13

Writing Centers: A Retrospective View to Understanding the Present and Future of Writing Center Programs in the Latin American Context

Violeta Molina Natera

Writing centers are a collaborative effort aimed at the development of writing skills, especially in higher education. While these programs first emerged in North American universities, they can now be found on a global scale. This article examines the historical trajectory of writing centers since their first appearance in regions outside of Latin America to their current status. In the last five years, Latin America has seen a Writing Center "boom" and the establishment of several writing centers focusing on a diverse range of topics and pedagogical approaches. This article also draws attention to the differing forces that led to the emergence of writing centers in Latin America, and where they are now in comparison to their North American counterparts. Through this examination, the article develops an understanding of the concept of writing centers and the practice of peer-tutoring, which serve as a core to these initiatives. As a temporary conclusion—conscious that writing center history is ongoing—I finish the article with a reflective prospect of how this type of teaching might shape the development of higher education in Latin America. While the impact of writing centers is already felt in this locale, the growth of this approach to literacies is still in consolidation. Therefore, there is great potential for the development of an academic community interested in writing centers.

In recent years, Latin America has seen several initiatives emerge offering alternative approaches to supporting students at the college level with their struggles in reading and writing.[1] Little was known about how these issues

1 Translators' note: We have avoided formulations that suggest a deficit perspective on

DOI: https://doi.org/10.37514/INT-B.2025.2739.2.13

were addressed in North American universities and other regions until the publication of Paula Carlino's research on the strategies implemented in colleges in Australia, Canada, and the US (Carlino, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, among others). In many cases, these works cultivated curiosity in some Latin American colleges wanting to undertake projects or programs that could better promote reading and writing practices amongst students. One such project is that of writing centers, which mainly function on the practice of peer-tutoring, to support a collaborative academic writing process outside of the classroom. This article offers a retrospective view on the historical trajectory of writing centers in order to better understand their emergence and potential implications in the Latin American context.

Background: Writing Centers in North American Universities

In North American higher education institutions, there is evidence of writing tutoring long before the appearance of writing centers. Waller (2002) identifies the following three historical references contributing to the origins of writing centers. First, in the 18th century, North American universities saw the birth of extra-curricular *literary societies*, whereby students engaged in lively debates and student-led literary exercises that today characterize much of the work led by writing centers. The labor is centered on students, who must work cooperatively with others, including their peers, as well as professors, emphasizing the writing process.

Second, tutoring as a service was offered to university students in need of specific academic support. Initially, tutoring services were offered by scholarly-minded individuals outside of the university on a hire basis, but during the 1950s universities began to offer free tutoring services to student-athletes and World War II (WWII) veterans, very much in the manner that we see in the 21st century. Later, during the 1960s, this form of institutionally led and paid tutoring service was offered to students categorized as low-income.[2]

The third historical antecedent of writing centers arose with the implementation of college composition courses, which in the North American educational context is often a part of general course requirements. Since the

students. For more on this issue, see "Reflection" later.

2 Translators' note: This change has been generally associated with the open admissions movement that took place during the 1960s. During those years, U.S. universities and colleges incorporated open admissions. This change in admissions policy radically modified the access to higher education, diversifying the demographic of the undergraduate student body.

early 19th century, North American English and Rhetoric departments have offered composition courses. In fact, shortly after their inception, composition courses were linked to a "conference" method of instruction. This approach involved personalized conversations between the professor and the student about the texts being developed (Bouquet, 1999). This individualized tutoring approach was later implemented in writing centers. In this manner, the institutionalized labor of writing centers is not necessarily foreign to the university (Waller, 2002).

Actual writing center programming is thought to have originated in the US toward the mid-twentieth century. And while there is no established agreement as to where exactly writing centers first appeared, what is known is that they quickly boomed throughout U.S. universities because of the new incoming body of students, who were viewed as underprepared in relation to the average college student of the time. Given the shifts in student demographics and the newly identified students' educational needs, colleges across the US responded with a variety of approaches, including composition courses built with a "writing laboratory" method (Buck, 1905). This method consisted of composition classes that were supported with a "laboratory hour" outside of classroom time. These writing laboratories promptly demonstrated their efficacy to the extent that, in the 1950s, seventy percent of North American universities drew on this method (Carino, 1995). Furthermore, several universities made it part of their programming to offer free individual tutoring services to students in need of writing support. The main advantage of this approach was that these were not "remedial" courses where students might feel as if they were being isolated and ostracized due to their writing practices, but instead spaces of voluntary assistance, although in some cases assisting these services was suggested by a professor (Boquet, 1999).

Besides the changing student population across college campuses after WWII, the US began to emerge as a world power, and this shift demanded that the nation reckon with its positionality in all regards. For this very reason, research and graduate programs in major universities developed in a way never seen before. More so, several distinguished European scientists fled their home countries to avoid armed conflict, and they found the US to be a favorable new home for the cultivation of the varied branches of knowledge.

