraduate studies, there were like 5000 students.⁴ It's nuts how it grew in that decade!⁵ But that exponential growth shown by the global statistics. That was concentrated in the newer, private universities, not the traditional Universities of the Consejo de Rectores.⁷

Because Universidad Católica is a traditional university, this institution did not necessarily experience substantial changes in terms of the composition of its student body. Still, this institution began to promote a series of internal transformations maybe due to rapid growth in the size of the student population, perhaps as an attempt to meet international standards, or perhaps to adhere to a general turn toward student-centered education in Chile.⁸ The Plan for the Development of the University, from 2000 to 2005, acknowledges the need for college education to adapt to a changing world and to provide students with broad, flexible transferable skills that will make them more competitive in the contemporary job-market:

For example, the capacity to deal with complex problems in creative ways, be good team workers, communicate effectively in oral and written form, speak a foreign language, have a great capacity to process information, etc.

To achieve the previous goals US universities are reinforcing and improving their general education programs, expanding active learning, promoting undergraduate research, and extending academic exchange programs with foreign universities (UC, 2010).¹⁰

Thus, at this particular institution, the pedagogical turn translated into a search for strategies to promote comprehensive skills and abilities in students and the development of college pedagogies—a process that emulated, in a way, the U.S. model of a university. A study conducted by the Chilean scholars Verónica Villarroel and Daniela Bruna (2014) indicates that this turn toward a model based on competencies in higher education took place in Chile in the late 1990s, following international trends in education, and defined competencies as contextualized, transferable skills. Villarroel and Bruna also mention several controversies that arose with the introduction of these guidelines, among those who believed these were necessary for the education of critical citizens and those who believed this paradigm put unnecessary strain on university professors, but Villarroel and Bruna do not go as far as to analyze the rhetoric around this turn.

At Universidad Católica, effective oral and written communication were some of the key skills highlighted by this institutional plan. To this purpose, one measure that began to be developed was the implementation of a campus-wide written communication exam. The first step in this direction involved the design of the test and a rubric to assess writing, which called for experts in psychometrics working at MIDE UC,⁹ a Universidad Católica center dedicated to this kind of work. The second step was to evaluate this instrument in practice. This step required that a team of

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experts in language be involved, such as professors from the Linguistics Department like Marcela Oyanedel, Ana Maria Harvey, and Jose Luis Samaniego as well as a few students studying linguistics. Natalia Ávila Reyes and Christian Peñaloza Castillo were among those students.

Before the end of this five-year period, the university implemented a written communication exam, which was a graduation requirement for all undergraduate students. As the results of this test, scores and rates of approval per academic unit began to circulate at the administrative level and concerns about writing grew. Cristian Peñaloza Castillo (2017) comments,

The thing is that, beyond scores, there is the problem. A problem that everyone knew that was there but that was now being quantified. And so, some academic units start manifesting their interest in, normally remedial courses...but of doing something.

Thus, before 2003, writing had become an institutional concern at Pontificia Universidad Católica.

I find that there may be some parallels between the way this local writing initiative developed and particular moments in Rhetoric and Composition Studies in the United States. As it so happens in the U.S., the emergence of first-year writing courses coincided with a national expansion of access to higher education at the beginning of the twentieth century (Berlin 1987; Bazerman, 2014; Bazerman et al., 2016). However, as shown throughout this section, this development does not neatly mirror 1970s literacy crisis narratives (Lamos, 2011; Mutnick, 2000). Indeed, PLEA at Universidad Católica was not created so much as a reaction to a diversification of the student body, but rather as part of a transformation of the institutional model that aimed to align the Universidad Católica with the United States' higher education model. However, this top-down agenda to mirror the U.S. university as an educational model was not grounded in any general pedagogical or curricular design theories, even less with theories about writing and writing pedagogies. So, despite these clear historical parallels, the writing exam, the first-year writing course, and the first research on writing implemented at this institution were all driven during this period by local theories, questions, and problems; and all with little to no knowledge or contact with Rhetoric and Composition disciplinary work in the U.S. For some time, a small group of people invented Writing Studies locally.

