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DYNAMIC BECOMINGS IN THE TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY: EXPERIENCES OF NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS ACROSS CONTEXTS AND WRITING PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the experiences of 11 students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds as they transition from school to university. Relying on data from 40 interviews, we utilize Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming* to comprehend students' navigation of different contexts, writing practices, and identities. Our results show that students experience dynamic and multilayered becomings and non-linear transitions as they combine diverse roles and engage in writing practices across domains and timescales. We also found that school students engage in diverse non-academic writing practices, but this narrows down in university as they focus on academic writing demands. However, they use their prior non-academic writing experiences to cope with academic writing at university. These findings challenge deficit discourses about marginalized students' writing and linear views on transition. Based on the data, we suggest strategies to support students in their transition to university.

KEYWORDS: Transition, academic literacy, writing practices, higher education, becoming.

RESUMEN: Este estudio explora las experiencias de 11 estudiantes económicamente desfavorecidos en su transición a la universidad. Basándonos en datos de 40 entrevistas, utilizamos el concepto de *devenir* de Deleuze y Guattari para comprender cómo los estudiantes navegan diferentes contextos, prácticas de escritura e identidades. Nuestros resultados muestran que los estudiantes experimentan devenires dinámicos y multicapas y transiciones no lineales al combinar diversos roles e involucrarse en prácticas de escritura en diferentes dominios y escalas temporalees. También observamos que los estudiantes participan de variadas prácticas escritas no académicas mientras cursan la escuela, las que se reducen en la universidad ya que priorizan la escritura académica. No obstante, ellos utilizan sus experiencias previas de escritura para enfrentar las nuevas demandas de literacidad universitarias. Estos hallazgos

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cuestionan los discursos deficitarios sobre la escritura y las visiones lineales sobre la transición y permiten sugerir estrategias de apoyo a la transición a la universidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Transición, literacidad académica, prácticas de escritura, educación superior, devenir

RESUMO: Este estudo explora as experiências de 11 estudantes provenientes de origens marginalizadas em sua transição para a universidade. Com base em dados de 40 entrevistas, usamos o conceito de Deleuze e Guattari de *becoming* para entender como os alunos navegam em diferentes contextos, práticas de escrita e identidades. Nossos resultados demonstram que os alunos vivenciam transformações dinâmicas e multicamadas e transições não lineares à medida que combinam diversas funções e se envolvem em práticas de escrita em diferentes domínios e escalas de tempo. Também observamos que os alunos se envolvem em uma variedade de práticas de escrita não acadêmicas na escola, que é reduzida na universidade, onde eles priorizam a escrita acadêmica. No entanto, eles usam suas experiências anteriores de escrita para lidar com as novas exigências do letramento universitário. Essas descobertas desafiam os discursos deficitários sobre a escrita e as visões lineares da transição e sugerem estratégias para apoiar a transição para a universidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Transição, letramento acadêmico, práticas de escrita, ensino superior, transformação

INTRODUCTION

Higher education has undergone a process of significant expansion and diversification on a global scale. In the last years, there has been a worldwide increase in enrolments and greater diversity within the student population (Guri-Rosenblit et al., 2007). Data from the UK shows a diversification process from the 1990s onwards, particularly regarding gender, ethnicity, and age (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education/Dearing Report 1997 in Lillis, 2001). In Latin America, similar processes have taken place with the rise in females, ethnic minorities, and low-economic background students (Espinoza & González, 2013). In this scenario, transitions to university have become a relevant issue for research and practice, mainly due to the need to ensure real opportunities for participation and inclusion for every student, especially those traditionally excluded from higher education.

As university students come from increasingly diverse previous backgrounds, transitions have also become more varied and less fixed, following unpredictable patterns rather than a linear progression from school to college and from college to the workplace. In this context of greater flexibility in individuals' trajectories (Ecclestone, 2009), transitions are now viewed as ongoing processes of becoming, as people move permanently across different settings and identities. From these understandings, transitions have been approached at different scales. Some authors have paid attention to educational transitions, such as the one from school to college or throughout the university (Baker, 2018a; Quinn, 2010); others have also examined transitions across settings and genres (Baker, 2018a; Spelman Miller & Stevenson, 2018).

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Literacy is central in transitions to – and throughout – higher education. Disciplines are areas of knowledge defined by their intellectual traditions, discussion areas, data collection, analysis practice, and particular genres and discourses (Tusting & Barton, 2016), all of which entail using specialized academic literacy practices. Writing is also one of the most common means for assessment, having a gate-keeping role (Lillis & Scott, 2008; Lillis, 2001) by regulating access and academic progress and sometimes narrowing educational opportunities for underrepresented groups. In this manner, writing is critical in students' transitions into, throughout, and out of higher education. Nontraditional students – defined by Lillis (2001) as individuals historically excluded from higher education due to factors such as race, social class, and gender, may face challenges when it comes to academic writing as they may lack previous experience with dominant literacies (Lillis & Scott, 2008). Moreover, their writing experiences may be categorized as less valued under deficit discourses drawing on negative stereotypes, which can lead to overlooking their skills and knowledge from other life domains, impacting their transition to university.

Numerous studies have explored the significance of writing during the transition into university (Jessen & Elander, 2009; Pessoa et al., 2014; Regalado, 2004; Stokes, 2014; Wahleithner, 2020). While some have developed fresh conceptual perspectives on transitions (see Baker, 2018a; Nordquist, 2017), many rely on rigid and linear understandings. Such approaches view the transition as a process that can be organized in stages (Everitt-Reynolds et al., 2018), a difficult moment to be smoothed over and bridged (Hebdon, 2015; Kodama et al., 2018), and writing in transition as a process of academic acculturation that should lead to academic success and curricular progression (Jessen & Elander, 2009; Regalado, 2004; Stokes, 2014). However, these positionings are often implicit, and only a few studies on academic writing have fully explored the concept of transition. Moreover, longitudinal studies that follow students' trajectories across educational systems are scarce (Baker, 2018a; Bazerman, 2013; Smith, 2020) and studies that account for both the transition from high school to college and across life domains are even more rare.

Some longitudinal studies have shown the complexities of such transitions. Drawing on four-year-long ethnographic case studies of linguistic-minority students' transitions, Harklau (2001) found that students experienced significant differences between high school and college, for instance in the way instructional time was arranged, and in the assumed responsibilities of teachers and students in the learning process. While writing practices did change from high school to college, these changes were located in broader cultural ecosystems of school and college which were just as salient for students. Harklau argues for the importance of a social-practice perspective on transitions into college literacy practices which recognizes the importance of such changing social and cultural norms and expectations.

Kapp and Bangeni (2020) conducted a qualitative longitudinal study to observe how black working-class students develop their sense of self while transitioning across domains and establishing connections between their home and academic discourses. However, their research failed to account for the specific writing practices that shape students' transition to new social roles at the university and their opportunities for participation in higher education. In

contrast, Baker (2018b) explored the experiences of students in the UK as they transitioned from A-levels to university and navigated their literacy practices. Baker found that there were significant differences in epistemological cultures and literacy practices across academic levels. While students relied on the subject textbook as the unique source of knowledge at A-levels, they developed more complex texts informed by multiple sources at the university level. However, Baker's study did not consider the role of social class in shaping students' transition to college and their writing experiences. Our research aims to fill these gaps by providing insights into the ways nontraditional students experience transitions into university, and across domains and writing practices.

This longitudinal study explores how non-traditional students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds experience changes in writing practices and social roles as they transition from high school to university. We utilize Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of *becoming* as a lens to better understand the fluid changes of these students as they move through different contexts, writing practices, and identities. The analysis allows us to comprehend the dynamism of students' actual experiences of transition. Based on these results, we suggest some strategies to assist students in transitioning into university life and academic writing practices.

CHALLENGING LINEAR REPRESENTATIONS OF TRANSITION TO UNIVERSITY

The transition to university is often described as a linear, fixed-stage process (Holmegaard et al., 2014; Tinto, 1988; Weaver, 2013). Following Van Gennep's (1960) *rites of passage* framework, some research portrays the transition to university in predefined phases, such as the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation into a new group described by Hillman (2005). This linear approach to transition emphasizes induction into university culture (Gale & Parker, 2014), where students' previous trajectories, beliefs and practices must be neutralized and subsumed into a dominant academic culture. Such a view neglects the diverse experiences and struggles of underrepresented students (Colley, 2007; Nordquist, 2017; Quinn, 2010). We believe that it's important to recognize the individual trajectory of each student and not judge them solely based on academic performance or institutional values. In fact, while dropping out is often considered a failure, students may leave university for valid reasons, such as unfavorable circumstances or timing (Quinn, 2010). Universities should be accommodating and flexible towards students who may have different paths and paces in navigating their academic careers.

Non-linear perspectives on transitions are more in line with people's flexible and dynamic life trajectories (Colley, 2010; Ecclestone, 2009; Ecclestone et al., 2010; Gale & Parker, 2014). These perspectives take into account the actual movements of individuals who transition in and out of university, those who move from school to a job and then to university, or students who study and work simultaneously. Such perspectives do not depict transitions as sudden shifts from one stable context to another or as a linear process. Rather, transitioning is a constant state of being, particularly in times of increased flexibility in individuals' life paths (Ecclestone, 2009). This approach also recognizes that individuals may hold multiple identities and navigate different narratives and subjectivities (Gale & Parker, 2014).

This understanding of transitions commonly relies on the notions of *rhizome* and *becoming* (see Amundsen, 2021; Gravett, 2019; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). A rhizome is a non-linear and non-hierarchical system with multiple entryways and exits. According to Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018), this concept is helpful in rethinking students' ways of knowing in transitions. They found from interviews with university students that decision-making is often fluid, emergent, or accidental and does not necessarily follow a rational evaluation of alternatives. In fact, "their knowing was more of an ongoing happening, an absorption, immersion, and gathering that followed non-linear pathways and was subject to recursive iterations which often produced accidental becomings" (p. 1261). The notion of becoming refers to an ongoing unfolding of the self (Amundsen, 2018) and emphasizes the fluidity of identity as a process of permanent change and development.

Such a view entails conceptualizing identity as fluid, multiple, and in permanent motion. The approach to transition as becoming leads us to avoid generalizing students' various, unique, ongoing, and rhizomatic experiences into stages or predictable universal processes. More fragmented experiences with transition are common in less economically privileged students, as reported by Quinn et al. (2005) in their study with working-class and first-generation students, who dropped out of university before completion but mainly expressed their desire to return to university. Some of those students left university because of the tight economic situation of their families and not because they were necessarily "unprepared".

Lifecourse trajectories are fragmented, dynamic, and unpredictable for many people. Transitions are ongoing processes in individuals' life; as Quinn (2010) points out, "we are always lost in transition, not just in the sense of moving from one task or context to another, but as a condition of our subjectivity" (p. 123). People are continually moving regarding their identities, roles, and how they envision possible futures. They are also in constant material motion as they engage in daily activities in concrete settings using specific tools and artifacts such as texts. Higher education institutions should recognize this complexity and offer flexible curricula and academic support in learning and writing that acknowledges students' multiple previous trajectories, rather than focusing on their failure to meet expectations modelled from mainstream transitions of privileged students.

WRITING IN TRANSITIONS FROM A LITERACY AS SOCIAL PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

When students move from school to university, they are not just entering a new homogeneous culture. They are simultaneously engaging in various social domains, such as home, work, and political groups. Each domain has its own literacy practices that are unique to that context (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Barton et al., 2007; Brandt & Clinton, 2000). Therefore, describing the shift from school to university as a move between two isolated contexts ignores the intricacies of human activity and how literacy practices shape and are shaped by these activities (Montes & Tusting, In press).

Entering university could be better understood if we recognize how students are already moving across contexts, languages, and genres every day. In this vein, Kagan (1991) identifies *vertical transitions*, those that unfold over

broader periods of time and organize people's narratives of their own life trajectories, like entering university, going through a divorce, starting a new job, etc., and *horizontal transitions*, those unfolding on a daily basis such as moving from a school setting to a social community or from university to home. Spelman Miller and Stevenson (2018) even describe moving across genres as microlevel transitions.

According to Burgess and Ivanič (2010), writers' identity unfolds over three different timescales. The *socio-historical timescale* refers to the wider social processes that shape the discourses and possibilities of selfhood available to people at specific times in history. The *ontogenetic timescale* describes the biographical trajectories of individuals. The *microgenetic timescale* focuses on specific acts of writing in particular settings, moments, and times. These three timescales provide different levels of analysis for transitions in both writing and life. For example, students experience new writing practices as they move from school to university in the ontogenetic timescale. However, they also transition between different contexts and writing practices in the microgenetic timescale as they engage in political groups, pursue personal interests, and participate in online communities.

METHODOLOGY

Eleven non-traditional students coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were the participants of this study. Six were enrolled in academically oriented schools and five in vocational ones. Both school types follow the same curriculum, except that vocational schools offer professional specialization starting from the age of 16. All the participants came from highly vulnerable schools, as per the educational vulnerability index of the Ministry of Education, which accounts for students' socioeconomic environment (Correa et al. 2019)[1]. They were also enrolled in an inclusion program that offered a special admission route for non-traditional students in higher education in Chile. We targeted students from such programs to ensure their continuity across educational levels. We contacted them via email and gave them detailed information about the conditions of participation and the characteristics of the study via text and a short informative video. Students agreed to participate through informed consent and legal guardians' consent when they were underage. We stored their personal information in encrypted folders and used pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Nine of our participants joined the study when they were attending secondary school and then continued their participation until their first year of higher education. We interviewed them twice while attending school between August and October 2021, with a time gap of at least a month between interviews. We interviewed them twice again while attending university, first between July and August 2022 and then again between November and December 2022. To gain a better understanding of some of the categories that had previously emerged from our data, , we recruited two more participants who were already enrolled in university and who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and had accessed university via the same inclusion program. In the case of these

[1] We worked with schools with a vulnerability index of 80% or higher, meaning that at least eight out of ten students were categorized as vulnerable according to socioeconomic factors.

participants, we explored their school experiences retrospectively. We interviewed them twice while they were studying at university, first in October 2022 and then again between November and December 2022. We conducted a total of 40 interviews over a period of 17 months. We also kept conversations with four participants via WhatsApp to clarify aspects of their interviews until March 2023.

We conducted *literacy history interviews* (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; 2000), focusing on participants' life experiences, including those related to literacy, and *talking around text interviews* (Ávila Reyes, 2021; Lillis, 2001; 2008). We recorded and transcribed all interviews for detailed analysis. Additionally, we collected 56 texts that were not analysed themselves but discussed in the *talking around texts interviews*. The students chose these texts because they were either meaningful to them or represented the most common writing practices in school.

Data analysis involved a recursive process of qualitative coding. During each interview, we took notes to track topics and relevant issues. These notes became our exploratory categories, or preliminary codes. Next, we used NVivo qualitative analysis software to adjust our preliminary codes and develop a more exhaustive coding scheme, and an operational definition for each code for consistency. We conducted two rounds of analysis, adjusting our coding scheme as we compared data against data (Charmaz, 2006). Finally, we related our codes and topics to theory, previous research, and our memos.

In this paper, we have gathered selected excerpts that show how academically successful students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds navigate changes in social roles, contexts, and writing practices as they transition from school to college. We chose quotes from our data that were originally categorized under the codes of *biographical accounts* (students' experiences in their trajectories from school to work or university), *identities* (self-descriptions and expectations for the future), *self-sponsored literacy practices* (personal reading and writing practices), *school writing, university writing, and workplace writing* (literacy assignments in school, university and the workplace respectively). These excerpts shed light on students' experiences transitioning from school to work or university and their engagement in new identities and writing practices across domains.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The desire to pursue higher education

Our participants often expressed their desire to attend university after completing their secondary education. This desire was often fueled by the hope of social mobility, as can be observed in the following conversation with Tisúa, a student from a vocational school.

> -Interviewee: What drives you to study like this?
>
> -Tisúa: Wanting something better for me

And later in the same interview…

> -Interviewee: Why do you think your parents are so supportive
>
> -Tisúa: Because they want me to be better than them.

Some students have always viewed going to university as their only option, seeing it as a chance to "be somebody," as expressed by Alejandra, a student from an academically focused school:

> -Alejandra: Maybe it has more to do with the fact that I was always presented with a model of what life should be like, where you get into school, you get good grades, you get into college, and you are somebody. So, without that, you're not somebody. So maybe... I know you don't need to go to college to be somebody and have your life and everything, but it's something that was rooted in me, that if you're in school, you have to go to college.

Alejandra expressed that she may have been influenced by the societal expectation that success is achieved through a specific path of education, including attending college. She acknowledges that this is not necessarily true, and that one can still lead a fulfilling life without following this path. However, this expectation has been ingrained in her, and it is experienced as an enormous pressure, as can be noticed from the following excerpt:

> -Alejandra: It was always like: «what are you going to study» and «what are you going to do?» So the idea of not getting into college kind of scared me a lot.

In this way, students' experiences after finishing secondary education are impacted by traditional views and social expectations, resulting in significant pressure for first-generation students. Although linear paths are often assumed in their stories, this is not always the case.

Accidental becomings in the transition from school to university: the case of Dana

This view of transitions as a one-way route from school to university and from university to a profession contrasted with the experiences of some of our participants who, on the contrary, evaluated various alternatives for their future, such as combining work and studies or taking a sabbatical before entering university. Although most of our participants expressed a desire to attend university, students' actual trajectories were less linear and predictable than expected. Such was the case of Dana, who attended a vocational school. During her final year of secondary education, she informed us that she had no immediate plans to attend university. Her father was a gardener and had been preparing her for the business since she was ten years old. Upon finishing school, Dana intended to take over and work as a gardener to save enough money to pay for her future university studies.

> - Dana: I want to work to pay for my studies. I mean, my dad can pay for my studies, but I would like to pay for it myself so that I will work for a while, and then I have the idea to enter university to study advertising.

Our participant was also considering working and studying at the same time:

> -Dana: I have to see how I will sort it out because, to be honest, even if I study advertising, I would like to keep my job maintaining gardens because it is what I know most about, and if it comes a moment when I am tired of carrying the machines, cutting the grass, the hit and everything, so if it comes the moment when I say I cannot do it anymore I can work in that what I studied[2]

In Dana's case, the decision to go to university was triggered by her non-expected high score in the national university admission exam and was enabled by the fact that she could receive free education, thanks to the *gratuity law* implemented in the country in 2016 (Espinoza et al. 2021). Despite having weak support from her father, she entered a competitive public university in the country, mainly supported by her friends who were also pursuing further studies.

> -Dana: Yes, so I was happy at the beginning when I did well, I said: «Hey! Studying would be good for me now that I've got good marks and I don't think I'll have the head to take the test again later on». And a friend of mine said to me: «Dana, you did a great job, you did great! You should enter university straight away». And I said: «Yes, yes, I'm seriously thinking about it».

Dana's case exemplifies what Taylor and Harris-Evans (2018) call accidental becomings. These are paths that unfold in unpredictable ways influenced by emotions, experiences, and unforeseen life events. They are not determined by rational decision-making or pre-set plans. In fact, some of our participants did not consider attending university as their only option, and their transitions were not predetermined. Some of them had previous work experience (N=5), planned to work or take a sabbatical before attending university (N=3), or had to take breaks from their studies with the intention of returning to university later (N=1). Their transitions were not linear stages but were rather multiple alternatives. Their eventual decision to pursue university studies depended on various factors, such as exam results, parental or peer support, financial opportunities, and work experiences. Their transitions after school were rhizomatic; they were non-linear and non-hierarchical and spread in many directions.

Multiple ongoing becomings and identities

Some participants from our study, like Dana, combine work with their studies. This implies that they enact various social roles and identities when they enter university apart from being students, which is the case for many non-traditional newcomers in the university (Amundsen, 2021; Taylor & Harris, 2018).

Our participants from vocational schools had prior experience as workers during their professional internships, which were a mandatory part of their vocational training. As a result, they were more than just school students and had the opportunity to explore different identities and social roles that influenced their writing practices and writing identities. Through their internships, they underwent complex processes of becoming and adopting new identities

[2] This excerpt was first quoted in Montes & Tusting (In press).

and roles that shaped their biographical trajectories. Participants shared their experience of navigating adulthood while attending secondary school, including María, a vocational student.

> María: And there I was, all dressed up in formal clothes; I was just like a little chick because it doesn't...it gives you nerves not to be accompanied, but it is like your adult self that has to go out in that circumstance.

These transitions from school to the workplace also involved new ways of doing things through writing and material artifacts (reports, contracts, etc.), which mobilize new identities. Pepsi, another participant from a vocational school, describes how writing played a role in his internship in a human resources unit. Writing tasks at the workplace signalled a new phase of adultness for him, where things were done for authentic purposes and entailed real consequences. He explained that writing tasks were not "*for a grade anymore*" but "*formal documents*" in which "*there was money involved*". He adds:

> I dealt a lot with writing up things, obviously more related to legal documents, where they made me write contracts, they made me write reports, and they even made me write important contracts for the company, like things like payroll, bonuses, and things like that.

In this vein, we have observed that students from economically disadvantaged schools bring complex trajectories, writing practices, and identities to university. As they go through various transitions in life, transitioning to higher education is just one of them.

Multiple writing practices across timescales

We observed that our participants engaged in multiple writing practices mediated by artifacts as they participated in activities from diverse life domains enacting different social roles. Their experiences with writing across time and domains can be organized within the three timescales described by Burgess and Ivanič (2010) and explained above: *sociohistorical, biographical or ontogenetic,* and *microgenetic* timescales. These distinctions allow us to observe people's transitions at different levels, such as biographical transitions from school to university, and micro transitions in the same life stage as moving between university and workplace.

Recognizing different timescales allowed us to represent the diversity of writing practices students engage with. Such complexities prevent us from depicting students' transitions as movements from one homogenous stage or set of experiences (school) to another homogenous space (university). On the contrary, while students attend school (*biographical timescale*) they also engage in various social practices where writing plays a role in their daily activities (*microgenetic timescale*). Hence, their identities and writing experiences cannot be reduced to those situated in schools, and when they enter university, they bring with them all those diverse experiences with writing that can be harnessed for deeper and more meaningful learning.

This diversity is summarized in Table 1, which includes the domains, practices and artifacts that our participants engaged with while they were attending school, completing internships, and attending university. We report here artifacts that were mentioned, even if they were referred to only once. We did not quantify mentions of each artifact as the number of times they were referred to did not reflect their relevance or impact on students' experiences (for example, multiple-choice tests or exams were sometimes mentioned just once by some students, but they were always referred to as the most frequent type of assessment at school). We captured all the artifacts that were mentioned in different biographical moments to observe how the types of artifacts and practices change over time and across domains. We listed those that were described as more frequent first.

Table 1. *Students writing practices and artefacts across timescales*

Sociohistorical timescale: possibilities for selfhood (role models, discourses, values, etc.)							
Biographical timescale							
		Attending school		Completing an internship for a vocational major	Attending university		
Microgenetic timescale	Domains	Academic (School)	Self-sponsored	Professional	Academic (University)	Self-sponsored	Professional
	Practice	Taking a school assessment. Studying for school assessments.	Communicating with peers. Documenting experience and venting. Finding things out and taking part. Exploring creativity through fictional writing.	Responding to internship tasks.	Taking a university assessment. Studying for university assessments.	Documenting experience and venting.	Performing a part time job. Searching for a job. Advertising a personal business.
	Artifacts	Multiple choice exam. Open-ended exam questions. Lecture notes. Summary. Mind-map. Emails. Essay. Report. Curriculum Vitae. Contract.	Text message. Cellphone notes registering events and thoughts. Instagram post. Diary entry. Book and game review. Poem. Novel. Formal letter to school authorities. Letter for friends or significant others. Film script.	Stock list. Contract. Report.	Lecture notes. Report. Essay. Open-ended exam questions. Multiple choice exam. Summary. Mind-map. Email. Sketch notes. Project. Logbook.	Text messages. Cellphone notes registering events and thoughts Diary entries Biography of a family member.	Reminder notes WhatsApp and SSMM ads. Curriculum Vitae Letter of interest

We observed from our data that students scarcely wrote as part of a school assignment, as we have shown elsewhere (Montes & Tusting, 2023). School assessments were usually mediated by multiple choice exams or short answers and rarely involved more extended written pieces. In contrast, our participants typically (but not always) wrote extensive texts, such as reports or essays, or longer and more complex answers to open-ended exam questions at the

university. These findings are convergent with what Baker found in her research with students moving from A-levels to universities in the UK. She observed a strong assessment culture (Baker, 2017) in A-levels and a shift to more complex writing tasks at the university (Baker, 2018a). The prevalence of multiple-choice tests or exams in our study can be observed in the following excerpt from Cristóbal, a student from an academically oriented school. He notes that tests were the most frequently assigned tasks, particularly in language, philosophy, and history, despite these subjects typically requiring more complex and lengthy writing.

> The most common ones were basically tests, in other things like language and philosophy, like these more humanistic subjects, except for history, there were more types of works, essays, texts, of producing things, although in language there were many tests, mostly the same, in history they were mostly tests and from there on, only tests.

As can be seen in Table 1, despite this lack of opportunities for extensive writing at school, our participants commonly engage in self-sponsored writing practices in various non-academic contexts while attending school (*biographical timescale*), such as composing a poem to express feelings, writing biographical accounts and thoughts as cellphone notes, keeping a diary, writing political messages in social media, among others. For example, Pepsi told us about his practice of sending videogames reviews to his friends via WhatsApp:

> For example, I also have several friends who like some things that I do, some games, some texts that I read, so the only big thing that I write are recommendations and synopsis of these texts, of these games

Another participant told us that he joined a political organization when he was a school student. He had got involved in politics because of his mother, who was an environmental activist. He explains: *"I was always, that is, when I was a kid, I was... I lived in a political environment* "and adds, *"They made me read about politics since I was 13 or 14 years old".* Vicente participated in a left-wing student movement as a propaganda secretary. He explains how he used writing in social media to promote political messages:

> Vicente: What did I write? I wrote... I don't know how to define it; it was about politics, and for example, publications about politics on Instagram, I wrote, how do you say it? I mean, they asked me to write…an Instagram publication has the photo, and below it has the text, right?
>
> Interviewee: Right.
>
> Vicente: Yeah, I would write that text. I would write that text when they asked me to write.
>
> Interviewee: Who asked you to write this?
>
> Vicente: In my political organization. I used to write several texts about that.

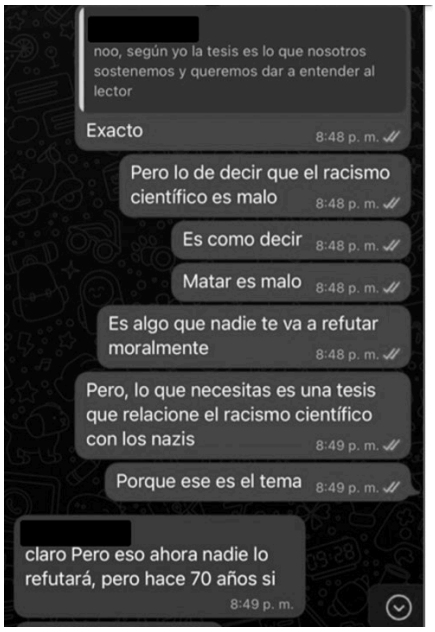
The fact that students engage with a variety of self-sponsored writing practices has been reported before (Ávila Reyes et al., 2020 Ávila Reyes et al., 2021; Ivanič et al. 2009; Zavala, 2011). However, we found that the extent to which our participants engage in those practices changes over time as they move from school to university.

At the university level, our participants typically (but not always) wrote extensive texts, such as reports or essays, or longer and more complex answers to open-ended exam questions. However, the variety of writing practices narrows in terms of the domains they were produced in. Students express not having time to read and write for pleasure or in non-university contexts and concentrate their efforts in understanding the new academic learning and writing demands:

> Interview with Yeyo (university level)
>
> *Interviewee: Yes, yes. Hey, Yeyo, in the last interview you told me that sometimes you wrote poems or messages to your girlfriend, do you still write those things? how... what things do you write outside the university?*
>
> *Yeyo: No nothing, nothing anymore, now I write mostly in notes on my cell phone, I write basically what is important and what I need, things like that (...)*
>
> Interview with María (university level)
>
> *Interviewee: (...) moving on to other types of writing, when we talked, I remember you used to write poems. Do you still write them?*
>
> *María: No, no, there is no time, there is no time, I only write summaries.*

Despite this scope reduction in students' reading and writing practices, they still use what they have learned in non-university settings to make sense of their current university learning and writing demands. Elías explains how reading recreational nonfictional books helped him to build arguments in argumentative writing at university; others, such as María and Yeyo, have maintained writing practices for studying that they developed independently at school (such as summaries or mind-maps). Similarly, Alejandra, a student from an academically oriented school, told us how she and her classmates used text messaging, a non-academic writing practice, to organize the writing of a group essay. As can be seen in the following image, Alejandra discusses with their peers what counts as a thesis and what does not.

Chat conversation about the thesis in a group academic essay (original and translation)



Student: -Noo, according to me, the thesis is what we state and what we want the reader to understand.

Alejandra: -exactly

-But to say that scientific racism is bad

-It's like saying

-Killing is bad

-It's something that no one will morally refute.

-But, what you need is a thesis linking scientific racism to the Nazis.

-Because that's the issue

Student: -Of course, nobody will refute that now, but 70 years ago they did.

-Not the killing

Vanesa also relates her academic writing in one of her modules in Architecture with her previous experience in a poetry workshop she attended outside school when she was in secondary education:

> They always ask me, whenever I go to do a sketch, they ask me to write something about what I'm drawing, that for me was like, ah, thank goodness, I took a literature workshop to be more prepared for this because basically it's like a kind of poetry.

