Writing Development and Life-Course Development: The Case of Working Adults

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Fifty-two-year-old Alejandro Ortega serves as public housing director for a midsized city not far from where he grew up in Iowa. Over the course of his twenty-five-year career in public service, he has written successful grant proposals for awards totaling more than $25 million, awards that have secured a variety of goods and services including construction supplies, literacy tutoring, wheelchairs, maternal education, and mental health assistance. He also mentors other grant writers on the housing staff, teaching them a writing strategy that he calls "making the case." When asked how he learned to "make the case," Mr. Ortega first referred not to his schooling (which included earning a master's degree in urban planning) but to this childhood memory:

> In growing up I noted that my father was active in the Mexican American community. There were things that were not going well in the community, and people would come to my father with problems. How do I file the papers to become a citizen? How do I get the assistance that I need? My son is in trouble with the police. So I saw what he did for people. He was a spokesperson for the community. So I guess I got that orientation. It's all a matter of making the case, and I like it.

This account brings attention to powerful aspects of writing development that are easy to miss when developmental models are too simple, too narrow, too linear, or too disconnected from context. Mr. Ortega's model locates the beginnings of his adult

grant writing expertise in orientations passed to him in childhood as he observed his father respond to neighbors in need and take action on their behalf. Long before encountering the genre of the grant proposal, Mr. Ortega experienced the forms of life that would give that vehicle meaning, value, and attraction as he also gained early access to connections between rhetorical efforts—making the case—and their outcomes for people. Above all, Mr. Ortega was given means to understand early on that his own writing development could be tied to the human development of those around him and that they could develop together.

This chapter explores the writing development of working adults through the lens of human development, drawing specifically on insights from multidisciplinary studies of life-course human development (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2004; Sørensen, Weinert, & Sherrod, 1986). This scholarship, located in such fields as genetics, sociology, history, and psychology, offers rich conceptual guidance for lifespan writing research. Across fields, life-course development research focuses on change and aging as continual, multidimensional and mutually influencing processes that are in analyzable relationships to processes and changes in wider environments. This work emphasizes how development comes to people through the roles they play or are expected to play at different times of life; the historical events to which they are exposed; and the reconfigured meanings and potentials that accumulate around these experiences (Elder, 1999; Elder & Conger, 2000; Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004). This orientation resists a view of human development as a timeless, universal, unidirectional, stable, or normative property of individuals. Rather development is defined in terms of changes that occur in relationships between people and their life worlds over time, changes that gather lasting consequence for the workings of those relationships going forward (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005; Bronfenbrenner, 2004). Human development, from this perspective, is a deeply interdependent endeavor, what psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) calls an ecological endeavor, in which one's developmental efforts and outcomes are constituted with and through the lives and events to which one is connected (also see Elder & Rockwell, 1979). Development is reciprocally realized and maintained, outwardly as well

as inwardly motivated, temporally situated, and, in essence, an ongoing process of adaptation that shares its forms, meanings, and potentialities with its contexts. Life-course researchers are committed to applying this perspective even when their studies or interventions focus on particular age groups or present-tense situations (Sørensen et al., 1986).

Life-course developmental research, both sociological and psychological, pays attention to people's patterns of exposure to enduring and changing environments and to the significance of place in developmental processes. It also offers a complex, multi-dimensional concept of time and timing as central to the contours of development. For the analyst, this means that development can be approached not merely in terms of biological or chronological age but in terms of roles and expectations that society associates with different stages of life (Elder, 1994; Elder & Giele, 2009). How a person's life course conforms with or deviates from the conventional expectations of social age carries implications for development (Settersten, 2004; also see Mayer, 2009). So too does the timing of one's birth and how one is moving through (and contributing to) large- and small-scale historical events and change. Anyone's life trajectories, including his or her choices and actions, will be in relationship to these multiple dimensions of time, timing, transition, and reciprocal change (Elder, 1998). So too will the emergence of individual dispositions—what Bronfenbrenner (2004, p. 97) calls "structuring proclivities" or "instigative characteristics"—which help to animate, mediate, and modulate developmental processes of self and others. Disposi-tions must be treated not as innate features of personality but as performances of adjustment across time, change, and contexts. Also contributing to developmental ecologies and outcomes are members of one's "social convoy" (families, community members, school and work associates) and the ways those people develop from their historical and social positions and environmental experiences (Antonucci, Fiori, Birditt, & Jackey, 2010; Moen & Hernandez, 2009). In this framework, human development becomes both a project and a reflexive product of social demands and experience (Heinz & Krüger, 2001). It is reflected in the range of socially contributive activities that an individual can instigate, coordinate, and maintain with increasing success.

Using the term *life-course* vs. *lifespan* development is a deliberate choice in this chapter as the aim is to bring attention to social structure as an active agent in the formation of individual literacy. In anyone's development one can discern what Mayer (2003) has called a patterned expression of social structure. This structure does not determine development but seriously conditions it as individuals participate in a social order across time. Life-course perspectives emphasize how earlier events influence later events and how getting selected for different roles and strata affects development. One can read from a developmental history the way a person has accommodated social norms. "Life course" denotes a difference from a "lifespan" perspective, preferred in the fields of biology and psychology, where the focus is more on the ontogenesis of development and the physical and cognitive structures and functions that change over time. But these two perspectives can be complementary and have been productively fused, for instance, in the work of the brilliant psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, whose concepts are explored later in this chapter.

