Chapter 1. Respecifying Literate Action Development Ethnomethodologically

Writing, as Prior (1998) suggests, is an insufficiently robust unit of analysis, particularly for researchers interested in understanding writing development. Rather, researchers must be aware not just of the text itself but of the circumstances of a text's production and, furthermore, the histories within which that textual production is caught. This local social ordering of activity to and through textual creation can be understood as *literate action*, a term that is central to Bazerman's (2013a, 2013b) theory and rhetoric of how writing works.

Bazerman's comprehensive theory of literate action draws on a number of generalized accounts of writing, development, society, and technology to develop a robust, multidimensional understanding of language use. In his conclusion to *A Theory of Literate Action*, Bazerman (2013b) argues that his volume "provides an account of the local production of purposeful meaning within textual interaction" (p. 191). Such an understanding of how writing happens and what it does, neither exclusively through static objects such as texts nor through "abstract, out of time conceptions of language, society, knowledge, mind, or thought," draws attention to the materially and historically situated work of writing (p. 191). Bazerman suggests that this focus "position[s] the writing self within historical circumstances to unpack the psychological complexity of someone attempting to produce effective texts for his or her circumstances and developing into a competent writer adequate to the opportunities and demands of the time" (2013b, p. 191). Bazerman's multidisciplinary approach enables a detailed, historically located, and material examination of how writers write and, to an extent, the ways in which these writers come to engage in writing differently in response to new circumstances. Such a theory of literate action is productive in accounting for the multidimensional complexity of human activity that makes up and accompanies the work of writing, and a productive starting point for understanding the ways in which writers work their way into new textual ecologies over time.

Bazerman's theory is rich with connections to theories of development in sociocultural psychology, interpersonal psychiatry, and pragmatism. These theories have generated useful insights for Bazerman both in their situated uses as parts of particular studies and as his studies accumulated into a broader, generalized understanding of literate action and how it works. In my work of turning literate action to the lifespan, however, I found it premature to turn to these theories and Bazerman's take-up of them. These theories have a great deal to say about interiority, about the ways in which the social becomes translated into the internal planes of our experiences. But before we can think about this complex interior work throughout the lifespan, we need a framework for envisioning the deeply social nature of literate action as it materially occurs in particular situations, and

how those situations materially interconnect across space and time. Developing a complex, coherent, and usable account of the material work of literate action development can serve as the launching point for orienting theories of development (particularly as Bazerman takes them up) toward the lifespan. In this chapter, I draw on ethnomethodology—that is, the study of members' methods of producing local, social order via interaction (talk, gesture, tone, etc.)—as a starting point for tracing the material work of literate action and its transformation over time. Starting my account from an ethnomethodological perspective will allow me, by Chapter 9, to articulate a foundation for studying lifespan literate action development from which later research, using Bazerman's (2013a, 2013b) uptake of developmental theory as a guide, can explore the interior landscapes that transform as part of the process of literate action development. My account begins by *respecifying* literate action development in ethnomethodological terms, which means locating it in the production of local social order. The first step in this accounting is attending to development, and engaging with its limits and possibilities as a concept.

Development: A Conflicted but Usable Term

Development, as a term, often goes undefined, or remains broadly defined, in its use. On the surface, the term seems self-evident: i.e., that we can recognize when development has occurred because things are not as they were before. Often, this term is tied up with the concept of improvement, of progress, of evolution. In this chapter, I highlight a particular way to go about considering development, one that is consonant with lifespan writing research.

Before moving into that explanation, however, I would like to clearly separate what development is *not* by outlining two terms that are often used interchangeably with it: learning and transfer. While I will, in some later chapters, draw on transfer literature, my attention remains on *development*. In my pursuit of the concept of development, I am exploring how people become different writers over time, and the mechanisms through which that difference emerges. Terms like learning and transfer fail to fully account for those changes. *Learning* often refers to the acquisition of knowledge or skills. One can learn the names of the planets or the rudiments of hitting a baseball, but this may not significantly impact the way in which the person interacts with the world around them. Learning may be involved with development, but the connotations of the word fail to capture the lived experience of enacting such knowledge, leaving it inadequate to capture the breadth of the phenomena that I am pursuing. We must know the *impact* of learning—the ways in which a writer engages in activity differently—and "learning" as a term does not carry that weight sufficiently.

Likewise, *transfer*, as it is traditionally taken up, does not adequately frame the work that the individual under study is taking on. *Transfer* implies two concrete situations—the one in which the student learns the writing skill, and the one

in which the student uses that writing skill again. What is left out of this implication is the role of the student to *construct* that situation—and, furthermore, to *continually* construct a situation, to participate actively in the building of "English class" or whatever the situation may be. When we talk about transfer, then, we are leaving out the agency of the individuals in the construction (and identification) of the situations that they find themselves in. The work of various scholars on both of these terms informs my pursuit of development, particularly in Part II, but is not the center of my interests.

The term "development" is hardly in better shape, and has been a fraught one for well over a century. Kessen (1986) traces the interconnections among the words "development," "evolution," "growth," and "progress" since the rise of Darwin's theory of evolution in the mid-1800s, suggesting that such interconnections have troubled the ways in which we think about development for individuals and societies. The tendency to think of development through the lens of evolution and progress has also impacted literature in the fields of Education and Writing Studies. Fallace (2015) has outlined how the impact of thinking about development through Deweyan terms has incidentally also perpetuated racist understandings of childhood development, complete with subtle shadings of the "white man's burden" and the "great chain of being."

In their work to develop an interdisciplinary perspective on writing development, the Lifespan Writing Development Group (Bazerman et al., 2018) offered a potential path forward for defining development. They note in the introduction to their edited collection that "We generally agreed on associating development with a reorganization or realignment of previous experience that registers through writing or in a changed relationship to writing" (Bazerman et al., 2018, p. 7). This orientation, they argue, "resisted strongly teleological or linear conceptions of writing development" and located development "not merely in an achievement of change but also in actions or efforts toward change" (Bazerman et al., 2018, p. 7).

The LWDG provides a productive starting point for examining development in ways that separate the term from some of its problematic histories of use. Their focus on change allows researchers to negotiate the boundaries of that change, the threshold through which such change earns the label "development." But in that negotiation, researchers can think about where such change is located—in the text, in the process of creating text, in the social arrangements within which text is created, etc. The LWDG also provides several ways to orient our researcher's gaze as we "look" for writing development:

- Look to the embodied act of writing;
- Look to the medium of written language(s);
- Look to contexts of participation; and
- Look to the historical and cultural catalysts of writing development (pp. 8-10).

