

## CHAPTER 13.

# WRITING IN TRANSITIONS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

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Lifespan Writing Research (hereafter, LWR) has focused on observing writing practices over time as they move and change throughout the lifespan. Dippre and Phillips (2020) refer to the lifespan as the “entirety of a lifetime” as it unfolds “across the many social spheres that writers participate in” (p. 5-6). They call for both life-long and life-wide inquiry that leads us to observe the developing writer’s multiple activities in their naturally dynamic and not necessarily linear forms.

Observing writing development along the entire lifespan is a challenging task. That is why LWR has regarded itself as a methodologically eclectic approach. This heterogeneity allows us to build the whole picture of writing development collaboratively. There are, in fact, different angles through which we can observe the lifespan of a writer and how their writing practices change all along the way. We can look at how writers master different genres or focus on how knowledge about writing is transferred from one context to another. This chapter contributes to this choral effort by reflecting on one particular angle of the human life course: transition.

Life-course transitions, such as changing jobs or moving from school to the workplace, could be a valuable entry point from which to observe developing writers’ challenges, struggles, achievements, and learnings across time. While some studies on transitions rely on rigid understandings of change—as some authors have already pointed out (see Quinn, 2010; Colley, 2007; 2010)—we would like to explore other approaches that give us some analytical and methodological tools to explore transitions in alignment with lifespan writing research’s main insights. This chapter will examine some of the latest contributions to the comprehension of transitions, mainly based on feminist theory and on critical concepts from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), highlighting the notion of *transition as becoming* and the inherent diversity of life course transitions.

We will consider several aspects of this diversity, including diversity in contexts, identities, and time, drawing on insights from New Literacy Studies. Finally, we will discuss some implications of these perspectives on transitions for LWR methodologies.

## WHAT IS TRANSITION?

Transitions have been traditionally referred to as changes in the life course that involve shifts of context, identities, and social roles (Colley, 2010; Ecclestone et al., 2010). Some transitions are regulated by educational institutions, such as passing from kindergarten to school, from primary to secondary education, or from secondary school to university. These movements encompass new identities and writing practices that shape and are shaped by those contexts. Other transitions, such as the one from single to married status, involve our social relationships and inscribe them in a civil law framework, shaping, for instance, the way we are referred to in legal documents. A job change implies getting involved in a new community in new roles and perhaps writing emails from a different interpersonal position. All these life course changes imply identity negotiations, as transitioning subjects change their social roles and the way they engage in daily activities with others. They also concern writing practices, as writers engage in different literacy events while transitioning across contexts and identities.

Within the literature on educational research and practice, transitions have been widely understood as periods of crisis. Researchers have depicted them as delimited periods of intense change that lead to a final stage of stability and adaptation to a new culture or social status. This comprehension of transitions has one of its roots in the concept of *rites of passage*, first introduced by Van Gennep (1960). He understood that human development is structured by a series of passages that function as markers of life change. According to Van Gennep, transitions follow a pattern of pre-liminal rites (rites of separation from a previous stage); liminal rites (during the transitional phase); and post-liminal rites, those unfolding when the individual is incorporated into a new world and status. Some works on “liminality” have paid attention to the “spaces in between,” foregrounding the uncertainty and indeterminacy of the process (Gourlay, 2009; Turner, 1995). Other studies describe transitions as a sequence of stages, such as Nicholson and West’s (1995) description of the transition to higher education organized in the phases of preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization. Thus, transitions have been seen as time-limited periods preceded and followed by periods of stability. The extension of this period has also been outlined with specific landmarks. For example, Coertjens et al. (2017) define the end of the transition to higher education when the moment of the first assessment comes.

These fixed depictions tend to neglect the fact that change and movement are constantly unfolding and disregard individuals' positionings in the social structure as if people all have the same opportunities, social repertoires, and economic capital when they go through transitions.

