

# Series Editors Preface

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Jay Lemke opens “Across Scales of Time: Artifacts, Activities, and Meanings in Ecosocial Systems” with two interesting questions:

- How do *moments* add up to *lives*?
- How do our shared moments together add up to *social life* as such? (273).

These questions call our attention to the relationship between particular moments—shared or otherwise—and the wide, rambling paths that make up our lives. But Lemke’s phrasing of asking how moments add up has always struck us as an imperfect encapsulation of what goes on in a life of moments (not that Lemke ever suggested it wasn’t). Our moments do not add up, in many ways: we have particular moments with considerable weight that transform or define our lives in some way. And we have other moments that are, at best, unremarkable: the uninspiring work of sending a “per my last email” email, the joyless attempts to stay awake in a meeting. The rich tapestry of our lives is made up of many moments of different import and impact across greater or lesser strains of time.

Lifespan writing researchers have long been wrestling with the relationship(s) of the moment and the lifetime. What is the role of the moment in a life? How can we see it? What should we attend to, as researchers? How can we trace the impact of a moment across a range of timescales?

There are no easy—or single—answers to the above questions. But Robert Yagelski’s *Madeline Was Our Sister* marks a major contribution to our ongoing efforts to get at them. In the pages of this thoughtful examination of a writing life—and the social lives that come with it—Yagelski engages with topics and questions that lifespan writing researchers have been pursuing for some time in the pages of our articles, chapters, and collections:

- What is the relationship between the researcher and the researched? (e.g., Naftzinger; Bazerman; Fulford and Rosenberg; Rosenberg, Fulford, McGowan, and Long)
- How might we position ourselves as researchers in relation to a research site? (Workman)
- What is the role of time and memory in a writing life? (Cirio and Naftzinger)
- How do inscriptions shape the lifeworlds we construct for ourselves? (Roozen)

Yagelski, of course, does not lead us to answers in these questions. He can’t, after all. These questions are not meant to be answered but explored. They position

us, as researchers, to be active agents in the work that we do and in the stories we come to tell about how writing happens throughout a lifetime.

Instead, Yagelski calls our attention to these issues, tracing the rich and complex life of Madeline through a network of careful decisions and thoughtful analysis. In this work, we can see what it means to meaningfully and deliberately question ourselves, challenge our positionalities, and examine the relationship between the researcher and writer while also moving forward, toward a richer and more complex understanding of how people build and sustain writing lives.

One reviewer of this manuscript argued that “[t]he primary value of this book is the means by which its ideas are discovered and represented in a recursive, genre-fluid monograph, which offers a unique blend of scholarly essay, biography/memoir, op-ed, and philosophical meditation. I have never read anything quite like it, and I appreciated its sophisticated layering of the personal, professional, philosophical, and spiritual.” In our earlier work, we describe writing through the lifespan as a massive research object, one that required every tool we could get our hands on to understand (Dippre and Phillips, “Introduction”). In consequence, we have sought out researchers from a variety of disciplines and who use many different approaches to share their knowledge, and we have facilitated conversations about methodologies for studying writing lives in multiple contexts. Our aim has been to build a “big tent” in which scholars from across the many different disciplines of writing studies can find a home—a site outside of disciplinary silos where their work, approaches, and findings are valued. In Yagelski’s book, as in other recent publications by Bazerman and by Phelps, we see writing studies scholars examining different ways of exploring the writing lives best known and most accessible to them: their own. We see Yagelski here offering lifespan writing research another tool as he models an extended self-examination of his writing life and of how that writing life evolved to become ever more expansive, ever more ontological, and far less invested in any particular product. Moreover, he does so in a way that speaks powerfully to this moment in which the truths in front of our own eyes are being daily assaulted.

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