CHAPTER 15.

WAYFINDING: THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN APPROACH TO LIFESPAN WRITING

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The Wayfinding Project emerged for us as researchers as we encountered anecdotes and updates from our former students–young people who had graduated from the University of California and who went on to diverse, creative careers as well as on to rich, rewarding personal and civic lives. Frequently, because we had taught these young people in writing courses or writing-oriented courses, they would talk to us about their writing lives, describing the writing they had done and what they had learned about writing after graduation. We realized, like many in the field of lifespan writing studies, that these young people's writing development was ongoing—and far more complex than we had heretofore considered. In particular, we were struck by the extent to which these former students not only adapted pre-existing knowledge about writing, but also actively sought new ways of writing and, just as often, stumbled into whole new ways of conceptualizing what writing is, what it does, and what it can be used for. Increasingly, the models of writing development we had been working with previously did not seem to capture the complexity, or what we came to call the *serendipity*, of the writing experiences that these writers were sharing with us.

Two quick examples from our pilot study's focus group interviews might help explain what we were seeing. This study was approved by our campuses' IRBs, and all reports use pseudonyms for participants' names. One writer, Francine, a teacher, spoke at length about a variety of writing experiences in both her professional and personal life, and we were especially struck by her description of encountering other former classmates who arguably had been harassed by a teacher. In the era

of #MeToo, she began collecting stories, set up a social media account to archive them, and moved toward writing up accounts that could be used by her school to make sure this teacher was not harming any other young women. We admired Francine's tenacity and ingenuity in conceiving of her writing as an opportunity to affect the lives of others, by bringing together her experiences as a student journalist and as a teacher, and by including the collection of other people's stories in that conception of writing. Another alum, Julissa, likewise spoke to us about a rich set of writing experiences. Almost as an afterthought, toward the end of the focus group interview in which she participated, she surprised us by talking about her creation of makeup videos and blog entries as a sideline. The videos she described struck us as complex and robust attempts to communicate about her makeup artistry, and we were particularly impressed by her account of how they provided access to another income stream as friends and viewers began to ask her to provide makeup services for special events. Julissa's success fed her interest in generating revenue through the gig economy. Such a venture seemed very much something that she "fell into," not something she had initially set out to do and not part of a larger or longer career trajectory. It was an opportunity that came about because she had been inspired by watching similar videos and because her talents became visible to an ever-widening circle of appreciative followers.

Francine and Julissa provide fascinating examples of how our alumni have been developing a wide array of writing and communication abilities to make their way in the world and, often, to change that world for the better. In both cases, and in most others that we have been collecting and analyzing, these alumni's stories about their writing are characterized for us by a sense of wayfinding, a quite literal "finding of one's way" through different possibilities. In our earliest conceptualization of wayfinding, we understood it as a potentially useful *metaphor* for the kind of roaming, searching, and even stumbling around that seemed to be among the main hallmarks of the narratives about post-graduate writing experiences we were hearing. Initially, then, wayfinding was a *description* of what we were seeing, but curiously it also described *our own* research process as we began collecting data, listening to participants, and developing themes from multiple focus groups. Could wayfinding be both a modality of composing *and* a methodology for analyzing writing development?

As we described in our first published article, *wayfinding* has been "a technical term for nearly 60 years in fields as disparate as urban planning, architecture, library and information science, computer programming, and health services" (Alexander, Lunsford, & Whithaus, 2020, p. 121). In urban planning and architecture, for instance, wayfinding characterizes the kinds of environmental signposts that not only guide, but also cue people into possibilities as they navigate complex terrains and environments. We chose this technical term because it captures both

