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SEÇÃO:

## Good Practices in Language Education: the contributions of *Bem Legal Journal* to Language Teacher Education

*Boas Práticas na Educação Linguística: contribuições da Revista Bem Legal para a Formação de Professores de Línguas*

Anamaria Kurtz de

Souza Welp<sup>1</sup>

[orcid.org/0000-0002-9015-4761](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9015-4761)  
[anamaria.welp@ufrgs.br](mailto:anamaria.welp@ufrgs.br)

Simone Sarmento<sup>1</sup>

[orcid.org/0000-0003-1405-3982](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1405-3982)  
[simone.sarmento@ufrgs.br](mailto:simone.sarmento@ufrgs.br)

Helena Vitalina

Selbach<sup>2</sup>

[orcid.org/0000-0001-9957-8328](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9957-8328)  
[helenaselbach@gmail.com](mailto:helenaselbach@gmail.com)

Dêner da Silva Ramos<sup>1</sup>

[orcid.org/0000-0002-3784-4042](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3784-4042)  
[denersramos@gmail.com](mailto:denersramos@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Inscribed in the scope of Applied Linguistics, this paper reports on the creation process of Bem Legal Journal and discusses its role as a formative space for pre and in-service language teachers. We present the theoretical framework which underpins the publication, providing an outline of the development of the journal since its onset: its objective, conception, and organization. Throughout a quali/quantitative analysis of the issues comprising eight years of publications, from 2011 (the launching of the journal) to 2019, we present an overview of Bem Legal's publications. The analysis corroborates the need for spaces for language teachers to share their pedagogical practices and experiences and gives evidence to the benefits these spaces bring to all agents of language education.

**Keywords:** Teacher Education; language education; practices.

**Resumo:** Inscrito no escopo da Linguística Aplicada, este artigo relata o processo de criação da revista Bem Legal e discute seu papel como um espaço formativo para professores de línguas pré e em serviço. Apresentamos o arcabouço teórico subjacente à publicação, fornecendo uma visão geral do desenvolvimento da revista desde seu início: objetivo, concepção e organização. Ao longo de uma análise quali/quantitativa das edições, abrangendo oito anos de publicações, de 2011 (ano de lançamento da revista) a 2019, fornecemos uma visão geral das publicações da Bem Legal. A análise corrobora a necessidade de espaços para os professores de língua compartilharem suas práticas e experiências pedagógicas e evidencia os benefícios que esses espaços trazem para agentes da educação linguística.

**Palavras-chave:** formação de professores; educação linguística; práticas

### 1. How it all began

The Institute of Languages and Literature of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) has always been closely involved with language teacher education. One example of such commitment was the joint initiative among the state English Teachers' Association (APIRS), the Porto Alegre City Education Department (SMED) and UFRGS, which started in 2006 and aimed at creating a space to exchange experiences related to language teaching in public schools. The forum was called "APIRS-SMED-UFRGS" and was organized in a non-hierarchical fashion, i.e., contrary to Freire's "banking" concept of education in which teachers' scope of action would extend "only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits"; knowledge would then be "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those



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<sup>1</sup> Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil.

<sup>2</sup> Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM), Santa Maria, RS, Brasil.

whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates the education and knowledge process of enquiry" (Freire, 2005, p. 72). In other words, the Forum was contrary to the old belief that universities (or professors) know it all and schools (or teachers) just have to follow instructions or methodologies "suggested" by universities.

The whole purpose of the Forum was precisely to create a space where school teachers could share their knowledge with peers. The Forum then went on for a few years and, even after it was no longer called this way, the partnership remained and the three participant institutions carried out other projects together. In the same line of thought, around 2009, a group of students taking Language Education<sup>3</sup>, started showing some concern about the teaching of literature in schools. These students also thought school teachers should have some space to share their successful experiences.