To become a world power, the US understood that it needed to develop leaders who could generate the changes of a modern society. Because of this understanding, the nation then became deeply invested in optimizing effective learning methods, especially as connected to professionalization (Russell, 2002). Among the many proposals that emerged from this desire was that of improving reading and writing at the college level, a proposal that has

developed considerably since its emergence. During the 1970s and the start of the 1980s, scholars focused on the assumed cognitive processes of people who write, and these were seen as tasks that a person could individually take up and resolve a writing issue; during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, they began to pay attention to the implications of context in the process of writing, and specific strategies were taken up to address these varied differences. During the 1990s there was a recognition of the differences in writing genres and disciplines at different schooling levels, such as high school writing vs. college writing, and this led to the conceptualization of what today is described as *academic cultures*. This concept, which has now gone through a number of iterations in the last 20 years, argues that "there is not one form of academic literacy, but instead literacies come in multiplicities and in plural forms" (Molina, 2012, p. 96). The 1980s and 1990s then gave rise to pedagogically oriented movements that focused on "writing across the curriculum" and its derivative of "writing in the disciplines" (Bazerman et al., 2005). This shift had particular momentum in Western and English-dominant contexts, especially the US, and sought to integrate the teaching of writing in different disciplines (Carlino, 2007).

In this manner, the following points present a historical trajectory which highlights several reasons that propelled the launch of writing centers:

- **As an extension of the classroom.** Initially these writing initiatives were launched as "writing laboratories." Carino (1995) explains that these laboratories started in the classrooms, more as a method than a place, in which the labor was focused on the grammatical improvement of writing. But later, during the 1940s, the labs physically transferred to outside of the classroom, following the scientific model of the laboratory as an extension of the classroom.
- **Remediation.** Several historical events, such as World War II, the civil rights movement, and the so-called literacy crisis of the 1970s, including the move to open admissions, shifted the student population in U.S. universities. This new student population was seen as underprepared and in need of further support and instruction (Boquet, 1999). The former led to the rise of remedial programs, which were presented as responding to a set of academic needs; of these programs, writing laboratories or clinics became most prominent (Moore, 1950).

One of the first writing centers, at Iowa University, started as a writing laboratory in which underperforming students would attend to improve their writing skills. What made the Iowa Center different from other programs (Buck, 1905; Cady, 1915) was that students attended voluntarily, or at the

suggestion of their professor, and received individualized support, as opposed to being obliged and having to complete generic paper handouts, although eventually attending the writing center would become a part of consequence of having failed a writing assessment or evaluation (Waller, 2002).

The various waves of new student enrollments, which occurred as a result of open admissions, strengthened the impetus for writing center labor. The first wave of new students took place after the Second World War when many veterans returned home from war and attended college campuses with new educational needs. The second wave happened toward the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, with the advent of the actual policy of open admissions, which resulted because of the pressures exercised by racialized and minority communities, who had been excluded from entry to the university. Taking an "accomodationist" approach, universities then launched remedial and basic writing courses for this new body of students, but these courses were soon viewed by community groups as discriminatory; in this manner, writing centers presented an alternative that did not carry the same basic writing and remedial course stigma (Boquet, 1999).

During the 1970s, the results of the SAT exams showed that students required further support with reading and writing skills.[3] Identifying this "need" became known as a "literacy crisis," which then propelled the labor of writing centers as they were in part trusted to undo the exam results. Therefore, writing centers took on the task of improving writing scores for those students who scored low. The focus of their writing support mainly looked at grammatical and structural aspects of writing, as well as guiding students in evaluating their ideas through writing (Yahner & Murdick, 1991).

- **Extension.** Some writing centers, like those at the University of Delaware and Widener College, first started their work as a service to local companies whose workers needed support with writing.
- **Writing across the curriculum.** When writing across the curriculum (WAC) and writing in the disciplines (WID) programs began to emerge, writing centers became their main support, and in some cases, even took on the role of coordinating them. Waller (2002) highlights how, in this WAC programming context and during the 1990s, writing centers sought to develop thinkers and writers. "Ideally, most writing centers want to be seen as places where all writers within the university community can find thoughtful, competent readers of their writing" (Waller, 2002, p. 6).

3 A standardized exam used to assess and determine college admissions in the United States.

Writing Centers Today

Nowadays U.S. writing centers receive ample support and recognition in most institutions of higher education, including 2-year colleges, often referred to as *community colleges*. In fact, writing centers have also gained traction in places of secondary education, as they are often seen as spaces and programs that contribute to the formation of writers in all fields and at all levels. Writing centers are anchored regionally, nationally, and internationally, and some such anchors are based in conventions and around annual conferences. The International Writing Center Association (IWCA, https://writingcenters.org) is the largest and most prominent world organization supporting this multifaceted work. One of the main efforts that IWCA leads is the publication of the two journals: *The Writing Lab Newsletter* (https://writinglabnewsletter.org), which amplifies the application and practice of writing center work, including that of writing center tutors, and that of *The Writing Center Journal* (https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/wcj), which presents and theorizes on current research in writing centers. This organization coordinates annual meetings, summer workshops, and professional development opportunities for its members. The organization also awards recognition to outstanding individuals in the profession, as well as materials, like peer-reviewed articles and books that have made crucial contributions to the writing center community.