intentional and serendipitous impulses. For example, a visitor navigating through the Louvre might follow the signage to artifacts deemed by prior museum patrons to be important destinations, such as the *Mona Lisa*. Upon seeing the long line in front of the painting, our visitor might choose to continue to follow the signage, but might also choose to seek an alternate path—whether a less traveled method of getting to the same place (say, by attending a private viewing), or a path to a less well known, but more personally relevant, destination altogether (say, by wandering through another wing of the museum to come upon an underappreciated masterpiece). All of these choices fall within the idea of "wayfinding." Moreover, a wayfinder often shares with others information about the path taken, again, sometimes deliberately (e.g., blogging about the experience) and sometimes incidentally (e.g., the route happens to be recorded by a phone's location system). This aspect of wayfinding–the accidental, the stumbling, the serendipitous–seemed to us a particularly compelling dimension of the concept, one that captured some of the accidental ways in which our alumni were talking about stumbling into whole new ways of writing, communicating, and thinking about to what uses they could put their writing and what new writing abilities they could develop. Indeed, as we argued in our first article, "[a]ll of these uses emphasize that, although cues may provide signposting for accepted ways of proceeding through these environments, individuals' own experiences are often 'messy,' inflected by additional environmental changes, happenstance, and individual agency" (p. 122).

Following in the footsteps of others thinking along comparable lines, such as Kevin Roozen and Joe Erickson (2017), we could easily have spent our time focused on deep descriptions and investigations of single authors or small sets of authors. Yet, given the seeming *consistency* of wayfinding characteristics that we were seeing in stories shared with us, we took inspiration from the work of Deborah Brandt (2001; 2014), wanting to track not only the ongoing development of literacy in American lives but what she more recently refers to as the "rise of writing," or the coming into dominance of writing as the key contemporary marker of literacy. Further, we were inspired by her attempts to track literacy development over multiple participants. A key element within the Wayfinding Project, and more generally within lifespan writing research, is this attention to how participants describe their own writing development. As a methodology, wayfinding offers participants opportunities to co-construct knowledge about their writing practices and its significance in their lives.

The remainder of this chapter outlines some of the key dimensions of wayfinding as we have refined it into a framework through which to approach and theorize writing development. While we began with wayfinding as a metaphor for understanding such development, we have come to appreciate the many ways in which wayfinding attunes our attention to how post-graduate writers come to understand

their movement in and through a variety of communication contexts. In turn, wayfinding's emphasis on pathways, whether intentional or serendipitous, has become for us a methodology for tracking how writers orient themselves or become oriented in multifaceted writing contexts. So, to answer our earlier question, wayfinding works for us as both description of composing practices and methodology for analyzing them. Key to our understanding of wayfinding as a methodology is the emergence of *orientation* as a significant and necessary dimension, which we consider in the next section. Then, we turn to the kinds of research questions generated from the wayfinding framework and provide specific examples of survey questions that we will implement in the next iteration of the study. In the final section, we consider how wayfinding is situated within the larger ecology of lifespan writing research.

ORIENTATION AS KEY TO UNDERSTANDING HOW WRITERS DEVELOP ACROSS MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

As an approach for studying writing, wayfinding necessarily foregrounds the many contexts participants navigate, create, and respond to. In doing so, wayfinding as a methodology resonates with two core insights articulated by Bazerman et al.'s (2018) Lifespan Writing Development Group (LWDG). The first has to do with the nature of "context," and the second concerns the importance of "orientation" as a methodological consideration. One of the core insights that the LWDG has brought to the table is their insistence on developing a robust conceptualization of context(s) that includes how multi-layered contexts influence writers as well as how writers shape—and continuously reshape—the contexts they encounter. That insight drives wayfinding as a methodology.

Our focus group participants' own words have shown us not only this plurality of contexts but also the many active ways in which writers choose to align with, select or discard elements from, decline engagement with, and otherwise actively create those contexts. The participants in the Wayfinding Project focus groups acted as co-constructors of knowledge about writing by not only engaging in conversations with the researchers, but also with each other during the focus groups. Listening to their accounts of writing as an activity that cuts across contexts, while also being embedded within multiple contexts, helped shape the ways in which we conceptualize writing development as contextual and also directional. One way that we have come to understand how individuals both act upon and react to contexts is through the concept of *orientation*—which includes, but is not limited to, the range of environmental cues, signposts, personal motivations, and happy circumstances that writers use to make their choices.