When applied analogically, the life-course orientation has much to offer the field of writing studies. It helps to get beyond treating writing ability as a skill set that accumulates as a property of the individual—a view that dominates curriculum, assessment, policy, and public perception. But this orientation also has something important to say to those who take a more contextual approach to writing, as it eschews a view of context as a container or social address that emits influence on people in some kind of predictable (but not deeply examined or explained) way (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). Rather analysts must scour contexts for evidence of developmental processes occurring (or not) as part of historically specific systems of people, places, and times. From this perspective, contexts are understood as constituents (indeed even beneficiaries) of individuals' development. This dynamic perspective brings attention to how people develop—or not—together (i.e., parent and child; teacher and student; colleague and colleague; writer and reader) and how real development registers as change not only in one's self but also in one's environment. Development is action, not a state of being. Such an active and outward-looking view of development is an obviously appeal-

ing lens for our purposes here, as writing, in its barest elements, projects language outward toward responsive others and, as a set of speech acts, bends toward altering worlds or possible worlds even as it changes a writer in the process.

Life-course scholarship, then, provides analytical frameworks that are relevant and resonant for literacy researchers even as it compels us to adopt more longitudinal, multifaceted, and integrated approaches to writing development. This orientation asks us to look broadly for life events and experiences that trigger and suppress writing development and to consider what stays stable and what changes in writing development (including when, where, why, and under what conditions). This orientation also requires us to approach writing development more collectively and interrelationally than we typically do, considering how people's development is linked to the developmental conditions and gains of those around them. It invites us to pay attention to phenomena that involve times, timing, place, duration, spacing, order, role, transition, variance, process, context, system, action, and change.

This chapter tries, then, to bring some of these conceptual tools of life-course studies to bear on processes of adult writing development. It is based on a qualitative reanalysis of in-depth interviews I conducted between 2005 and 2012 with sixty adults ages 25 to 80 who were employed in a range of public- and private-sector jobs or in volunteer civic positions that required them to write for a minimum of 15 percent of the workday and, in most cases, much more than that. They held jobs in a wide range of enterprises—health care, insurance, finance, accounting, business, farming, ministry, public relations, technology, education, law, military, science, politics, social service, public policy, art, publishing, and communications, among others. They served at various ranks, from entry level to supervisory, and in large and small concerns. Their length of employment ranged from a few months to more than thirty years. The original research project for which the interviews were collected sought to track relationships between reading and writing in the everyday lives of writing-intensive individuals and the effects of writing intensity on the ways these individuals understood and valued their literacy. The study was published as *The Rise of Writing: Redefining*

Mass Literacy (2015). The focus of that study was not explicitly on writing development; however, conversations did focus quite a bit on how, over time, people learned to do the writing they were currently pursuing. In addition, several interview questions invited wide-ranging reflections about the meaning and value of writing across the lifetime. (For the value of retrospective life accounts for life-course research, see Elder, 1998; also Cohler & Hostetler, 2004.)

As I engaged with the other scholars represented in this volume in exploring writing development from a lifespan perspective, I wondered what this existing interview data might yield for our collective purposes. I decided to reanalyze the interviews for patterns and processes of writing development, even as I recognized the limitations of the study's original design for such purposes. Obviously had writing development been the explicit focus of the inquiry, the design of the study would have been more inclusive; different questions would have been asked; and participation would have been organized around cohorts and convoys to allow more systematic comparisons and contrasts of people's experiences across time. Instead, by intention, the original study excluded people who did little or no writing on a daily basis and focused instead on adults who did a lot of writing for work. Consequently, the participants had higher levels of education and higher-paying jobs than the population overall. So what is presented here comes with some challenges in design, interview format, and participant representation. But with those limitations stated, and even acknowledging the security that higher education and employment can provide, adult writing still emerged in the new analysis as sensitive to change, vulnerabilities, and shifting dependencies—all of which mattered, for better or worse, to how people experienced writing development and its outcomes. Indeed I hope it will prove an asset to theory development that individuals in this study had such sustained exposure to powerful processes of writing development across multiple and diverse places and times. At the very least, the fact that the interviews, even unintentionally, contained references to development suggests how deeply developmental processes are embedded in routine writing experiences and self-reflection about them.