“We were so young”: Inventing Writing Studies

Between 2003 and 2006, three studies related to academic writing were published by faculty from the Linguistics Department of PUC (Samaniego, Oyanedel & Mizón, 2003; Harvey & Muñoz, 2006). Both Ana Maria Harvey and Marcela Oyanedel were key figures in this research: Oyanedel was trained in the tradition of French grammar and functional linguistics, and she was a pedagogue at heart. Harvey was an acute researcher in the field of discourse studies, always aware of the more recent developments in the field. Both, as well as José Luis Samaniego (a grammarian at Universidad Católica) played an important role in the organization of the ALED Conference¹¹ that took place as early as 2001 at Universidad Católica. The theoretical and rhetorical traditions –French grammar, linguistic functionalism, and discourse analysis– by these women and the School of Letters they constituted at the time at Universidad Católica are also important to delineate within the context of producing the first regional studies on college writing.

Natalia Ávila Reyes appears to draw some attention to a time when these research lines and the emerging interest in writing as an object of study and the institutional demands around writing instruction were all seeming to converge but had not yet been fully made sense of. However, a visit by an early Latin American specialist in writing may have acted like an oracle to shed some light, a sign perhaps that some attuned scholars were already seeing the development of a new area of study for this region. This visit is also a reflection, perhaps, of an institutional context suddenly receptive to this kind of research and a foreshadowing of the disciplinary spaces that would take on the task of developing it further in the years to come. However, in that moment, there were still no writing-specific courses in place at the university, and while data was being gathered, this group of scholars was still trying to figure out best ways of approach, as Natalia Ávila Reyes points out:¹²

Natalia: The first time I ever heard about this topic was in an ALED Conference that was organized at PUC, here on this campus (San Joaquín). It was tiny. And, to that ALED came Elvira Narvaja de Arnoux. Have you heard of her? From UBA (Univeristy of Buenos Aires). She invented these workshops, that don't exist anymore, for the general education program of UBA. [...] And those were the first courses that were taught. In fact, this is the first bibliography that I know of. It is a very linguistic-workshop approach, very similar to what we started doing here at Universidad Católica.

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Ana: Ah! So then, when you started designing the course, you thought: “We will do something similar to Narvaja’s” ...

Natalia: No. We started doing something similar because we were linguists.

One of the first data collections conducted by Samaniego, Oyanedel, and Mizón (2003) to study college-student writing took place in the early 2000s, within the context of a research study titled “Function and quality of academic discourse.”¹³ This research was supported by internal university funds called DICPUCs, which are awarded to research projects that had almost (but not quite) qualified for national funding. DICPUC includes funds for main researchers, research assistants, and materials. Natalia Ávila Reyes, Christian Peñaloza Castillo, and a few other research assistants, who at that time were advanced undergraduate and graduate students, worked on this project.¹⁴ Apparently, they were all given the task of finding problems or criteria to evaluate samples of student writing:

There what we did was we gathered texts very much flying by the seat of our pants, and then analyzed them, also flying by the seat of our pants. Obviously, what you did as a linguist, taking a text and analyzing what problems it had, was to construct inventories of errors¹⁵ (Ávila Reyes, 2017).

Their findings on student writing as part of exploratory research were published in an internal institutional report that is often cited by later works dealing with PLEA (though the report itself is somewhat difficult to find). Still, maybe one of the most important contributions of this study –besides the fact that it was the first, hence, a foundational study on writing conducted at this university– is that this study brought together a group of people that would later take on the development this kind of research.

In fact, when the written communication exam was implemented, it was this team of student researchers that was also called to work on the evaluation process, beginning with the rubrics to assess students’ writing and ending with the actual written exams. By 2005, they designed and started teaching a writing instruction module at the Faculty of Letters in connection with the course “Introduction to Linguistics.” When the results of the written communication exam offered opportunities for comparisons among the average scores of different academic units, more and more faculty started requiring writing courses for their students. Also, as faculty across different schools started noticing the presence of lingering failing

students in advanced levels of their undergraduate programs, concerns reached higher officials of the university's administration, as Peñaloza Castillo (2017) points out:

