Beyond Remediation: Rethinking Writing Education in Argentine Public Universities

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Abstract: The massification of higher education in Argentina has created a central dilemma for public universities: how to uphold open access while ensuring that traditional literacy standards do not exclude the most disadvantaged students. This qualitative study examines how writing instructors and program administrators at three public universities in the Buenos Aires conurbation navigate this challenge. Findings reveal two core tensions. First, competing notions of college readiness emerged, viewed either as an individual condition for academic success or an institutional responsibility to guarantee inclusion. Second, the activism of writing program administrators proved crucial in advancing programs and pedagogies that moved beyond a remedial paradigm toward one centered on inclusion. The study underscores the need to reexamine the structure and purpose of early-stage writing instruction and to strengthen partnerships across educational levels and within universities to broaden and sustain writing education opportunities.
Keywords: writing education; academic literacies; college access; higher education; Argentina

Repensando la enseñanza de la escritura en universidades públicas argentinas: Hacia un abordaje inclusivo
Resumen: La masificación de la educación superior en Argentina enfrenta a las universidades públicas con un dilema político: ¿cómo sostener el compromiso con el ingreso irrestricto sin desconocer los efectos excluyentes de la cultura lingüística dominante sobre los sectores

menos privilegiados? Esta investigación cualitativa indaga en las perspectivas de coordinadores y docentes de cursos de escritura en el tramo de acceso a tres universidades públicas del conurbano bonaerense. Se destacan dos hallazgos principales: en primer lugar, visiones contrapuestas con respecto a la prontitud de los estudiantes para la escritura académica, por un lado vista como un atributo individual necesario para el éxito universitario y, por el otro, como una responsabilidad institucional para garantizar inclusión. En segundo lugar, el activismo de los docentes-investigadores de escritura surge como una condición necesaria para transcender un abordaje remedial de la enseñanza escritura y desarrollar programas y pedagogías inclusivos. Esta investigación subraya la importancia de reexaminar requisitos de lecto-escritura para el grado universitario, fortalecer la articulación secundaria-universidad y promover colaboraciones intra-universitarias para expandir el apoyo a la escritura.
Palabras-clave: alfabetización académica; acceso universitario; inclusión; literacidad; Argentina

"A gente não parte de uma perspectiva remediativa": Reimaginar o ensino da escrita em universidades públicas da Argentina
Resumo: A massificação do ensino superior na Argentina coloca as universidades públicas diante de um dilema político: como sustentar seu compromisso com o acesso livre e irrestrito sem ignorar os efeitos excludentes da cultura linguística dominante, que tendem a afetar mais os setores menos privilegiados? A questão é dirigida principalmente aos docentes de disciplinas que têm a função de fortalecer a leitura e escrita na transição ao primeiro ano universitário. Esta pesquisa qualitativa investiga as perspectivas de coordenadores e docentes de disciplinas de redação que são pré-requisito para acessar a graduação em três universidades públicas da região metropolitana de Buenos Aires. Duas conclusões se destacam: primeiro, visões contrastantes sobre a "maturidade acadêmica" dos alunos, por um lado vista como um atributo individual necessário para o êxito universitário e, por outro, como uma responsabilidade institucional para garantir a inclusão. Em segundo lugar, o ativismo dos professores-pesquisadores de escrita surge como uma condição necessária para transcender uma abordagem remediativa ao ensino da escrita e desenvolver programas e pedagogias inclusivos. Esta pesquisa ressalta a importância de reexaminar a estrutura e o propósito do ensino da escrita no ingresso na universidade, de fortalecer a colaboração entre ensino médio e universidade e de promover colaborações intrauniversitárias para expandir e manter o apoio à escrita.
Palavras-chave: ensino da escrita; letramento acadêmico; acesso ao ensino superior; educação superior; Argentina

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In Argentina, public universities have played a key role in broadening access to higher education by offering tuition-free undergraduate programs to all high school graduates and generally maintaining non-selective admissions policies (Fernández Lamarra & Perez Centeno, 2018). However, as increasing numbers of low-income and first-generation students have enrolled, a critical question has emerged: How can public universities uphold broad access to higher education while more effectively supporting the academic success of their most disadvantaged students? Despite the egalitarian promise of open access, a persistent tension remains: students from more privileged backgrounds continue to graduate at higher rates, calling into question the system's true inclusivity (Chiroleu & Marquina, 2017). While scholars continue to debate the possible causes of these equity

gaps, some point to insufficient academic preparation among the lowest-income sectors, reflected in their lower achievement levels in secondary school and pre-college literacy courses (Ezcurra, 2011; García de Fanelli, 2019). This perceived lack of "college readiness" has often been framed as limited "cultural capital" among disadvantaged students, encompassing not only study skills, literacy, and numeracy but also self-confidence, aspirations, and work habits. As such, various scholars have underscored that social origin continues to play a decisive role in shaping students' ability to persist and succeed in Argentine higher education (Adrogué & García de Fanelli, 2018; Chiroleu & Marquina, 2017; Ezcurra, 2011).

These challenges are particularly pronounced in universities in the Buenos Aires conurbation, as they serve a predominantly low-income and first-generation college student population (García de Fanelli & Adrogué, 2019). These universities have been shaped by evolving political agendas to boost economic and social development in underserved communities and modernize higher education (Rovelli, 2013). These institutions have played a critical role in absorbing rising student demand while expanding access for low-income and first-generation college students. In doing so, they have become key drivers of social inclusion in higher education. However, their students' complex socioeconomic realities have often translated into academic barriers, particularly for those from the lowest-income sectors, which can hinder degree completion (e.g., Ezcurra, 2005, 2011). For this reason, many scholars have emphasized the importance of equalizing not only opportunities to access higher education but also the conditions to succeed academically (e.g., Chiroleu & Marquina, 2017; García de Fanelli & Adrogué, 2019; Navarro, 2017; Pérez & Natale, 2017). Their arguments challenge the belief that open enrollment in and of itself guarantees a fairer distribution of college opportunities; instead, they underscore the importance of shared responsibility among policymakers, researchers, and institutions in ensuring equality of opportunities and outcomes.