The idea of gathering teachers' stories in a book was firstly considered. However, we came to the conclusion that something more agile and lightweight would be more appropriate: a journal made up of short and interesting texts that would promote teachers' protagonism and collective reflection (Garcez and Schlatter, 2017, p. 13) and that would gather accounts from teachers themselves addressed to fellow teachers. Being "the general principle to guide education [...] the exercise of citizenship", we shared Garcez and Schlatter's conviction that "the task of the university teacher educator is to articulate what s/he observes in the practice of author-teachers in order to promote opportunities for them to meet with one another, exhibit their authorial productions collectively and record their experiences" (Garcez and Schlatter, 2017, p. 13).

In 2010, when thinking more clearly about the initiative, we asked ourselves questions such as: How was it possible to devise a journal, but not a journal like the ones that were currently circulating out there? Would it be possible to create a

publication where agents of basic education would feel comfortable to share their stories, accounts, projects and lesson plans because they know that their interlocutors would be people who want to know successful activities that are happening in other classrooms? In the meetings, "Bem Legal!" was always the most frequent group of words spoken and heard. And, then, the online and free-of-charge "Bem Legal!"<sup>4</sup> journal was born: a publication that moves away from academic rigidity would have a name readers and collaborators could relate to.

In 2011, with the support of the Outreach Department of the University, it was possible to apply for a grant to help create the logo and the journal's website. Thus a partnership between Caixola, UFRGS experimental advertising agency, and Bem Legal journal was created.

This paper reports on the creation process of Revista Bem Legal and discusses its role as a formative space for pre and in-service language teachers. It is inscribed in the scope of Applied Linguistics (AL) in the sense that it aims to "understand and offer solutions to socially relevant problems that involve the use of language in educational contexts" (Kleiman; Vianna; De Grande, 2019, p. 725) by providing a space for "collective reflection on what it means to learn to teach in each specific context" (Garcez and Schlatter, 2017, p. 14).

We start by presenting the theoretical framework which underpins the publication. Next, we give an overview of the development of the journal since its onset: its objective, conception, and organization. We also aim at unveiling the ideas presented in the 19 numbers published so far throughout a quali/quantitative analysis of the issues comprising eight years of publications, from 2011 (the launching of the journal) to 2019. We conclude by proposing the need to have spaces for language teachers to share their pedagogical practices and experiences and by giving evidence to the benefits these spaces bring to all agents of language education.

<sup>3</sup> Course offered in the UFRGS Languages and Literature Teacher Education undergraduate program.

<sup>4</sup> Pretty Cool

## 2. Language teachers as members of a Community of Practice

For Nóvoa (2009), one learns to be a teacher at school and in dialogue with fellow teachers. As he puts it, it is necessary to take concrete steps to support initiatives, build networks, share experiences, and assess what has been done and what remains to be done to promote improvement and innovation in teaching practices. For this to happen, it is of utmost importance to register these practices, reflect on the work and exercise evaluation. It is by establishing professional practices as spaces of reflection and training that professional advancement will be upheld. The author also claims that collective competency is more than the sum of individual skills. Integrating a set of collective modes of production and work regulation in the teaching culture may result in an enriched professional fabric. In that sense, we perceive Bem Legal as a space for promoting, publicizing and recording authorial productions collectively (Garcez and Schlatter, 2017, p. 21).

According to Nóvoa (2009), it is vital to strengthen communities of practice with conceptual spaces composed of committed educators. The author claims that pedagogical movements arising from such communities are essential for teachers to feel invested with the autonomy to perform changes through concrete intervention practices. Through dialogues with colleagues and exchange of experiences, collective competency is reinforced and a sense of belonging and professional identity - that are essential elements in the professional development of teachers - is provided.

## 3. Sharing teachers' practices and experiences: final productions

Revista Bem Legal is grounded in meaningful learning which is fostered and generated by students-teachers-educators' interests, concerns and reality (Welp and Vial, 2016). Thus, project-based work (PBW), whose main contribution is to make students learning meaningful, is present in the vast majority of the submissions. PBW is "a view towards pedagogical relationships

and learning through dialogue and inquiry" (Hernández, 2014, p. 65). One of the characteristics of this pedagogy is to motivate students with the proposal of final (public) productions, seeking to develop students' autonomy and engagement in authorship practices.