Understanding *contexts* as plural and malleable means our methodology needs to account for writers' generative relationships across, through, and with the contexts

they engage. Near the opening of *The Lifespan Development of Writing*, Charles Bazerman et al. (2018) insist on the need to "account[] for the individuality of trajectories that can lead to distinctive voices and expressions" as well as the "complexities and many dimensions" that make up different context(s) (p. 21). Bazerman et al. remind us that context, especially when thinking about writing development over time, is never singular. It is always nested within multiple experiences that writers have as they move across contexts, and often a writer may carry elements from one context to another. These are not only interpretations of different contexts, but also the creation of context through a writer's understanding of a situation in relationship to, or rather with reference to, previous situations. Ryan Dippre and Anna Smith (2020) capture some of the vitality around this conceptualization of context(s) in their chapter, "Always Already Relocalized: The Protean Nature of Context in Lifespan Writing Research." Dippre and Smith "take up the word *protean* to describe [their] vision of context because it highlights the highly variable character of context—the responsive flexibility that the so-called 'background' of our social actions has to those actions . . . [They] see protean as a useful word located in interesting corners of literacy and writing research to articulate the complex social worlds within which writers and readers of texts live, work, and build" (p. 28).

This conceptualization of contexts as protean resonates with our wayfinding approach to studying writing because of the ways in which our participants defined contexts and pushed us to think outside of—or really *across*—school, professional, personal, and civic contexts. The protean nature of these contexts emerged strongly when focus group participants in the initial three-year pilot study were asked (as part of a series of eight questions) to "describe for us a time or situation in which you have written something meaningful. What was it and what was your process?" While we originally included this question in an effort to help us replicate some of the work in Michele Eodice, Anne Geller, and Neal Lerner's *Meaningful Writing Project*, our participants' answers began to push us to consider how they were defining and/or asking questions about what writing contexts we were interested in. Participants often asked us to clarify whether we were limiting the question to writing done while they were in school. When we did not define a context for them, or when we insisted that context was whatever they wanted to discuss, they would move on to include examples such as an obituary for a dog, an unsuccessful cover letter, a Master's thesis, a post about a social issue that unexpectedly went viral on Reddit, a family memorial, and lesson plans for a course in French, among many others.

Responses to this question illustrated not only the wide range of contexts in which participants found writing to be meaningful, but also how their sense of what counts as meaningful changed when their understanding of the context changed. For example, Julissa responded that her most meaningful writing was the poetry she

wrote as an undergraduate in a setting deliberately crafted to be separate from her schooling: "I think I would have to get into my space, into my cozy writing space in my dorm at my desk, have a nice notebook specifically for this kind of writing, it's not my school notebook." She went on to explain that she had in mind a particular piece of poetry, "because it was about my family and I ended up submitting it. It was the only thing I ever submitted. It was like a runner up for fifth place for some UC poetry thing but it was such a huge deal . . . to share something in this sort of way." In other words, although Julissa generally created a private, "cozy" environment separate from her schoolwork to engage in poetry, the most meaningful piece was about her family that, "put something personal into a form I felt confident enough to share and then any sort of small recognition in that way is that kind of validation like, 'Oh, okay. This is something.'" Julissa's comments resonate with Ryan Dippre and Anna Smith's (2020) assertion that writing contexts are protean, always partially formed and overlapping, complex ecologies, where "the responsive flexibility that the so-called 'background'" is reshaped and re-envisioned as participants recall it. Dippre and Smith's insight that writing plays a "reciprocal role in producing context" (p. 27) has encouraged us to allow participants to define their contexts. With that said, our participants' insistence on the importance of context should not be taken as a claim that contexts determined why a piece of writing was meaningful. Rather, participants often articulated how their own agency, how their own actions to produce a piece of writing, made that writing meaningful.

