

## Chapter 5. The Totality of the Literate Experience

The first four chapters of this text provided an exigence for an ethnomethodological respecification of writing development when considering writing through the lifespan and articulated a set of interrelated concepts to frame the *lived reality of literate action development*. This chapter brings these concepts together to form a portable logic-in-use for understanding the lived reality that I refer to as the *totality of the literate experience*. This totality is a lens that I will be using to make sense of literate action development at other points in the lifespan in Part II. Below, I tightly bound the lived reality of literate action development, articulating what needs attending to and what does not when researching writing through that lens.

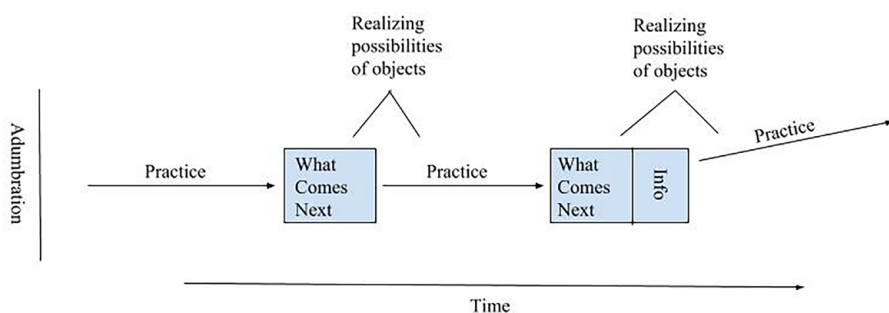
### The Totality of the Literate Experience: A Conceptual Framework

As I indicated at the close of the previous chapter, the five concepts I've brought to bear on the lived reality of literate action development (*practices*, *What-Comes-Next*, *information*, *adumbration*, and *possibilities of objects*) appear to work productively with one another in certain ways. With the *totality of the literate experience*, I fully integrate these five concepts to build a productive and, as seen below, portable logic-in-use for understanding the lived reality of literate action development. The totality of the literate experience (or "totality") directs attention, through an integrated network of concepts, to each passing moment of literate action and the richness of each moment. Essentially, the totality begins with the assumption that any given moment of literate action is bursting at the seams with many dimensions of human activity.

The ways in which this opportunity is taken up in a given moment—the way in which the totality is operationalized, made real as the moment develops—can be followed through the concepts traced through the first four chapters of this text. These concepts are situated along a timespan (see Figure 5.1) through which the totality continually unfolds. Note how the practices, understood in an adumbrated manner by individual actors, lead into and shape the joint production of *What-Comes-Next*. The increasing uncertainty of *What-Comes-Next*, indicated to the right-hand side of the figure, is represented by the disconnect between the height of practices and the height of *What-Comes-Next* as depicted in the figure. It is this gap that may trigger literate action development.

I suggest that, in order to understand the lived reality of literate action development, we need to make the totality of the literate experience the center of our

theoretical and empirical attention. Of course, it is impossible to see the totality of the literate experience in its entirety: no matter our social positioning, there is always a horizon of understanding beyond which we will be unable to see. Attending closely to individual moments of writing, how people co-construct order within those individual moments of writing, the dimensions through which that ordering carries to the next moment, and the ways in which unarticulated dimensions are dragged along through that ordering are all made possible with the totality of the literate experience, as a conceptual framework, acting as a central interpretive lens. Treating the totality of the literate experience as a concept for considering the literate action of individuals over time enables writing research to look toward the material, situated, and intersubjectively-aligned actions that contribute to the construction, perpetuation, and alteration of literate practices. Through attention to the totality of the literate experience, we can understand not just how individuals come to make sense of the world over long periods of time and retrospectively, but also how those literate practices come to be constructed from materially and temporally situated actions by individuals.



*Figure 5.1. Concepts in action: Focusing on the lived reality.*

## Revisiting Alice's River Teeth through the Totality

In Chapter 1, I indicated the first of what became five candidate moments of literate action development and, drawing on ethnomethodological insights as a starting point, asked whether such a moment might “count” as literate action development for the student in question, Alice. At that point in the text, I had not yet developed a sufficiently robust conceptual framework through which I could examine Alice's literate action to answer my question effectively. In the intervening chapters, I took a closer look at the classroom Alice was working in, traced out other candidate moments of literate action development, and articulated a working conceptual framework, the totality. In Part II, I will be bringing this totality to bear on other moments of literate action at different points in the lifespan, but I want to fully bring my Part I investigations to a close by bringing this completed conceptual framework to bear on the case of Alice.

This investigation begins, of course, with the practices that Alice brought to bear on her work with the “river teeth” writing. Alice was participating in the work of ~~desk organizing~~, ~~instruction reading~~, and ~~writing activity~~ in her work on May 23. Her participation, as I noted in the start of Chapter 1, began as unexceptional in regard to her past participation: she was silent, followed the teacher’s examples, and did not converse with her fellow students nearby, even when others took advantage of the opportunity. So we can think of Alice’s practices as largely meeting the demands of *What-Comes-Next*. What we need to find in the sequence of Alice’s work is the increase of uncertainty, the rise of information that her scenically-available practices are incapable of meeting. There are two signals of a potential rise of uncertainty: Alice’s reflective writing and her written-out “river teeth” story.

Alice’s writing in both of these texts suggests a need to work through information with writing in ways that the scenic availability of past practices cannot account for. Much like Marianne, Alice has found something in the content of her work that makes it different from her previous writing. As Alice is constructing a text about her sister pushing her off of a trampoline, she sees the construction of the text not only as a series of moves to be completed according to the structuring that Emily provides, but as a place to work out the complexities of a past experience. Alice’s literate action for and around the “river teeth” writing takes into account both the unfolding social situation of a ~~writing activity~~ and, at the same time, as an item in a broader series of situational moments stretching back into her interactions with her sibling. Alice’s listening to her teacher’s stories (which involved her interactions with her own family and her own injuries that emerged as part of those interactions) brought to mind her past experiences with falling off of the trampoline, which then became an artifact of her May 23 activity.

When Alice brings her “river teeth” packet out to engage in her story drafting, the trampoline story becomes scenically available to her, and is caught up in her practice of moving from pre-writing to outlining to writing and revising a text throughout a unit, which has become a common practice in Emily’s classroom. In her work of co-constructing social order from an adumbrated perspective, Alice has blended the history of her interaction with her sister with the work of completing one of Emily’s units, and this blending has not only extended the life-world of her schooling activity (bringing her family life at least partly into it) but also created additional information—the complexities of her past experience that need working out. This blending then leads Alice to her claim that her sister, in apologizing for knocking her off of the trampoline, “realized that it is all fun and games until you do something dum.” Alice seems to face increased uncertainty again in her construction of her reflective writing, when she draws the conclusion that she would like to remember her “river teeth” moments.

To summarize briefly, Alice’s practices led to two moments of increased information in the ongoing sorting of *What-Comes-Next*. This, in turn, led her to

extend the lifeworld of her classroom activity in resolving the complexities of her past experience, which she came to see, in her adumbrated perspective, as central to the ongoing work of her “river teeth” story. This leads her to see new possibilities in the objects in front of her, which is as a place to work out such complexity. So it would seem that Alice, at this point, has had a transformative moment and that, just as before the conceptual framework was elicited, this is a genuine candidate moment of literate action development. But is it actually a moment of development?

One of the important signals that a candidate moment of development actually *is* a moment of development is the durability of the transformation. Drawing on the language we developed in Chapter 4, we can say that the transformation makes itself scenically available in the future production of literate action. Alice’s literate action, occurring as it does late in the academic year, does not provide a great deal of opportunity for following the practice into the future. However, Alice is able, in her moment of “river teeth” writing, to extend her academic lifeworld to encompass stories about and from her family. As the “river teeth” writing moves on in the final weeks of the academic year, we see Alice continue to do the work of integrating these lifeworlds across another entry, culminating in her brief comment in the critical reflection. This suggests that Alice, in the construction of her “river teeth” writing, has had a moment of literate action development.

### Chasing a Phenomenon of Interest: Making the Totality Portable as a Logic-in-Use

The concepts of the totality are, as I indicate in these initial chapters of Part I, a productive one for examining literate action development from the perspective of the lived reality. At this point in the text, however, the phenomenon of interest—literate action development—has been located in the strategic and perspicuous research settings of a middle school. School settings are important aspects of literate and social development, not the least because of the sheer volume of time that it takes up at important phases in the lives of developing writers (but see Prior, 2018). Emily’s classroom provided a more strategic and perspicuous research setting than most classrooms, rife as it was with many kinds of writing on a regular basis throughout the academic year. The conceptual framework as it stands, however, is tightly tied to the particularities of studying writing when the following resources are available:

1. Regular access to writing in all of its stages, both public and private;
2. Regular access to literate action as it is happening; and
3. Opportunities to observe transformations over time.

These resources are not necessarily available, depending on the goals of a research program. For instance, if I were interested in the development of literate

action for writers throughout the twentieth century, none of these resources are available to me—I am restricted to writers as they develop throughout the twenty-first century, as I would need to witness the literate action as it happens. Yet research such as that of Deborah Brandt's (2001) still shows us a great deal about how people become different kinds of writers over time.

In order to give wider flexibility to my conceptual framework (and, as I will show in Part II, to use that flexibility to my advantage as I study literate action development throughout the lifespan), I suggest envisioning the framework not as merely a tool for investigation but as a *logic-in-use* (Green, Skukauskaite, & Baker, 2012; Kaplan, 1964), one that focuses on the lived reality of literate action development and uses that focus to shape subsequent investigations of literate action with a range of methods, participants, and records.

The term logic-in-use has several roots. Kaplan (1964) separates a logic-in-use from what he calls reconstructed logic (p. 3). A logic-in-use is, as its title suggests, a logic that exists as it is used. In the writing up of research, this logic is often reconstructed in ways that fit neatly under separate banners of “methodology,” “epistemology,” and so on (see Lee, 2004 for a concise summary of Kaplan's position). The claim that Kaplan makes is that this reconstruction is not the logic-in-use. Our epistemologies, our ontologies, do not stand still for distillation into a particular section of a text. They are lived, enacted in the conduct of research, and only fragmentarily revealed via reconstructed logic. Reconstructed logics are, in Lee's words, *maps*, and maps, although helpful, are not territories.

In order to mobilize this framework into something more portable, I propose articulating not a methodology or an epistemology but a logic-in-use that is flexible in response to the needs of the research question and the research site. I draw particularly off of the language of Green, Baker, and Skukauskaite (2012) in this work. In their development of ethnography as a logic-in-use, they provide what they refer to as “principles of operation” (2012, p. 312) to guide the work of ethnographers in a “nonlinear” process of enacting “an iterative, recursive, and abductive logic” (p. 309). These principles of operation include

- Ethnography as a non-linear system;
- Leaving aside ethnocentrism;
- Identifying boundaries of what is happening; and
- Building connections.

These principles generate conceptual issues and implicated actions, which they articulate further through a *telling case* (Mitchell, 1984) that highlights the work of these principles in action.

Rather than offering principles and implicated actions, I offer, in Table 5.1, three *framings* for operationalizing the concepts of the totality into a logic-in-use that can be applied to new sites of study. These framings, available in Table 5.1, will enable researchers to ask new research questions, bring new methods to bear, and still keep the lived reality at the center of research.

**Table 5.1: Rendering a Portable Logic-in-Use**

Concept	Framing
Practices	Ongoing, Joint Action
<i>What-Comes-Next</i> , Information, Adumbration	Individuated Actor
Possibilities of Objects	Scenic Reduction of Uncertainty

I offer these framings as an alternative to a more rigid methodology in order to enable researchers to make methodological choices informed by my findings but still responsive to the needs of the actor under study. In Part II of this text, I bring these steps to bear on writers at other points in the lifespan, writing under very different circumstances, in order to examine the effectiveness of this logic-in-use.

### Framing Ongoing, Joint Action

The initial framing move in this logic-in-use is envisioning literate action as occurring among (and as part of) the ongoing, joint production of social order. People make meaning, make sense of the world around them in order to operate within it. Any given literate act occurs as part of a wider sequence of joint production of social order that carries on what we perceive as “broader,” “larger,” or “more distant” social structures. Social order only exists, in other words, because people work together to *make* it exist, again and again, always for another first time.

In framing any given literate action under study as participating in ongoing social order, researchers must see literate action as composed of *practices*—socially recognizable actions that allow people to orient themselves to one another and keep social order (and, with it, literate action) going. As we saw in the work of Nick in Chapter 3, practices in the ethnomethodological tradition help us to think differently about goal-directed human action. The goal of a practice, for instance, may be to do nothing more than continue social order: to maintain a line in a bookstore (Livingston, 1987), to maintain momentum in an awkward meeting among family members, etc. Through the concept of practices, researchers can attend to the ways in which members of a group engage in ongoing, joint action with, through, and from which literate action development occurs.

Researchers can begin framing ongoing, joint action by turning to the following questions to orient their work:

1. What signals are present in available records that might suggest practices in action?
2. How might the sequential development of such available records suggest practices of multiple actors?
3. In what ways might the records suggest an interplay among these practices in action?

Though broad, these questions and others like them can help researchers focus on to the work of ongoing, joint action by attending to individual practices and the work that those practices do to help people keep literate action going.

Early in Chapter 1, I articulated the need to attend to the *serial* production of social order—that is, literate action as it happens with, through, and around a particular actor over time. In the intervening chapters, this focus on the serial has become backgrounded, but it is a crucial aspect of the first step in this logic-in-use. Whatever the available records are—recordings of writers, interviews, existing documents, or some combination of the three—ongoing, joint action can only be productively framed if the joint action is seen as serial, as linked and historical in nature, even if the connection between one moment and the next (as was indicated in the studies in the earlier chapters) needs some analysis.

Beginning with ethnomethodological insights on social order in mind, the work of literate action must be framed as occurring amidst the ongoing work of jointly-produced social order. It is at this step that socially recognizable practices need careful attention: how do people act in ways that will be interpretable to themselves and others, and how does that action shape the situation as it unfolds—and, for those interested in development, how does one unfolding situation lead to the next?

### Framing the Individuated Actor

After framing ongoing, joint social action through an attention to practices (and the questions above), researchers can move toward an individuated orientation to those practices and their development over time. This is the second step, which frames individuated actors in the work of the ongoing, joint production of social order. As noted in earlier chapters, all individuated views of unfolding social order are *adumbrated*, and this adumbration is the condition through which development emerges. As groups work to reduce the uncertainty of *What-Comes-Next*, uncertainty will be raised higher for some actors than others. Their work to continue the fragile social ordering of everyday life has the opportunity to transform their practices, perhaps in enduring ways. Understanding the ways in which individuated views on an unfolding situation have been adumbrated enables the tracing of increased uncertainty when it arrives.

Researchers can uncover the individuated actor in the ongoing production of joint social action by working through the following questions:

1. What threads of practices by a single individuated actor might be productively followed across records?
2. How might such practices be envisioned as tactical responses to the problem-at-hand of producing social order?
3. What instances of particular practices represent the start of a dynamic transformation for the individuated actor in question?



Through these questions, the individuated actor can be singled out of a series of records and their particular practice(s) can be traced across multiple instances over time. In this second step, the individuated literate actor is recognized and followed, and the available records are reduced and, in ethnographic terms (see Green, Skukauskaite, & Baker 2012), turned into data for further analysis.

### Framing the Scenic Work of Uncertainty Reduction

In keeping with a repurposing of ethnomethodology that attends to the *serial* production of local social order, and drawing on the insights available from Chapter 4 in particular, the final step in framing is to attend to the ways in which the past is scenically located in the present. This final step in framing the lived reality highlights the serial nature of local order, and the ways in which individuated actors make the past materially available in the present.

In the first two frames, literate action development was characterized as (1) occurring through the ongoing, joint production of social action and (2) an individuated experience for particular actors under study. At the third step of analysis, then, researchers should have an individuated actor in mind and a particular practice (or practices) to follow through available records-turned-data. Step 3 enables the researcher to see the instances of practice use as deeply scenic by turning to the material work of co-constructing that practice. Through an attention to the material, and a realization of the connections that those materials have to past records of a practice, researchers can identify the new possibilities of objects that are recognized by individuated actors over time.

Researchers can highlight the scenic, material, tactical work of a practice by asking the following questions of the data available from the first two frames:

1. What objects appear to be attended to across particular moments of practice by the individuated actor?
2. How do these objects appear to create new possibilities for action during the highlighted moments of potential dynamic transformation?
3. How might these transformations be materially confirmed in future instances of a practice?

These questions conclude the path to the totality of the literate experience: they, when approached after the conclusion of the first two steps of the process, highlight the transformation of a literate practice from the perspective of the lived reality, and signal to researchers the ways in which the continued transformation of that practice over time might be productively attended to.

These framings are nebulous, but they are purposefully nebulous. At the heart of ethnomethodological study in the tradition of Garfinkel is the rejection of an express methodology. A methodology should be built, in part, on the phenomenon of interest and the site of study for that interest—an intersection, really, of a disciplinary investigation and the site within which that investigation hap-



pens. So to prescribe a particular methodology in a form such as grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) or ethnography (as framed by Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) would threaten to occlude an important part of the decision-making process in following the phenomenon of interest across sites, lifeworlds, and the lifespan. Each of the framings articulated here is a productive middle space between site- and participant-responsive methodological choice-making and the larger project of examining literate action development through the lifespan. In Part II, I mobilize this logic-in-use across several sites along the lifespan in order to both test the utility of the totality and begin developing lived reality-grounded concepts from which middle-range theories can later emerge.