Concerns about college retention and degree completion prompted public universities in the Buenos Aires conurbation to develop strategies to ensure students are prepared for the rigor of college courses. Many of these universities require attendance to "must-pass" reading and writing courses before enrolling in first-year classes, sometimes followed by support programs spread throughout the first academic year (Marquina, 2011). These courses represent a middle ground between an open-access model and meritocratic admissions that typically exclude the least prepared students outright. However, institutional conditions, like high teacher-to-student ratios and misalignment with the college curriculum, sometimes reduce these courses to "remedial" classes and "de facto" admission mechanisms (Carlino, 2008; Navarro, 2012). As a result, many Argentine universities have shifted to comprehensive writing programs that support both entry-level and advanced courses (e.g., Moyano & Giudice, 2016; Natale, 2013; Navarro, 2012, 2013). What distinguishes universities in the Buenos Aires conurbation is that their student population is more likely to need various forms of support in their transition to higher education. If entry-level reading and writing requirements are not designed with an equity orientation, they can put the inclusion of many students at risk.

This study examines the perspectives of writing instructors and program administrators leading early-stage writing courses in public universities in the Buenos Aires conurbation. Previous research has shown that writing education initiatives have yielded positive outcomes for students and instructors in Argentine universities, such as improving students' argumentative skills (Padilla Sabaté de Zerdán et al., 2010) and enhancing the use of writing to teach disciplinary content (Moyano, 2010; Natale, 2013; Navarro, 2013). However, writing instructors leading early-stage writing courses have also reported challenges in supporting diverse learning needs with their existing working conditions (e.g., di Stefano, 2004; Pereira, 2006). Although this body of scholarship underscores the promise and complexity of writing education in Argentina, few studies have

explored entry-level reading and writing courses through an ethnographic lens (Navarro, 2012). Understanding instructors' perspectives is essential, as they influence policy, teaching practices, and prevailing beliefs about literacy education (Ivanič, 2004).

This study builds on a robust tradition of equity-oriented writing scholarship in Latin America (Ávila Reyes et al., 2020; Carlino, 2013; Navarro, 2012, 2017; Pérez & Natale, 2017; Zavala, 2011). I specifically ask: How do writing instructors and program administrators balance their commitment to open access with their expectations for college-level writing? To answer this question, I conducted a qualitative study using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twenty writing instructors and writing program administrators of early-stage reading and writing courses in three public universities in the Buenos Aires conurbation.

Drawing on insights from the sociology of education (Bourdieu, 1986, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, 1990), the new literacy studies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1993) and the academic literacies framework (Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis, 2001, 2003), this study shows that "readiness" for college-level writing was seen both as an internal quality needed for success and as a responsibility of university education. It also identifies institutional factors that enabled or constrained writing program administrators' efforts to integrate academic socialization and academic literacies perspectives into a more inclusive model of writing education.

College Access Debates in Argentina: Some Context

In Argentina, access to public universities has long been a battleground for democracy. After World War II, higher education demand surged due to industrialization, population growth, and rising secondary school completion (Ballerini, 2017). When the Justicialist Party took power in 1946, the university system, viewed as a bastion of the elite serving only the "sons of privilege" (Buchbinder, 2010, p. 151), underwent major reforms. President Perón eliminated tuition in 1950 and entrance exams in 1953 to democratize access (Ballerini, 2017). These advances were reversed under the military dictatorship, when access and intellectual freedom were sharply curtailed. With the return to democracy in 1983, public pressure led to the reinstatement of open access and cost-free education. Despite ongoing funding challenges, these reforms laid the foundation for a mass university system. Since then, free tuition and open admissions have symbolized democracy, citizenship, and the right to education (Ballerini, 2017).

Public universities in Argentina have undergone a significant transformation: from serving a predominantly elite student body to accommodating mass enrollment, with nearly 1.5 million students (Adrogué & García de Fanelli, 2018, p. 4). By 2015, nearly half of all undergraduates were enrolled in just six of the largest national universities (García de Fanelli & Adrogué, 2019, p. 10). Chiroleu (2018) attributes this shift to policies introduced by 21st-century socio-democratic governments aimed at expanding access, especially in the national university sector. Key initiatives included the 2006 National Law of Education, which made upper-secondary schooling mandatory; the FinES program, supporting youth and adults in completing primary and secondary education; and expanded financial aid for low-income students. Combined with increased public investment and the proliferation of tuition-free, open-access undergraduate programs, these policies boosted enrollment among students from the lowest income quintiles (Chiroleu, 2018; Chiroleu & Marquina, 2017). In the public universities of the Buenos Aires conurbation, which this study focuses on, low-income and first-generation students now form the majority, and their numbers continue to grow (García de Fanelli & Adrogué, 2019).

Despite greater access to universities, social inequalities continue to impact the educational trajectories of the most disadvantaged students. While postsecondary enrollment and graduation rates among low-income groups have improved in recent decades, these students are still more likely

to enroll in tertiary (non-university) institutions and lag behind their more affluent peers in both access to and completion of university degrees (Adrogué & García de Fanelli, 2018; Chiroleu, 2018; García de Fanelli, 2019). Some researchers attribute these disparities to a "lack of cultural capital" among low-income and first-generation college students, citing their lower performance on standardized tests (e.g., PISA) and in pre-college courses in subjects like math, reading, and writing (e.g., Ezcurra, 2005, 2011; García de Fanelli, 2019; Gluz & Rosica, 2011). This pattern aligns with research showing that socioeconomic segregation in Argentina's secondary schools, particularly in Buenos Aires province, negatively affects the academic performance of the lowest-income students (e.g., Krüger, 2013).

Institutional factors were also recognized as hindering progress toward equity in Argentine higher education, including inadequate planning in establishing new regional universities, little monitoring of equity-oriented policies and programs in education, poor articulation between educational levels, and shortcomings in the administration of financial aid (Chiroleu, 2018; Chiroleu & Marquina, 2017). This complex interaction of socioeconomic and institutional factors has resulted in unintended outcomes despite increased access opportunities. As the next section discusses, a greater focus on literacy education has been identified as a promising pathway to enhance equity and inclusion in higher education.

Literacy, Equity, and Transition in Argentine Universities

In Latin America, researchers and policymakers have emphasized the importance of universities supporting students' *alfabetización académica*, a framework programmatically advanced by researcher Paula Carlino. Initially defined as a process of academic enculturation, *alfabetización académica* equips students to engage in the ways of thinking, reading, and writing that characterize specific academic communities (Carlino, 2003). In her later work, Carlino (2013) distinguishes *alfabetización académica* from the concept of *literacidades*. While the former refers to pedagogical processes, specifically, the teaching and learning of academic and disciplinary literacies, *literacidades* shifts the focus away from instruction and toward the broader "written cultures" or socially legitimized practices of language and thought characteristic of the academic field (Carlino, 2013, p. 373). This framework has prompted many universities in the region to revisit traditional pedagogies and develop initiatives to strengthen students' academic and disciplinary literacies.