Considering how writers *orient* themselves and *are oriented* by different contexts becomes a particularly significant way in which we can analyze the moves writers make within protean contexts. We can return to the case of Julissa for an example of what such orientation looks like in participants' discussion of their post-graduate writing lives. Following up on her responses to the most meaningful writing she has done, Julissa explained that she "rarely" wrote poetry at the time we spoke with her, again attributing her writing response to the *environment* she now inhabits: "Yeah. It's funny how getting into the land and business of words really zapped any energy to write them. Maybe on the subway sometimes." As Julissa's responses articulate the conditions under which her poetry is "meaningful" to her, they also indicate the environmental *cues* she attends to in order to make that determination: her sense of the coziness of her dorm and the special notebook (cues: emotions, space, and materials); her focus on her family and the resulting reward of her private interest being validated by public attention (cues: topic and response); and her reflection on how making words her professional business has led her to indulge in poetry only in transit (cues: time, space, and materials). As we have been developing the idea of wayfinding, we have found ourselves becoming ever more alert to how participants describe and attend to these cues which *orient* their writing, as well as their sense of what writing is for and the roles it plays in their lives.

The Wayfinding Project is not the first group of lifespan writing researchers to take up the importance of "orientation." Anna Smith considers how methodological approaches that emphasize orientations to writing development "across," "through," and/or "with" may enable researchers to embrac[e] the complexity of writing" (p. 16). For Smith, "an across orientation assumes writing—its writers, artifacts, practices, etc.—are in constant motion (Kell, 2009), and that writing in one location and time is not tethered or isolated to that context; rather, writing is a widely distributed, highly complex phenomenon (Prior, 1998; Shipka, 2011)" (p. 18).

As a way of studying writing and writing development, an *across* orientation acknowledges contexts but it also acknowledges writers' agency and how that agency changes and shifts not only what different contexts mean but quite literally what different contexts *are*. Smith's emphasis on considering *through* as another key orientation for lifespan writing researchers draws on Lemke's (2000) notion of using different scales of time for considering writing development—as when, for instance, ideas drawn from or developed over many different contexts and through many different scenarios crystallize in writing in a particular moment (p. 20). Finally, Smith (2020) notes that a methodological orientation towards studying writing *with* participants "makes writing researchers privy to critical in vivo insights," "provides proximity to practice that cannot be otherwise articulated," and as Django Paris and Maisha T. Winn (2014) have argued, is "potentially a more humanizing orientation than researching about" (p. 22). These three approaches emphasize the importance of researchers considering how participants view writing within the contexts of their lives.

Smith's attention to orientation has been enlightening and inspiring for us, but her primary focus in her scholarship is on *researchers'* attitudes and approaches. Our particular innovation with wayfinding is to recognize how *participants'* descriptions and reflections emphasize orientation in their own writing lives. We are interested in orientation as not just a research disposition but as a *phenomenological experience* of post-collegiate writers. Indeed, as with Julissa, many of our participants describe their writing lives as a complex process of orienting themselves to ever-shifting terrains of communication, some with clearly marked signposts directing them to particular modalities and genres of writing and others with unexpected and sometimes serendipitous pathways forged in the process of making discoveries, imagining connections, and encountering new possibilities for rich forms of writing and communication.

Methodologically, wayfinding picks up on this multifaceted approach to orientation, and it relies upon, analyzes, and plays with all of the meanings of "orientation." After all, as researchers, we are interested in how participants orient themselves within their writing environments – whether alumni are

deliberately choosing personal or professional goals according to signals they encounter in their environments, or actively crafting and re-arranging their environments to be more conducive to their goals and well-being, or accidentally falling by happenstance into activities or environments they find suitable. Moreover, we find ourselves reflecting on our own orientations towards the project and to environmental factors (such as responses from our own reviewers and readers; the technologies available to us; the regulations that constrain us) that cue us towards certain research processes and away from others. In the next section, we consider how our own research processes have oriented us toward certain questions we have begun asking our participants about their writing lives post-graduation.