Since the pivotal work of Van Genneep, it has been recognized that transitions involve a social component in the form of social expectations and regulations. They are often socially regulated by institutions such as schools or the civil law. These institutions hold discourses and ideologies that also shape our understandings and expectations. Just as we could sustain an "autonomous model" of literacy (Street, 2005) by disregarding social conditions and cultural understandings of what it is to read and write, we could also do the same with transitions by depicting them according to what is expected from a normative perspective. The representation of a linear progression from kindergarten to primary school, from secondary education to higher education, and so forth tends to subsume many people's diverse realities into one universal process, often regarded as *the* successful progression.

As many authors point out, such a view neglects many experiences, struggles, and trajectories (Quinn, 2010; Colley, 2007; Nordquist, 2017). The fact that transitions are socially determined makes them highly diverse depending on social class, gender, ethnicity, among others. At the same time, even though there are social expectations regarding when and how specific transitions "should" occur, such as the age when students "should" enter university, contemporary individuals' trajectories are more diverse. People are more likely to change jobs as the labor market is more dynamic (Ecclestone, 2009), and students traditionally excluded from higher education are now entering university (Cupitt & Trinidad, 2017; Lillis, 2001; Villalobos et al., 2017).

This scenario pushes us to build new understandings of transitions in the lifespan. Recent research describes transitions as more fluid processes using terms like *transition as becoming* (Gale & Parker, 2014) or *life as a transition* (Colley, 2007). From this perspective, transitions are not described as shifts from one homogeneous and stable context or identity to another; rather, transitioning is a permanent condition of people's lives. We will discuss some of the contributions of this approach to transition, and their potential usefulness for studying writing across the lifespan.

## **TRANSITION AS BECOMING: A RHIZOMATIC UNDERSTANDING**

Many recent works in transitions rely on the notions of *rhizome* and *becoming* developed by Deleuze & Guattari (see Amundsen, 2021; Gravett, 2019;

Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). The concept of the *rhizome* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) refers to a non-linear and non-hierarchical system with multiple entryways and exits. This helps us think of transitions as nonpredictable *becomings* that can spread in various directions. Changes of context and identities across time should not be depicted as predictable or occurring in developmental stages but as dynamic processes that vary from person to person. This contrasts with approaches to writing development which compare two points (e.g., primary and secondary school) and assume the latter will be superior (Smith 2020). This common expectation fails to acknowledge the multiple writing contexts in which students participate (Ivanič et al., 2009; Barton & Hamilton, 1998) and the many influences on their writing abilities beyond school.

We suggest that transitions in the lifespan should be understood as processes within a more complex orchestra of simultaneous changes and becomings, which can evolve in multiple ways. Mainstream paths in transitions, such as from secondary to higher education, are not the only “correct” or “logical” sequence. Seeing transitions as rhizomatic pushes us to regard them without a pre-defined idea of their direction and order. Expectations of what a “typical” transition looks like are significantly determined by our social position and views.

Trajectories such as school to workplace, job to further education, or in and out of university are common for people traditionally not represented in mainstream educational paths. Such is the case of Kurdish women refugees entering and leaving formal education in cycles described by Mojab (2006) and analyzed by Colley (2007; 2010), or the working-class and first-generation students interviewed by Quinn et al. (2005), who dropped out of university before completion but desired to return. Students from our current research on transitions after school in Chile also have shown far from linear trajectories. One of our participants, a student in her last year of secondary education, is not planning to enter university after finishing school but to join her father’s gardening business, which she started to learn at ten-years-old. For her, this choice is compatible with studying in university after a period or while working:

I have to see how I will sort it out because, to be honest, even if I study advertising I would like to keep my job maintaining gardens because it is what I know most about and if it comes a moment when I am tired of carrying the machines, cutting the grass, the heat and everything, so if it comes the moment when I say, ‘I cannot do it anymore’, I can work in that what I studied.