These orienting directions guide researchers to locate writing development in the cognitive work of producing material texts within complex social organizations amidst a particular swath of history. The LWDG used these directions to determine multidisciplinary intersections, and that very multidisciplinarity avoids prioritizing any of these ways of "looking." Additionally, their avoidance of teleological, linear, and normative conceptions of development have opened up new ways of thinking about development without articulating a particular way of envisioning what writers develop *toward*. Since writers are developing throughout their lives, it is unclear what they might develop toward. Each writer, as they change as writers throughout their lives, will be taking different, rambling paths of activity that co-construct new situations demanding the deployment of literate actions which, through such deployment, propels those writers into new (and not always predictable) situations.

Without the sense of an end goal for writers, what we are left with is the idea of simple "change," or what Haswell (1991) would refer to as *growth*. Growth, while a useful concept to explore, is hardly the goal that writing instructors and writers wish to witness and foster. It is a necessary but insufficient aspect of the overall transformations of writing that is expected through consistent work with and through the written word. In what ways, then, might we go about framing an understanding of development that is more than simple growth, but while continuing to avoid the teleological commitments that many understandings of development have taken on?

The start of such an understanding of development may usefully begin with Applebee's (2000) overview of alternative models of writing development. Applebee categorizes different approaches to writing development as "emphasizing purposes for writing, fluency and writing conventions, the structure of the final product, or strategic knowledge" (2000, p. 92) and goes on to consider the impact of those categories on curriculum design and instruction. However, Applebee concludes, at the end of his chapter, that "writing development remains ill-defined and difficult to assess" (2000, p. 103). In response to this issue, Applebee draws on recent research in writing across grade levels to show that the models he identifies "have treated writing development outside the contexts within which that development occurs" (2000, p. 104) when, in fact, "writers negotiate their place within the many communities of which they are a part, with a variety of resources and competing demands" (p. 104). Applebee takes up this attention to context and argues that "we must judge [student] development as writers in terms of their ability to participate with increasing effectiveness in an increasingly wide array of culturally significant domains for conversation" (2000, p. 106).

This approach—which Applebee calls "writing as participation in social action" (2000, p. 103)—provides a broad suggestion for studying writing development that suggests a potential lens for defining, bounding, and tracing development. Seeing development as participation widens attention away from merely the written word, or the act of writing, and to the complex social worlds within which that writing is happening—and through which that writing, by the partic-

ipant, is understood. Essentially, writing as participation frames writing development as *literate action development*, and posits that individual writers develop within responsive contexts. Such a perspective on development would prioritize the "contexts of participation" orientation that the LWDG identifies, and make that the leading edge of an investigation into development.

With Applebee's (2000) work as a starting point, we can envision a way in which *development*—despite its problematic history—offers a focused and appropriate approach to understanding how writers transform themselves and their writing throughout their lives. It allows us to examine the ways in which individuals construct and are constructed by situations via material interactions with talk, tools, and texts activated in those situations. Below, I build on Applebee's framing of development to make a case for an *ethnomethodological respecification* of the term when considering literate action through the lifespan. This case begins in the literate action that one seventh-grade student, Alice, performs in the writing and reflection of her "river teeth" writing. This simple example will call our attention, in the following chapters and with the orientation that I develop, to the ways in which seemingly insignificant difference can serve as a driver of powerful change in literate action.

Alice's River Teeth

It is a warm spring day, and the sun is shining outside of Emily's classroom as her students complete a "river teeth" activity in class. This "river teeth" activity is an attempt by Emily to encourage her students to write about the experiences in their lives. Based on *River Teeth: Stories and Writing*, by David James Duncan, the "river teeth" activity asks students to think about their memories from the past that stuck with them for one reason or another. This initial activity is a ten-minute period that allows students to write down a few notes about experiences they remember.

During this ten-minute period, Alice worked quietly but diligently on her sheet. She is able to identify five experiences to draw from—one more than the amount provided by Emily's sample worksheet. During this work, Alice spoke to no other students in the class. She paid attention to her own work, identifying interesting "river teeth" and then illustrating them slightly—with pencil only—before the writing period was up. A look at Alice's work in Figure 1.1 will show that at no point does she make her work chronological—even though she is writing in pencil, and the flow of the "river" in the middle of the page seems to encourage the writer to do just that.

A closer look at the writing that Alice does shows that the "river teeth" moments that she focuses on are not positive, by a long shot: she is pushed off of a trampoline, she is hit in the head with a toy by her brother, and she falls off of her bike. Two memories are positive—or, perhaps, at least not negative: her memory of snorkeling and her memory of using a zip line. These are not clearly positive in

the prewriting activity that Alice completes. In fact, the zip line is marked as an experience that had her "scared," although there is not sufficient context to fully understand what Alice meant by that in only this activity. Perhaps the experience was at first scary but eventually thrilling—the text alone does not let us know this.