So, then the Provost Office said: “We can't leave these lads hanging, or else they won't be able to graduate.” And this is when summer courses were invented. [...] I imagine the first must have been taught by Marcela Oyanedel, Jose Luis Samaniego, they must have taught some classes, but soon it was Natalia and me who were doing those courses. They were summer intensives. And there a group of student assistants started to come together. In fact, I remember that, for one version there were so many students enrolled that we had to have a morning and an evening session...¹⁶

What they started teaching in these courses –and the way they taught them– echoes the first research on writing conducted at the Linguistics Department of PUC. These studies were designed to address frequent errors in student writing, communicate the academic norms and conventions, and provide linguistic tools to construct coherent and cohesive texts. A solid tradition of grammar and linguistics was the core of this design. With time, the group of instructors added to these their knowledges of education. Much like the American scholars that raised critiques to current traditionalist approaches to error (Lu, 1991; Laurence; 1993) or who identified with Mina Shaughnessy's work *Errors and Expectations* (1979), this group of Chilean scholars soon became aware that this kind of traditional or remedial approach centered on errors was inadequate for teaching writing at the university level. In the context of our interview, Christian Peñaloza Castillo reflects that the rationale behind this realization was probably influenced by a turn towards genres, functional grammar, and discourse analysis that had recently been introduced in the Linguistics Department by a group of professors and graduate students, together with an awareness about the specific features of disciplinary discourses (Hyland, 2004; Prior & Bilbro, 2012).

This turn introduced theorists like Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov. Indeed, an article by Oyanedel (published in 2006) and some course syllabi developed around the time suggest that the reception of the Bakhtinian concept of genre was mediated by a linguistics foundation that traced a trajectory from Ferdinand de Saussure, through structuralist linguists such as Roman Jakobson, Louis Hjelmslev, and Émile Benveniste, and then functionalists like André Martinet and Jean Michel Adam (see also Feuillard, 2012). In this context, the concepts of text and genre came to “fill in a gap” that sentence-level linguistics could not make sense of; that of the text as a unit of meaning (Oyanedel, 2006, p. 10). Interestingly enough, these theorists also

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influenced the development of Writing Studies in the U.S. (Miller, 2005; Prior, 2009). Notably, Bakhtin's theories heavily influence English studies (Devitt, 2004).

Needless to say, by 2005 several writing courses were in place, and researchers conducted and published studies on writing and academic discourse. Even though other scholars (specifically from Universidad Católica de Valparaíso) published rather prolifically on academic writing at that time, the case of PUC was an interesting contribution because, at this particular location, Writing Studies emerged in relation with discourse studies. At this point, from the group of student assistants that began working on this project, at least Natalia Ávila and Christian Peñaloza were students with a master's degree; their work as teachers and researchers was funded by small TA salaries and university funds. It was young people's work: exploratory, passionate, but somewhat precarious. It still had not found a stable place within the institution, neither in terms of a clear location within one or more university departments or disciplinary areas, nor as a stable curricular structure, or in terms of sources of funding. The same can be said about Writing Studies at this particular time and place.

Inventing Writing in the Disciplines: Finding WAC

The PUC institutional plan regarding writing considered two fundamental actions. One action was the implementation of the written communication exam. The other action was a curricular intervention that was designed to be implemented in each academic unit and that consisted of what the University President called "marked courses." These courses were selected more or less randomly and were designated as writing intensive courses: writing activities and writing assessment were important components of the syllabus. This move was, of course, an attempt to reproduce the U.S. model of writing intensive courses. However, the teachers designated to work on development and implementation became cognizant of this parallel somewhere during the design process, an awareness that further corroborated that the directions this initiative was taking made theoretical and practical sense in comparison to international experiences.

So, once summer writing courses were established and academic departments were ready to count on an introductory, remedial writing course for students, faculty within those departments started to wonder how to implement the second part of the plan: writing in the disciplines. This part of the plan is when a new form of collaboration sprang into action between writing specialists and disciplinary specialists across campus. The Nursing School and the Civil Construction School became the first two departments to express an interest to implement this initiative. Later on, the

Engineering School also jumped on board. Although for different reasons, the collaboration between the Nursing School and the Engineering School constituted crucial turning points in the history of PLEA. One of those turning points implied locating a broader disciplinary conversation within an international field of research (Writing Studies, Rhetoric and Composition); the other, locating a more powerful and stable source of funding for this emerging writing initiative.