Argentine universities' commitment to *alfabetización académica* has historically relied on early-stage reading and writing courses that serve as a bridge to first-year coursework. These courses aim to strengthen students' rhetorical awareness, genre knowledge, reading comprehension, and Spanish grammar (e.g., Carlino, 2006; Navarro, 2012; Pereira, 2006). However, one of their persistent challenges is that institutional conditions, such as high teacher-to-student ratios, often limit instructors' ability to address the diverse learning needs of their students (Pereira, 2006). In addition, these courses are frequently disconnected from undergraduate curricula, which diminishes their relevance and impact during the first academic year (Carlino, 2006; Navarro, 2012). As a result, ensuring that students are prepared for college-level literacy demands without compromising the principle of open access remains an unresolved and challenging dilemma for many public universities in Argentina.

Research suggests that writing education in Argentine universities has expanded significantly, evolving from stand-alone reading and writing workshops to more integrated, curriculum-embedded approaches. As documented elsewhere, Anglophone traditions have influenced the rise of Argentina's Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs. Although institutional challenges remain, such as faculty resistance, writing program administrators report positive outcomes. These include gains in students' writing knowledge, development of higher-order thinking skills, improved

reading and writing abilities, and increased confidence (Natale, 2013; Padilla Sabaté de Zerdán et al., 2010). Moreover, such programs have also helped instructors incorporate writing more effectively into their disciplinary teaching (Moyano & Giudice, 2016). Taken together, these findings suggest that integrating writing instruction into the curriculum benefits both students and faculty and is more effective than stand-alone literacy courses required before program entry.

Qualitative studies in Argentine public universities indicate that exclusionary pedagogical practices and traditional views of writing persist. Diment & Carlino (2006) found that while students valued instructors who emphasized writing, many faculty members saw writing instruction as outside the university's scope. Similarly, Natale (2011) reported that upper-division faculty often viewed writing merely as a tool to express ideas or reflect innate talent, rather than as a skill that can be taught. Navarro's (2013) study at the University of Buenos Aires revealed that students frequently felt insecure about academic communication, mainly when rhetorical skills were assessed but not explicitly taught. These findings highlight a disconnect between students' needs and faculty assumptions about writing.

Literacy Education as an Avenue for Inclusion in Higher Education

Expanding writing education in higher education supports all students, especially those with limited exposure to academic literacies. Pérez and Natale (2017) argue that *alfabetización académica* is essential for inclusion, calling for more curricular opportunities for students to engage with the literacy practices of their disciplines. They view inclusion as a shared responsibility among institutions, faculty, students, and policymakers, aiming not to reject established academic conventions but to ensure all students are taught how to use them. They contend that teaching these legitimized literacies is key to reconciling quality with inclusion in higher education.

Another view of an inclusive writing curriculum actively challenges dominant discourses. In the Latin American context, Virginia Zavala critiques the assumption that students should assimilate into hegemonic literacy practices, highlighting how these norms marginalize Indigenous, Quechua-speaking students in Peruvian universities (Zavala & Córdova, 2010). Instead, she advocates for pedagogies that help students rhetorically negotiate their linguistic and cultural identities, affirming their agency and empowering them to make purposeful language choices in academic writing (Zavala, 2011).

While not predominant, this line of research has shaped how writing education is understood and practiced in Latin American universities. Building on Zavala's work on identity, voice, and agency, Ávila Reyes et al. (2020) explore how students in a Chilean inclusive admissions program navigate university literacy. Drawing on surveys and interviews, they found that while socially disadvantaged students often undervalued their digital and vernacular literacies, they actively used these resources to develop academic voice, identity, and ownership over their learning. Students engaged more deeply with writing tasks that resonated with them, often using writing to support content learning. The authors argue that inclusive writing curricula must reject deficit views, recognize students as literate agents, and build on those literacy practices students are well-versed in while gradually introducing more complex academic writing through scaffolded instruction.

In Argentina, Bombini & Iturrioz (2021) drew on Zavala's work, among other critical scholars, to design their preparatory writing course in a public university serving predominantly low-income and first-generation college students. They describe how certain pedagogical decisions allow for a smooth transition into the university while contesting dominant reading and writing practices; for example, they assign culturally relevant readings and have students write reflectively and creatively from/about their personal experiences. This case emphasizes the potential of critical

writing pedagogies to promote literacy development and greater inclusion among students from less privileged backgrounds.

Evidence from Argentine universities shows that diverse writing programs and pedagogical approaches are being implemented to support students' transition to college-level literacy. These initiatives are grounded in a commitment to democratizing education and rethinking traditional notions of academic writing. While some emphasize strengthening support for disciplinary writing, others advocate for questioning dominant norms around what counts as legitimate knowledge and experimenting with critical language pedagogies.

Conceptual Framework

This study draws on insights from the sociology of education, the new literacy studies, and the academic literacies framework to examine writing instructors' and program administrators' perspectives on writing education in Argentine universities.

Schools as Sites of Social Reproduction

Foundational studies in the sociology of education during the 1960s and 1970s in Europe and the United States challenged the notion that schools promote equal opportunity, showing instead that they often reproduce existing socio-economic inequalities. Among these, Bourdieu's work has been especially influential in revealing how schools legitimize and transmit the cultural norms of dominant classes through pedagogic practices, such as curricula, exams, and lectures. Schools' symbolic violence involves imposing the dominant class's culture and values in a way that appears natural or legitimate, even though it is ultimately based on arbitrary power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Although schools present themselves as meritocratic institutions where natural talent and hard work lead to success and upward mobility, they in fact tend to favor students whose early socialization aligns with the dominant culture (Giroux, 1983, p. 268). As a result, the cultural backgrounds of other groups are often implicitly devalued. This is why Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that "the organization and functioning of the school system continuously and through multiple codes retranslate inequalities in social level into inequalities in academic level" (p. 158). They argued that "social origin is doubtless the one whose influence bears most strongly on the student world," shaping opportunities and constraints throughout the entire course of schooling (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 8). Even in higher education, they observed persistent disparities in academic performance, career trajectories, and sense of belonging between privileged and disadvantaged students (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979).