Workplaces as Sites of Writing and Human Development

In contemporary workplaces, writing is both a means and an end of production. Particularly as the country's economic base has shifted over the last seventy years away from the manufacturing of things and toward the providing of services, writing has become a dominant form of labor for millions of Americans. In many public and private concerns, written texts are the only products made. It is not unusual for people in many occupations to spend three, five, eight, or more hours a day with their hands on keyboards and their minds on audiences. As a result, the development of writing—as a human resource and a transactional product—has come to be built into the structures and processes of many businesses and institutions, embedded in routine activities of planning, production, and oversight. It is through these larger productive efforts that individual writing development emerges—not as an explicit goal of the workplace but as a by-product or residue of work, as people labor to write in rhetorically consequential conditions with powerful technologies at hand and with regular invitations to reflect, revise, and talk about writing. In these conditions, people find their writing literacy shaped and often amplified by the economic, political, and cultural power of the groups for whom and with whom they work. But, in these conditions, access to instruction, opportunity, and reward for writing are stratified as a matter of economic principle—dependent on one's position in the production process—and also highly susceptible to disruption, change, and, of course, cessation, as workplaces adapt (or not) to shifting economic, technological, and political conditions. Workplaces, then, provide especially clear windows into the powerful yet often fragile ecological processes that feed and condition writing development.

The Role of Roles in Workplace Writing

One of the main tenets of life-course scholarship is that human development is catalyzed and modulated by the social roles one plays or is expected to play across the lifespan (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elder & Giele, 2009; Kohli, 1986; Sørensen, 1986). Roles

situate people in particular activities and sets of obligations or cultural regimes that demand, invite, or suppress particular kinds of growth and experience. While often congruent with certain stages of life (i.e., youth, middle age, old age) the multiple and simultaneous roles most people play in families, communities, and workplaces condition developmental trajectories and possibilities even as they interact with one another. Roles in some sense are opportunity structures for development and, as such, are one of the biggest sources of developmental variation and stratification.

As a lens for approaching writing development, role lends much conceptual assistance. The role(s) one occupies at work position writers within particular hierarchies or networks of production; dictate the amount and timing and genres of their writing; set the audiences they address; and determine the convoys of other writers with whom they move, among other variables. Roles also have implications for gaining access or not to tools, assistance, learning, and feedback that can matter to writing development. Roles are not static. In the workplace, promotions, staff reductions, reorganization, the arrival of new technologies and other innovations—not to mention the loss or change of jobs— can alter work roles and the role of writing in work. Roles are often the prisms through which general events in the immediate or global environment are refracted into an individual's writing context. In sum, roles are one of the major sources of dynamism and contingency in adult workplace writing development.

Consider the following observation of Anne Schmidt, who, when I interviewed her in 2005, was 36 years old and running her own one-person freelance writing business. Over the previous fourteen years she had held five different positions in both mid-sized and large organizations in the East and Midwest, working as a technical writer or editor in the areas of media, software, finance, and academia. Here Schmidt recalls her first full- time job out of college. For one year in the early 1990s, she was on the staff of a national optometry trade journal in New York City. "My job," she explained, "was to write little blurby pieces, captions, feature articles, that kind of work" and went on to disclose the role of roles in workplace writing.

I was the low person when I started out. Above me there were other people who wrote their own stories who had more seniority than I did. They didn't particularly oversee what I did. But supervising the staff was an executive editor, a managing editor, and also an editor-in-chief. The executive editor did the first-level edit and proofreading. The managing editor took care of the production part of it. And the editor-in-chief signed off on all the galleys. She and I had a very close relationship. She sat two desks away from me and I could talk to her. If I had a concern about a piece of information I was trying to communicate I would bring it to her attention. So we would collaborate on that sort of thing all the time. But often I was in a position of being asked to do a final proofing of everybody's work at the galley stage. This editor would come to me and say that she would like another set of eyes on this and she trusted me to do that. So I often ended up proofreading my own work and everybody else's too.

This description makes obvious how roles are partly structural. Schmidt entered a production hierarchy where tasks were segmented by job title and where writing assignments were meted out in part by seniority. But roles also can be emergent, stemming from conditions and relationships particular to a setting. These conditions can be material; for instance, the positioning of desks seems integral to the tutor-tutee roles that developed between Schmidt and her editor. But they also can be political, as when Schmidt says she was "in a position of being asked" to help the editor with proofreading. So while occupying a structural role as "the low person," Schmidt's collaborative relationship with the chief editor brought a reciprocal obligation. As a result, she crossed the usual organizational lines and gained some oversight over other people's work, as well as her own.

This recollection also shows how even structural roles at work share something of the characteristics of the people who occupy them. Being the "low person" often means being one of the younger people in a setting, part of a complex power dynamic that is associated with any workplace role. This dynamic can invite pedagogical overtures from more seasoned employees but it also sometimes means getting assignments that other people do not want to do. One interviewee described how, in his early years working in the petroleum department of Citibank, he was

made to ghostwrite a condolence letter that was to be addressed from the bank president to the widow of a major client. "The head of the department didn't want to do it so it went all around and way down to the lowest guy in the room," he recalled. At the same time, people of younger age can be perceived to have some advantages over older or more entrenched staff, especially when it comes to knowledge of emerging technology. Here is Schmidt again discussing how she gained her first exposure to desktop publishing while interning, along with her college roommate, at a public television production company:

> One day they said we need somebody to lay out a thirty-page training manual for a session we are having next week, and this is the kind of thing that often fell on interns to do. So my roommate and I took an afternoon off and she showed me everything she knew about how to do desktop publishing. This was back in 1989 when nobody was really doing it. And there is a theme here. Most of what I know how to do has come to me that way.