Alice's preoccupation with negative "river teeth" moments is the result of several elements that align in various ways. First, Alice does not look to her peers for ideas about writing—what she decides to write is based on her own experiences and her understanding of the task as presented by the teacher, Emily. Emily, actually, had provided a few examples of her own "river teeth," and two of these moments were noticeably negative (falling out of a moving car, catching fire). Alice's peers had turned to positive moments in their lives for their "river teeth" moments, and Alice could easily have turned to them for inspiration, advice, or further ideas. However, Alice—just as she had done throughout the school year—kept to herself, doing what she thought the teacher was asking for her. Alice, of course, was able to do what the teacher asked of her—she wrote down memories that could serve as a starting point for constructing a story. What I want to focus on here is not the writing that she does but the ways in which she organizes herself for that writing.
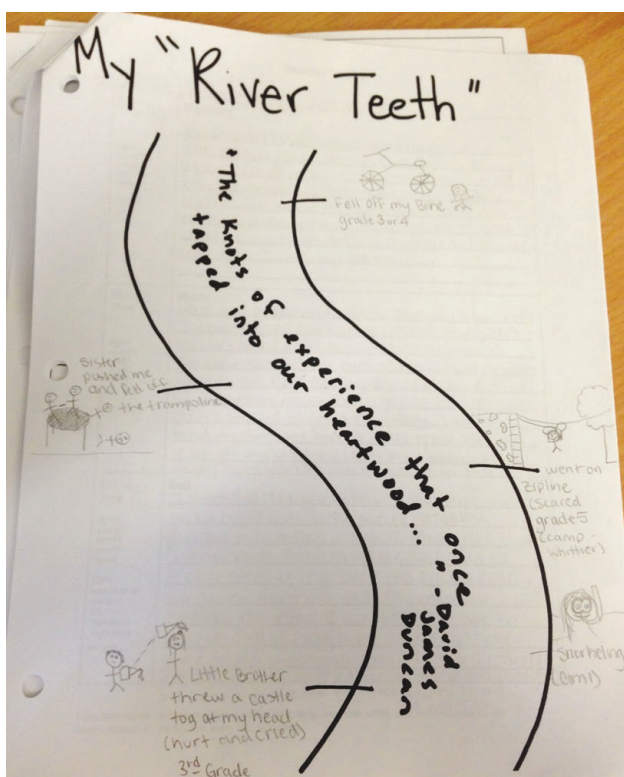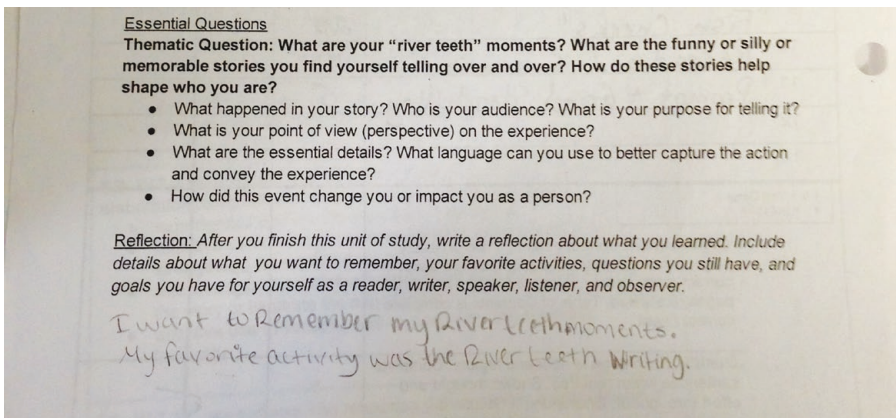

Figure 1.1. Alice's River Teeth.

Alice was silent in class—she did not speak unless spoken to or told to speak by Emily's instructions. I was intrigued by her silence, and I asked Emily about it. Emily noted that Alice was a hardworking student who did all of her work and participated when called upon, but who was curiously silent throughout the rest of the class period. When she did speak, it was in almost a whisper. This quietness did not seem to hamper Alice's success in the class.

Once provided with directions, Alice focuses on her work, following the directions given (and clarified) by Emily in order to complete her tasks. While her fellow students discuss their projects with one another, add color to their designs, and further develop their ideas, Alice mimics the sample moments that her teacher provided, providing a few drawings before the writing period ended.

One could reasonably assume, at this point, that Alice is writing as she has always written: that she is bringing her understandings of the world to bear as she always has, and completing the work in a manner that her teacher finds satisfactory, as she always does. And yet, if we look further into the future, we see a potential incongruity when Alice writes her reflection piece at the end of the "river teeth" unit (see Figure 1.2). If we compare Alice's end-of-unit reflection entry to her previous reflection entries, we can see that she is doing something slightly different than she has before. While she is, indeed, writing a rather short entry, this entry is actually one sentence longer than her other reflections. Furthermore, unlike previous reflective writing at the end of units, Alice expresses a desire to keep something with her at the conclusion of the unit. Instead of recapping the work that she has done throughout the unit, as she has done in previous reflective writing, Alice points out her favorite activity and says "I want to remember my river teeth moments."

Essential Questions
Thematic Question: What are your "river teeth" moments? What are the funny or silly or memorable stories you find yourself telling over and over? How do these stories help shape who you are?
- What happened in your story? Who is your audience? What is your purpose for telling it?
- What is your point of view (perspective) on the experience?
- What are the essential details? What language can you use to better capture the action and convey the experience?
- How did this event change you or impact you as a person?

Reflection: After you finish this unit of study, write a reflection about what you learned. Include details about what you want to remember, your favorite activities, questions you still have, and goals you have for yourself as a reader, writer, speaker, listener, and observer.

I want to Remember my River teeth moments.
My favorite activity was the River teeth Writing.

Figure 1.2. Alice's reflection on the River Teeth unit.

Of course, the instructions above Alice's writing suggest that she "Include details" about what she wants to remember, and her favorite activities. However, this chunk of text on the sheet is not unusual or new for Emily's reflective activities—

Alice has seen them before and has not responded to them. What can be made of this difference, then? Is Alice a different writer now than when she started her "river teeth" unit, and is that difference in any way noticeable? If so, does this small difference mean anything in terms of the wider span of Alice's development as a writer?

These brief moments of literate action suggest that some kind of transformation may be afoot. On the surface, this bout of writing by Alice might seem inconsequential. As I will argue throughout this text, however, these seemingly inconsequential moments of alteration in literate action add up into the larger transformations that we can see with the broader instruments of text analysis and retrospective accounts—and, by extension, are moments that we as researchers and teachers of writing must pay attention to if we are to understand lifespan literate action development in all of its complexity.

Attending to the Novel within the Recurrent: Ethnomethodology

As the above example suggests, there is a great deal of difference between the moments of literate action I describe above and the previous (and subsequent) moments that I put it in conversation with. In fact, if we attend strictly to the materials involved in the construction of each situation, we will find that the similarities across instances are slim indeed: even the structure of the reflective activity (perhaps the most repetitive aspect in each of these moments) differs from one instance to the next. Miller (1984) notes that the situations we define as recurring cannot be recurrent in the materials themselves: "What recurs cannot be a material configuration of objects, events, and people, nor can it be a subjective configuration, a 'perception,' for these, too, are unique from moment to moment" (p. 156). Miller instead claims that the recurrent rests in the realm of *intersubjectivity*: it is "a social occurrence," and "cannot be understood on materialist terms" (1984, p. 156).

The disconnect between the material and the social creates the space for the novel to emerge within what might be otherwise considered recurrent events. Consider, for instance, the work of communicating with a spouse about dinner. As I begin to type a text message to my wife to ask what she wants to eat, I am creating a recurring intersubjective understanding (i.e., that we need to eat another meal and discuss what that meal might be), even if most of the materials—such as where we are in relation to one another, the circumstances we are in at our respective locations, the clothes we wear, the chairs we sit in—change dramatically. A number of things can change in the production of the recurrent. The challenge for researchers is to understand the changes, the novelty, in the recurrent that can "add up," over time, into sustained patterns of changes in literate action. To do that work, I turn to ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967, 2002, 2006, 2008) and the attention that it pays to the material production of social order.