Part of the cultural arbitrary that schools uphold and reproduce is a socially sanctioned form of language. Bourdieu (1991) argues that the education system plays a central role in creating and maintaining a unified linguistic market within modern nation-state formation, alongside other forces such as writers, grammarians, dictionaries, and textbooks. The "official" or "standard" language, shaped by and associated with dominant social groups, gains authority through institutions like schools. Within this framework, all other ways of speaking are judged against the dominant language, which sets the norms for written expression and reinforces the perceived inferiority of informal or conversational speech (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 49).

Bourdieu emphasized that linguistic capital significantly shapes students' educational trajectories, especially in early schooling and during transitions between levels, where mastery of the dominant language is closely assessed (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). While rejecting strict determinism, Bourdieu showed that working-class students often self-eliminate or are marginalized within the education system. His theory of reproduction asserts that students' ability to succeed in

school largely depends on the cultural capital inherited from their families, passed on inadvertently through educational credentials, embodied dispositions, and access to cultural goods (Bourdieu, 1986). As a result, students whose social and linguistic backgrounds align with the dominant culture promoted by schools enjoy a "profit of distinction" in formal education.

Literacy, Schooling, and Power

Literacy education is not a neutral process but an ideological one that helps dominant groups maintain power. Traditionally defined as the ability to read and write, literacy has been linked to modernization, economic progress, and cognitive development, a set of assumptions some scholars refer to as the "literacy myth" (Gee, 1996). The new literacy studies (NLS), which emerged during the social turn of the late 20th century, challenged this "autonomous model" by advancing an "ideological model" of literacy. NLS scholars argue that literacy is not a universal skill but a socially situated practice shaped by power relations and institutional hierarchies of culture and language (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1993). From this perspective, the ideologies embedded in institutions such as the state, religion, and education influence how people engage with reading and writing.

A key strand of new literacy studies has examined how writing is conceptualized and regulated in higher education through the *academic literacies* perspective. In response to broader college access in the UK, this framework challenges text-focused, psychologized views of academic writing that have naturalized Western forms, such as essayist literacy, as universal norms to which all students should conform. Instead, it frames student writing as a socially situated practice that unfolds within institutions shaped by specific histories, cultures, values, and practices (Lillis, 2001, 2003).

Pedagogically, the academic literacies framework advocates for teaching practices that recognize the ideological nature of knowledge and the ways students' identities are shaped by dominant literacy norms (Lea & Street, 2006). It emphasizes meaning-making, identity, power, and authority, and situates academic writing within institutional structures. This contrasts with traditional models like "study skills," which frame writing as an individual cognitive ability, and "academic socialization," which views disciplinary genres as fixed and transferable through instruction (Lea & Street, 2006). Rather than expecting students to assimilate into dominant academic norms, the academic literacies approach calls for inclusive pedagogies that engage with students' full cultural and social experiences.

Context of the Study

This study examines the perspectives of writing program administrators and instructors who lead pre-college and first-year writing courses at three public universities in the Buenos Aires conurbation (*conurbano bonaerense*), a densely populated region with a high concentration of low-income households (García de Fanelli & Adrogué, 2019). The universities, referred to here as "La Marea," "Andamios," and "El Camino," represent national efforts to democratize higher education (Marquina, 2011). Like other public universities in Argentina, they offer high-quality, tuition-free undergraduate programs to a predominantly low-income and first-generation college student population.

El Camino

El Camino is a public university with approximately 18,000 enrolled students. It has a centralized campus comprising four schools and 16 institutes, offering a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs. According to the university's website and 2015 data, 70% of

incoming students were the first in their families to attend college. Admission procedures at El Camino vary across schools, institutes, and degree programs. However, most two- to four-year programs require students to complete a three-course preparatory module, which typically includes a mandatory reading and writing course.

This study focused on the preparatory writing course offered by the School of Humanities, which is required for enrollment in first-year classes. According to course materials, the course aims to introduce students to the types of discourse that circulate in the university, expose them to texts presenting diverse perspectives on science and society, support their writing development, and help them identify and resolve challenges in their writing. Students engage in creative tasks, such as transforming and reworking different types of texts and analyzing and producing argumentative writing.

I interviewed four instructors and one program administrator involved in the pre-college writing course at El Camino. Participants had academic backgrounds in literary studies, linguistics, and education, and each had at least one year of teaching experience at the university. I also interviewed two faculty members from the School of Humanities, who collaborate with writing instructors to align the preparatory course with the school's various programs.

La Marea

La Marea is a public university located in the largest and most densely populated district of the Buenos Aires conurbation, with an enrollment of approximately 40,000 students. Its centralized campus offers a variety of programs, including one- and two-year technical degrees, four-year undergraduate programs, and graduate-level studies across a wide range of disciplines. Access to first-year courses is mediated through either a one-semester or an intensive one-month preparatory program. These programs vary by school and degree but typically include reading, writing, mathematics, and science coursework.

This study focused on La Marea's preparatory reading and writing course, which is required for enrollment in first-year classes. According to course materials, the class is structured into three units: the first introduces the concept of genre, the second teaches critical reading strategies, and the third guides students through writing academic texts, particularly reading reports. I interviewed three writing program administrators and four instructors involved in the course. Most participants held academic backgrounds in sociolinguistics and communication sciences, with many engaged in research in critical discourse analysis.

Andamios

Andamios is a public university with approximately 8,300 students. Like La Marea and El Camino, it offers two- to four-year undergraduate programs and graduate-level degrees across various disciplines. According to the university's 2019 census, between 70% and 75% of students are first-generation college attendees; 51% work while studying, and 40% are employed in the informal labor market.

At the time of this study, Andamios was transitioning toward a fully open-access model. What had previously been pre-requisite reading and writing courses had been restructured as credit-bearing workshops required during the first year of study. Writing education at Andamios was comprehensive, featuring a three-course sequence in reading and writing during the first academic year, a Writing in the Disciplines program for upper-division courses, and a university-wide access and support program offering tutoring, counseling, and services for students with disabilities.

I interviewed three writing program administrators and three instructors involved in the first-year writing sequence and the upper-division writing program. I also spoke with a former program administrator who contributed to the program's early design and implementation, and a

former instructor who provided valuable institutional memory to help reconstruct the program's development. Participants had extensive experience researching and teaching writing, and their academic backgrounds were primarily in linguistics and literary studies.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative methodology to explore beliefs about writing and approaches to writing instruction in preparatory and first-year courses at three public universities in Argentina. As a mode of inquiry, qualitative research aims to understand and interpret the unique ways individuals, including the researcher, construct their worlds, make sense of their experiences, and attribute meaning to them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Guided by a constructivist paradigm, the research was grounded in the understanding that reality is not singular or objective but consists of multiple, socially constructed interpretations shaped by individual and collective experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From this perspective, the study sought to understand how instructors and program administrators interpret and make meaning of their pedagogical practices and institutional contexts. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain, constructivist inquiry assumes that "realities are multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature [...] and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions" (p. 110).