For people in "higher" positions, the stakes that surround so much workplace writing and the potential for liability if something goes wrong often shape the oversight and mentoring roles they take toward less experienced or subordinate staff. "We have more on the line," explained a senior partner in a midsized accounting firm as to why he and the other partners undertook all the document review, "in case something would get us in trouble or something." Here other supervisors describe the delicate teaching dimensions that accompany their oversight of subordinates' writing, a responsibility that requires metalanguage for writing as well as sensitivity to writing egos:

> If somebody hands me something, I will edit it and go back to their desk or say, here, I made a couple of changes. In some cases I'll say let's do it this way. It's not like I'm gathering people around me and saying here is how we're going to write, although I don't think that's a bad idea. (government unit head)

> I don't use a red pen. I don't highlight. But I suggest. And it might be something like, if I were writing this, I don't think I'd send this out in this form. Look at this. There was a time in my

life when I would have underlined it. I don't do that anymore. (branch manager of a brokerage)

I use a couple of different feedback methods depending on the person. I either sit down with them and review the document, point out some things to them, or I will print the document and put some notes on it and send an email with some feedback. (social service director)

But such give-and-take review was not available in all work environments. Especially where people worked in small or under-funded enterprises, and perhaps where stakes were lower, review of writing was less common. A librarian at a historical society, for instance, discussed how even in the first weeks of his job he was on his own to respond to researchers who inquired about the collections: "In some libraries it was common for supervisors to read letters before they went out but we never had enough people for that." Another interviewee recalled being hired early in his career to write user documentation for a financially failing weather-graphics company: "I made vain attempts to get people to review my work," he said. "Rarely would they read it. But that was okay because customers weren't going to read it either. So if it was wrong it didn't matter."

So roles are partly structural and official. But they also partly partake of the contingent material conditions of the workplaces and their comparative relationships to a wider economy (see Mayer, 2009). Roles also partake of the sociological relationships among individuals who occupy them, including the stereotypical expectations that might be placed on individuals by virtue of their age, race, gender, or standing in a wider society. For writers from groups that are often negatively stereotyped or stigmatized, these expectations can register as differential treatment leading to a sense of heightened pressure. A Latina police detective, aware that some of the people who read her work "might not think I can produce," paid careful attention to her reports. "I try to do them as best I can because sometimes that is all people will see and I'll be judged by that." Her writing efforts could blunt what she saw as gender and race bias. As a result of the care she took, she said, "I probably write better than a lot of other people around here." An African American business professional discussed a

cycle of pressure under which he wrote: "I think I have been very effective but the more effective you are, the more people expect of you. The more effective you are, the more you attain goals and achieve them, the more people will raise the bar. And it's not like people say, that's great. They just raise it again."

Roles, then, and their interactions lend a crucial lens through which to observe writing experience and development. In the broad life course, those I interviewed played a breadwinner role for themselves and dependents; writing at work was a requirement of that general role. But the writing roles they played at work were particular, stratified, fraught, formative, and elastic. Roles position people within sets of formal responsibilities, organizational arrangements, material and political conditions, reciprocating collegial relationships, and cultural biases and changes, among other variables, all of which can shape writing experience and invite and constrain growth. Workplace writing roles and their fluid configurations in different locations introduce inevitable variation into the course of writing development, even as individuals may hold similar job titles or compose in similar genres across contexts or have similar career trajectories. Indeed when we look closely enough we can see that what people write and how they write it will embody an interpretation of role—what it calls for and what it makes possible or not at the time of composition—contributing to individual variation in writing. As the discussion moves to additional processes that feed and condition adult writing development at work, the role of role will continue to be visible in the dynamic.

Historical Times and Timing

One of the most valuable contributions of life-course development research is the way it attends to history, time, and life stage as material influences on human development. In his pioneering studies of children raised during the Great Depression and men inducted into the military during World War II, the developmental sociologist Glen Elder showed how major historical events—and the social disruption and change they can engender—matter (and can matter differently) to individual life outcomes. Life trajectories

and possibilities are nested in interactions between historical time and developmental time (i.e., one's place in the aging process and in the social process). Through his use of longitudinal survey data, Elder documented how the younger a child was when the Depression hit and the older an inductee was when drafted into the military, the more disruptive these events were likely to be on his or her subsequent social, educational, and economic development, in some cases lingering negatively for years to come.

Elder's interest is in how disruptive historical events take people out of their expected life trajectories and put them on a changed path. Many younger children of the Depression were forced to enter the labor market early, forgoing opportunities for additional schooling that older siblings had attained. During the Second World War, older draftees were forced to leave the labor market, interrupting careers and in many cases disrupting the economic well-being of their children and spouses, challenges that affected younger inductees much less.