WAYFINDING'S RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As we have completed our three-year pilot study, we have come to realize that the consistency of our observations about our alumni that we named through the metaphor of wayfinding caused us to shift our own research methods towards thinking about and eliciting possible dimensions of wayfinding. That dialectic between our observations and the metaphor has become embedded within the project, moving us toward wayfinding as a methodology: Specifically, wayfinding pays attention to both the unexpected encounters and the orienting pathways that participants follow as they develop as writers across time.

Recently, we have deliberately sought to operationalize the methodology of wayfinding through specific interview and survey methods that we will employ when, late in 2023, we launch the full study of alumni from our three UC campuses (i.e., all alumni 3-10 years from graduation). The focus group interviews from the pilot, as discussed in the examples above, have suggested several robust themes to pursue. We will reprise these themes in the future focus group questions, and we have chosen to focus specifically on the themes of orientation, intention/serendipity, and the gig economy in the survey. We hope to leverage the large numbers of alumni from the UC system to elicit survey data to paint the large-picture context for the study.

As an approach towards understanding both intentional and serendipitous writing development among not just individuals, but large populations of participants, wayfinding guides us towards these overarching research questions:

1. How do participants orient themselves towards, navigate within, and, most significantly, create the different contexts in which they write? In other words, as researchers, we prioritize participants' agency as they decide for themselves what they want their writing to do, when, and how. We seek to analyze how participants make these orienting decisions, and what they identify in their

environments as important elements by which they orient their actions, their knowledges of writing, and their decisions about where to invest their time.

We operationalize this research interest by asking survey and interview questions regarding not just what they learned in one context versus another, but about their histories of writing of all types (professional, personal, self-sponsored, civic, social) and how they came to write them. In our analyses, we are attuned to the signposts they mention in their decisions (for example, choosing to pursue or abandon writing in response to other people's opinions) and to unexpected opportunities that present themselves through writing (for example, realizing that a new activist project resonates strongly with an already developed creative writing project).

In the survey we have developed after the pilot, we are seeking to elicit more information about how the different types of signposts our initial respondents mentioned affect alumni's career choices. We include a series of questions about such signposts in the revised survey. In the pilot, for example, our alumni mentioned that they often make choices about writing based on responses they receive from others. In this current survey, we tease out the impact of these responses, such as in this question about the impact of positive responses on how alumni do or do not select writing opportunities:

> Others' positive responses to my writing have led me [check all that apply]
>
> - To pursue a different professional opportunity I did not anticipate
> - To pursue a different volunteer opportunity I did not anticipate
> - To pursue a different hobby or personal interest I did not anticipate
> - To try new types (genres) of writing
> - To discover a new talent
> - To renew my determination to pursue a career pathway I had chosen

Such questions, we hope, will elicit more data about writers' agency in orienting themselves towards different post-graduate writing experiences.

2. In general, we are interested in how historical and economic contexts influence our participants' understandings of writing, but wayfinding as a concept turns our attention to a more specific question: How do participants respond to and orient themselves towards cultural moments of change? We are especially interested in this question because it emphasizes the serendipitous side of

wayfinding, particularly when navigating through uncharted territory. Based on our experiences with the pilot version of the Wayfinding Project, we have revised our survey and interview questions to explore three areas of cultural change:

a. The gig economy, with attention to the many stories of our alumni creating their own economic niches through writing

b. The exacerbated civic divides within many countries, with attention to how alumni orient themselves and their writing towards different socio-political positions, and with particular attention to participants whose socio-political contributions are less visible than, but no less significant than, those of self-identified activists

c. The continuous impact of new media developments, with attention to how alumni take up new platforms' affordances for composing, publishing, reception, and rebroadcasting, and how, in response, alumni alter their understandings of what writing is and what it does

To take up one example, the issue of the gig economy, we have found through the pilot study that participants often do not count gig jobs as something worth mentioning to us, just as they often do not consider many things they do as "writing." If we want to know more about gig work, then we need to ask participants explicitly about these issues.