Data Collection Methods

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with writing program administrators and instructors involved in preparatory and first-year writing courses at three public universities located in the Buenos Aires conurbation, which serve predominantly low-income, first-generation college students.

Participants were recruited through snowball sampling. An initial round of seven in-person interviews was conducted during a research trip to Buenos Aires in June 2019. Between July 2019 and July 2020, I expanded the dataset to include 22 interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Interview questions explored participants' conceptions of college-level reading and writing, their pedagogical priorities, and their views on the relationship between writing instruction and student inclusion. Interviews were designed not only to gather data but to engage participants in a reflexive dialogue, in line with constructivist principles.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), supported by the qualitative data analysis software NVivo12 Pro. The analysis began with an first cycle of Initial and In Vivo Coding (Saldaña, 2009), in which I reviewed the complete data set and paid particular attention to participants' language choices when discussing college-level reading and writing.

In the second coding cycle, I applied concept coding (Saldaña, 2009) to identify patterns and groupings aligned with key theoretical constructs drawn from the literature, such as *literacy practices*, *writing*, *identity*, *inequality*, *inclusion*, and *access*. This stage was guided by the research questions and the broader sociocultural frameworks underpinning the study.

Through an iterative coding process, comparison, and refinement, I developed a coding scheme comprising 30 nodes. I then organized these nodes into broader thematic categories that informed the interpretation of findings and helped construct an analytical narrative across cases.

Findings

The Challenge of Open Access: Maintaining Literacy Standards Without Risking Inclusion

Broadening access to the university raised concerns about a literacy crisis at La Marea. Natalia, program administrator of an entry-level writing course, defined La Marea as an "inclusive" university, emphasizing that leaders worked hard to ensure students' needs were heard and met. However, ensuring that all students, regardless of their social and educational backgrounds, were included in the university sometimes conflicted with instructors' expectations of the literacy levels they should have to succeed in college. After emphasizing that La Marea served a first-generation college audience, Natalia talked about the wide disparities in literacy levels among incoming students and how these differences often prevented some from enrolling in college-level courses:

> We are convinced that having minimum reading and writing skills will help them start strong, with a capital they didn't have before. When students arrive, they are at very different levels. A few have no difficulty with reading and writing, but they're the exception. Many are far behind, still reading syllabically and struggling with comprehension. So, we always tell them: "Maybe you didn't reach the minimum level this time, but you will improve—and you'll get there on the next attempt."

According to Natalia, the "capital" that the students lacked was primarily academic. She highlighted specific linguistic skills fostered by formal education, such as critical reading, which involves interpreting texts with rhetorical awareness; critical thinking, referring to the ability to critique arguments and ideas; and the ability to produce argument-driven papers, emphasizing the importance of coherently elaborating an idea. Natalia's statement reveals two realities: first, that literacy serves as a gatekeeper at La Marea, with many students struggling to meet the minimum reading and writing benchmarks required for entry-level courses. Second, "college readiness" was defined as an individual condition that students must secure in advance to succeed in college-level work.

This so-called "literacy crisis" was linked to the growing presence of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, which has been a typical pattern in such discourses (Gee, 1996; Ivanič, 2004). Luciana, also a writing program administrator, was worried about the inadequate academic preparation of students coming from the surrounding communities or with non-traditional educational pathways:

> Not all students are prepared to embark on a college program. Don't forget that La Marea is a large district. Despite receiving students from everywhere, most come from the district, where secondary schools are not very good or where students' social level makes their preparation not that good. Some students have finished high school via the *FINES* program[1] and are not in the condition to face college.

According to Luciana, the lowest-income sectors, now accessing the university at higher rates, struggle to do "basic things" with writing, like understanding a less-than-one-page text, summarizing it, interpreting its intention, and identifying its central argument, purpose, and genre. Like Natalia, Luciana understood "college readiness" as an individual condition, arguing that students must demonstrate a minimum level of reading and writing to gain university status.

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[1] The FINES program was launched in 2010 to target students over 18 with incomplete primary or secondary schooling. The program supports socially disadvantaged students finishing compulsory schooling by offering hybrid in-person and online instruction that accommodates their schedules and needs.

One issue with literacy crisis narratives is that they often frame the increasing diversity of higher education seekers as a "problem," reinforcing deficit perspectives and low expectations for students from non-privileged backgrounds (Lillis, 2001). Luciana, while supporting democratic access to higher education for all, expressed concern that opening university doors to lower-income students, whom she perceived as "unprepared," might compromise academic rigor. She argued, "The idea is that many people get into the university, that many have the possibility, but that the level is good; it doesn't have to be detrimental to the level of the programs." However, maintaining high academic standards while expanding access is achievable if institutions adapt to the realities of new student demographics. The literacy crisis narrative often leaves unchallenged assumptions of what constitutes "good" academic performance, overlooking the need to revise practices that can exclude students who don't fit the traditional, middle-to-upper-class, full-time student mold.

Concerns about a literacy crisis, common during expansions in education, underpinned a "study skills" model of writing instruction at La Marea (Lea & Street, 2006). Araceli, also a writing program administrator at La Marea, explained that her writing course emerged as a direct response to concerns of the Office of Institutional Affairs about "the problems with reading and writing that students bring with them when they arrive at college." She then emphasized that her course made efforts to alleviate those concerns:

> Yes, students have difficulties understanding and producing a simple text that a reader can understand. Those are the initial difficulties we encountered. So, we work based on that and the different demands different programs bring us. Every time they say: "These students are entering university, and they can't read an academic article, they can't read the textbook; we ask them to answer a prompt or to write a summary, and they don't know how to do it," all the difficulties that the departments encountered, well, we are trying to answer them.

Like Natalia, Araceli described her writing course as equipping students with critical skills needed for success in college-level courses, such as interpreting and summarizing scholarly articles and textbooks. While this is true, it remains unclear how a standalone writing course, heavily focused on assessing these skills, will help students transfer their learning to future courses. Moreover, framing the course as an effort to "remediate" literacy shortcomings does little to foster a university-wide commitment to literacy education.