The very idea behind Revista Bem Legal is to motivate pre and in-service teachers to engage in the process of authorship and to publicize their productions so that they can "perceive themselves as authors who generate knowledge and pedagogical know-how" (Hernández, 2014, p. 66). Authorship can be understood as:

materialized in the taking of public positions, expressed in the dialogue between peers and reflected in practice with the students, about teaching principles and methods, and evaluation criteria and procedures. Authorship is also manifested, perhaps even more clearly, in the production and shared appreciation of teaching and learning assessment materials and instruments. And authorship also manifests itself [...] in the systematic account of lived pedagogical practices, collective decision-making and actions to face the different challenges of teaching and learning. We will refer to this as "register", maintaining that it is a fundamental step towards a circuit of pedagogical dialogue that integrates continuing and initial education, as well as the educators who work in Higher Education and the teacher-authors-educators who work in basic education itself (GARCEZ AND SCHLATTER, 2017, p. 18-19).

The importance given to final productions relies on the fact that they go far beyond classroom assignments. Therefore, allowing teachers/professors to publicize their final productions from courses such as Practicum and Didactics becomes paramount:

the invitation to the public register and the practice of reading previous records and discussing and reflecting on them, relating them to the teaching practices already experienced or that are being experienced. [...] Since the first edition of Bem Legal Journal, we have proposed the reading and discussion of articles published in previous editions and the writing of articles for publication in the journal about some *pretty cool* aspect of the project's experience developed in the practicum (instead of reports addressed to the supervisor). The same proposal is also put into practice in the Portuguese for Foreigners Program, as it can be seen in the different editions, and in final projects of inservice education programs we participate (GARCEZ AND SCHLATTER, 2017, p. 30).

Thus, the goal of the journal is twofold: 1) to publicize good and successful outcomes and 2) to make teachers-to-be and teachers' experience meaningful and available to a much larger audience. Moreover, as Garcez and Schlatter (2017, p. 30) put it, "the journal brings together an editorial committee of more experienced teachers-authors-educators who host, analyze and make suggestions for the rewriting of articles, thus creating the opportunity for teachers-authors to also become teachers-authors-educators".

#### 4. The journal

Bem Legal is described as:

a semiannual electronic publication journal designed by students and professors at the UFRGS Institute of Languages and Literature, who had the desire to exchange experiences, stories and successful experiences in the classroom. Created with the purpose of establishing partnerships to articulate what is produced in the Institute of Languages and Literature and in the various school settings, Bem Legal brings school teachers closer to the academic community. Its main objective is to establish a vehicle of communication with educational agents to disseminate knowledge about initiatives, actions and projects of language teaching that have succeeded. On Bem Legal, teachers can publicize their actions and be inspired by the work developed by their fellow educators and, thus, contribute to the improvement of language education (REVISTA BEM LEGAL, 2011).

The journal has five sections corresponding to five different discourse genres with distinct objectives and norms for publication:

- 1) "Reports on Good Practices" comprise up to 2,200-word texts that detail a successful project or task sequence that has already been put into practice;
- 2) "Lesson Plans" are up to 1,500-word texts that contain a lesson or an activity plan;
- 3) "Classroom stories" are genres up to 1,500 words long that focus on interesting classroom anecdotes;

4) "Project proposals" are texts of up to 1,000 words long which present suggestions on ideas for projects or didactic sequences;

5) "Interviews" are limited to 2,000 words and provide an account of a dialogue with an education agent from basic education about a relevant theme.