The Nursing School and Nurses

During Natalia Ávila Reyes's first encounter with Charles Bazerman, at a conference held in Chile around 2009, Bazerman had made a comment to her, according to her recollection, that was something like, "Yes, nurses are always leaders in WAC initiatives. I don't know why. They are proactive, enthusiastic... I don't know." Some years later, Ávila Reyes was accepted at the Graduate Program at the University of California Santa Barbara, under the mentorship of Bazerman. In 2005, however, she was still trying to figure how to implement disciplinary writing courses at the Nursing School of PUC. Very soon after, her collaboration efforts produced unexpected outcomes.

Part of the intervention at the Nursing School dealt with gathering and analyzing text samples; identifying genres and recurrent writing problems; and finally, generating writing assessment rubrics for this specific context. The intervention also involved carrying out a series of workshops for both faculty and student assistants. In these workshops, writing specialists met with disciplinary experts to discuss issues, such as how to use rubrics to evaluate student writing as well as discussing the fundamentals of teaching writing in the disciplines. These workshops were also used to address and de-stabilize common assumptions about writing, such as the idea that writing is a basic competence or the idea that writing amounts to remediating the failings of previous academic trajectories. Instead, learning how to write in a discipline was framed as a process of enculturation into the discipline, producing arguments supported by using scholarly references produced by disciplinary experts (Prior, 2013; Wenger, 1952/1998). Indeed, the work with the nursing school offered an opportunity to move away from the remedial towards a model that drew on specialist knowledge to design pedagogical interventions; in other words, pedagogy based on empirical research.

As Peñaloza Castillo (2017) recounts, this approach was driven both by the group's initiative as by the need to persuade campus authorities through the collection of "hard data":

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To do this work right, beyond the theoretical background you are putting together, you need the support of statistics, because, when you talk to psychologists—who were the ones that had the control of the exam—or even when you talk with Main Campus,¹⁷ you need to show up with your quantitative data. Not just with an uncorroborated theoretical support.¹⁸

As Castillo points out, the collaborators of PLEA worked to gather empirical evidence to use as rhetorical resources to inform their practice and to negotiate the relevance and efficacy of the program with university administrators.

Academics at the Nursing School made these actions possible due to their active interest to engage in this discussion. In fact, they were not only interested in performing better as teachers and adequately responding to student writing, but also developing a scholarly interest in ideas about academic writing pedagogies within their discipline. Moreover, they wanted to do some research and publish about this work and experience (Mantuliz, Salamanca, Ávila Reyes, et al., 2011). Ávila Reyes (2017) recounts,

And they went to the data bases to do searches about writing, and... Oh! They found a tradition. That was somewhere around 2005 or 2006. So there, through the nurses, I got to read Paula Carlino, and I got to read people working on college writing in Australia, like Aitchinson...¹⁹

Indeed, it was through the collaboration with this group of nurses that Ávila Reyes encountered WAC scholarship for the first time. Thanks to this serendipitous event, the pedagogical and investigative approaches that resulted from this group at PUC suddenly became grounded in a clear and well-established theoretical framework, informed and defined by the work of scholars such as Susan McLeod, Charles Bazerman, David Olson, and Paula Carlino. This newfound scholarship was utilized to re-signify and re-interpret the understanding of academic conventions and genres and to cast a new light on ideas like the “marked courses” initiative that had been introduced at this university during the rise of institutional awareness about writing. Yet, whereas collaboration with the Nursing School emerged from academics in nursing interested to generate better pedagogical practices for their students, the collaboration with the Engineering School was triggered by institutional constraints.

The Engineering School

In 2007, the Engineering School of Universidad Católica went through an accreditation process conducted by the ABET international accreditation agency. Apparently, the Engineering School fulfilled all the requirements for accreditation before going through its assessment process except for one: this school had no disciplinary writing courses. Hence, for engineers, writing became a problem yet to be solved. While collaborations between engineers and writing specialists helped to get the process started, once writing specialists identified some predominant genres, relevant journals, and recurrent citation practices, engineers quietly retreated back and left writing to the writing specialists.