As Elder's research demonstrates, when events change the life script, considerable adaptation is required. Certainly these themes could be found among the people I interviewed when it came to technological changes that began to disrupt writing practices in the late 1970s and 1980s and continued into the 1990s and beyond. Those of a certain age who had made considerable investment in the practices and technologies of traditional print culture found their literacy skills becoming inadequate if not maladaptive. Many adapted (often with the support of employers who embraced the changes); others did not. Several of those I interviewed lost jobs or were reassigned or fitfully embarked on new learning and relearning during the especially tumultuous years of early personal computing and the emergence of the Internet (for more on this experience, see Selfe & Hawisher, 2004). Some felt they never adequately adapted, including a lawyer, born in 1962, who discussed her research processes, saying: "I can get a lot of statutes and federal materials online now. It saves our firm a lot of money. But I still have a hard time finding them. It is much easier conceptually to do it in the books. I've always been better researching in the books." For several of the older professional men I interviewed, their inability to type was turned from a privilege of status into a dysfunctional drawback

as writing technologies changed, gender expectations changed, and work environments became more fast-paced and competitive. In his mid-fifties, the branch manager of a financial advising firm enrolled in a night class in keyboarding at his local community college. He explained:

> Guys like me have been lucky by surrounding ourselves with smart women who did stuff for us. But my associate is so good she can't waste her time doing what I should be doing. She should be using her full skills, not doing menial things that I can't do. It's just not efficient. But typing is laborious. I'm still not very good at it.

While Elder directs our attention to age differentiation within cultural upheaval to show the influence of history and time in human development, these processes are in fact broad and diffused. All of the accounts I collected about people's writing lives are drenched in historical particularity, demonstrating how trajectories of individual writing development relate to larger cultural and economic developments with which they meld. In other words, writers and their times develop together and with mutual impact. If, as Elder (1994, p. 5) has observed, historical sensitivity helps us see "the impact of changing societies on developing lives," it also helps us see the impact of developing lives on changing societies. So just as we must look at how people of different ages intersect with historical trends, the age of historical trends at the time of the intersection will also matter to developmental trajectories. This is especially true given the technological changes that have helped condition the transformation of writing into a form of mass labor and have catalyzed new capacities of writing for identity formation and political activity. Within these general transformations, the timing of economic and cultural developments and individual writing careers converge.

Consider the remarkable case of Margaret Warrick, who fell into a writing-intense career in the 1970s, as US corporations began pouring new investments into upgrading the training of staff, a transformative process that became critical to competition among technical and other knowledge-reliant industries in this era. Warrick, who had been born in 1951, graduated from col-

lege in 1972 with a degree in elementary education. After taking what she thought would be a temporary summer position within a national telephone company, she was suddenly plucked from her desk and reassigned to the training department, which was undergoing reorganization. She recalled:

> Training was lacking. It was all lecture-based and done by people who used to do the jobs themselves. They knew it was inadequate. So they began grabbing up any employee who had any knowledge at all about education and sending us to classes in adult education. The salaries they were paying for trainers in the corporate world were almost double what teachers were being paid so it was good for me to stay there.

Warrick indeed stayed in this field for most of the rest of her career, although she moved over time from the telephone company to a mutual-fund company and eventually to the headquarters of a national trade organization for credit unions. There she took charge of producing educational materials for thousands of members, boards of directors, and staff. This publishing enterprise, which sold its materials to local credit unions all over the country, remained healthy and busy through the early 1990s. During her more than twenty years in the training field, Warrick was sometimes instructor; sometimes author of instructional material; sometimes researcher of learning effectiveness; a pioneer in organizing and assessing distance education in her field ("it was very antiquated when you look back on it") and eventually executive editor of a commercially successful line of credit-union publications, producing dozens of books on as many topics with sales exceeding 100,000 copies. "It was an ever-evolving process," she reflected, "because things never did stay the same for any great period of time."

By the time of our interview in the mid-2000s, book sales had sunk, the organization's educational activities had moved on-line, and Warrick had been recruited to a different position: maintaining the integrity of her organization's management software and database. Interestingly, her new position was created out of the odd millennial crisis known as Y2K, a reference to a glitch in the coding of computers' calendar systems that people feared would wreak havoc worldwide when the century ended. She explained:

So in 1999 when Y2K was coming around the corner they realized that the software we were running was not Y2K-compliant and, besides, the CFO had a new concept for how to run the association. So they pulled me out of education and put me in charge of the transition from the legacy software to the new software. So these days I do a lot more writing of procedures— here is exactly what you need to do to run a report, how to get that information you need and understand it. I write for senior vice presidents and I write for clerks. My writing has changed so much. No more examples and lengthy descriptions. It needs to be quick to read and cleared of clutter. Now that I think about it, it is such a swing.

As we can see, the forms of Warrick's writing are stimulated, sustained, and repurposed as a function of the economic histories of the institutions in which she works. As corporations strive to grow, compete, and transform, they recruit and develop the mental and scribal skills of employees in particular ways. Warrick was not the only individual I interviewed who found herself writing as part of an emergent enterprise that required her to invent writing procedures and even text types from scratch. A man I interviewed, born in 1934, who ran an advertising agency, remembered teaching himself how to write and produce live television commercials as TV and TV advertising emerged in the 1950s. Another man I interviewed, born in 1946, worked for the credit-card department of a major bank that was internationalizing in the 1970s. He traveled to Europe and South America to enlist bank customers. With limited language skills, handwritten notes, ad hoc banking forms, and a telex machine, he tried to build a workable infrastructure for credit exchange. Interestingly, he referred to this task as "heavy writing" (by which he meant the weight more than the amount).