#### 5. What has been published so far?

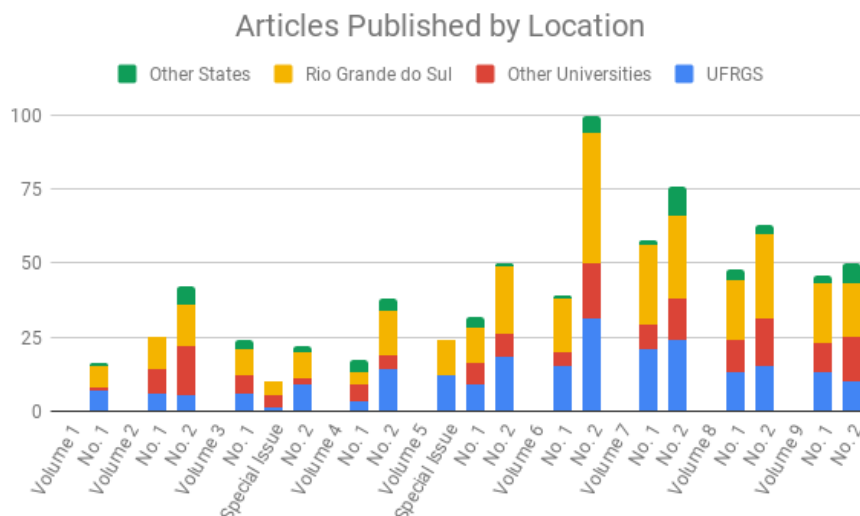
In order to provide an overview of Bem Legal's publications we have conducted a quali/quantitative analysis of the issues comprising eight years of publications, from 2011 (the launching of the journal) to 2019. The methodology consisted of collecting, mapping and analyzing all the issues and their corresponding publications/texts which resulted in a total of 19 issues and 395 texts. Each issue was analyzed by itself, and the data was systematized in charts, according to three main categories: 1) location, 2) language, and 3) sections. The first category comprehends the authors' geographic positions and their graduation institution. The second category contains texts classified according to the language they were written in. The third and last category presents the number of texts published in each section of Bem Legal. Categories two and three are divided into two aspects: articles published until the second issue of 2018 (2018/2) and articles published since the first issue of 2019 (2019/1)<sup>5</sup>. The charts that follow provide a panoramic view of the three categories.

##### 5.1. Location

The data concerning the first category, location, consisted of the author's graduation institution and her or his geographic position. Chart 1 presents the results.

<sup>5</sup> This division was necessary due to the fact that, until 2018/2, articles that were characterized as "Lesson Plans" or "Project Proposals" were published together in the same section. Since 2019/1, the sections were separated, and the articles were published in the respective section according to their discourse genre.

**Chart 1 – Articles Published by location**



**Source:** the authors

The data collected and analyzed comprises authors from 1) UFRGS; 2) other universities; 3) the state of Rio Grande do Sul; and 4) other Brazilian states<sup>6</sup>.

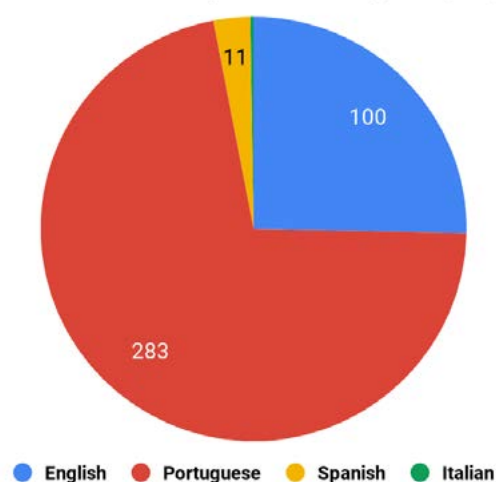
The chart shows that most of the published articles were written by authors from UFRGS, which consequently raises the number of texts written by authors from Rio Grande do Sul. The number of authors from other institutions has been increasing throughout the years, which can be seen on issues number one and two of volume eight and issue number two of volume nine. Even though the authors are from other universities, almost all articles were written by authors from Rio Grande do Sul.

## 5.2. Language

The second category, articles published by language, is divided into two aspects: articles published until the second semester of 2018 and articles published in 2019. Charts 2, 3, and 4 present the results.