The peculiarity of the Engineering School was its size. Generally, other schools at the Universidad Católica admitted between 30 to 100 students, but the Engineering School admitted four or five times that number.²⁰ At the time, the people working on writing in the university were still, basically, Ávila Reyes, Peñaloza Castillo, and a few other student assistants. However, to implement a writing course effectively within this discipline required faculty knowledgeable in WID (Writing in the Disciplines). Thus, around 2009, Engineering provided a permanent and sustainable source of funding that initiated a search for instructors, and PLEA was founded.

PLEA experienced accelerated growth and continual development due not only to the WAC initiative in place and legitimacy across campus but also its source of funding and presence within the largest school at the university. The coordinators of the program recruited more young and emerging scholars to teach. Soon, the success and spirit of collaboration between PLEA groups created a certain glamour around the program that made it popular among undergraduate students. Hence, during this period, the best students of their cohort applied to work with PLEA as student assistants, and their labor was greatly appreciated for evaluating the written assignments produced by the 40 to 45 students per course, the enrollment norm at the Engineering School. Work in PLEA was further enriched by collaborators seeking common goals and outcomes, according to Ávila Reyes (2017):

We held meetings with engineering instructors. We read texts among us. We had one day each week where we would read a bibliography and comment on it. We all made the course syllabus together, student assistants and instructors, with an equal right to voice. We changed those things that didn't work from one semester to the next. All

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in the logic of action research, because we didn't know anything. We were inventing the wheel in that sense.²¹

This kind of fully engaged collaborative work, both within the members of PLEA as well as with the discipline-specialists involved within the initiative, led to pedagogical models that emerged from empirical research gathered within the program. The dynamics of such labor dynamics lasted until 2011, when Ávila Reyes left Chile (and PLEA) to begin her doctoral studies at University of California, Santa Barbara. However, such work continues in that what was started was left in the hands of a group of former PLEA student assistants who are now graduate students in Linguistics.

Conclusion: Recent Developments and Future Questions

PLEA continues to grow as a provider of writing courses for different academic units at PUC. Since 2016, two other initiatives independent from PLEA were implemented to address writing at the university, no doubt influenced by the work from PLEA. One initiative is PED²² (*Programa de Escritura Disciplinar* or Program for Disciplinary Writing), a program designed for instructors to promote the use of writing as a tool for learning in academic disciplines. The other initiative is known as PRAC²³ (*Programa de Apoyo a la Comunicación Académica* or Program to Support Academic Communication), a writing center meant to support Universidad Católica's student population.

During 2014, a specialist in Systemic Functional Linguistics undertook the direction of PLEA. This theoretical perspective could introduce PLEA to broader conversations with this theory of language, as well as an additional methodology for the study of academic discourse, and a pedagogy in coherence with those orientations. The introduction of this framework may transform and unify the theoretical grounding of PLEA's work in ways unimaginable as of yet. This new approach centers on systemic functional genre pedagogies: "In SFL approaches, the teaching-learning process is typically seen as a cycle which takes writers through modelling, joint negotiation, and independent construction" (Hyland, 2003, p. 26). A possible advantage of having one unified theoretical frame is that it allows each instructor to design and develop their course syllabi autonomously, while adhering to a common set of values and principles that orient the program as a whole.

These recent developments show that the formation process of a project like PLEA is profoundly dynamic and in constant dialogue with thought outside Latin America: the U.S. tradition in Writing Studies first and the Systemic Functional

Linguistics second. I say dialogue because the different influences that have shaped the development of this project have always been received by an academic culture with an identity of its own, which has operated as an active interpretation and appropriation of these elements. It is difficult to tell, at this point, what transformations in terms of research orientations and pedagogies these more recent contacts with international theories will produce. But, most probable, these dialogues between Writing Studies in Latin America and other traditions will continue to expand. For instance, conferences like ALES (Association of Latin American Writing Studies) –with a clear transnational orientation– continue to gain force and a presence in the international panorama. My hope is that other people will learn from histories like the one I have discussed as ways to help to interrogate the borders of national and regional traditions in Writing Studies and to raise relevant questions with regard to the theoretical exchanges, appropriations, and loans that shaped traditions located at the *center* of the global academic landscape (Canagarajah, 2002).