The vast number of publications focused on writing centers demonstrate how these spaces constitute research (Babcock & Thonus, 2012), generating a multitude of knowledge, including writing instruction (Murphy & Law, 1995), administration (Murphy & Stay, 2006), assessment (Schendel & Macauley, 2012), peer-to-peer learning (Rafoth, 2000), the relationship between writing and meaning-making (Murphy & Sherwood, 2011), interculturality (Greenfield & Rowan, 2011), the use of new technologies (Hewett, 2010), among others. All these publications have helped establish and empower an academic community, which is consistently fortified through its knowledge-making practices its members produce and disseminate.

As for the tutoring practices, which are at the heart of writing center work, in several U.S. universities, this work is advanced by graduate students or instructors in specific disciplines, but in many writing centers, undergraduate students perform this work. Tutor training, as Waller (2002) explains, is treated as institutionally sanctioned labor, since those participating receive academic credits often in addition to their paid hourly labor. This demonstrates how universities recognize the collaborative work that writing centers lead.

Furthermore, writing centers have developed robust regional associations, which plan and conduct annual conferences and events for both the program

directors and the tutors. These regional writing center associations are formed so that everyone, especially tutors, can gain opportunities to get together, exchange experiences, draft academic papers, discuss ongoing research, or work proposals, which can then be shared in conferences or academic events. As of now, the US has 10 regional associations, Europe has one (https://europeanwritingcenters.eu), and the Middle East and North Africa share one (http://menawca.org).

The History of Writing Centers in Latin America

As mentioned earlier, in most countries in Latin America very little was known about writing centers until the early 2000s when Carlino started publishing on the successful practices carried out in U.S., Canadian, and Australian universities. However, prior to these publications, there already was a writing center in Puerto Rico: The Multidisciplinary Writing Center (*Centro de Redacción Multidisciplinario*), in Recinto at Universidad Internacional Iberoamericana (UNINI) of Puerto Rico (http://web.metro.inter.edu/facultad/esthumanisticos/crem_intro.asp). This center emerged as an initiative by two professors and received institutional support both for its research phase, conducted at North American universities, and for its implementation. The center was formulated as an answer to "a worry and a commitment with the teaching and practice of writing across the curriculum" (Quintana et al., 2010, p. 37), and it was consolidated through the institutional support that the various writing strategies and initiatives received. Quintana and García-Arroyo (2012) also note that their institution, being a UNESCO site, has also contributed to the initiatives that the center has led.

The second writing center in Latin America is that of the Center for Learning, Writing, and Language (Centro de Aprendizaje, Redacción, y Lenguas, CARLE), of the ITAM university of Mexico (http://carle.itam.mx), which opened its doors in 2005 in a space that combines the various modalities of learning, writing center, language center, and multimedia (Ormsby, 2015). CARLE is a proposal that, in addition to traditional learning strategies mediated by a professor or peer tutor, incorporates a variety of multimedia resources to support guided, semi-guided, and open learning of writing and languages. This program, from its inception, proposed technology as a learning resource for writing and language instruction.

After the establishment of these two writing centers, several new proposals were launched. In South America, the first one was that of the Centro de Escritura Javeriano, which was established in 2008 in Cali, Colombia, with three main approaches for writing center work: peer-tutoring, writing

mentorship, and virtual consultations (Molina, 2007). Without a doubt Colombia has established itself as a writing center and programming leader in the Americas. As of now it has eight different working sites (Centro de Escritura Javeriano Cali and Bogota, Centro de Español Universidad de los Andes, Centro de Escritura Universidad del Cauca, Centro de Escritura ICESI, Centro de Escritura Universidad del Norte, Centro de Escritura Universidad Minuto de Dios, and Centro de Escritura Universidad de Ibagué). Additionally, currently three writing centers are in the design and formulation stages (Universidad del Trópico, Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia, and Universidad Santo Tomás).

In addition to the centers already mentioned above, writing centers have been established in Puerto Rico (Centro de Redacción Interdisciplinario Recinto Metropolitano Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, Centro de Lectura y Redacción Universidad del Turabo), Mexico (CARLE), Argentina (Centro de Escritura de Posgrado Universidad de Buenos Aires and Centro Virtual de Escritura Universidad de Buenos Aires), Chile (Centro de Escritura Universidad de Tarapacá), and Uruguay (Centro de Escritura Universidad Católica de Uruguay), as far as is currently known.[4] A current trend in establishing writing centers is that of writing programs being formed with the writing center as a central component of their design, as is the case for the Programa de Español at Universidad de los Andes, in Colombia; others have first instituted a writing program and once consolidated added the writing center as a supporting component of their writing work and administration. There is also the case of writing center work being established and amplified because of actions beyond that of peer-tutoring, for instance, writing work related to professional development, writing across the disciplines, as a collaborative partnership with faculty teaching specific courses, to name a few. An institution that exhibits this model is the Centro de Escritura Javeriano in Cali and Bogotá.

These different writing center modalities have been analyzed in Núñez's (2013) study on a number of writing centers across several distinct countries, including Spain. It is important to clarify that several of the initiatives analyzed by Núñez (2013) actually correspond to virtual resource centers rather than what this article defines as a writing center. In this investigation, Núñez (2013) concludes that the main goal of these writing centers is promoting

4 Only writing centers are listed here. Other forms of writing programming and curricula initiatives, although important to the growth of writing, do not constitute the work that generally characterizes that of writing centers, such as that of peer-tutoring and personalized writing consultations.

communicative skills across the university, especially among students, which they do through several approaches. According to the author, the main functions of these programs are "training, information, advising, promotion, and research" (p. 93), with the first being the most important of all. This training is carried out through three modalities: intensive writing courses, writing tutoring, and workshops. Information, meanwhile, is provided through distinct types of resources and materials conceptualized for self-learning. Advice consultations take root in the possibility of offering writing services to people in the academic community or those outside of it, and with a monetary cost. Promotion activities are varied, and their goal is to promote reading, writing, and any other communicative skill. Lastly, research and investigative activities are those that are least disseminated by these programs, although in some cases they are essential to their establishment.

Overlapping Patterns with Writing Centers in Other Regions

Latin American writing centers share several of the same motivations for their creation as their North American counterparts:

- **Attending to a diverse population and establishing access.** Inequality is a phenomenon that characterizes most nations in Latin America, and this makes it so that some students arrive at college with enough resources and skill to respond to the demands of the university and others do not have the same ability or opportunity to face these demands. This makes it so that communities from rural sites and from ethnic communities, such as Indigenous and Afro-descendant people, in many cases, are considered as underserved and having needs that the university must attend to. Cases like that of the Centro de Escritura at Universidad de Tarapacá in Chile are examples of centers that have conceptualized writing as a supportive mechanism to the significant number for students they serve from rural regions.
- **Remediation.** The scholarly research assessing the state and practice of literacy (reading and writing) (e.g. Pérez & Rincón, 2013) has shown the multitude of practices that students struggle with and need support for in order to face the demands imposed by the university. The consistent institutional concern is that "students don't read or write" (Molina, 2008), and at the forefront of this claim are those initiatives that seek to remediate the problem. These remedial approaches are motivated by the idea of deficiencies on the part of the student, and they rarely

study this phenomenon of struggle as something connected to administration and faculty instruction. Despite this, these are demands from administrators that must be addressed through initiatives like these. However, in many cases, remediation becomes the perfect pretext for proposing comprehensive actions with shared responsibilities.

One of the main reasons for creating these writing programs and initiatives is students' results on standardized state exams that seek to assess the quality of higher education in different countries, such is the case of the exam Saber PRO (Knowledge PRO) in Colombia.[5] In general, the results in reading and writing competencies are discouraging, prompting a call to take action to improve students' performance on these assessments.

- **The amplification of the writing classroom.** An increasing number of universities have established institutional policies mandating an introductory writing course in the first semester (in some cases extending it to the second semester as well). More recently, however, an integral component in the rise of writing centers has been that of writing across the curriculum in the form of reading and writing intensive courses, which are coordinated and supported with faculty in linguistics (for instance the E (W) courses at Universidad de los Andes in Colombia). Writing centers then surge as a support system to these courses in which a tutor accompanies the processes proposed in the classrooms (Moreno & Baracaldo, 2016).
- **Amplification—with Professional and Technical Personnel.** This is a practice less often observed. As of now a writing initiative that speaks to this motif is that of the Centro de Producción Textual at Universidad del Trópico in Colombia, which works to offer business and technical writing consultations to individuals, or established programs and organizations seeking support, because of a need that was not met in their region.

In addition to the noted trends that have motivated the surge in writing centers in Latin America and in relation to North American universities, there is one other approach that seems to be part of the ongoing synergy of writing programming evolution: the need to consolidate an academic community. In the US, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, writing centers grew out of the desire to amplify the production of knowledge. In 2013,

5 Translators' note: Students usually take this standardized exam as they are proximal to their college graduation. The general exam design includes 5 modules: critical reading, quantitative reasoning, citizenry practices, written communication, and English (https://www.icfes.gov.co/en/acerca-del-examen-saber-pro.)

Cali, Colombia held the first Latin American Congress on Writing Center and Programs (Molina, 2015), which resulted in the recognition of the many writing centers and programs' members across Latin America. This network of members—known as Latin American Network of Writing Centers and Programs (RLCPE, *Red Latinoamericana de Centros y Programas de Escritura*)—seeks to generate an academic community that can mutually benefit the experiences of its participating writing programs, as well as members, and cultivate dialogues and professional development for writing tutors, and participate in the production of research-based knowledge conducted in these different centers. RLCPE also seeks to increase the visibility of the work led by its affiliated programs and members.

Even though this network is still young, it already has the representation of 28 universities across Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and Venezuela.[6] A short-term goal that RLCPE established is building a website offering information on the ongoing activities of the network; as an intermediate goal, RLCPE hopes to establish biannual meetings in which members, including tutors, writing center and program directors/coordinators, and administrators. In the long term, it is expected that a publication on writing centers and programs will be established to begin producing knowledge on these topics in our language.

But What Really is a Writing Center?

Finding a unique and precise definition of writing centers is a difficult task since they often adopt and implement their own particular approaches depending on their institutional context and the people establishing the center. Perhaps the most representative work on the notion of writing centers is that of "The Idea of a Writing Center," by Stephen North and published in 1984. In this article, directed to writing tutors-in-training, the author concludes that a writing piece reflects the process that precedes it, instead of a product that must be reconstructed to meet a set of standards or corrections. North argues that tutors should centralize students in the writing process and not the texts, and this has become the basic writing philosophy that grounds writing centers.

Different from the traditional writing courses in the university, the focus of writing centers is not to correct issues in the text; writing tutoring is fundamentally centered on the intellectual and individual skills that a writer puts at play

6 Translators' note: By 2025, RLCPE's membership has surpassed 180 institutions from 22 countries and has held five international conventions. Additionally, RLCPE has a website (https://sites.google.com/site/redlacpe/?pli=1) and a bulletin named *Andamiajes*.

when writing. According to North (2001), the main responsibility of a writing center, with a student-centered pedagogy, is to "talk to the writers."

A decade after publishing this paradigmatic article on writing centers, North, in a gesture of both greatness and humility, proposed to revisit his own idea of a writing center. The main difference in his revision was to reconsider and complicate the relationships on which a writing center is based. The first instance is that of the tutor with the writer, the primary scene of tutoring. Next, the relationship between the tutor and the course instructor, fundamental to the development of the tutoring sessions. Lastly, the relationship between the tutor and the institution (North, 2011). The most forceful and clear way, in my view, in which North (2011) expresses these relationships is as follows: "an hour of talk about writing at the right time between the right people can be more valuable than a semester of mandatory class meetings when that timing isn't right" (p. 67).

Another paradigmatic work on the concept of writing centers is that of Muriel Harris's (1995) "Talking in the Middle: Why Writers Need Writing Tutors." Harris proposes that a writing center's main responsibility is that of working one-on-one with writers, which does not mean duplicating, taking away from, nor supplementing the work of writing classes. Writing centers are also not supposed to compensate for poor writing classroom pedagogy, crowded classrooms, or instructors' lack of time and engagement with students. The individual nature of tutoring sessions allows students to "gain kinds of knowledge about their writing and about themselves that are not possible in other institutional contexts" (Harris, 1995, p. 27). Some of the ways in which this gets accomplished, according to Harris (1995), are by cultivating independence in collaborative conversation, supporting the acquisition of strategic knowledge, assisting with affective concerns, and making meaning of academic language.

Harris (1988) has also offered a conceptualization for writing center through the labor that these programs undertake:

- Tutoring sessions take place in a one-to-one context.
- Tutors act as mentors and fellow collaborators, not professors.
- The focus of tutoring sessions is that of meeting students' individual needs.
- Tutoring sessions cultivate writing experimentation and practice.
- Tutors work with a variety of writing courses.
- Writing centers are available to students of all levels of writing proficiency.

As noted above, the core of writing centers is the tutoring sessions, which are centered on developing the writing skills of students. Something that

differentiates writing centers from the writing classroom is that the job of the tutor is not to demonstrate their knowledge—given that sessions take place in the moment and as they go—nor to make the student copy strategies that work for the tutor; instead it is about figuring out which are the writing strategies that best work for each student (Bouquet, 2002). As previously noted, one of the main factors in the development of writing centers is the selection and professional development of tutors. In Latin American writing centers, tutors are typically outstanding undergraduate students who demonstrate an ability for helping others to become successful writers. Similarly, writing tutors ought to demonstrate patience and strength in offering feedback, motivation, and praise (Gillespie & Lerner, 2003).

Tutoring sessions support writers in all steps of their writing process: from brainstorming and organizing ideas, to drafting and writing, to revising, and proofreading (or editing). Although there is no single way of conducting a tutoring session, it is important to be familiar with several strategies to effectively assist in the different possible scenarios (Ryan & Zimmerelli, 2010). One of the main premises of paired tutoring sessions is that the writer remains responsible for the writing project at all stages—before, during, and after the tutoring session. Additionally, the grade obtained on the project is not the tutor's responsibility. It is not the tutors' role to "fix" or "clean up" the text, but rather to teach writers how to do it themselves (Geller et al., 2007). On the other hand, tutors first identify what is working in the text, before focusing on what must be improved.

An aspect of tutoring sessions that can create controversy at the beginning is that tutoring may be offered by people who have different disciplinary training from that of the writer. At the front of this controversy, it is important to establish that it is not the job of tutors to be experts about the topic of the text at work, nor grammatical correction. Instead, tutors should focus on establishing a healthy tutoring environment, having a sense of what to attend to first, hearing about the text in its totality, and formulating open questions, allowing the writer to make decisions, and knowing when there is more work needed (Molina, 2011).

Provisional Conclusion

Writing centers are an educational initiative with demonstrated efficiency in the development of reading and writing skills. Although they were originally conceived in North American universities and have undergone significant evolution there, in the Latin American context, some similarities can be observed in the reasons that led to their creation. This article makes the case that the increasing number of writing centers indicates a growing interest in this

type of initiatives. This article has demonstrated that many universities today are showing increasing interest in these initiatives, as most writing centers have emerged only recently. This rise in interest in writing centers also indicates a shift from targeted approaches—mainly remedial courses designed to address what is perceived as a problem—to more comprehensive solutions with an institutional impact, where any member of the academic community can feel included, not just students viewed "as struggling."