**Chart 2 – Total of articles published by language**

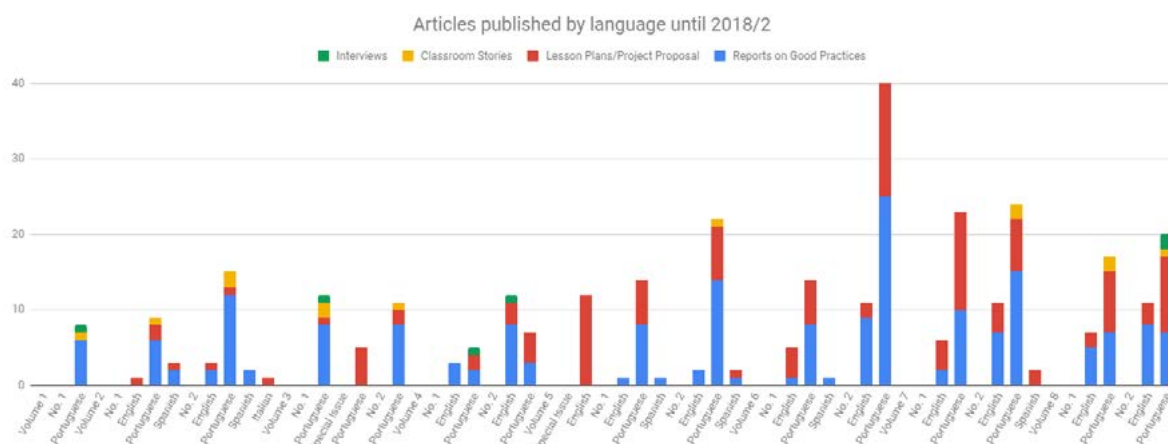
Total of articles published by language



**Source:** the authors

We could verify that 71.6% of the articles were written in Portuguese, followed by 25.3% written in English, and 2.8% in Spanish. Only one article was written in Italian (0.3%).

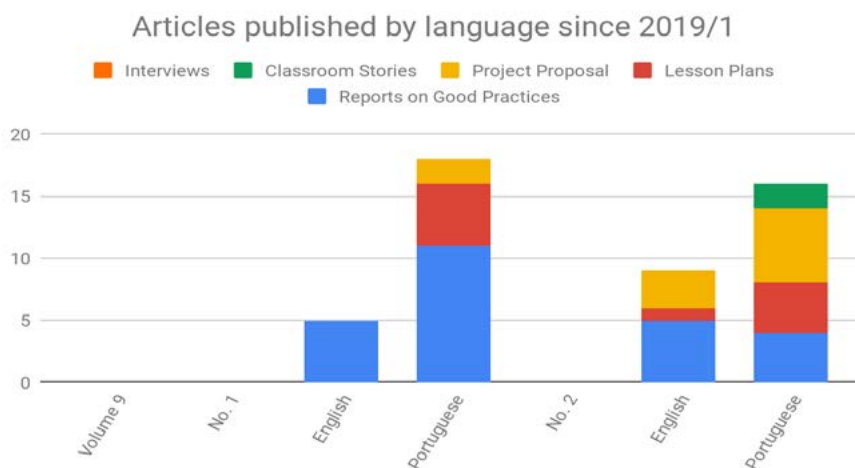
<sup>6</sup> We have also gathered data regarding publications from other countries whose numbers proved to be inexpressive. For that reason, the corresponding data was removed from the chart.

**Chart 3** – Articles published by language until 2018/2

**Source:** the authors

This chart shows the data concerning articles published by language in each issue from volume one to the second issue of volume eight. As mentioned before, articles written in Portuguese are the majority. The only issue in which the articles were mostly written in English is number two of volume five. Portuguese and English

were mostly chosen by the authors for Reports on Good Practices and Lesson Plans/Project Proposals. The highest number of articles written in Portuguese are found in issue number two of volume six, while the ones in English are found in issues number two of volume four and in the special issue of volume five.