Institutional factors appeared to interfere with instructors' best efforts to support students academically. Luciano and Martín, part-time writing instructors at La Marea, noted that the high teacher-student ratio hindered their ability to build meaningful relationships with students. Both described the challenge of remembering the names of their 50–70 students and providing feedback on practice assignments. Luciano expressed regret over "losing many students along the way." Moreover, both instructors had concerns about the assessment policies, which placed high importance on students' performance on a final exam. Martín mentioned that students with less preparation in reading and writing were less likely to pass the class:

> Perhaps the saddest and most tragic thing is that those who start the class knowing how to write well cannot attend any class. If they do not come to one class, they will not get a 10, but they can easily get a 7 because, deep down, it's simple. Instead, the odds that they will improve in 14 classes are very small for those with many writing difficulties.

Martín's reflection is critical because it highlights how social privilege and disadvantage continue to be reproduced in education, particularly through language assessments that place the transition between educational levels (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Two institutional factors, large

enrollments and merit-based language assessments, were unsupportive of students with the lowest levels of academic preparation.

Although instructors viewed college readiness as a condition students should have developed to succeed in first-year courses, some also recognized that it was the university's responsibility. Natalia identified "inclusion" as a central component of her university's mission and described various institutional efforts to respond to students' needs, from summer courses to academic support to a cafeteria. She viewed her writing course as contributing directly to inclusion, emphasizing its goal of supporting success in first-year classes:

> I tell students what I honestly believe. The class is meant to prevent them from failing in the first academic year, so they don't leave thinking, "This isn't for me; what was I thinking?" because most students don't have university experiences in their families. In their communities, attending the university is a big deal; the fact that the kids from these communities are going to the university causes great commotion, so this course guarantees that those who access the university have the minimum elements to succeed in the first academic year.

Natalia recognized that the university can be exclusionary for students from less privileged backgrounds, so she believed that having a class devoted to reading and writing would help retain students in the first academic year.

However, more significant changes to the traditional university structure were more complicated to implement. Natalia described failed attempts to promote an academic socialization model of writing education at her university (Lea & Street, 2006). Her team had tried to develop partnerships with faculty across undergraduate programs to support writing beyond the first academic year; however, they largely encountered resistance. Natalia felt that "professors' conservatism" was not conducive to student learning: "Students would learn more and with less difficulty if we taught them writing." She then stressed that universities should revise their traditional structure to accommodate the diversity of students:

> Now, the tension lies precisely in having incorporated sectors of the population that were previously marginalized, something that also happened in secondary schools. When you do that, you're faced with new challenges that the system or institution is not always prepared to address. So here we are, trying out new strategies, and I believe the human side of the teaching vocation has filled in the gaps in most cases. The institution needs to diversify its offerings to reach different kinds of students, so that each one, at their own pace, can reach the essential level to become the professional they aim to be. Because the thing about university is, well, an engineer is an engineer; the balcony can't fall. You can't release a professional into society who is only somewhat prepared, just because they started from a more disadvantaged position. They still have to meet the required standards.

Natalia believed the university's doors should be open to all students, regardless of their background. At the same time, she emphasized that universities must offer different pathways to ensure students with varying literacy abilities have equal opportunities to meet the standards of their programs. This perspective shifts the responsibility for college readiness from the student to the university, highlighting that expanding college access should be paired with institutional efforts to support the growing diversity of students.

From Remediation to Inclusion: The Advocacy Work of Writing Program Administrators

Promoting literacy education as a college-wide responsibility was more successful at Andamios. At this public university, the long-term advocacy of writing program administrators led to institutional support for integrating writing education across the college curriculum. These administrators emphasized an "anti-remedial" approach, arguing that literacy should not be a barrier to a college education. Instead, they worked closely with other university departments to develop guided pathways that supported students' onboarding processes and overall college journeys. Providing literacy instruction "a lo ancho y a lo largo," across all departments (width) and through all stages of college (length), was a key priority at this university.

Strong leadership and advocacy were essential to developing writing instruction at Andamios. Program leaders María and Elena discussed their long-term efforts to institutionalize writing support across disciplines. Elena traced her advocacy to the 1980s, when she collaborated with a STEM master's program to support thesis writing, persistently convincing faculty of the importance of writing instruction. After receiving training in systemic-functional linguistics, she formed a research group and promoted university-wide writing initiatives. Elena worked tirelessly to build alliances and secure institutional support, noting, "until the idea began to take off." María, now leading the program, focused on ensuring fair compensation for instructors and making partnerships with undergraduate programs mandatory. "Since 2009, as a program administrator, I started to fight…so that the program could be recognized as a teaching job and that we did not have to teach double hours." Their collective advocacy led to the program's integration into the curricula of all undergraduate programs, with María noting, "The change is that we are systematized because we are in all the programs and integrated into their curricula."

An understanding of literacy as a social practice underpinned writing education at Andamios, consistent with an academic socialization model proposed by Lea & Street (2006). Instructors resisted the idea that writing courses should serve a "remedial" function in the early stages of college, a perspective that reinforces institutional selectivity. Initially, the university required students to complete a non-credit-bearing reading and writing course before enrolling in first-year subjects. However, over time, writing education evolved into a more comprehensive sequence of credit-bearing classes integrated into the first academic year. This shift aimed to minimize exclusion by supporting students through a gradual progression, from general academic skills to discipline-specific writing. Instructors and program administrators noted that this reform was part of the university's commitment to reducing barriers to college access, which aligns with Argentina's higher education policies. Micaela, a coordinator of first-year writing classes, explained the rationale behind Andamios's approach to writing education:

> The reading and writing competencies that a student must develop in the academic field are complex. Students who have just graduated from secondary school do not have to know them; they must learn them. These are other ways of reading and other ways of writing, particular to the field, and they have to go through these ways in a very gradual, sequenced way so that they appropriate those competencies and develop a deeper understanding of them and the genres that they will have to write in academia. Not as something remedial; it is not to remedy what high school did not give them, but from now on, how to insert themselves in an unknown environment with very specific rules.

Micaela recognized the socially situated nature of writing (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Lillis, 2001), advocating for a gradual socialization of students into academic and discipline-specific literacy practices. She viewed writing instructors as guides who introduce students to the new "culture" of

the academy (Lea & Street, 2006). At the same time, she stressed the importance of exposing students to various linguistic resources and writing genres, a key principle of the academic literacies framework. Her "anti-remedial" approach shifted the focus from viewing students as "unprepared" to emphasizing the university's responsibility to teach writing.