Ethnomethodology has long influenced the fields of Writing Studies, Education, and Literacy, both directly—in ethnomethodological publications—and indirectly, in the take-up of ethnomethodological insights across a range of theories. For instance, Latour (2005) argues that Actor-Network Theory is "half" Garfinkel in its nature. Brandt (1992) describes ethnomethodology as "a radical form of analysis that studies the methods that people use for 'doing everyday life,' including 'doing talk'" (p. 317). Ethnomethodology has as its goal "the explanation of how everyday activities achieve their organization or order" (Brandt, 1992, p. 318). Brandt separates the work of ethnomethodology from ethnography, suggesting that ethnography *uses* the everyday accomplishment of social order in order to understand a group, but ethnomethodology examines the accomplishment of that everyday social order. Ethnomethodologists have demonstrated (i.e., Garfinkel, 1967; Liberman, 2013) that the mundane is indeed something that is *accomplished*: "A fundamental insight drawn from these and other projects is that as actors in the world we spend a lot of our time (and language) *making ourselves accountable* for what we are doing and *accounting for* what other people are doing" (Brandt, 1992, p. 319). This focus on accomplishment in a local sense (that is, in the moment of producing text) can transform how we understand literate action: as not simply participation in far-flung organizations of social action, but also tactical responses to an unfolding, local social order.

Ethnomethodology has its roots in early- and mid-twentieth century sociological discussions. Harold Garfinkel, the founder of ethnomethodology, received his Ph.D. from Harvard in 1952, working directly under Talcott Parsons, then the giant of the sociological scene. Parsons' work, structural-functionalism, was of interest to a young Garfinkel, though he came to see that the organization of structural-functionalism raised problems in several ways. In his thesis, *The Perception of the Other: A Study in Social Order*, as well as his dissertation prospectus (published as *Seeing Sociologically: The Routine Grounds of Social Action*, edited by Anne Warfield Rawls, in 2006), Garfinkel challenges some of the assumptions of Parsons' approach, drawing on the phenomenology of Gurwitsch and Schutz to work though his problems with those assumptions.

Garfinkel's issues with Parsons' work stemmed from a divergent reading of Emile Durkheim's *Rules of Sociological Method*. Durkheim (1895) suggests that "the objective reality of social facts is sociology's fundamental principle" (p. lvii). A "social fact," for Durkheim (1895), is a "category of facts with very distinctive characteristics: it consists of ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him" (p. 3). As Bazerman (2004) points out, people come to believe social facts are true, and those facts then shape how they define the situations they find themselves in.

The ways in which Parsons and others traced the production of social facts was, in Garfinkel's view, misguided. Parsons and many of the structural-functionalists who followed saw social facts as emerging from a broader system of

values that individuals act out in their lives. Social facts, then, are part of an overarching social world that shape individual actions. Garfinkel (1967) suggests that the models of structural-functionalism create an image of a human being "who produces the stable features of the society by acting in compliance with preestablished and legitimate alternatives of action that the common culture provides" (p. 68). This unreflexive character of the actor, Garfinkel argues, is inaccurate, because it leaves out the ability of the actor to do their own sense-making and leaves them as a "cultural dope" (1967, p. 68), unable to do anything but follow sociological rules (see Lynch, 2012b for more on the development of 'dopes' in Garfinkel's writings).

Garfinkel hoped to attend to an *actor-oriented perspective* that would highlight the reflexive capacities of social actors, revealing their powers as "culturally astute agents" (Lynch, 2012b, p. 224) and the ways in which their actions *produce* social facts in particular situations. Toward that end, he did two things. First, he turned to the language of phenomenology, initially through the work of Schutz and Gurwitsch but later expanding his reading to other phenomenologists (Merleau-Ponty, for instance) and the intellectual descendants of the phenomenological movement, such as Derrida. Drawing on the interaction of self and object, of intention and object, Garfinkel (drawing in particular on the phenomenological sociology of Schutz) realized that the broad searches for social order evident in the statistical analyses of the structural-functionalist school were, in effect, losing the phenomenon of social order (Garfinkel, 2002). Social order was not to be found in aggregates, pulled together through sociological techniques applied to an unordered plenum.[1] Rather, social order was an ongoing accomplishment of social actors: in any given moment, people work together to make sense of both what is happening in a given moment and what is going to happen next. The production of social order, Garfinkel came to see, is always local, always *scenic* (that is, constituted from objects at hand—*justhere, just-now, with-just-these-tools,* and *just-these-people*, or what Garfinkel would come to call *haecceities*), and always constituted "for another first time" (1967, p. 9).

Several texts have traced the features, principles, and assumptions of ethnomethodology since its inception (Hammersley, 2018; Hilbert, 1995; Livingston, 2003; Sharrock & Anderson, 2012), and considerable effort has been made, particularly with the rise of the International Institute for Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis in the late 1980s, to further these features, principles, and assumptions. Below, I articulate several of the key assumptions of ethnomethodology that are central to understanding how I operationalize ethnomethodological work toward the study of literate action development.

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1. Garfinkel (2002) would come to refer to this as Parsons' Plenum, which was a shorthand to reference the inherently unordered social activity that structural-functionalist methods assumed of social action.

Ethnomethodology must be understood, in this work, as a *radically empirical* project: it attends to the material production of social order as that production happens. The pursuit of a radical empiricism eschews, for many ethnomethodologists, cognitive explanations of social action. Coulter (1991) productively frames the cognitive in the world of the ethnomethodologist: "Rather than construe memories as *themselves* neurally-encoded phenomena, we should instead think of neural structures, states or events as enabling, facilitating *the situated production of memory-claims* (to oneself and others) in all their variety" (p. 188). Much like it is for Hutchins (1995) or Latour (2005), cognition for the ethnomethodologist is deeply *scenic*, occurring with and as part of the material surrounding it, and the production of social order remains scenic right along with it. Explanations that remain cognitive in nature (or rooted in the individual—see Rawls' editorial introduction to Garfinkel, 2006) end up reifying the individual, obscuring social order, and therefore losing the very phenomena that ethnomethodologists hope to study.