**Chart 4** – Articles published by language since 2019/1

**Source:** the authors

This chart shows the data regarding articles published by language in both issues of volume nine. In these issues, English was mostly chosen by the authors to write their Reports on Good Practices. As can be noted, English was the only language used for this genre. However, in issue number two, the Project Proposal articles were

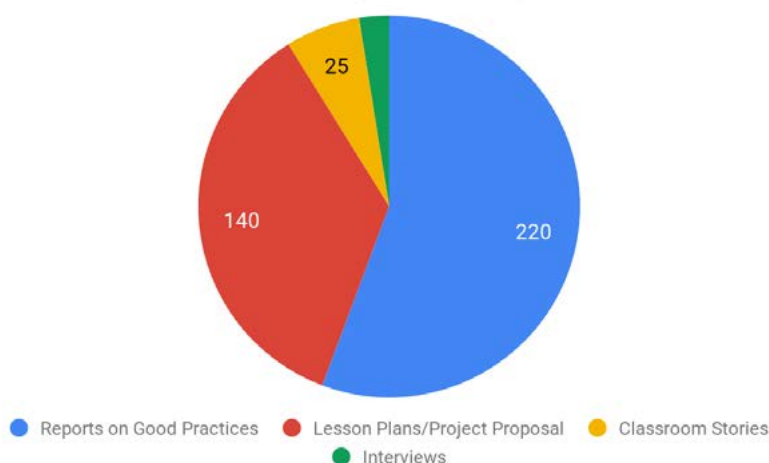
mostly written in Portuguese.

### 5.3. The articles' sections

While analyzing the volumes and issues, we could also gather important data regarding the sections. We begin by showing a pizza chart concerning the numbers of articles in each section.

**Chart 5** – Number of articles published by section

Total of articles published by section



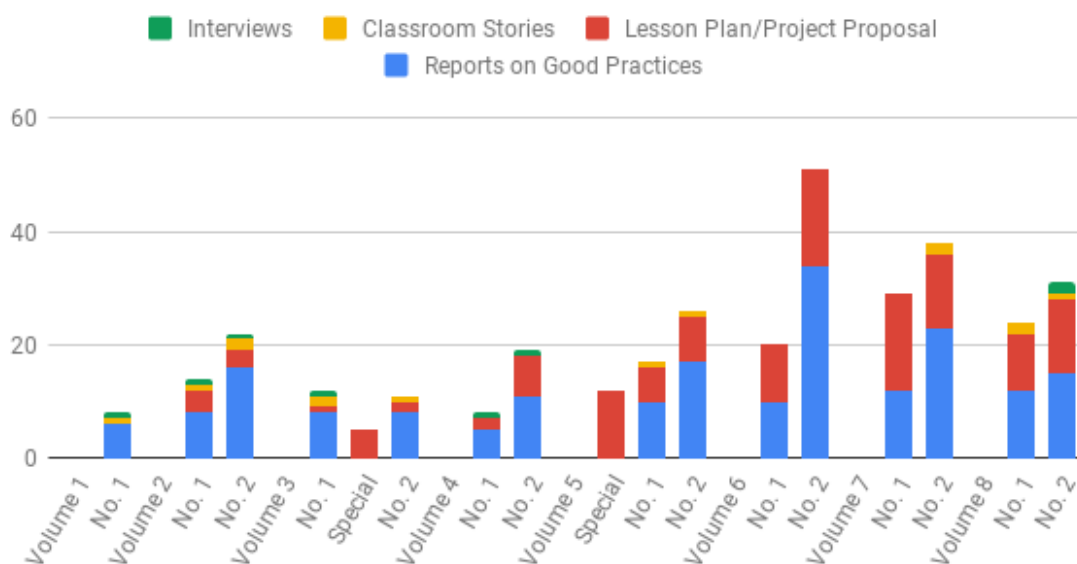
**Source:** the authors

In nine of the volumes published, 220 (55.7%) were Reports on Good Practices, followed by Lesson Plans/Project Proposals, with 140 (35.4%)

articles. The number of Classroom Stories and Interviews are low, with the first being only 25 (6.3%) and the second 10 (2.5%).