Writing at the university was not viewed as a neutral practice, but rather as something inherently embedded in relations of power, a core premise of the academic literacies framework (Lea & Street, 2006). María and Eugenia recognized that dominant ways of thinking and using language in educational settings, often hidden in the college curriculum, can be exclusionary for low-income and first-generation college students, who comprise the majority at their university. As a result, they emphasized the importance of demystifying writing expectations at the university level:

> M: It is an excluding factor. We understand inclusion from a symbolic perspective, ensuring that you engage in intellectual tasks, allowing you to know, understand, and promote classes. It's not only a matter of financial aid; if you have the book but cannot use it to understand or make an assignment for a class, it doesn't fulfill its function. The work is not complete.
> E: It's also related to a work of empowering students and enhancing their self-esteem; students bring with them the discourse of "Well, this is a university for first-generation college students," "The university is not for me," "I can't, I'm not smart enough," "I'm the problem." We want to demystify that and make explicit the necessary tools for reading, writing, and speaking in the university.

María and Eugenia highlighted the symbolic power of the dominant linguistic culture (Bourdieu, 1991), which is evident in the identity conflicts experienced by students from less privileged backgrounds in the traditional space of the university. From their perspective, supporting inclusion fundamentally involves equipping students with the linguistic resources needed to learn and succeed in college coursework.

Writing education can lead to significant institutional change, according to writing program administrators. María celebrated that university leaders had finally understood the goals of their writing program and granted "institutional status" to the work they had been doing for decades. She also highlighted the impact their writing education efforts had on the quality of teaching at their institution, saying that their collaboration with professors in the disciplines has improved the way student writing is understood and assigned:

> It's another realm, another language. The university authorities understood what we were aiming for. Sometimes, professors express concern that students write poorly, or the issue arises when students don't understand the material. But there's also been self-reflection. We conducted a study and found that, through our work within the disciplines, many faculty members began to realize they didn't know how to formulate clear instructions or provide effective guidance. We carried out a qualitative study to examine the program's impact, and now teachers recognize it as an opportunity for their own professional development. It helps them integrate writing into their teaching because writing is also disciplinary. You're not a lawyer if you don't know how to draft a contract. Through our collaborative work in the classroom, many began to consider this dimension more seriously.

María identifies writing as an integral part of getting a higher education and professionalizing in a field, alluding to the social nature of literacy practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Her perspective emphasizes the responsibility of university professors, as representatives of specific academic communities, to proactively mentor students in the literacy practices of their disciplines, rather than expecting them to navigate them on their own.

Inclusive Writing Pedagogy: Moving Beyond Academic Texts

Concerns about power and identity informed pedagogical decisions at El Camino's preparatory writing course for students in the School of Humanities. In this university, instructors were critically aware of the symbolic power of dominant discourses in academia (Bourdieu, 1991; Lillis, 2001). Like La Marea and Andamios, El Camino prioritized inclusion, particularly given its large population of first-generation college students. However, unlike these other cases, El Camino opted for non-traditional approaches to writing, incorporating creative writing and "hybrid" texts (works that blend different genres or styles) to better reflect students' diverse backgrounds.

Mitigating language-based exclusion was a key priority for writing educators at El Camino. Paula, a coordinator for the university's preparatory writing course in the School of Humanities, viewed early writing courses as essential to preventing student exclusion from the outset of their academic journey. She observed that many of her students struggled with reading scholarly articles and writing academic essays, often feeling detached, saying, "I haven't read or written for years." Paula highlighted the exclusionary impact of academic genres. She noted that first-year professors often view literacy as a skill most students lack, with some being judgmental of "la lengua del barrio," a term referring to the non-standard, informal language of marginalized youth. For Paula, early-stage writing courses were vital to eradicate class-based attitudes and support low-income, first-generation college students.

At El Camino, using writing pedagogy to question traditional forms of academic writing was a key decision tied to inclusion. Unlike La Marea and Andamios, Paula was skeptical about dominant approaches to writing instruction during the early stages of college, which typically focus on study skills, text types, and academic genres (Lea & Street, 2006). Instead, she believed that assigning "hybrid texts," such as short stories, chronicles, and magazine articles, and encouraging students to develop their voices was a more inclusive approach. As she explained:

> We make a whole journey with texts that are not purely academic; we work with literary texts that work intensely in the first person, which students modify by alternating the person and changing parts of the text. We go through a powerful journey in that sense. As a theoretical framework, we align with Virginia Zavala, with the question of academic literacy and literate practices. It is not enough to tell students that an essay or a monograph has a thesis, a body, and a closing statement because you can repeat it 20,000 times, but then appropriating that type of discourse is quite an endeavor.

Paula questioned the assumption that students should reproduce dominant writing genres. Her preferred approach aligned more with the academic literacies framework (Lea & Street, 2006; Lillis, 2003). Referencing Virginia Zavala's work, Paula believed that teaching writing to students with complex social realities and non-traditional educational journeys required a mindful approach to power imbalances within the traditional university setting.

At El Camino, an "inclusive" writing pedagogy sought to minimize the gatekeeping power of literacy and foreground students' voices. Now a writing instructor, Julia did her undergraduate studies at El Camino. She recalled her own experience taking the writing course she now leads, which used to have a grading policy that relied heavily on a timed essay. Julia celebrated the shift to a portfolio-based system, where students write one assignment per class, "and in almost all or most of the cases, students rewrite, either at home or in class, but all that work needs to be submitted." Paula believed that this approach to writing assessment was fairer than the one-time essay, "where students' destinies were defined."

Moreover, El Camino's preparatory writing course questioned naturalized assumptions about "academic writing." Liliana, a writing instructor for this course, explained that the choice of shaping writing assignments around readings not traditionally represented in the university curriculum, like a chronicle, short story, or an article from the university's magazine, fulfilled two purposes. First, it alleviated some academic barriers students usually encounter in first-semester writing, as students find these readings more accessible. Second, it invited students to find their voice in writing rather than expecting them to adhere to conventional academic writing standards. As Liliana put it: "Our main goal is that students, as writers, as producers of written texts, develop their voices rather than just copy-paste what they found elsewhere."

Like Andamios, institutional support at El Camino was essential for balancing inclusion with academic literacy standards. Paula emphasized the strong backing her team received from the School of Humanities to design a course centered on student voice and hybrid texts. Close collaboration with faculty teaching first-year disciplinary courses allowed them to align writing instruction with academic expectations, such as analyzing sources and composing prompt-based essays. This teamwork also made it possible to identify students needing extra support and strategize around retention. While Liliana voiced concerns about rising enrollments, most instructors felt class sizes remained manageable, enabling them to offer targeted support. These conditions fostered a productive environment for integrating critical writing pedagogies with disciplinary literacy demands.