Transitions have been regarded as shifts of *contexts* and *identities* across time. They are socially regulated and shaped by social expectations, discourses and socially determined possibilities, access, and opportunities. They are concerned

with changes situated in core areas of our human activity; our social practices and the identities that we create within them. A clear understanding of contexts and identities could provide many clues of how to study transitions and writing across the lifespan.

## TRANSITIONS AND CONTEXTS

Transitions, as life-course phenomena, should be regarded from both a *life-long* and *life-wide* perspective in the same way that lifespan writing practices should be (Dippre & Phillips, 2020). The life-wide perspective helps us to see how the multiple contexts in which people engage change simultaneously around significant life transitions. In transition to higher education, for example, this means taking into account not just the movement from school to university but also all the daily activities in different contexts occurring on a smaller scale. This means understanding transitions across the lifespan as multidimensional rather than as a change from one unified context to another.

This multidimensionality has been considered in transition research using metaphors like ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ transitions (Kagan & Neuman, 1998). Vertical transitions indicate movements between more extensive periods of an individual’s life (Zigler & Kagan, 1982), such as the one from primary to secondary education. As they commonly represent progress across educational levels (Johansson, 2006), vertical transitions tend to be regulated by social institutions, such as ministries of education, national curricula, and lifelong learning policies. In contrast, horizontal transitions refer to those movements happening in shorter time frames, even daily, when individuals move across life spheres (Kagan & Neuman, 1998). Another scale is introduced by Spelman Miller & Stevenson (2018) with the idea of micro transitions in writing, referring to the negotiation of different genres, learnings, and modalities or semiotic systems. These various dimensions (vertical, horizontal, micro) require an ecological approach to fully capture them. In this vein, Johansson (2006) highlights the importance of looking at the interactions between different scales of transitions as they occur in the entire experience of individuals. These perspectives suggest a layered idea of writing practices and contexts in transition.

Changes in context are frequently associated with changes in writing practices, a connection highlighted by the New Literacies Studies understanding of literacies as a social practice. One of the central precepts of this approach is that “there are different literacies associated with different domains of life” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 8). The workplace, school, university, home, and health-care, among others, are all different life domains in which we can see a range of literacy practices that materialize in concrete writing events mediated by texts.

Life transitions across time are rarely a movement from just one isolated context to another. On the contrary, when transitions occur, many contextual changes frequently unfold simultaneously. For example, when students move from school to university, they are not just shifting from school culture to university culture; they participate in a more diverse range of social domains such as home and family, political groups, and the workplace. In this vein, depicting “the transition from school to university”—or any other—as a movement between just two homogeneous contexts does not recognize the complexity of human activity and the literacy practices shaping and being shaped by those activities.

### TRANSITIONS AND IDENTITIES

The concept of *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) is also illuminating to understand the relationship between transitions and identity. It refers to the continual production of differentiation in which the self is permanently unfolding in an ongoing process of change. The process of becoming does not begin with a delimited entity; this is not *someone* becoming *someone else*. On the contrary, our entire subjectivity goes through a constant movement of becoming. This means that when we look at people’s life transitions—and writing practices within them—we might want to avoid representations of change as a movement from instability to stability, from struggling to adaptation, or from an unsettled identity to a complete one. Rather, individuals constantly negotiate their identities as they participate in diverse life domains. This understanding pushes us to look at these change processes with an open mindset, without hoping for a “final stage” where the transition is over but looking at transitional movement through more extended observations to see the nuances of changing processes as they unfold through time.

Identity positions us in relationships with others and is built through social participation in concrete activities mediated by cultural tools and artifacts (Russell, 1997). Ivanič (1998) writes of *identification* as the “process whereby individuals align themselves with groups, communities, values, beliefs and practices” (p. 11). Wenger’s (1998) notion of identity as an experience negotiated through participation in communities of practice shows how subtle the edge between identity and context is. Understood in this way, it becomes clear that there are multiple identities as we participate in various life domains.