On the other end of the spectrum, younger people I interviewed, who were born well into the so-called information age, spoke of the sometimes paralyzing glut of other people's texts that surround their writing efforts, texts that serve as potential sources for their writing and also as competitors for attention (Lanham, 2006; Spinuzzi, 2008). Rather than invention of new text types, the situation seems to call at times for the deconstruction of old ones. Here a communications specialist for a state government

agency, born in 1981, talks about the potential exhaustion of his bread-and-butter text: the press release.

> Some people say the press release is dead. It could be. I'm not sure. Everybody writes them. Everybody sends them. There is no club you have to join to send out a press release. I am sure with email and fax the news organizations get more of them than they know what to do with. So maybe from that standpoint the formalized here's-the-story press release might be going away and maybe there will be more of an emphasis on building relationships and feeding [reporters] raw materials. Hey, we're doing this and that. Here's some really neat stuff. Maybe it's not formalized as a press release.

Historical processes and events (and especially the ongoing history of literacy itself) shape the horizons of writing development both as a shared cultural resource and as an individual set of experiences. As we have seen, these horizons can take their character from forces made up of advancing and receding economic currents, advancing and receding writing technologies, and advancing and receding genres, among other factors. Anyone's writing development will bear these (and other) striations of history.

Economic forces are vital to these processes but are not the only factors that matter. Cultural and political developments are also consequential to the literacy life course. Particularly given their collective character, cultural and political movements in different historical times help to organize social convoys of people who develop their literacy together within a particular historical horizon of consciousness.

As but one example, LGBTQIA visibility and activism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been broadly influential in this regard (Pritchard, 2016). One woman I interviewed, Stella Kind, explained to me how her writing development rested inside a local instantiation of the queer rights movement, an organization that was using writing and performance to support individuals in the process of coming out. When I interviewed Kind in 2012, she was 25 years old and working as a bank teller, but our conversations turned quickly to the writing she was doing outside of work. From childhood Kind had written fiction,

poetry, and screenplays, and had pursued a creative writing degree in college. But her creative development had recently taken a significant leap after she joined an LGBTQIA narrative activist-writers' group that had organized several years previously in her local community. Group meetings, where she said she found unconditional acceptance for the first time in her life, were giving her the courage to write explicitly as a lesbian. The group, which Kind called "family," consisted of writers, musicians, artists, teachers, and others who shared their works in progress and were coauthoring a collaborative, mixed-genre book for use by other LGBTQIA narrative groups. Kind explained that whereas, as a younger person, she had often restricted her writing to what she called "fantasy" and "escapist" genres, she was now venturing into riskier, more meaningful nonfiction prose that she intended to publish. Here we can see both the critical role of social convoys and the way that writing development, like human development overall, involves a changed relationship between a person and a wider society, with implications for both going forward. She said:

> Part of my growing as a person has been to share really vulnerable parts of myself with other people and realize that they will love me on the other side of it. And I think that the difference between my writing now versus even two years ago is that I think I have seen how rewarding it is to share myself with other people and have them understand more about me, understand more about themselves, understand more about the world. So one thing that I feel that my writing is doing is helping people, whether that is by seeing that someone who identifies as queer is worthy of love and kindness and compassion and isn't just a piece of gum on the bottom of somebody's shoe, or by learning more about how gender is complex and not binary. But if I didn't have the group supporting me, I wouldn't be able to write what I am writing now.

Perhaps more acutely than any other tool of life-course analysis, historical perspectives illuminate how writing development is a contextual and relational phenomenon, suspended in material and interactional processes and efforts that are dynamic, contingent, collectively produced, and mutually sustained. Our capacity to write cannot be found in us: it lies between—in our relationships to the contexts through which we live. The historical

events that are part of these contexts serve as powerful magnets, organizing and disrupting the timing and paths of writing development. Through historical awareness, literacy researchers can learn much about how economic, cultural, and political networks in particular times (and places) will carry, feed, divert, expand, contract, reroute, make possible, make impossible, in short, delineate anyone's literacy life course.

Dispositions for Writing Development

This final section returns to the brilliant research of developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, whose ecological perspective on human growth brings attention to how individuals contribute to their own psychological development. At various ages and stages, beginning from birth, individuals work deliberately, selectively, and progressively with their environments, human and nonhuman, to gain what they need for social learning and psychological growth, using what Bronfenbrenner (2004, p. 97) calls "developmentally instigative characteristics" of their personhood to fulfill these efforts. Of course, because environments will vary in their capacity and manner of response to these characteristics, such attempts will have unpredictable and varied developmental outcomes for individuals and environments. Still, Bronfenbrenner calls on life-course researchers to pay rigorous, systematic and comparative attention to what individuals are doing in their contexts that have developmental implications, including how they use cumulative experience to formulate and apply beliefs about how to progress. He calls these orientations structuring proclivities or, more generally, dispositions. While dispositions overlap with more traditional psychological concepts like motivation, efficacy, or personality, they are always constituted in interactions. Dispositions often gather continuity and stability over time; yet they are an ever-renewing coproduction of persons and their lifeworlds—constituted out of inner and outer resources, permeable, dynamic, and performative. Human development, then, is associated with an ability to solicit support for one's growth from the environment and to coordinate one's own development with the development of others.