Through questions such as these, we hope to learn more precisely how frequently our alumni are taking up gig work in the current economy, to what extent such jobs involve writing, and to what extent our respondents consider them as deliberate or serendipitous moves towards new writing opportunities.

3. What roles do non-curricular and non-professional writing play in orienting how participants develop their individual knowledges of writing? As an approach, wayfinding does not privilege one learning context—schooling—over others. That interest often overshadows attention to how personal, creative, activist, social, and other forms of writing that alumni deem "unofficial" shape their understandings of writing—and especially how, for individual respondents, the boundaries among these different domains of writing are wonderfully porous. Participants may, for example, orient themselves towards self-defined overarching goals or aims that diminish or even negate distinctions among different contexts, as when a historian describes writing a novel never intended for publication as one of the ways she develops better understandings of other cultures. Those better understandings might inform her professional research articles, but, in her account, writing a never-to-be-completed novel is not positioned as a preliminary exercise towards those articles, but an equally valued way of continuously thinking about the world. Likewise, as researchers,

we are attending to the multiple "teachers" of writing that participants identify, which so far have been as varied as family members, distant colleagues, friends, anonymous respondents on social media, and audiences for stand-up comedy.

Drawing upon the pilot study, the current survey contains a series of questions that name non-curricular/non-professional contexts and agents. These questions seek to elicit data about how the participant has oriented their decisions about when, where, and why they write. Moreover, they seek information about whether these decisions led participants to discover new career or non-professional writing opportunities. For instance, we have one set of queries about how participants respond to the requests of family members. Other questions in this series seek to suss out the impact of writing for creative purposes, activist purposes, non-professional organizations or volunteer groups, and social media.

4. How do participants themselves perceive the histories and futures of their writing pathways (as more traditional? serendipitous?), and thus how do they orient their identities as writers around these perceptions? Wayfinding comprises both deliberate and serendipitous occurrences during a writer's life. As researchers, we have learned from the pilot study to be cautious to avoid assumptions about how a participant perceives a certain event or sequence of events. What we might interpret as a happy accident, a participant might see as intentional, and vice versa. Moreover, our alumni have different tolerances for recursivity, writing during times of ambiguity, and dealing with the unanticipated. The pilot data from the focus groups suggest that alumni may more or less smoothly integrate new goals into the stories of the writing lives that they present. To avoid imposing our own interpretations of the traditional and the serendipitous on the histories and futures of writing that alumni articulate, we have again decided to include explicit queries about their perceptions, such as the following:

> Which of the following best describes your career path so far? [check one]
>
> • Since earning my bachelor's degree, I have been following a career path with well-defined steps
> • Since earning my bachelor's degree, I have been following a career path with unanticipated turns

These explicit queries also include questions about how COVID-19 has impacted their professional and personal journeys. Again, we seek to document our respondents' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities that the pandemic has brought, and how respondents integrate these moments into their accounts of their writing lives.

5. What are the different epistemological, cultural, subcultural, and lingual knowledges about writing that our participants identify, and how do these factors orient alumni's writing development? Of course, this question covers quite a bit of territory, a landscape shared by many writing researchers. However, we are specifically watching for moments of choice in these accounts, times when alumni decide for themselves what they want their writing to do, when, and how—and what elements they name as orienting those choices. In many cases, those elements come from contexts beyond school or professional cultures. As mentioned earlier, one of the most productive questions we asked during the pilot was a variation of the central question from *The Meaningful Writing Project* (Eodice et al., 2017). In the current survey, we include the following pair of questions about meaningful writing:

> What is the most meaningful writing you have done (for whatever reason, in all aspects of your life)? Why is it the most meaningful for you?