For example, when students enter university, they are not “becoming somebody” but adding new nuances and possibilities to their multiple identifications with others’ values, beliefs, and discourses, some of which might even conflict with each other, as Lillis (2001) showed in her research with non-traditional students. Similarly, Zavala (2011) explores tensions between Quechua students’

identities and academic cultures. These identity negotiations are a crucial element of any transition and commonly occur in the interaction of artifacts, institutions, and social actors in different positions of power.

Hamilton (2010), analyzing transitions in adult learning, understands identities—following sociocultural theories—as relational in nature, emphasizing how they are built and rebuilt through interaction. She explores transitions into and through the Skills for Life program for adult literacy and numeracy developed in 2001 in the UK and observes how artifacts and social actors mediate the construction of narratives and identities of both students and tutors in the program. She shows how identity is not only in a permanent state of becoming but is also socially and culturally negotiated. Regarding educational transitions, these identity negotiations are frequently determined by institutional narratives about what it is to be, for instance, a university student, or a student in an adult literacy program.

The role of institutional narratives and the *possibilities for self-hood* (Ivanič, 1998) they offer to individuals are key to understanding the multilayered complexities of identity negotiations in transitions. As Ecclestone (2009; Ecclestone et al., 2010) has pointed out, transitions are changes of contexts and identities where individuals have a space for agency but are also regulated by social expectations and institutional constraints. This means that identity negotiations in transitions could be observed in individual participation and interactions and in the relationship with institutional regulations, which are frequently built through cultural artifacts such as texts. In this vein, Hamilton (2010) shows how guidelines, exams, screening tests, program descriptions, etc., in the Skills for Life adult learning program helped to construct institutional narratives and sometimes promoted stigmatized identities. Following Hamilton, it is critical to think about such intersections among texts and socially constructed identities in transitions. We suggest that both a multi-context and a multi-identity approach are needed, allowing us to understand the natural dynamic of these life-course changes and their connections with meaning-making processes through writing.

## TRANSITIONS AND TIME

Time is a fundamental concept for transitions as every transition constitutes changes of contexts or/and identities *over time*. Just as contexts and identities are multiple, time can be conceptualized as multiple and diverse rather than simply linear.

Colley (2010) argues that the most widespread understanding of time in transition research and theory is triadic; time is organized into past, present, and future. For instance, Biesta and Tedder (2007) depict human agency as



iterational orientations (influences from the past), projective orientations (to the future possibilities), and practical-evaluative orientations (regarding the present). From this point of view, agency regards “the formulation of projects for the future and the realization of those projects in the present” (Colley, 2010, p. 134). This understanding, criticized by Colley, shows a positivistic approach to time as a one-direction progression projected according to the individual’s will.

However, time is not necessarily linear but can be perceived in diverse ways in people’s actual experiences. As Tusting (2000) points out following Zerubavel (1981), time can indicate boundaries between one social domain and another. Students inhabit different social roles in higher education, for instance in “class time” versus “break time.” In these different times, “ways of doing things” in social practices (Wenger, 1998) dramatically change, such as rules for making questions or interrupting a conversation.

By looking at how time unfolds at this more micro level, we can see how its linearity vanishes. Time passing leads us from one context to the other. A pop up message could make us think about a future holiday destination; a few minutes later, we return to the chapter that we were writing before. At the same time, we can recognize different time scales (Burgess & Ivanič, 2010). Following Adam, Tusting (2000) emphasizes the “multiplicity of times” (p. 41); the time frame of an individual’s life history is very different from the broader historical sweep. We could add to these the time experienced in daily activities while people engage in concrete events mediated by writing.