While Bronfenbrenner focused on young children and their interactions in contexts of caregiving, his concepts lend fascinating direction for theories of writing development across the lifespan. What are psychological characteristics that enhance writing development at different stages of life? In what kinds of contexts do they emerge? Concomitantly, what characteristics of writing development enhance personal development over time and in what kinds of contexts do they emerge? Systematic answers to these questions must await further ecologically oriented writing research. (For important leads, see Herrington & Curtis, 2000.)

Here I am able to offer only rudimentary and exploratory observations about writing dispositions as they arose, by happenstance, as ancillary or implied topics in the interviews. This section in fact depends on a serendipitous aspect of the original interview project by which some of the participants chose to range widely over their pasts—including childhood experiences—in order to address basic interview questions about how they learned to do their workplace writing. In other (also serendipitous) cases, interviewees chose to expand narratively in their answers to basic demographic questions having to do with the work histories of earlier generations or their own educational histories. Where these elaborations occurred, interviews provided glimpses into formative and enduring aspects of writing development. In this analysis, as incomplete as it must be, I tried to capture references to dispositions that people said they brought from other contexts into their workplace writing as well as dispositions that they said developed from force of writing at work that then carried over into other aspects of life.

As with the experience of the grant writer with whom this chapter began, several of the people I interviewed linked their interests or skills in writing to formative childhood experiences at home or school. Two men, one a public information officer for a high-profile municipal police department and the other a policy analyst for the human resources department in a large institution, both linked their orientations to writing to the adaptations they made as children when they were forced by family circumstances to move around a lot. Here the police officer reflects on his experience as a child of divorce, who lived intermittently with his mother in the South and his father in the North, and its impact

on his adult ability to communicate with a wide range of people in his public writing:

> I really think I'm the person I am because I had to adapt to different school environments, different people, and just a whole different set of circumstances. I was a kid having to make some adult-type adaptations. As time went on, moving didn't scare me and it didn't detract from my ability to do what I needed to do. It was definitely one of those developmental plusses. So it helps me now when I must write to a wide audience with different educational levels and backgrounds, that 80-year-old grandpa or that 16-year-old high school student who is assigned by his teacher to read the paper. My audience is not just local. It expands out across the United States and even internationally. So I have to be conscious of that too.

Below a human resources planner talks about a relationship between his childhood background and the writing niche he developed in his department, specializing in what he referred to as "change management." Having lived in five different states by the time he was 13 because of his father's employment changes, he now writes texts that guide employees through new policies and procedures or departmental reorganizations:

> If I send out an email, right in the first paragraph I will say that I recognize this is going to be difficult for you or I understand that this is going to be a challenge and that we are trying to do everything we can to minimize that. I try to talk at a certain level. I try not to condescend. But I think it starts with acknowledging the difficulty. I learned to do that by moving around so much, constantly finding myself in new situations where you have to take the lay of the land and be sensitive to people's emotional and psychological position, where they are coming from. I don't think it was ever a conscious thing but I just got very used to it and it almost became second nature.

This idea of a second nature for writing arose in other interviews as well, sometimes attributed to language environments in early childhood households as well as to a growing sense of a match between background experiences and certain kinds of writing. In the following fascinating assessment of her ability to carry out her workplace writing, a 36-year-old governmental

policy analyst discusses the deep, interflowing origins of her writing disposition:

> I can't say that I ever consciously learned to do this kind of writing. It probably had something to do with growing up with parents who had a wide range of interests and strong backgrounds in writing. I was always being asked: Why did that happen? You did something. It didn't come out the way you wanted it to. Why not? So I became the kind of person who thought ahead of the consequences of my actions. My mom says I am a jack of all trades and master of none but by having that broad, diverse background you're able to start to see where things have some similarities or where they touch on each other and what's the tangential relationship of things and then you can kind of start to form the broad, overarching view of how the interrelatedness works and then you have to try to somehow concisely put that on paper. I think that's why in general I tend to think about things for a long period of time but write for a short period of time because I'm spending my time forming those relationships.

All of these accounts together provide insight into how early life experiences can be creatively transformed into productive orientations to writing (see Gonzáles, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). These experiences range far wider than what we normally think of as literacy experiences, even though they hold the seeds for writing. As a result of childhood experiences, these writers gathered to themselves enduring feelings, realizations, habits of mind, and sets of commitments that—when given the opportunity—could be melded into dispositions for particular kinds of writing and writing careers and turned into particular writing strategies. Certainly their accounts force an expansion of what is considered transfer in writing, as not merely an ability to carry over writing experiences from one context to another or to translate background knowledge from one task to the next but rather a more abstract ability to turn raw experiences into "structuring proclivities" for literacy learning and, indeed, textuality itself. As a field we need to continue to expand the search (and what we consider searchable) for the psychological processes that make up life-to-writing transformations, transfers, and amalgamations. And we need to recognize that what may well be at the center

of writing development are opportunities to seek and find one's second nature in the world of writing.

Before leaving the topic of writing dispositions, however, attention turns to an inverse process by which writing orientations developed through workplace practice are incorporated into a person's more general dispositions toward life. While in the standard interview protocol I asked people how their workplace writing might influence writing, reading, or speaking in other arenas of life, some people chose to answer more generally, addressing how their work and work writing affected them as people. In these usually short and offhand remarks are glimpses into how routine daily engagement with powerful institutional or professional dispositions embodied in work roles, genres, and production processes get under the skin, so to speak. Talking about the imprint that fact-based writing had on the way he engaged with friends and even family, an FBI agent remarked: "It's just habit-forming. If you do something for ten hours a day it is going to carry over into the rest of your life." The software manager encountered earlier in this article said the technical process-base of her current writing "makes me left-brained in the way I manage the household, negotiate an airport or a foreign country, how I put together IKEA furniture, how I learn or how I encounter any situation that is new to me. That process is just so engrained." A policy analyst who had been studying environmental issues for the past five years as part of her job responsibilities observed: "The more you learn about a subject, the more you start seeing things. Once you learn about nonpoint pollution and the fact that cows should not be standing in a stream the less you start seeing nice pastoral scenes and the more you are like, get those cows out of the stream. In some ways you know more than you want to." Relatedly and unsurprisingly, several people told me that their political viewpoints had changed as a result of the writing they did at work. Here a longtime executive budget officer explains:

> The work I do on state budgets has made me more moderate in some ways politically. You start to realize how difficult the process is, how complicated, the sheer number of deserving people and social institutions and costs. As a child of the sixties you begin to realize that some of the solutions people thought

up then were simple-minded. The people I related to then would scare the hell out of me now.

But the most mentioned impact of workplace writing was on general language dispositions, particularly as they pertained to interactions with family. The care that must be taken with language at work, the thought that must go into it, seems to carry over into habits of personal interaction. Here are two typical examples: "I would say I'm more conscious of what I am saying and how I am saying it," explained a finance clerk. "I take more time to think about my words instead of just blurting out whatever is on my mind. It may partly be age and maturity but I think my work has helped my communication skills with my husband." The public information officer for a police department said: "I am more thoughtful now. I used to shoot from the hip with comments or the way I'd react to things. Now due to the writing, and talking with the media, there is more thought put into what I'm saying, whether it's in this job or at home."

This has been a brief foray into relationships between human development and writing development as they pertain to the emergence of adult writing dispositions. Though the evidence presented here is scanty, it does point us, as ecological theory would suggest, to look for interanimating processes by which psychological growth feeds and directs writing growth and vice versa. We have much more searching to do within the experiential and action contexts of the life course to identify these processes, their exact workings, their patterns, and their consequences. But as we find them we will begin to fill in the neglected story of the psychology of mass writing and the contributions it is making right now to social, intellectual, and cultural growth among individuals, families, and societies. We will begin to appreciate the intergenerational, long-term, and deeply contextual origins of writing dispositions. We also may reach clearer understandings of how people at different ages are appropriating life events for literacy growth, and consider how workplaces serve (and fail to serve) the larger projects of individual human growth.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined three fundamental concepts from life-course research—roles, historical timing, and dispositions—that offer generative directions for further research in writing development. Life-course perspectives—social and psychological—expand the lens through which we look *for* and *at* development and encourage a much more relational way of thinking about it. The adult working writer is an accessible figure for exploring the slow-growing, dynamic, fragile dimensions of development because of the contexts in which they work and write across the lifespan. When writing functions as an engine of economic development, as it does in many situations today, writers are necessarily caught up in the propulsion of those forces. Development emerges from particular—and stratified—locations in organizations and from expectations associated with particular jobs and occupations, factors that set the composing conditions that accompany daily writing tasks, including their rhythms, their genres, and the degree of authority and control they offer. At the same time, economic processes rarely stand still, so writing development among working adults will occur in contexts of change and disruption and will require adaptation—conditions that have been especially palpable in the past several decades. The longer the life, the more of this experiential history accumulates, as work, life, and writing shape dispositions and orientations going forward.

While the experience of the adult working writer may not have obvious parallels to that of the student writing in school, it is still worth considering the relevance of these perspectives to the teaching and learning mission. The more narrowly we treat curriculum or classroom context as the focus of inquiry, explanation, or assessment, the more likely we will be missing the dynamic life processes that flow in and around teachers, students, and administrators at school. Developmental gains will be more robust and life-lasting when these processes are recognized, harnessed, and incorporated into what counts as teaching and learning. Among the questions that life-course perspectives have raised in my own mind as a teacher of writing are these: How is my students' development related to the institution where we

teach and learn? How is my students' development related to my own development as a writer and teacher? Where do my areas of underdevelopment influence shared experiences and outcomes? How and when do students enter into one another's writing development and with what effects? How do teacher and student locations in the life course and in historical times matter to what is happening in the classroom? How do social-age expectations function as resources or hindrances in our work together? What roles are available to students when they write? What kinds of dispositions are invited to take shape? How do their interpretations of those available roles and dispositions matter to writing performance? How does writing development register as change in the world of the classroom and beyond?

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