When I began doing this research, back in 2017, my understanding of the field of Writing and Rhetoric Studies, and its development in Latin America looked very different. I was new to the field in the U.S. The ALES conference had just been formed, and I had not had the chance to look at my own tradition from a distance. Even the question (no longer standing) about the existence of a regional discipline and tradition seemed relevant and pressing. The present study, which now feels a bit outdated and naïf raises, however, some important questions. Can the field of writing and rhetoric be understood as one that develops across boundaries, rather than solely inscribed within national territories? How would understanding this field across borders transform the understanding of the discipline? What roles does the study of regional (marginal or “emergent”) traditions play in the understanding of the field at large? What are some productive ways of promoting a dialogue between traditions with unequal prestige and power? And, what are some of the principles and outcomes that we expect will come from such exchanges?

Endnotes

1. Land acknowledgment - College of arts and science of Syracuse University. (2020). Retrieved February 25, 2020, from <https://thecollege.syr.edu/land-acknowledgement/>
2. Interviews with Natalia Ávila Reyes and Christian Peñaloza Castillo are cited intensely throughout the text, because they are co-founders of PLEA. Interviews with Soledad Montes, Natalia Leiva, and Riva Quiroga were essential for my

understanding of recent developments concerning this program, but not cited directly in this article.

3. Personal translation, of the original text in Spanish: “La mayoría de los nuevos alumnos han llegado a la educación superior gracias a la extensión de la cobertura de enseñanza media, que era del 90% en 2000, con un promedio de 10 años. Si bien el primer quintil es proporcionalmente, todavía, el mayor usuario de la enseñanza universitaria, el incremento de alumnos en ella se debe fundamentalmente a que alumnos de los quintiles segundo, tercero e incluso cuarto hoy son candidatos a ingresar a la universidad.” (Neira, 2004, web).
4. Personal translation, of the original text in Spanish: “Alumnos y profesores no tienen hoy tanta capacidad para incidir en el sistema como una generación de empresarios con capacidad de crear universidades, apoyados por grupos de poder y acceso a capitales. Estos empresarios universitarios no necesariamente se mueven por el lucro, pues muchos lo hacen más bien motivados por incrementar la difusión y el poder de las ideologías -casi siempre conservadoras- que comparten.” (Neira, 2004, web).
5. This number is hyperbolic. The actual number was closer to 15000.
6. The 2000s.
7. Original text in Spanish: “La diversificación de los sujetos que llegaron a la universidad. Si bien esa expansión en Chile es un poco mentiroso decir que fue súper alta... A ver, en Chile la expansión es como de un 1000% en diez años, una cuestión así de locos, pero de ese porcentaje los que llegaron a las universidades del Consejo de Rectores son muy poquitos. En el fondo, [...] la Católica creció un montón. Cuando yo entré eran como 5000 estudiantes, si es ridículo como creció en esa década. Pero, ese crecimiento exponencial, de locos que muestran las cifras globales, se concentró más en las universidades privadas más nuevas, fuera del Consejo de Rectores.”
8. It is challenging to point out specific literature about this topic. Although there are publications that suggest that such a shift was taking place during the first decade of the 2000s in Chile and maybe other countries in Latin America (Dettmer, 2008), these references emanate from studies in different disciplinary pedagogies, e.g. medicine (Triviño et.al., 2009), engineering (Salgado et.al., 2012), nursing (Araya et.al., 2011). And, the terminology describing the turn may vary (competences, skills, integral training).
9. Personal translation of the original text: “...la capacidad de enfrentar creativamente problemas complejos, trabajar bien en equipo, comunicarse eficazmente en forma verbal y escrita, hablar un idioma extranjero, tener una gran

capacidad para procesar información, etc. // Para lograr los objetivos anteriores las universidades de los EEUU están reforzando y remozando sus programas de formación general, expandiendo el aprendizaje activo, favoreciendo la educación personalizada, promoviendo las actividades de investigación en el pregrado y expandiendo los programas de intercambio académico con universidades extranjeras.” (UC, 2010. Plan de desarrollo 2000-2005).