Nordquist & Lueck (2020) challenge the tendency to separate literacy development into homogeneous levels like “high school writing” and “college writing,” which neglects actual diverse students’ experiences with reading and writing in their daily lives. These linear representations of time set social expectations attached to age and cognitive development: “These stages are reinforced with appeals to ostensibly predictable relations among age, grade level, and cognitive, curricular, and social processes of development” (Nordquist & Lueck, 2020, p. 254). Following these ideas, we attempt to reinforce the multiple nature of time and how the experience of time as it progresses in an individual’s concrete life events is not necessarily reflected in broader narratives of time as a linear progression.

## **STUDYING TRANSITIONS AND WRITING IN TRANSITIONS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS FROM A RHIZOMATIC PERSPECTIVE**

Researching writing across the lifespan is a significant challenge that requires collaborative efforts and multiple gateways to approach the complexity of people’s writing practices in the frame of their life-long and life-wide trajectories.



We have suggested that transitions in the lifespan are just one more angle to explore, but a meaningful one as transitions represent shifts in core areas of human development. A focus on transitions could encompass questions such as: how are changes of context involving new social roles and identities in someone's life course linked with writing practices in meaningful ways?; how do social expectations and individuals' agency shape changes across contexts and identities?; how do social institutions regulate life-course transitions, and what is the role of artifacts such as text within them? We might want to look at specific transitions, for instance, the movements in and out of university or the entry to an adult learning program. Looking at those changes as transitions involves accounting for an individual's life history of participation in multiple contexts where identities and social roles are negotiated.

Transitions could be looked at vertically, along time and across institutions, or horizontally across contexts in a smaller time range. In particular, horizontal transitions could also be understood from writing across contexts (Prior & Smith, 2020; Kell, 2011) or transliteracies approaches (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017), contributions that have played a pivotal role in LWR. Finally, the angle of transitions focuses on changes encompassing identity negotiations and forms of participation in different time scales.

Transitions and the ways we understand context, identity, and time are not neutral. On the contrary, they have been depicted in diverse manners that imply particular epistemologies, methodological approaches and methods of inquiry. Looking at transitions is a rich node for exploring writing practices across the lifespan, but this could be looked at through different lenses. Consequently, it is critical to be aware of our own lenses and their implications.

Looking at transitions from a rhizomatic perspective has several methodological implications. It involves understanding writing practices as contextualized activities in peoples' lives, unfolding in diverse and dynamic trajectories of change across multiple levels of contexts, times, and identities. We suggest at least three main methodological orientations to study transitions and writing across the lifespan. We will also give examples of particular methods that lifespan researchers could incorporate when they take this stance.

## 1. OPENNESS

When we look at one specific transition, we are always at risk of assuming a previously defined trajectory. For instance, we might be tempted to explore school to university or university to workplace without recognizing that these trajectories are not necessarily the same for everybody. When we decide to study a particular transition, it is always worth asking ourselves: what diversity of possible trajectories

could we consider? Are there movements that we are not taking into account? How could we be open to unexpected movements? Which social factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity, among others, could be shaping how transitions unfold?

Being aware of the variety of possible trajectories, and being open to exploring those we did not predict, could be helpful at different levels of research. For instance, in the sampling phase, we can choose participants who could experience transitions differently rather than work just with those who will follow mainstream careers. Moreover, we could incorporate openness during interviews by not assuming a specific direction in participants' transitions. Participants of our current research who were interviewed in their last year of secondary education were from economically deprived neighbourhoods in Chile. Even though they were part of an inclusion program to access higher education, going to university was not taken for granted for many of them. We tried to keep open to and hear their desires and expectations, often attached to the social valuing attributed to tertiary education but sometimes linked to other careers or possibilities.

An open mindset could also be adopted during the coding process. Broadly speaking, coding involves organizing data by labeling them within themes or categories. Coding is in itself an exercise of data simplification, reduction, and abstraction. It takes us "away from the data—from their detail, complexity and singularity" (MacLure, 2013, p. 169). Following Deleuze's critiques of representational thinking, MacLure points out that coding tends to use a tree-like hierarchical structure that organizes data in categories and subcategories in static relationships. This logic could lead us to "recode what is already coded by language culture, ideology and the symbolic order" (p. 170) and, more importantly, it could prevent us from taking into consideration those elements that might not fit with our previous understanding of a phenomenon or with our coding scheme. This openness to unpredicted interpretations is especially critical when social contexts become particularly unpredictable or unwieldy, as was explored by Ávila et al. (2021) in their research in times of social unrest and pandemic.

Regarding transitions, as we seek to capture change over time and across contexts in a way that involves multiple identity negotiations, it seems particularly important to avoid coding schemes that might restrict our capability to see how change is inscribed in the data along a period of time. This is also relevant to capture identities in their plurality and intrinsically dynamic becoming. In other words, if we want to observe the negotiation of identities that are not only multiple but changing over time, fixed tree-like themes and categorizations might not always be helpful. From our perspective, this view on coding does not imply abandoning themes and categories but using them more flexibly by allowing us to hold those fragments that do not fit or enabling the emergence of more rhizomatic connections between different elements of our data.

Some researchers in transitions have applied a rhizomatic approach to data analysis (see Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018; Amundsen, 2021) by focusing on “data hot-spots” that seem to carry complex relationships of language, emotions, and thoughts. In this vein, MacLure suggests incorporating the practice of *unforgetting* by holding fragments and details in slow and intimate work with data. We encounter various elements that resist coding in our current study. For instance, one of our participants repeatedly used a question prosody when asserting or answering a question. This was a persistent tendency in our interviews with her, showing us the interpersonal nature of our interactions and the imbalance of power in them. Her silences, doubting prosody, and conciseness could also be expressing something else, something that escapes our current ways of thinking, but we are committed to not forgetting those signs, even though we still wonder about their meaning.

## 2. MOTION

As some lifespan researchers (Bazerman, 2013; Dippre & Phillips, 2020) and researchers of writing across contexts (Prior & Smith, 2020; Kell, 2011) have pointed out, writing has commonly been studied from a one-context perspective. Since the turning of the new century, the notion of context has gained increasing attention from writing research (Lillis, 2008). Linguistic ethnography has frequently explored one setting by prolonged immersion in the context, using field notes and detailed observations, among other methods. These techniques have enormously contributed to writing studies, focusing on the writing event or the activities mediated by texts rather than on the written piece as the main object of inquiry. However, exploring writing practices across contexts remains a central challenge (Prior & Smith, 2020).

We commonly depict a movement from one context to another when studying transitions (e.g., from a job to another, from university to a job, etc.). However, research on transition usually focuses on the “new setting,” where the person is transitioning to (see Hebdon, 2015; Megwalu, et al., 2017; Elliott et al., 2019). A step forward to capture the complexity of transitions could be to explore the two reference points in our transition, such as school and university, for example, through a longitudinal study across educational levels. We can take another step forward by looking at the diversity of contexts students engage with while moving from school to university, from one job to another, or from university to work. This multisite approach allows us to explore how people experience transitions in the context of their life as a whole rather than as an isolated phenomenon. In this vein, if we observe transitions at the end of schooling, we can look at people’s movements across context and identities as

their life trajectories unfold and explore the diverse roles of writing across these.

To observe movement across time imposes significant methodological stakes. It implies the need to perhaps follow our participants across settings or find meaningful ways to talk with them about their several spheres of social activity. Various studies have challenged the one-setting approach by moving with participants across time and contexts. Nordquist (2017) incorporates time-space mappings and *shadowing* (Jirón, 2011) in his research about writing and mobilities. He “became the shadow” of his participants by walking with them in their daily activities from school to home, from home to extracurricular activities, work, etc. While shadowing participants’ routines, he took field notes, had more informal conversations, and recorded interviews throughout the day. This seems to be a valuable tool to observe transitions as they unfold across time and context and to explore the writing practices that shape both those movements and settings.

Barton et al.’s (2007) repeated interviews across time with adult learners is also worth mentioning. The researchers conducted several interviews focusing not just on participants’ experiences with reading and writing but on the broad context of people’s lives in different careers: work, health, education, etc. They use temporal representations of events within these trajectories and explore how writing practices are entangled with individuals’ experiences in several life domains. The authors also capture the materiality and spaces of social practices by using photographs of places or meaningful objects. In our current research, we discuss with our participants some of the texts they wrote for school and other contexts. We regard these texts as artifacts mediating concrete activities and ask for them in their original format to see how these cultural tools were used. For instance, some of these texts were notes on a wrinkled piece of paper; other times, they were cellphone notes with letters and emojis. Working with artifacts as they exist in the context of the activity that they mediate allowed us to see through them our participants’ several social practices and writing practices.

### 3. REPETITION

Researching transitions as a permanently unfolding process of change over time and across contexts requires detailed observation of people’s practices. As other researchers within LWR have stated, longitudinal observations comparing two predefined points—for instance, first and second year of university—do miss the spaces in between. In transition research, those spaces in between are regarded as transitional stages or liminal sites in transition studies. These spaces are precisely one of the defining aspects of transitions, as moments where changes of contexts and negotiation of multiple identities show the mobility and unsettledness of individuals’ experiences. One observation of a particular context or one

interview before and after is not enough to capture this subtleness of transitions; on the contrary, we need sustained engagement through repeated interactions or/and observations across time.

A central methodological principle of ethnography is sustained engagement (Hammersley, 2006; Lillis, 2008) in a particular setting. This could be challenging when observing writing practices in transitions as they unfold across several contexts. However, as Lillis (2001; 2008) and Ávila (2021) suggested, long term engagement could be incorporated in research as long conversations with participants. Lillis suggests conducting cyclical talking around text interviews with several encounters with participants. This methodological tool seeks to consider students' perspectives on their processes of meaning-making through writing. This *emic perspective* helps us hold the principle of openness described above and is a valuable way to avoid the *reification* (Lillis, 2008) of what participants say or describe as immutable and easy to translate into general principles.

In our current research, we engage in repeated encounters with our participants. We seek to understand the role of writing practices as students move out from school to new settings after secondary education. Through our interviews, we found many horizontal and micro-level transitions while students were in their last year of school. They faced an unprecedented pandemic that forced schools to shift to online learning. Writing practices mediated by technologies became preponderant in the school classroom with laptops, cellphones, emails, online platforms as new tools for communication and learning. In our first interview, one of our participants told us how difficult it was for her to write on her laptop. Her dad was a porter and a resident of the building he was working in gave him a disused laptop. This was now the computer of our participant, and she was getting familiar with this new tool: "Technology was difficult for me . . . even though we are the youth that knows, for me was too difficult," she says. However, at our second interview a few months later, she had become accustomed to using her laptop for school homework and even for personal fictional writing which she used to write in a notebook. After the first interview, our impression was that technologies could be challenging for students who did not have earlier access to them; the reification of this judgment would have led us to a misunderstanding. We would have missed how new mediational tools could have evolving meanings for our participants and play changing roles in their practices.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have explored the concept of transitions and shown the importance of considering transitions as a diverse and rhizomatic phenomenon. We have argued that the concept of *transition as becoming* is likely to be a more

fruitful way to approach transitions for lifespan writing researchers than seeing transitions as simple linear shifts over time. Drawing on researchers from New Literacy Studies and from LWR, we have emphasized the importance of understanding context, identity and time as dynamic phenomena of multiple layers, and discussed methodological implications of this for writing research across the lifespan. In particular, we call on lifespan researchers to adopt the principles of openness, movement across contexts, and repeated data collection across time, to develop fuller understandings of how writing practices develop, transform, and remain, as people transition between different contexts throughout their lifetimes.

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