An ethnomethodological study is *radically empirical*, then, because it attends so closely to the scenic production of social order. This social order is not theorized, or even historicized: the objects involved in the production of social order are treated in and of the production of a given situation among co-actors. Theorizing and historicizing can also lead to the loss of the phenomenon of interest. Ethnomethodologists are interested in the ongoing work of *immortal, ordinary society* (Garfinkel, 2002, p. 92). According to Garfinkel,

> *Immortal* is borrowed from Durkheim as a metaphor for any witnessable local setting whose parties are doing some human job that can range in scale from a hallway greeting to a freeway traffic jam where there is *this* to emphasize about them: Their production is staffed by parties to a standing crap game. Of course the jobs are not games, let alone a crap game. Think of freeway traffic glow in Los Angeles. For the cohort of drivers there, just this gang of them, driving, making traffic together, are *somehow*, smoothly and unremarkably, concerting the driving to be *at* the lived production of the flow's just thisness: familiar, ordinary, uninterestingly, observably-in-and-as-of-observances, doable and done again, and always, only entirely in detail for everything that detail could be. (2002, p. 92)

Attending to the situated production of order—in traffic jams, in restaurants, at intersections, in queues, etc.—offers a useful focus into the *local* work of actors to perpetuate social order. This focus on locality works hand-in-hand with attention to the scenic: because ethnomethodologists pay attention only to particular scenes of social action, and because they attend to the scenic aspects of the production of social order in those scenes, the ways in which social facts become established can be highlighted for ethnomethodologists.

Ethnomethodologists attend closely to language use, albeit in particular ways. Language, as Garfinkel (1967) claims, is deeply indexical: even words that are commonly understood to have a fixed meaning are deeply dependent on context in order to be understood, to create meaning into a productive communicative act. The indexicality of language reinforces the ongoing work of actors to produce local social order. By considering language as having its meaning contextually grounded, ethnomethodologists can avoid abstracted understandings of language and instead see how it operates in the production of a given social situation.

Throughout the rest of Part I and, to some extent, the rest of this text, I will continue to draw on ethnomethodological concepts and elaborate on those listed above, but these initial assumptions provide a sufficient orientation to begin ethnomethodological work, and will be the building blocks on which a perspective of the *lived reality* perspective is constructed. Ethnomethodology's *radical empiricism* calls attention to the *local* production of social order via attention to the *scenic* features of that locality. Part of those scenic features involves an inherently indexical language, which is brought to bear both in the pursuit of broad goals and in the work of maintaining social order.

Identifying and Resolving Concerns for an Ethnomethodological Orientation

Though ethnomethodology has a productive set of concepts and assumptions for thinking through the lived reality of literate action development, the particular focus of the ethnomethodological project is rather distanced from writing research—or research on writing development—and this distance creates some inconsistencies and issues that need to be resolved as the respecification of literate action development continues. The primary issue with bringing ethnomethodology to bear on writing research is, as Brandt (1992) and Prior (2017) have acknowledged in their work, that ethnomethodologists have traditionally paid little attention to writing and the production of it (but see Lynch, 1993). Ethnomethodologists traditionally identify *perspicuous settings* (Garfinkel, 2002) that enable the production of social order to be effectively identified and traced. These settings do not attend to the production of writing, and they certainly do not trace the production of writing through *multiple* settings, which would be required in order to work out the ways in which literate action develops.

The focus on particular, perspicuous settings is linked to another disconnect between the aims of this research project and ethnomethodology. Ethnomethodology is the study of *members*' methods—that is, members of a group who are working together in order to make social order happen. Tracing the production of freeway traffic, or the flow of pedestrians across crowded intersections, has a fundamentally anonymous character to it when examined ethnomethodologically: the practices of drivers and pedestrians are interchangeable, and, once described,

can be taken up by others involved in constructing social order in that setting. Take, for instance, Liberman's (2013) study of pedestrians at a crowded intersection: the acts of pedestrians to make themselves known to drivers, to move along crosswalks in ways that are accountable to other members of that group, are not dependent on particular members. It is for this reason that ordinary society is referred to by Garfinkel (2002) as *immortal*: there is no one person that it depends upon and, indeed, there is no whole, complete *person* available in the production of social order, anyway (see Rawls in Garfinkel, 2006). Rather, individual *actors*— socially-constructed and constructing aspects of individuals—work together to make a situation happen. The whole of the person is unavailable in any given situation, and so is not of interest to ethnomethodologists.

One final concern remains for the work of respecifying literate action development ethnomethodologically. The phenomenon of respecifying is, fundamentally, done through the practices and language of actors in a particular social scene. As Davidson (2012) notes, respecification "treats some concept, problem or notion as a local matter for members to address rather than a problem for sociologists" (p. 32). Zaunbrecher (2018), for instance, ethnomethodologically respecifies "spontaneity" in order to see how particular actions are co-constituted in the ongoing production of social order to *count* as spontaneous to the actors in the situation. "Development," however, is a *second-order* phenomenon—it is something identified by an observer (that is, a sociologist) looking at a situation, not something that emerges as an accountable phenomenon among members of a situation. So, in purely ethnomethodological terms, it is not possible to respecify development ethnomethodologically, at least not for those engaged in the act of writing.[2]

None of these concerns are insurmountable. The starting point for resolving them is, of course, that the object of my study is not the ongoing production of social order but how literate action develops within, through, and as part of that production. First and foremost, this is writing research, and is focused on the production of writing (or, more specifically, literate action). My intention in this work is to bring ethnomethodological insights, assumptions, and concepts to bear on literate action development. Attending to the above limitations is not intended to make this a fundamentally ethnomethodological study, but rather to avoid appropriating ethnomethodology against the grain of its own principles and, by extension, losing the advantages that Writing Studies stands to gain from such an approach.

With this positioning of the study in relation to ethnomethodology in mind, I can now turn to these problems one at a time. The primary issue at work with ethnomethodological studies of writing is that ethnomethodology has not tradition-

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2. One could, of course, study the situated production of responding to student writing in order to understand how teachers came to understand development. Though an incredibly interesting research site, that is beyond the bounds of this particular project, as it loses the perspective of the developing writer as they are writing.

ally attended to writing, and so there is little prior work in ethnomethodology to build from with regard to writing. This is connected to the search for perspicuous settings by ethnomethodologists: the performance of literate action often does not occur in perspicuous settings, particularly for older writers. Writers tend to write in at least partial solitude, and to do so without the visible kinds of collaborative work akin to, say, negotiating a crosswalk. Prior (1998), Prior and Hengst (2010), and Pigg (2014a, 2014b) have begun the work of attending to writing in a more material and ethnomethodological way, but understanding what counts as a perspicuous setting for those interested in literate action development remains an open question.

My focus on literate action *development* calls attention to multiple settings: that is, it is important to see not just literate action once, but across multiple occasions to identify meaningful, measurable, and enduring change. So however these perspicuous settings are identified, they need to be multiple and connected—the practice of watching a traffic jam will be insufficient for tracing such development. This is not to say that a recurrent site of literate action—such as a classroom—cannot be attended to, but rather that such work needs to attend more closely to particular actors than ethnomethodologists have traditionally been willing to. In the coming chapters, I select a classroom as a recurrent site of literate action with a stable collection of specific students throughout an entire academic year. By selecting a recurring site that the same people return to again and again, I can begin the work of stitching together moments of literate action across instances of situations that may "add up" into developmental work.

Of course, turning to *people* seems, on the surface, to turn away from an ethnomethodological rejection of individual persons and a focus on anonymous group members. Throughout Part I, I focus not on *individuals*—that is, whole, discrete persons—but rather *individuated actors*, participants in producing social order with unique footings in the social space that they are co-constructing. The language of *individuated actor* allows me to focus on the contingent, situated, and locally-produced aspects of participants, as well as keep my attention on that which changes. *Individuals* encourage me to see people in a situation as complete beings who may change, whereas *individuated actors,* as a concept, allows me to see people as always in-process, always engaged in some kind of change.

Such a distinction is important to get at the situated production of literate action development. Ethnomethodologists have never argued that individuals do not exist, but rather that the concept of the individual occludes the production of social order. Taking this as a starting point, I focus on the work that members are doing (see Chapter 2, for instance) to create ongoing social order and, from there, trace the work of individuated actors as they contribute to that production—and, by extension, how those productions change through future instantiations of social situations involving the same individuated actor. My attention is thus to the singular work of a developing writer as understood through the unique-to-the-group contributions to ongoing social order over time.

The final concern addressed above is that of development as a second-order concept. Since members' methods in the situations I am interested in examining (that is, literate action through the lifespan) do not attend to development in the sense that I mean it, it cannot be respecified in a true ethnomethodological sense. However, beginning with the framework (Applebee, 2000) of development as participation in social action, I can render the concept of development more ethnomethodological. I call this rendering a respecification, not to conflate the similarities of it to traditional ethnomethodological respecification, but rather to highlight the tradition of turning to members' methods that it builds upon. This take on respecification follows Garfinkel's tradition of *deliberate misreading*. Below, I articulate this respecification, drawing on the assumptions and concepts above.

Respecifying Development Ethnomethodologically

Deliberate misreading is a term that Garfinkel used when reading (or encouraging others to read) phenomenological literature. Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Schutz, and Gurwitsch were regular components of Garfinkel's reading, and often assigned to his graduate students, as Liberman (2013) points out, but Garfinkel read these texts *as if* they were talking about the local production of social order. Such a deliberate misreading allowed Garfinkel to develop insights that he could then follow up on through a careful study of perspicuous settings.

The key word in *deliberate misreading* is "deliberate." Based on my reading of Garfinkel's work, I read "deliberate" as *cautious*, not simply *intentional*. Garfinkel certainly intended to misread these phenomenologists, but he did so in a cautious manner, with a particular view in mind. Perhaps another word for "deliberate" might be "disciplined." Garfinkel's misreading was a disciplined misreading. My misreading of respecifying, in turn, is also disciplined in nature.

Since the respecification of development in a purely ethnomethodological sense is not available, it may be useful to begin with an understanding of what respecifying does for ethnomethodologists and, drawing on the particularities of the phenomenon of interest in this study, extrapolate from that work. Respecification returns attention to the work and understandings of members of a particular social situation. Attending to the ways in which actors make themselves accountable to themselves and one another in the co-construction of a situation allows researchers to develop an actor-oriented perspective on the joint production of social facts, and respecifying research questions toward that cooperative, local work—what Garfinkel (1991, 2002) refers to as *haecceities*—allows researchers to attend to that work without obscuring it in broader theoretical frameworks or methodological techniques.

Respecifying development ethnomethodologically means attending to these haecceities in order to find transformations that endure beyond those haecceities. Seeing such development, however, requires multiple situations, each with its

own haecceitic production of social order—and, by extension, attending to the individuated actor across those situations. Therefore, a respecification of development begins with attending to the ongoing production of situated social order by following an individuated actor across multiple situations.

Understanding development as emergent from the sequential production of social order keeps the focus on social order even if the term *development* is, itself, not fully respecified in a strictly ethnomethodological manner. And the distinction between the novel and the recurrent—that is, what of the infinite changes in the (re)production of social order come to count as "development" for an individuated actor—has yet to be fully articulated. At present, the conditions required are sketchy: the change must be involved in the production of social order for an individuated actor, and that change must endure through future recurrences of that production of social order. In order to begin filling in this sketch—something I will continue to attend to across the next four chapters as I build up a picture of the *totality of the literate experience*—I turn back to Alice's literate action from earlier in this chapter. How might an examination of Alice's work through an ethnomethodologically-respecified understanding of literate action development highlight potential development in the literate action of Alice?

Pivoting to an Ethnomethodological Respecification: Alice's Literate Action Re-Examined

With this broad overview of an ethnomethodological respecification in mind, we can turn our attention back to the work of Alice in her "river teeth" writing. I want to treat this work as a *candidate moment* of literate action development for Alice: that is, a potential site of literate action development that is worthy of further study. Two ethnomethodological tools will be used to work out this respecification: the *unique adequacy requirement* and *ticked brackets*. These concepts, working together, bring the researcher's attention to the constructed orderliness of events, enabling the lived reality to emerge from that orderliness for closer examination.

The *unique adequacy requirement* is a central concern of ethnomethodologists. Because "a phenomenon of order* is only available in the *lived* in-courseness of its local production and natural accountability" (Garfinkel, 2002, p. 175, emphasis in original), researchers attempting to uncover unfolding social order must be adequately competent in the unfolding situation at hand. This is what ethnomethodologists mean when they refer to the *unique adequacy* of a research study. Unique adequacy comes in a weak form and a strong form. The "weak" form of the unique adequacy requirement requires that the researcher "must be *vulgarly* competent to the local production and reflexively natural accountability of the phenomenon of order* [s]he is 'studying'" (Garfinkel, 2002, pp. 175-176). The strong form of the unique adequacy requirement goes one step beyond vulgar competence: "It demands that the methods of analysis used to report on a

setting should be derived from that setting" (Rooke & Kagiolou, 2007, p. 11). The strong form requires "a refusal to evaluate, describe or explain the activities that constitute the setting using criteria, concepts or theories that are not a part of that setting" (Rooke & Kagiolou, 2007, p. 11).

I address the details for meeting the weak form of the unique adequacy requirement in Chapter 2, but I can briefly summarize my meeting this requirement by noting that I was an observer in Alice's class from the first day of school to the last, that I spoke with Alice and her students on a regular basis, and that I had access to the worksheets and activities that Alice, her classmates, and her teacher (Emily) did. I also arrived at the scene with five years' experience teaching in a public secondary school in the United States. The strong form of the UA requirement is somewhat more complicated, particularly since my ethnomethodological respecification of literate action development pulls away from the situated orderliness and into the serialized, situational orderliness of social action. But the second concept I am using—ticked brackets—are needed to indicate the effectiveness of and need for UA.

Garfinkel (2002) uses several figures to suggest the difference between ethnomethodological work and what he refers to as "formal analytic" (FA) work. The working assumption of FA is that "there is no order in the concreteness of lived everyday activities (Garfinkel, 2002, p. 135). It is the job of FA, in Garfinkel's eyes, to establish order in the *plenum*, or "the plentitude; the plenty of it; the more than you or anyone can say or hope to say; the endless chaotic circumstantiality of lived, living, lebend, uhr, um, etcetera, and etcetera" (pp. 136-137). Garfinkel describes the plenum as -[ ]-. Within these brackets is the unorderliness of lived experience. FA studies use methods, which Garfinkel characterizes with an arrow, to develop ordered understandings of the world, which Garfinkel puts in parentheses. An FA approach to a research site then looks like this:

$$-[\ ]- \rightarrow (\ )$$

Garfinkel takes a different approach by beginning with a different assumption. Garfinkel assumes that there *is* order in the plenum, and makes uncovering that orderliness the task of ethnomethodology. Garfinkel expresses the difference between the FA assumption of an unorderly plenum—that is, the -[ ]- —with a different set of ticked brackets:

$$\{\ \}$$

Such assumed orderliness can also lend itself to formal analytic method, which Garfinkel represents through the following expression:

$$\{\ \} \rightarrow (\ )$$

Garfinkel argues that while the → ( ) can allow for various observations and generalizations, they lose the phenomenon of "the lived phenomenal properties" of ⦃ ⦄ (2002, p. 151). In my examination of Alice's work, I'll be drawing on

a uniquely adequate understanding of both Emily's classroom and Alice's literate action to develop an account of how social facts are produced in the "river teeth" writing activity, and how development emerges from witnessably concrete practices amidst that activity. I will be using the ticked brackets to indicate how orderliness is produced in and through Alice's work—just-here, just-now, with just-these-tools and just-these actors. The labels within the ticked brackets, then, operate as more than simply codes: they call attention to the ongoing work, the methods of interaction, through which social order (and, by extension, the flow of classroom life as it may be described ethnographically) is perpetuated. The labels, in other words, describe the work through which the reality of the classroom is co-constructed, the ways in which students and teachers work to make sense of what is going on—and, as a result, what they should do next.

On May 23, after the class finished its daily warm-up and announcements, Emily and her class performed a ⸢desk organizing⸣ activity, which oriented them all to the work of their "river teeth" writing. The act of ⸢desk organizing⸣ in Emily's classroom is an interrelated set of responsive practices through which Emily and her students come to build and make sense of a transition between activities. Throughout the year that I observed Emily's classes, ⸢desk organizing⸣ emerged as a stable, coordinated practice.

Emily began ⸢desk organizing⸣ after she finished some announcements. "All right, for class today what you will need is . . . this packet that says 'river teeth' on it," said Emily, holding up a blank packet of assignments for the "river teeth" unit. "If you were absent," she continued, "it's probably in the mailbox," referring to a space at the back of her classroom where students who were absent in the previous class could pick up copies of their assignments.

After Emily made this announcements, students began taking their "river teeth" packets out of their backbacks. Some engaged in brief conversations with neighbors, while others, like Alice, remained silent. Emily answered a follow-up question about a previous announcement amidst the rustle of paper and the quiet hum of conversation. After answering the question, Emily said "All right, clear your desks except for this, please. And a pen or pencil." Students continued to put away materials and carry on quiet conversations while Emily helped a student looking in the mailbox for a packet. At this point, the ⸢desk organizing⸣ is well underway. Emily used a projector to show her table of contents for the "river teeth" packet, announcing "All right. So we're just going to catch up on this a little bit. Um. This should be the only thing you have out. This is it." Emily then said she would "remind you of what we were doing, because it's been a little while."

Although Emily has done the entirety of speaking to the entire class, the act of ⸢desk organizing⸣ is a collective act, begun, developed, and concluded via the material, physical, and social action of the members of the classroom. Emily's direction to "clear your desks" did more than clear desks: it set in motion a series of material interactions that led both Emily and her students to orient their attention to the work of the "river teeth" packet.

Emily built upon ⸢desk organizing⸣ with another haeccetic feature of social order in her classroom by beginning ⸢instruction reading⸣. Emily first directs students to a particular page in the packet with spoken language: "Down here are the essential questions, and I want to remind you what we're doing." The "down here" is accompanied by a gesture to the packet that is projected on to her television screen at the front of the room. Emily directs them further, down to "thematic questions." She repeats her instruction again, followed by a request for a specific student to begin reading: "I need everyone to look here where it says 'thematic questions.'" She then calls on a particular student, asking "will you read them to us?"

I begin my review of Alice's "river teeth" writing with ⸢desk organizing⸣ because we can see this as the beginning of a clear pattern of social ordering *just-here, just-now, in-just-this-classroom,* and with *just-these-tools.* Emily and her students produce an interactional order, a back-and-forth set of activities in speaking, movement, and material use that allow them to create joint meaning out of a particular segment of a large packet of activities during the ⸢instruction reading⸣. This order is an accomplishment, an achievement that effaces the conditions of its own creation. But it is from this accomplishment that Alice participates in the co-construction of the "river teeth" writing activity. By a continued reading through assignments and small writing activities in the packet, Emily and her students (including Alice) come to understand the page in Figure 1.1 as a site for recording important experiences in particular ways—through writing, illustrations, and color.

In the movement from ⸢desk organizing⸣ to ⸢instruction reading⸣ to ⸢writing activity⸣, the purpose of the writing activity—in this case, the "river teeth" writing—becomes sensible to both Emily and her students. Alice, when faced with a blank river and ten minutes to generate writing to fill it, understands her task not merely through the words on the page or the instructions of the teacher as the ⸢writing activity⸣ gets underway, but also through the way that Emily and her students have ordered themselves socially toward the writing task. By attending carefully to the haecceitic construction of social order, as evidenced in ⸢desk organizing⸣, ⸢instruction reading⸣, and ⸢writing activity⸣, we can see the production of social facts that led Alice to the "river teeth" writing that she did. Furthermore, we can begin to identify what triggered her work with the reflective writing, and whether or not we may consider it to be a sign of development.

As the ten minutes of the ⸢writing activity⸣ unfolds, Alice keeps her attention on her page, rarely looking up to acknowledge students as they walk by, or to look at Emily as she occasionally makes suggestions for "river teeth" ideas. Furthermore, there is no evidence in Alice's subsequent writing hinting that she took any of Emily's suggestions, such as focusing on the first days of school, or birthday parties. A close look at the pace of her writing activity, however, and the work on the page suggest that a slight shift in Alice's pattern of literate action begins here, and endures across the remainder of her "river teeth" writing.

Alice's ten-minute writing activity can be broken into two segments: an initial, consistent flow of writing for approximately five minutes, followed by a gradual

taper with a brief flurry of writing in the final five minutes. The bulk of Alice's attention seems to lie at the start of her writing, as her later "river teeth" narratives focus on falling off of her bike and being pushed off of a trampoline, which she wrote about early on. Though unpleasant moments, Alice values recalling them in her writing and remembering them long-term, based on the reflection she wrote (see Figure 1.2).

Attending to the ordering practices of the classroom leading into the "river teeth" writing activity, as well as the material work of Alice during the ten-minute ⸦writing activity⸧ shows how Alice's activity was oriented to the task of writing "river teeth" ideas. Alice, to this point, has acted how she has always acted in the classroom: she silently participates in the co-construction of social action in the classroom, and she uses the aligned understandings that emerge from that work as a tool to accomplish the tasks at hand. But if we turn to the writing that occurs between the ⸦writing activity⸧ and the reflective writing that later happens, a subtle change in Alice's literate action emerges.

Figure 1.3 shows the result of a later ⸦writing activity⸧, one that builds off of the May 23 ⸦writing activity⸧, at least in part. In this sample, Alice recalls her sister pushing her off of a trampoline at a young age. This is something she drew and wrote about in her "river teeth" idea writing on May 23, but here Alice follows it up with an entire story. She closes the story with an interesting sentence: "My sister came up to me and apoligized, and she realized that it is all fun and games until you do something dum." This sentence is uncharacteristic of Alice's other writing in that she subverts a common expression to signal a criticism of another person—in this case, her sister and her actions in pushing Alice off of the trampoline. Though it appears to have been in part motivated by an option in the left-hand column, this is still a second unexpected move that emerges from the fairly ordinary activity that Alice performed during the May 23 "river teeth" writing.

If we locate this sentence between Alice's initial "river teeth" writing and her subsequent reflection, a pattern begins to emerge that distinguishes itself from the other writing that Alice has done. Alice begins by engaging in "river teeth" writing in what has become a fairly typical manner for her. Her pattern of literate action during the ⸦writing activity⸧ suggests focused early writing followed by a tapering of activity, and the writing done in those first five minutes correlates with the extensive later writing she would do. In this writing, Alice takes on some tasks that she hasn't taken on previously: she repurposes a common expression to underscore her own claim, and she engages more explicitly with a reflective activity than she has in the past. Alice demonstrates, in this series of writings, that her attention toward the series of tasks she co-constructs with her fellow students and her teacher may be changing in some subtle way. The ⸦writing activity⸧ does not stand on its own as the isolated activity Alice has treated it as in the past; rather, the text that emerges from the activity carries forward into the narratives that Alice creates. These narratives are artifacts of

other ⟨writing activity⟩ moments, of course, but they suggest that, within them, Alice privileged particular ⟨writing activity⟩ moments in her past (which was made materially present by the "river teeth" text) in order to shape her writing. Furthermore, the final product of this writing (that is, the narratives) became documents that she valued in her reflective work on the unit. Alice, in her "river teeth" writing, has begun to stitch together the products of her ⟨writing activity⟩ throughout the unit, resulting in a final product (i.e., "river teeth" narratives) that she expresses as being valuable.

Figure 1.3. Alice's "Trampoline" river teeth moment.

Turning back to the issue of respecifying writing development ethnomethodologically, we can trace in Alice's interactions and writing a slowly shifting coordination of the talk, tools, and texts around her. Alice begins the unit with the same solitary focus on her writing as she has in previous units, but as the "river teeth" writing experiences develop, she attends to the material world around her differently, materially drawing on particular past ⟨writing activity⟩ moments to develop the more complex texts that are being socially ordered into relevance.

Following the Phenomenon: Building on Alice's Developmental Candidacy

In the above section, I draw on Garfinkel's (2002) concept of ticked brackets to highlight the social construction of the initial "river teeth" activity and build, from that, an understanding of how Alice's literate action may have developed. Attending to the production of social order in Emily's room set the stage for understanding how Alice shifted her patterns of literate action—how she came to see the interconnected nature of multiple assignments and respond with her writing accordingly, and how the products to emerge from those shifted patterns came to be valued by her during a ⟨writing activity⟩ that she has historically done little writing in. We can identify this as a transformation in her serial production of local social order while producing the texts required for an academic unit. According to my earlier ethnomethodological respecification, this would seem to be a candidate moment of literate action development. But the tools available for this analysis do not provide sufficient insight for making a determination for or against development on their own. For now, then, I am going to leave this as only a candidate. In the next three chapters, I will further articulate a logic-in-use through attention to more moments of literate action with some of Alice's fellow students. In Chapter 5, I'll bring this logic-in-use to bear on Alice's literate action and make a case for whether this "counts" as development. First, however, I would like to articulate the differences between the ticked brackets and what Garfinkel (2002) labels the formal analytical brackets—( ).

Garfinkel's ticket brackets continually brought attention back to the way in which a given activity, whether it be clearing desks, reading instructions, or engaging in writing, were socially produced accomplishments. Doing so revealed Alice's participation in those accomplishments and, through that revelation, the ways in which her literate action was beginning to change. Formal analytic methods and their attendant sociological abstractions—which, as Garfinkel argues, ignores the order inherent in the plenum—may have lost both the accomplishments and the developmental transformations that came along with those accomplishments. This is not to deny the obvious value of such methods in other research studies, but rather to suggest that, when it comes to understanding literate action development—particularly through the lifespan—such methods run

the risk of losing the very phenomena they hope to describe. It is my argument that such methods *do* have a place in studying lifespan literate action development—indeed, as I argue in Chapter 9, we would not be able to grow as a subfield without it—but that they need to be repurposed, respecified, and misread in order to enable researchers to adequately and effectively follow the phenomenon of literate action and its development through the entirety of a life.