**Chart 6** – Articles published by section until 2018/2

Articles published by section until 2018/2



**Source:** the authors

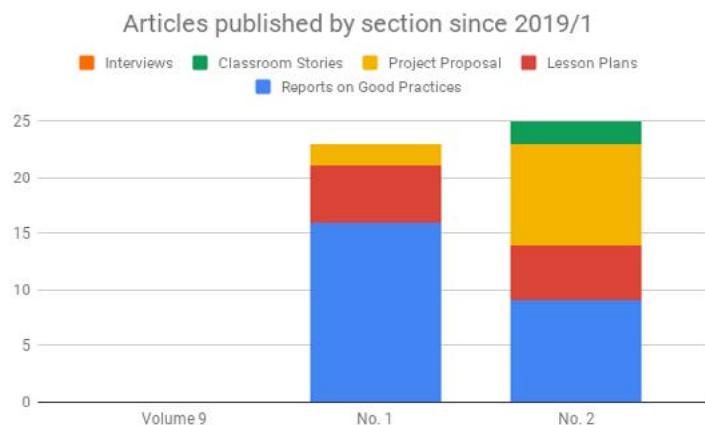
From volume one to the second issue of volume nine, Bem Legal has increased the number of publications. The issue containing more articles is number two of volume six, in which 51 articles were published, being 34 Reports

on Good Practices and 17 Lesson Plans/Project Proposals. This issue is considered our high-score of published articles, with more than 60 texts submitted for possible publication. We believe this number was high probably due to the growth

of Bem Legal, especially in social media networks such as Facebook. Also, the number of articles published constantly increased between volume

five and volume eight. We attribute this increase to the journal's success due to the dissemination of published texts.

**Chart 7** – Articles published by section since 2019/2



**Source:** the authors

This chart presents data from sections published on the issues of volume nine. The number of articles published in volume nine is higher in its issue number two, having texts allocated in four sections, whereas, in issue one, articles were only published in three sections. Since volume five, Bem Legal has increased the number of articles published, but this number has gone down in issues one and two of volume five, which have 23 and 25 articles published each. Even though the number of articles published has decreased, we still receive a large number of submissions.

### Final Remarks

Revista Bem Legal was created with the purpose of establishing a knowledge structure, a communication vehicle with educational agents to disseminate knowledge about initiatives, actions, and successful language teaching projects. This idea encompasses the notion that students should be challenged "to get engaged in activities that focus on language use, discussing relevant and interesting topics and reading and writing different discourse genres as a means to increase their participation in different communities of practice and construct participant citizenry" (Schlatter, 2009, p. 11).

The journal is a space in which language

teachers may share experiences, stories and successful practices in the classroom. Its main objective is to offer teachers opportunities to publicize their actions and be inspired by the work done by their peers and thus contribute to the improvement of language education. Throughout the years, Bem Legal has been publishing genres which are constitutive of the school practice. Although most of the publications are from authors from Rio Grande do Sul, the number of authors from other institutions has been increasing. The main language of publications is Portuguese, indicating that Bem Legal provides room for peer dialogue in Brazil; the languages for the publicizing of Reports on Good Practices and Lesson Plans/Project Proposals is Portuguese and English. Reports on Good Practices are also the genre the majority of the authors opted for engaging in. This choice is followed by Lesson Plans/Project Proposals.

The continuing engagement of language teachers in Bem Legal's issues throughout the years corroborates the fact that there seems to be a need for spaces for teachers to share their pedagogical practices and experiences and gives evidence of the benefits these spaces bring to all agents of language education.



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Helena Vitalina Selbach  
Av. Roraima nº 1000  
Cidade Universitária, 1000  
Camobi, CEP: 97105-900  
Santa Maria, RS, Brasil

Dêner da Silva Ramos  
Av. Paulo Gama, 110  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul  
Secretaria de Comunicação Social, 8º andar, Reitoria  
Farroupilha, 90040-060  
Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil

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## Endereços para correspondência

Anamaria Kurtz de Souza Welp  
Av. Paulo Gama, 110  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul  
Secretaria de Comunicação Social, 8º andar, Reitoria  
Farroupilha, 90040-060  
Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil

Simone Sarmiento  
Av. Paulo Gama, 110  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul  
Secretaria de Comunicação Social, 8º andar, Reitoria  
Farroupilha, 90040-060  
Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil