CONCLUSION AS PROLEGOMENA: FROM POINTS OF CONVERGENCE TO MURMURATIONS ACROSS SITES, RESEARCHERS, AND METHODS

Ryan J. Dippre
University of Maine

Talinn Phillips
Ohio University

The authors of this collection have shared a range of theoretical positions and empirical studies that uncover the complex literate lives of writers and point us towards more diverse and more robust paths to researching writing through the lifespan. We have looked at writing from grade school students (Arya et al., Chapter 11) to retirees (Bowen, Chapter 7), and from everyday inscriptions (Naftzinger, Chapter 5) to religious and school writings (Roozen, Chapter 14). We've examined concepts and methods as diverse as sociohistoric theory, autoethnography, and structural equation modeling, along with other theoretical and empirical approaches, and we've questioned everything from the role of context in the production of literate action (Dippre & Smith, Chapter 2) to the way that language as seemingly insignificant as prepositions shapes the ways that we think about lifespan writing and lifespan writing research (Smith, Chapter 1). We've explored innovative, even radical methodologies that push us out of our disciplinary comfort zones and examined how existing methodologies might be best leveraged to understand lifespan writing. Throughout these vibrant and diverse chapters, we have attempted to showcase the creative range and methodological flexibility needed to meet the challenges of understanding writing through the lifespan.

Yet a considerable challenge for lifespan writing research remains: how can we mobilize the various traditions, methods, and understandings of writing in these pages (and beyond) *together*, in ways that build on convergent themes, theories, methods, and stances but also take advantage of the divergences of each approach? How do we create unity from all this diversity? How, in other

words, can we generate murmurations for a lifespan writing research agenda that includes the multiple approaches needed (including many more not represented in this text)? And how do we simultaneously orchestrate those approaches into harmonious, productive, and mutually enriching work? In our conclusion, we chart a path forward for a multidisciplinary, multi-site, multi-generational study of writing through the lifespan.

MOBILIZING CONVERGENCES TO EMBRACE RESONANCES

This collection suggests many moments of convergence: research that through methodological and epistemological stances, data sources, analytic choices, findings, or interests overlap and/or interact with one another in some way. Bowen's work on literacy tours, for instance, shares some significant theoretical assumptions with Roozen's work on semiosis and Dippre and Smith's work on context. The first "move" of our attempt to orchestrate our broad range of methods is to mobilize these *points of convergence*.

We do this by identifying, explicating, and elaborating upon the connections across the widely varying traditions that fall under the "big tent" of lifespan writing research. Much like Agar (1994) mobilizes a *frame clash* between ethnographic site and ethnographer into a *rich point* for research, we mobilize a *point of convergence* by (a) attending to the ways in which the intersecting traditions reached such a point, (b) uncovering the assumptions they bring with them, and (c) articulating the finer agreements and contradictions that emerge from such work.

Consider, for instance, the *point of convergence* that occurs between Roozen's and Naftzinger's chapters in this volume. Both Roozen and Naftzinger address ordinary, even mundane inscriptions. Roozen arrives at this point by following the work of Latour, trying to work out the ways in which everyday inscriptions shape and are shaped by the actions of his interviewee. Naftzinger comes to the concept of everyday writing by trying to get into the heads of the participants he is working with to see how they operationalize the concept of "everyday writing" for their own purposes. We can see two different but qualitative ways of envisioning what this "everyday writing" concept is all about.

So we have two studies, each of which has reached the concept of "everyday writing," but through different framings and with different intentions. Now, what might we have to say about the assumptions that these two chapters are bringing with them? How can we unpack that in ways that can help us go about the work of bringing these two together? A good starting point might be the agentive nature of inscriptions that Roozen's approach brings. By inviting in the work of Latour, we can see more clearly that inscriptions do things, much like

other aspects of any given social situation. The inscriptions are *actants*, really, pulling on other actants, coordinating with other actants as meaning unfolds.

Naftzinger's text, on the other hand, does not attend to the agentive powers of the writing that he investigates. In fact, his work seems focused squarely on the understandings of the human beings in his study, and how they might come to understand this concept of everyday writing. So we have two different starting points for agency: Naftzinger's understanding, at least in this study, rests in the human being, whereas Roozen's rests in the interaction of elements, including the agentive power—that is, the ability to impact a situation—of inscriptions, even mundane ones. But is this an insurmountable difference? Might we find a third way forward to integrate these two or, at the very least, obviate on some occasions (i.e., in the pursuit of some kinds of study) a difference such as this?

Perhaps. An interesting aspect of the finer points of Roozen's uptake of Latour is in the distributed aspects of cognition that are caught up in Latour's thinking. This can be seen in Latour's (1996) response to Hutchins' *Cognition in the Wild*, which argues for understanding cognition as deeply situated, as occurring through the action and interaction of people and objects. This may be a particular way to understand Roozen and Naftzinger together and, by extension, move forward with lifespan-oriented research on writing.

Let us unpack this a bit more. Roozen envisions inscriptions as agentive in that they have bearing on the situation and help actors make sense of an unfolding scene of action. Naftzinger attends more closely to the individual understandings that unfold when writers reflect on the work of everyday writing. In both of these situations we can use Hutchins' work as a way of making sense of the material that we see—both Roozen's interview subject in bringing chemistry and religion together, and Naftzinger's subjects in identifying everyday writing. This work occurs amidst the coordinated efforts of people and objects, and it is through that that we can see both the blend of religion and chemistry and the acts of defining an everyday activity. So we can use distributed cognition as a divining rod, one that can be followed out in two ways: to treat everyday inscriptions as sense-making vehicles with their own agency, and to attend to acts of reflection by multiple interview subjects.

As the above example shows, mobilizing a point of convergence can bring more questions than answers, which is fine: through such articulations, we can identify further points of convergence, uncover connections to still more traditions, and thereby communicate across a range of theoretical, empirical, and disciplinary orientations. But such mapping, as we note above, is just the first "move" in the complex work of building a lifespan study of writing. At this point, as the name of the chapter suggests, we've merely *embraced resonance* by capitalizing on points of convergence that emerge from research that aims to understand writing through the lifespan. Though it's disappointing to tag such

complex work with the word "merely," we have but only begun our work. In the next "move" of our process, we outline how we might move from the new insights that embracing resonances offers to then creating the coherence needed to move a multidisciplinary project forward.

EMBRACING RESONANCES TO CREATE COHERENCE

As readers will no doubt agree, the mark of a good research study is its integrity across its steps. While a research study should of course be on sound ethical ground, we focus here on a different definition of the word *integrity*: as *whole*, as *undiminished*. A study has *integrity* when its various parts are deeply interrelated. The research questions, theoretical assumptions, methods, and conclusions feed off of one another, each crying out for the choices made in the others, with those cries being answered effectively.

If such integrity is at the core of a strong research study, the aim of a coherent multidisciplinary research project should be to enable the pursuit of such projects. At this point the stakes are raised and points of convergence must be further mined so that a deeper understanding of each approach emerges, and with it a mutual orientation to the problem at hand. Building on the finer points of agreement provided in this next step, *creating coherence*, we can start to move forward in ways that inform future studies.

Much as we mobilized points of convergence in order to embrace resonances, we can use those resonances to create coherence through multiple steps. Our first step, *reciprocating*, brings our attention to the ways in which the disciplines we bring to the table can be used to support one another. Our second step, *motivating*, allows us to orient multi-disciplinary studies toward similar objects of interest. Drawing on two other studies from this collection—Bowen's (Chapter 7) literacy tours and Workman's (Chapter 13) cognitive mapping—we demonstrate these steps in use.

Bowen's and Workman's studies are miles apart in many ways: Bowen attends to the deeply material aspects of performing literate action, to the point of attending to the physical spaces within which writing happens, and Workman pays close attention to the cognitive constructs that her subjects carry around with them in their heads. Furthermore, Bowen works with an older writer in his 80s, while Workman interviews a college-aged student. On the surface, then, we can imagine that these two studies are essentially parallel lines, destined never to meet. Thankfully, our total disrespect for geometry allows us to identify places where we can see these parallel lines meeting.

Both of these authors have a basic interest in lifespan writing research and are orienting their studies in a lifespan direction. This gives us a starting point

from which we might identify opportunities to *reciprocate*—that is, moments in theoretical framing, in data collection, and in analysis when each study might be used to support the other. This can be something as simple as using similar word choice in interview questions, or as complex as building up a set of connected, testable propositions that carry across from one research site to the next.

In the cases of Bowen and Workman, the two authors are paying close attention to sense-making practices, even if neither one uses the phrase directly. Workman is interested in a changing theory of writing over time and Bowen is interested in understanding the ways in which individuals organize themselves to engage in the act of writing. Both authors, in other words, attend to sense-making activity, albeit with different starting points and in different ways. This starting point or common frame can allow the two researchers to conduct future studies that can feed into their understandings of sense-making, while also collecting data that enriches each other's work. Workman, for instance, might offer an opportunity for participants to describe their writing environment as well as their theories. Bowen, on the other hand, may add some interview questions that allow her subjects to articulate the cognitive framework they use to think through writing.

Such reciprocity serves as a starting point: it gives each researcher some skin in the other's work, and by extension provides opportunities for further work together. From here, the researchers can take the next step, *motivating*, in which they begin to orient toward similar research objects.

This is not as easy as it sounds. After all, both Bowen and Workman are oriented toward writing, and in particular, writing through the lifespan. But, in their work with different theoretical frameworks, different methods, and different research questions, their studies are—with the exception of the sense-making focus addressed above—separate from one another. In the *motivating* step, we propose helping researchers identify and operationalize together the shared motivations that they have. Bowen's work, for instance, challenges a curriculum of aging as part of its lifespan-oriented agenda. Workman's study, on the other hand, complicates and challenges our notions of transfer and the complexity of the constructs we hold in our minds when going about the act of writing.

But there's an underlying connection at work, one that has sense-making as a component of it. Each of these researchers is attempting to understand a process that is at odds with contemporary accounts of related phenomena. Bowen sees older writers writing and develops a methodology of literacy tours to uncover some facts that push-back against the pervasive curriculum of aging. Workman, meanwhile, sees visual mapping as a way to uncover the complexity of writing across one's life, developing an account of that complexity that runs counter to simpler psychological accounts of writing and transfer.

Both of these authors, in other words, push back against contemporary accounts of writing and uncover persuasive supporting facts in the process. Because they are interested in challenging such notions of writing and writers, both Workman and Bowen attend carefully to the sense-making activity of their research participants. This careful attention pays dividends in developing persuasive cases that, with that sense-making activity at their center, productively disrupt commonplaces about writing. *It is the focus on sense-making that allows them to uncover persuasive facts.*

The connection between sense-making and push-back is the starting point for motivating these researchers to attend to similar phenomena in mutually productive ways. Bowen's challenge to a curriculum of aging could be further served by a raft of complex visual maps that trace out the richly literate lives of older writers, just as Workman's attempt to highlight the complexity of writing can be further enriched by attending to literacy tours. Thinking about the benefits of moving together toward shared goals—even goals as broad as countering contemporary accounts of writing—is the starting point for actually moving forward together. When we see how our research can benefit, we have motivation to move beyond simply embracing resonances to create the kind of coherence needed to generate murmurations.

CREATING COHERENCE TO GENERATE MURMURATIONS: DEVELOPING LINES OF INQUIRY ACROSS SITES, RESEARCHERS, AND METHODS

Our moves of mobilizing points of convergence to embrace resonance and then creating coherence give us a good starting point—a flexible framework that allows us to start from just about anywhere. In terms of having a useful, portable framework for multidisciplinary research, this is a good thing. In terms of establishing an ambitious, long-term research project at multiple sites around the world, though, it's inadequate. Once our metaphorical birds have taken flight together with some kind of coherence, we've got to be able to maintain that coherence while we're in flight. We will need to be able to define a goal and shift directions if we truly want to accommodate so many diverse disciplines, interests, and goals. Coherence gets our studies off the ground; murmurations keep them moving, together. Thus, our final move is to use the coherence we've created to develop *lines of inquiry*. These lines of inquiry give our murmurations enough structure that the flock stays together instead of splitting into multiple directions. We propose that lines of inquiry can allow us to prioritize the points of coherence, keep them linked, yet also allow their directions to shift over time as interests, exigencies, and, most important, the data dictate.