These productive connections among writing practices across domains have also been observed by Calderón Araya et al. (2023), who find that high academic achievement students can transfer knowledge from their vernacular literacy practices to their academic literacy demands at the university. In the same direction, these results show that students can harness their previous writing experience to respond more creatively and effectively to academic writing. At this point, it is worth noticing that self-sponsored writing practices and academic writing do not exist in completely isolated and distinct domains. Students, on the contrary, bring to the university their literate experience as a whole to make sense of new challenges and use their various linguistic repertoires and practices to encounter academic demands.

Our data shows that these students recognize several transitions along their life trajectories (biographical timescale), such as starting an internship or leaving school and entering university. They also transition among domains, identities and writing practices that shape their daily life experiences and impact their transition into university. Students write in various domains while in school, in a job or at university. Their writing practices and the artifacts mediating these practices are shaped by the social contexts in which they are participating. The variety of self-sponsored writing practices tends to narrow when moving from school to university, as they focus on mastering more and more complex writing demands in their university courses. However, they bring their cross-domain experiences as writers to encounter these new academic challenges, connecting vernacular and institutionalized practices and potentially providing new ways to explore facets of students' academic writing.

CONCLUSIONS

This study followed students from marginalized backgrounds as they transitioned from high school to university and examined how their writing practices and social roles changed. We used the concept of *becoming*, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and the notion of *timescales* from Burgess and Ivanič (2010), to better understand the fluid changes in these students as they moved through different contexts, writing practices, and identities.

Our research found that many non-traditional students had prior work experience. While they expressed a desire to attend university, some viewed it as just one potential path for their future. Moreover, their decision to pursue university studies was sometimes the result of accidental becomings rather than the consequence of pre-planned rational decisions. Our data also showed that students from economically disadvantaged schools had taken on different social roles and identities when they entered university. Additionally, our participants who came from vocational schools had previous experience of becoming adult workers during their professional internships, bringing more complex identities and experiences with writing to the university and reinforcing Ecclestone's (2009) observations of diversity in individuals' trajectories.

Finally, we observed that our participants engaged in multiple writing practices mediated by artifacts as they participated in activities from diverse life domains enacting different social roles. Despite the lack of opportunities for extensive writing at school, our participants commonly engaged in self-sponsored writing practices in various non-academic contexts while attending school, such as composing a poem to express feelings, writing biographical accounts and thoughts as cellphone notes, keeping a diary, writing political messages in social media, among others. This variety of writing practices narrows down when they enter university as they privilege academic writing demands. However, to cope with the demands of academic writing at university, students often rely on their prior writing experiences outside of academia. Overall, our data showed that these students experience several transitions along their life trajectories, such as starting an internship or leaving school and entering university. They also transition among domains, identities, and writing practices that shape their daily life experiences and impact their transition into university.

Based on these results, we suggest some strategies to assist students in transitioning into university life and academic writing practices based on Gravett's (2019) ideas of transitions as rhizomatic and fluid, troublesome, ongoing, diverse, and enriched by students' multiple experiences. First, as transitions are *rhizomatic and fluid*, students bring a wide variety of previous educational, work, and leisure experiences with them that can enrich university learning and academic writing experiences. Even though the educational system attempts to place boundaries around writing practices for distinct stages across time and educational levels (Nordquist & Lueck, 2020), students cannot be reduced to one homogenous average trajectory. Second, as transitions are complex and *troublesome* (Harklau 2001; Quinn 2010), we should consider negotiation and resistance of academic writing as a natural part of the learning process in higher education rather than hoping students incorporate academic writing conventions blindly. Third, as writing practices and identities attached to them are *ongoing*, writing support should not be exclusive to the first year, as students do not adapt to one unified and stable set of conventions once and for all. Fourth, as students experience *diverse* previous and current experiences with writing, writing support cannot predefine a homogenous group of students with the same knowledge and experiences but offers opportunities for students to bring their varied writing experiences to build up from them to get to new learnings. Writing assessment at university could be broadened to recognize multiple ways of learning from students' different learning trajectories, incorporating recognition of feedback and collaborative work in the writing learning process. Sixth, we should celebrate students' *multiple experiences*, previous knowledge, and ways of knowing, opening up opportunities for historically underrepresented groups (Lillis & Scott, 2008). Teaching academic writing should be an invitation for students to both challenge and bring in their existing ways of thinking and writing.

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