10. Short for Centro de Medición de la Universidad Católica, Center for Measurements of Universidad Católica.
11. ALED stands for Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios del Discurso, Latin American Association of Discourse Studies. This organization was founded 1995 in Caracas, Venezuela (<http://www.aledportal.com/aled.html>).
12. Original text in Spanish: “Natalia: [...] yo la primera vez que escuché hablar de este tema fue en un encuentro ALED que se hizo en la PUC, aquí en San Joaquín. Chiquitito. Y a ese ALED, vino Elvira Narvaja de Arnoux. ¿La ubicas? La de la UBA. Y ella inventó unos talleres, que ya no existen, del ciclo básico de la UBA [...] Y estos fueron los primeros cursos que se hicieron y, de hecho, es la primera bibliografía que yo conozco. Ese enfoque es un enfoque bien de taller lingüístico, y es bien parecido a lo primero que empezamos a hacer nosotros en la Universidad Católica. // E.: Entonces ustedes cuando empezaron a pensar en el diseño dijeron, ya, algo parecido a lo de Narvaja... // Natalia: No. Empezamos a hacer algo parecido porque éramos lingüistas.”
13. The original title in Spanish is "Función y calidad del discurso académico escrito."
14. The names of people who were not interviewed or asked to contribute to this history was purposely omitted.
15. Original text in Spanish: “...ahí lo que hicimos fue recopilar textos, a tontas y a locas, y analizarlos, también a tontas y a locas. Obviamente lo que hacías, como lingüista agarrando un texto y analizando qué problemas tiene, era eso: hacer catastros de problemas.”
16. Original text in Spanish: “Casa Central (Subdirección Académica) dijo, “a estos chicos no los podemos dejar en el aire porque sino no van a poder aprobar sus licenciaturas”. Y se inventan los cursos de verano. El primer curso de verano [...] me imagino que los primeros los debe haber dado Marcela Oyanedel, José Luis Samaniego, que algunas clases deben haber dado, pero ya los hacíamos básicamente Natalia y yo. Eran cursos durante enero. Intensivos. Y ahí también se empezó a armar un equipo de ayudantes. De hecho, recuerdo que en una versión se inscriben tantos estudiantes que tuvimos que tener una versión matinal y una versión vespertina...”.

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17. Meaning, people in high administrative positions in the university.
18. Original text in Spanish: “Entonces para hacer bien este trabajo, más allá de todo este marco teórico que te estás armando, necesitas un sustento estadístico, porque cuando hables con los psicólogos, que eran los que tenían el control de la prueba, incluso cuando hables con Casa Central, llega con evidencia cuantitativa. No solo con el soporte teórico no corroborado.”
19. Original text in Spanish: “Y se fueron a las bases de datos a buscar sobre escritura, y... ¡Oh! Encontraron que existía una tradición. Eso, fue el 2005, tal vez el 2006. Y ahí, a través de las enfermeras, yo llegué a leer Paula Carlino, llegué a leer gente que trabaja en Australia con temas de escritura universitaria, como Aitchinson...”
20. Contrast with recent data on the following site:
<http://www.psu.demre.cl/postulacion/carreras-requisitos-y-ponderaciones/pontificia-universidad-catolica> (last visited, December, 2017).
21. Original text in Spanish: “Nos juntábamos con profes de Ingeniería. Leíamos textos entre nosotros. Teníamos un día a la semana para leer bibliografía y comentarla. Hacíamos entre todos el programa, ayudantes y profesores, mismo nivel de voz. Cambiábamos las cosas que no habían resultado de un semestre a otro. Super en la lógica de investigación acción porque no sabíamos nada, estábamos inventando la rueda en ese sentido.”
22. See PED’s website here: Programa de Escritura Disciplinar,
web: <http://escrituradisciplinar.uc.cl/> (last visited, December, 2017).
23. See PRAC’s website here: Programa de Apoyo a la Comunicación Académica,
web: <http://comunicacionacademica.uc.cl/> (last visited, December, 2017).

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