To this point, it is important to highlight the success that many existing writing centers have had, because their impact can create the kinds of reach and support that other initiatives can't always reach, like that of remedial courses. The very form in which work is done in writing centers, as explained here on the conceptualization of writing centers, marks a profound difference with traditional courses, given that a student attends voluntarily for help, and does not receive any form of assessment. The one-on-one interaction and the establishment of a collaborative, empathetic work environment—centered on the student's needs—ensure an understanding of their own writing practices. This is necessarily the first and most important step toward improving those practices.

Another advantage that writing centers offer is that they can be assessed relatively easily, and therefore results and impact can be reviewed accordingly. These outcomes can serve as the foundation for developing institutional policies that position reading and writing as central components within universities. This is the case for writing centers in North American universities, where writing centers have become a key component for the support of writing policies across the university (Bazerman et al., 2005; Russell, 2002). Among some of the models in which writing centers can work to support writing policies, and which are already at work in the Latin American context, are those of the programs focused on faculty professional development, ranging from support in writing scientific articles, to certificate courses on writing strategies across the curriculum. Writing initiatives on intensive reading and writing have also been effectively advanced, and have been accompanied by tutors and/or instructors from the writing center. In some cases, the design and implementation of college-entry exams have also been placed in the hands of writing centers, and these centers have also conducted research on these exams and their results. And many more options could be listed for how writing centers have been (or can be) institutionally tied to writing initiatives.

Writing centers, then, are an emerging and rapidly growing academic community. In the case of Latin America, this community is consistently incorporating new members into the Latin American Network of Writing Centers and Programs (RLCPE). The consolidation of these centers as an academic community can offer possibilities for improving the quality of

academic work as institutions of higher education and can also bring a much more powerful learning experience to not only tutees but also tutors.

The hope of this was to raise interest and curiosity rather than offer answers. In particular, it looks to generate the curiosity of other institutions to imagine a formative space for the development of reading and writing practices—open to all members of this academic community, not just those perceived as "in need." For those who are willing to experiment with a paradigm change, which is already on its way in our region, the Appendix offers a brief guide on how to initiate this process. The pathway is mapped, and the real experience lies in walking it.

> If writing centers are going to finally be accepted, surely they must be accepted on their own terms; as places whose primary responsibility, whose only reason for being, is to talk to writers. That is their heritage, and it stretches back farther than the late 1960s or the early 1970s, or to Iowa in the 1930s—back, in fact, to Athens, where in a busy marketplace a tutor called Socrates set up the same kind of shop: open to all comers, no fees charged, offering, on whatever subject a visitor might propose, a continuous dialectic that is, finally, its own end. (North, 2001, p. 78).

References

Babcock, R., & Thonus, T. (2012). *Researching the writing center: Toward an evidence-based practice*. Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

Bazerman, C., Little, J., Bethel, L., Chavkin, T., Fouquette, D., & Garufis, J. (2005). *Reference guide to writing across the curriculum*. Parlor Press; The WAC Clearinghouse. https://wacclearinghouse.org/books/referenceguides/bazerman-wac/

Boquet, E. (1999). Our little secret: A history of writing centers, pre to post-open admissions. *College Composition and Communication, 50*(3), 463–482. https://doi.org/10.2307/358861

Boquet, E. (2002). *Noise from the writing center*. Utah State University Press.

Buck, P. (1905). The laboratory method in English composition. In *National Education Association Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the 43rd Annual Meeting*. National Education Association.

Cady, F. (1915). The laboratory method at Middlebury College. *The English Journal, 4*(2), 124–125.

Carino, P. (1995). Early writing centers: Toward a history. *The Writing Center Journal, 15*(2), 103–115.

Carlino, P. (2002). Enseñar a escribir en la universidad: ¿cómo lo hacen en Estados Unidos y por qué? [Teaching writing at university: how do they do it in the USA and why]. *OEI-Revista Iberoamericana de Educación, 2*(2), 57-67.