Discussion

Making public universities inclusive beyond the point of entry is a central concern for writing educators in Argentina. Participants in this study challenge the assumption that open access policies necessarily lead to greater inclusivity if pre-existing inequalities remain unaddressed. Their efforts to promote meaningful and far-reaching writing education programs and opportunities suggest a belief in a shared, institution-wide responsibility to counter the exclusionary effects of traditional university structures.

This study joins a long line of Latin American scholars who have emphasized the potential that writing education has for inclusion at the higher education level (Ávila Reyes et al., 2020; Carlino, 2013; Navarro, 2013, 2017; Pérez & Natale, 2017). Writing instructors and program administrators in this study highlighted the benefits of providing students with early-stage writing support and ongoing mentorship in academic and field-specific literacy practices. Across the three university contexts examined, instructors emphasized that writing is inseparable from academic and professional development. They affirmed that students learn best when given dedicated space to reflect on the writing demands of their courses. In the case of Andamios, they also noted that college-level instruction is enhanced when faculty collaborate with writing experts to better support students' writing processes. These perspectives support a core principle of the paradigm of *alfabetización académica*, namely that university educators must make writing expectations more transparent and actively teach/mentor writing in the various fields of expertise (Carlino, 2003, 2013).

The various writing program configurations and pedagogical approaches described in this study shed light on conditions that either promote or hinder inclusion in access-oriented universities. At La Marea, for example, the must-pass writing course required for first-year enrollment often poses barriers for the least academically prepared students, who are frequently socioeconomically disadvantaged. Instructors noted that large class sizes and the fast pace of the course limited their ability to provide regular feedback and support at-risk students. They also expressed concern that using an in-class literacy test as the primary form of assessment excluded students with limited exposure to academic texts, effectively turning the course into a gatekeeping mechanism (Navarro, 2012). These findings underscore the need to carefully design early-stage writing courses to avoid

reproducing patterns of exclusion. Smaller class sizes would facilitate the use of formative assessments, offering more opportunities for writing practice and individualized feedback. Such conditions would support both student retention and teachers' workloads. Moreover, when implemented, language assessments should aim to identify students' learning needs rather than function as exclusionary mechanisms, as the sociology of education has long cautioned (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

At Andamios, writing education efforts tied to inclusion were supported by strong university leadership. The successful activism of writing program administrators highlights the importance of building partnerships across campus to integrate writing support throughout the curriculum, an approach particularly beneficial for at-risk students, as it extends the writing support beyond the entry point. Rather than expecting students to be "college-ready" upon entry, Andamios emphasized a college-wide commitment to making writing practices more transparent and accessible through gradual, scaffolded instruction. This approach aligns with research recommending that students be guided through increasingly complex literacy tasks over time (Ávila Reyes et al., 2020). Andamios's case illustrates how writing program leadership can help transform traditional university structures to better serve a diverse student body.

Inclusion was also supported by rethinking writing pedagogy. While most instructors in this study followed an academic socialization model, elements of an academic literacies perspective also informed their teaching. Instructors at both Andamios and El Camino recognized the identity challenges low-income, often first-generation students face in engaging with academic genres. At Andamios, pedagogy focused on demystifying dominant practices through scaffolding, while El Camino emphasized decentering dominant genres and encouraging students to develop non-conforming voices (Ávila Reyes et al., 2020; Lillis, 2001; Zavala, 2011). Although this study did not assess pedagogical outcomes, instructors' perspectives suggest that both teaching and critically examining dominant literacy practices can advance inclusion.

The call to prioritize writing education in universities is grounded in a view of "college readiness" as a shared institutional responsibility, not merely a student trait. The cases in this study suggest that fulfilling this responsibility requires significant changes in programs, pedagogies, and faculty attitudes toward student diversity. Writing program administrators advocate for embedding writing support throughout the college experience, promoting a vision of higher education where all faculty contribute to literacy development. However, such changes are often gradual and face resistance, especially from faculty hesitant to adopt roles as literacy educators. As prior research has shown, evolving student demographics demand institutional strategies that ensure not only access but also the academic support necessary for student success (Chiroleu & Marquina, 2017; Ezcurra, 2011; Pérez & Natale, 2017).

Concerns about a "literacy crisis," often tied to a perceived lack of "cultural capital" among disadvantaged students, reflect enduring hierarchies of language and culture in higher education. Sociological research shows that schools reproduce the linguistic norms of dominant groups, marginalizing students from non-privileged backgrounds based on language assessment (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, 1990). However, naturalizing the cultural capital of dominant groups as the benchmark for college readiness is neither democratic nor inclusive. A more equitable approach involves addressing the structural inequalities embedded in the education system (García de Fanelli & Adrogué, 2019). Access to and persistence in higher education depend not on general cultural traits but on the "academic capital" students have developed through prior educational opportunities (Navarro, 2017). In Argentina's segregated school system, low-income students, often attending under-resourced schools with other low-income students, face systemic barriers to acquiring the literacy skills universities expect (Krüger, 2013). This poses a key equity challenge for

public universities in the Buenos Aires conurbation: ensuring that the academic demands of college-level coursework do not exclude those with less training in schooled literacy.

Stronger partnerships between public universities and high schools, particularly in disadvantaged districts, can help ease the transition to college and support retention. Argentina's public universities have a strong tradition of research-based writing instruction in the early stages of higher education. This expertise could inform secondary-level curriculum and instruction to better prepare students for the academic demands of college. With their extensive experience teaching and supporting high-risk students, the writing instructors in this study are well-positioned to co-develop localized, context-sensitive programs that bridge the gap between high school and university, ultimately supporting a smoother entry into first-year courses. Alongside assuming a college-wide responsibility for reading and writing, strengthening the high-school-to-college pipeline in the most underserved areas is a critical step toward leveling the playing field.

This study also highlights the importance of supporting students' progression throughout their first year of college as they encounter new academic and disciplinary literacy practices. Writing instructors across the three universities emphasized the need to scaffold students' access to first-year courses while enhancing literacy instruction in college to mitigate the effects of selectivity. The various program structures and pedagogical approaches used to reduce early attrition reflect meaningful, equity-driven reforms that move beyond traditional models of remediation. These efforts to uphold rigorous academic standards without marginalizing the least academically prepared students merit further consideration and broader adoption. Advancing such strategies is essential to realizing a more inclusive and equitable vision of higher education.

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