Elsewhere (Dippre & Phillips, in press), we define a line of inquiry as a rigorous investigation of a concept or set of concepts that can be traced through the lifespan and scaled from a case study to a large data set. Our work of developing a line of inquiry, then, begins with a concept or a phrase that has value to researchers throughout the Writing Through the Lifespan Collaboration. Consider, for instance, the focus of Dippre and Smith's chapter: *context*. Context is important for understanding how writing changes across time. Where people write, how they write, and the objects they use to write all impact their understandings of the limits and possibilities of writing, as well as their eventual uptakes. Dippre and Smith argue for a particular orientation to context, and although some chapters like Roozen's deliberately work within a similar framework, others like Zajic and Poch (Chapter 3) conceive of context as less "active," and instead operating as a steady backdrop that can allow for changes in writing to be brought into focus. This is a concept, then, that matters to multiple researchers and orientations, even if it matters in different ways.

After selecting a concept, then, we need to put it to work, using it to generate a question that is both intriguing enough to encourage researchers to join the work but broad enough for multiple disciplines to engage. Asking, for instance, "how does context impact writing development?" might indeed be a broad question, but too tightly bound to the orientation to context that Dippre and Smith develop, thereby excluding Zajic & Poch. The framing of such a question, then, is crucial to orienting researchers and beginning the work of creating coherence.

Perhaps a more useful framing of a question about context is "What is the relationship between context and writing through the lifespan?" Such a question, again, is too broad for a single research question, but can be pursued through a range of methods. Sociohistorical researchers, for instance, can examine the interactional work of contextual elements in order to develop a new understanding of the active role context plays in development, while psychometric researchers can begin treating certain elements of what they had previously considered to be inert contextual elements as active agents in understanding the results of their research studies.

Another example of a line of inquiry might be *agency*. Questions of how we foster participants' agency as researchers and how our research can highlight the agency of those participants are through-lines that intersect many chapters in this book. For instance, Bowen, Rosenberg (Chapter 6), and Zebroski (Chapter 9) each challenge researchers to consider the ways that agency manifests in older adults and argue that creating space for agency in our research designs is essential for capturing the complexity of lifespan writing; yet, they do so through very different theoretical and methodological orientations. Their collective interest in participants' agency forms linkages and accommodates a common focus and goals that can generate a murmuration even while their theoretical and methodological

choices diverge. Moreover, agency-as-murmuration forms those linkages in a more substantive way than simply aligning along a shared demographic of older adults.

The final line of inquiry that we will suggest here is *semiosis*. Authors in these chapters explore multiple ways that their participants make meaning across the lifespan. Roozen and Naftzinger highlight the importance of everyday inscriptions for understanding the complexity of our writing lives while Arya et al. (Chapter 11) ask us to attend to data representations as an unexplored site for creating and assessing semiosis. Lee (Chapter 8) explores how her participants' literacies and thus semiosis have evolved and been shaped across multiple generations while Knappik (Chapter 4) argues for the unique value of the literacy narrative as a semiosis that reveals our sense-making of our literate lives. Again, this shared interest is able to unite work that is otherwise vastly divergent. Investigating how people make meaning, the tools they use, and how those tools shape meaning-making itself is essential to the lifespan research project and allows us to move forward, individually, but together.

CONCLUSION

We titled this chapter "Conclusion as Prolegomena" because we wanted to encourage our readers to see what we've developed throughout this text as the *starting point* for future multidisciplinary research, rather than as its end point. The frameworks, concepts, orientations, and understandings developed above are only meant to be initial scaffolding into the under-explored territory of lifespan writing research. Following writers from their first inscriptions to their last, from one generation to the next, is going to uncover information that we never realized we needed, suggest methods that our field has not yet considered, and lead to insights that we cannot predict. It would be foolhardy to close off such potential information, methods, and insights now, at the start of what we expect will be a century-long journey. We ask readers, then, to treat this concluding chapter as a starter pistol in what will no doubt be a long and sometimes grueling (but also incredibly rewarding) task of researching writing through the lifespan.

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