Carlino, P. (2003a). Alfabetización académica. Un cambio necesario, algunas alternativas posibles [Academic literacy instruction. A necessary change, some possible alternatives]. *Educere, 6*(20), 409–420.
Carlino, P. (2003b). Pensamiento y lenguaje escrito en universidades estadounidenses y australianas [Thought and written language in U.S. and Australian universities]. *Propuesta Educativa, 12*(26), 22–33.
Carlino, P. (2003c). Alfabetización académica en Australia: Enseñar a escribir, leer y estudiar en la universidad [Academic literacy instruction in Australia: Teaching writing, reading, and studying at university]. *Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones en Ciencias de la Educación, 21*, 3-12.
Carlino, P. (2004). Escribir a través del currículo: Tres modelos para hacerlo en la universidad. [Writing across the curriculum: Three models for doing it at university]. *Lectura y Vida, 25*(1), 16–27.
Carlino, P. (2005a). *Escribir, leer y aprender en la universidad: Una introducción a la alfabetización académica* [Writing, reading, and learning at university: An introduction to academic literacy instruction]. Fondo de Cultura Económica de Argentina.
Carlino, P. (2005b). Representaciones sobre la escritura y formas de enseñarla en universidades de América del Norte [Representations of writing and ways of teaching it in North American universities]. *Revista de Educación, 336*, 143–168.
Carlino, P. (2007). ¿Qué nos dicen hoy las investigaciones internacionales sobre la escritura en la universidad? [What do international studies tell us today about writing at university?] [Unpublished conference paper]. *I Encuentro Nacional de Discusión sobre Políticas Institucionales para el Desarrollo de la Lectura y la Escritura en la Educación Superior*, Bogotá, Colombia.
Greenfield, L., & Rowan, K. (Eds.). (2011). *Writing centers and the new racism: A call for sustainable dialogue and change*. Utah State University Press.
Geller, A. E., Eodice, M., Condon, F., Carroll, M., & Boquet, E. (2007). *The everyday writing center: A community of practice*. Utah State University Press.
Gillespie, P., & Lerner, N. (2003). *The Allyn and Bacon guide to peer tutoring* (2nd ed.). Pearson Longman.
Harris, M. (1988). The concept of a writing center. *National Council of Teachers of English*.
Harris, M. (1995). Talking in the middle: Why writers need writing tutors. *College English, 57*(1), 27–42. https://doi.org/10.2307/378348
Hewett, B. L. (2010). *The online writing conference: A guide for teachers and tutors*. Boynton/Cook Heinemann.
International Writing Centers Association. (2014). *Starting a writing center*. https://writingcenters.wordpress.com/resources/starting-a-writing-cente/
Molina, V. (2007). Centro de escritura Javeriano: Una nueva alternativa para mejorar las habilidades de estudiantes y profesores [Javeriano Writing Center: A new alternative to improve student and teacher skills]. *Revista Universitas Xaveriana, 38*, 10–13.
Molina, V. (2008). "…es que los estudiantes no leen ni escriben": El reto de la lectura y la escritura en la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Cali ["…students

don't read or write": The challenge of reading and writing at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Cali]. In H. Mondragón & I. Murgueitio (Eds.), *Leer, comprender, debatir, escribir: Escritura de artículos científicos por profesores universitarios* (pp. 53–62). Sello Editorial Javeriano.

Molina, V. (2011, June). *Las tutorías entre pares: El caso del Centro de Escritura Javeriano* [Peer tutoring: The case of the Javeriano Writing Center] [Conference presentation]. VI Congreso Internacional de la Cátedra Unesco para el Fomento de la Lectura y la Escritura, Barranquilla, Colombia.

Molina, V. (2012). La escritura en el currículo en Colombia: Situación actual y desafíos [Writing in the curriculum in Colombia: Current situation and challenges]. *Magis Revista Internacional de Investigación en Educación, 5*(10), 93–108.

Molina, V. (2015). *Panorama de los centros y programas de escritura en Latinoamérica* [Overview of writing centers and programs in Latin America]. Sello Editorial Javeriano.

Moore, R. (1950). The writing clinic and the writing laboratory. *College English, 11*(7), 388–393.

Moreno, E., & Baracaldo, N. (2016). La lectura y la escritura en la clase de Teoría del Aseguramiento: Una experiencia del Centro de Escritura Javeriano Bogotá [Reading and writing in the Assurance Theory class: An experience from the Javeriano Writing Center Bogotá]. In V. Molina (Ed.), *Panorama de los centros de escritura en Latinoamérica* (pp. 187-198). Sello Editorial Javeriano.

Murphy, C., & Law, J. (1995). *Landmark essays on writing centers*. Hermagoras Press.

Murphy, C., & Sherwood, S. (2011). *The St. Martin's sourcebook for writing tutors* (4th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.

Murphy, C., & Stay, B. L. (2006). *The writing center resource book*. Routledge.

North, S. (2001). The idea of a writing center. In R. Barnett & J. Blumner (Eds.), *The Allyn and Bacon guide to writing center theory and practice* (pp. 63–78). Allyn & Bacon.

North, S. (2011). Revisiting "The idea of a writing center." In C. Murphy & S. Sherwood (Eds.), *The St. Martin's sourcebook for writing tutors* (4th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.

Núñez Cortés, J. A. (2013). Una aproximación a los centros de escritura en Iberoamérica [An approach to writing centers in Ibero-America]. *Legenda, 17*(17), 64–102.

Ormsby, L. (2015). Centro de Aprendizaje, Redacción y Lenguas CARLE [CARLE Learning, Writing, and Languages Center]. In V. Molina (Ed.), *Panorama de los centros y programas de escritura en Latinoamérica* (pp. 33-43). Sello Editorial Javeriano.

Pérez Abril, M., & Rincón Bonilla, G. (2013). *¿Para qué se lee y se escribe en la universidad colombiana? Un aporte a la consolidación de la cultura académica del país* [Why is reading and writing done at Colombian universities? A contribution to the consolidation of the country's academic culture]. Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.

Quintana, H., & García-Arroyo, M. (2012). The ups and downs of the interdisciplinary writing center of the Interamerican University of Puerto

Rico, Metropolitan Campus. In C. Thaiss, G. Bräuer, P. Carlino, L. Ganobcsik-Williams, & A. Sinha (Eds.), *Writing programs worldwide: Profiles of academic writing in many places* (pp. 333-340). The WAC Clearinghouse; Parlor Press. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2012.0346.2.29

Quintana, H., García-Arroyo, M., Arribas, M., & Hernández, C. (2010). La alfabetización académica en las instituciones de educación superior en Puerto Rico en el siglo XXI [Academic literacy instruction in higher education institutions in Puerto Rico in the 21st century]. In G. Parodi (Ed.), *Alfabetización académica y profesional en el siglo XXI: Leer y escribir desde las disciplinas* (pp. 21-47). Ariel, Grupo Editorial Planeta.

Rafoth, B. (2000). *A tutor's guide: Helping writers one-on-one*. Boynton/Cook.

Russell, D. (2002). *Writing in the academic disciplines: A curricular history* (2nd ed.). Southern Illinois University Press.

Ryan, L., & Zimmerelli, L. (2010). *The Bedford guide for writing tutors* (5th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.

Schendel, E., & Macauley, Jr., W. L. (2012). *Building writing center assessments that matter*. Utah State University Press.

Waller, S. (2002). *A brief history of university writing centers: Variety and diversity*.

Yahner, W., & Murdick, W. (1991). The evolution of a writing center: 1972–1990. *The Writing Center Journal, 11*(2), 13–28.

Appendix. Basic Steps to Start a Writing Center[7]

1. Visit other writing centers to have firsthand experience with scaffolding writing. Search and research a variety of approaches in order to have options to choose the model that best meets your needs.
2. Read the resources offered by IWCA (www.writingcenters.org) and the existing literature about writing centers.
3. Seek institutional support for your initiative and ensure the support of at least one director.
4. If a regional association exists, join. You may also join the international association. You will be able to meet the members and ask them as many questions as necessary.
5. Subscribe to *The Writing Center Journal* and *The Writing Lab Newsletter* or check the available online journals.
6. Join WCenter, the mailing list of the writing center community (not officially part of IWCA).
7. Answer the following questions:
   a. What will be the mission and goal of the center?
   b. Where will it be located?

7 Based on International Writing Center Association (2014).

   c. What staff will be in charge of its functioning?
   d. How will the staff be remunerated?
   e. How will the staff be trained? Who will do it?
   f. How will the staff be evaluated? Who will be in charge of the evaluation?
   g. Where will the budget come from for the center? Institutional funding? Subsidies? A mix of both?
   h. Where will the materials and equipment come from? What materials will be needed?
   i. Who will make decisions in the center? What will be the mechanisms to make decisions?
   j. Who will be served by those decisions?
   k. What will be the policies of the center?
   l. How will the center be led?
   m. What will be the responsibilities of the director?
   n. What data will be recorded? What information will be gathered? Who will do it? With what goals? How frequently? How will that information be stored and distributed?
8. Write out the goals and purposes of the writing center to clarify how it will fit within the mission, vision, and hierarchical structure of your institution.
9. Create a list of objectives for various years (might be five years), to reach those goals every year of operation. If possible, you may do strategic planning with short (one year), medium (three years), and long term goals (five years).
10. Be passionate and carry out your proposal: it is the only way to convince others.

Reflection

Writing this article took me around three years. It emerged as a result of a research study that I carried out to create what I thought was the first writing center in Latin America. However, during the process, I found out there were already two other writing centers established in Latin America. So, when I started to study writing centers, it was important to me to learn the reasons behind their emergence, their history, and the influences—sociopolitical, educational, etc.—that helped to turn writing centers in Latin America into a movement. I was fascinated by their history, especially because at first the emergence of these three different writing centers appeared disconnected from one another. Over time, however, commonalities emerged and they

slowly started to connect with each other, later forming an association together that would go on to grow significantly over time.

The idea to track the emergence of these writing centers inspired me to develop the article's hypothesis, where I state that, while in the US the development of writing centers has been influenced by the country's socio-political circumstances, Latin America has its own unique conditions and characteristics. Therefore, these unique characteristics need to be taken into account when implementing new writing centers in Latin America, but without ignoring the existing field of knowledge which can help to guide these efforts. Those engaged in developing new writing centers in Latin America should "cut across" disciplines and traditions in order to learn from experiences in other contexts. When I wrote it years ago it was an innovative hypothesis which may in turn help to explain the positive reception of the article.

Nowadays, I still maintain that it is necessary to know the history, theory, and the field's current research base in order to ground the practices that are implemented in Latin America. However, after ten years doing research in the field, I also think that we should include the critical perspectives that have emerged from writing center studies. For example, social justice approaches, anti-racist practices, and guidance against other ideological forms that, involuntarily, might emerge during tutoring sessions in writing centers and that can in turn reproduce hegemonic discourses, as is the case with academic writing. Similarly, I would explicitly mention in my article that deficit discourses have no solid foundation. These discourses claim that certain students—especially those from historically disadvantaged and discriminated groups—lack preparation or have deficiencies. While these ideas have often led to the creation of writing centers and initiatives, they are fundamentally flawed and should not be accepted.

The emergence of writing centers in a large number of Latin American countries, as well as other parts of the world, should lead to the construction of a common approach to the concept of tutoring, one that incorporates the academic and non-academic cultures found in all contexts. Consolidating these approaches would enable the exchange of knowledge in a progressive and equitable way, and I contend that this should be the role of writing center associations.

Lastly, I could have saved a couple of words in a title that now looks very lengthy to me.

– Violeta Molina Natera