We are also asking similar questions in our revised focus group interviews. Our adaptation from Eodice et al.'s version is to decouple the questions from an inquiry about a school curriculum. In fact, when participants during the pilot asked us whether we intended to restrict answers to their school years, we responded that they could, but they could also consider writing in extracurricular activities and in the years since graduation. We also encouraged them to use their own definition of "meaningful" and to explain how they defined it.

Wayfinding encourages researchers to ask questions about the roles that serendipity, creativity, and the unexpected play in shaping literate practices across time and in different environments. Wayfinding also analyzes participants' awareness of their own ongoing writing development through reflection on their experiences. That is, wayfinding implies that who you understand yourself to be as a writer shifts over time and across contexts. Wayfinding opens up a way for writers to describe those shifting writerly identities in ways that are nuanced and based on lived experience, projected plans and identities, and imagined, even aspirational futures.

WAYFINDING IN THE ECOLOGY OF LIFESPAN WRITING STUDIES

In sum, we contend that wayfinding offers researchers in lifespan writing studies a compelling metaphor and methodology for conceptualizing how writers navigate different writing environments over time. Emphasizing writers' agency, wayfinding tracks writers moving across multiple contexts, stitching together a

variety of experiences with writing while also grappling with unexpected challenges and opportunities. Wayfinding offers lifespan writing studies a multi-dimensional and flexible approach to studying writers' experiences.

Our interest in alumni writing development has often been understood by reviewers and interlocutors as a form of transfer. After all, aren't we tracking the movement of writing knowledge across different domains? Indeed, we have learned much from our colleagues who undertake research in transfer. At the same time, we have come to see how the metaphor of transfer privileges the impact of curricula in a fairly linear direction. We offer wayfinding as a more writerly driven and holistic accounting of writers' experiences across protean contexts. For instance, one significant difference lies in how transfer studies often focus on the movement of abilities and knowledges from one curricular context to another, or from an authority-defined context *outward*. Wayfinding is much more invested in the agency of writers and the choices they have to make, sometimes improvisationally, as they move through and navigate different, sometimes unexpected contexts. Second, transfer studies generally emphasize more of a one-to-one model of context-to-context, whereas wayfinding tends to emphasize the exploratory. Certainly, transfer studies often acknowledge the "fuzziness" of transfer across contexts, but wayfinding tends to *prioritize* that fuzziness, attending as it does to ambiguity, serendipity, and the unexpected.

Another frequent comment in response to our work pertains to its potential applicability in the teaching of writing, specifically in the composition classroom. At this point in our research, however, our interest has been in generating knowledge about post-graduate writing experiences as a primary object of scholarly research. In time, with more data and analysis, our research might generate insights about how to shape the teaching of writing in ways that anticipate some of the directions and trajectories that our participants suggest are important to them. At this time, though, we cannot help but return to the prominence of the serendipitous in the stories that such participants bring to us, and so we cryptically suggest that a wayfinding-inspired composition pedagogy might try to make room for chance, the accidental, and the unexpected. Further, wayfinding has taught us that a curricular focus does not always make sufficient room to acknowledge, much less honor, epistemologies and experiences outside the standard, normalizing curriculum. For instance, Kate Seltzer (2022) adopts wayfinding to describe a Latinx bilingual student's metacommentary on her own experiences as someone labeled as a "struggling" student; far from "struggling," though, this student wrote poetry and shared her writing with others, actively pursuing the "seeking and navigating that so many writers engage in, particularly those . . . who stake out a writerly identity and practice that eschews the white gaze" (p. 17). Making room in our research for such experiences when

they exceed formal and curricular domains is increasingly crucial if we are to understand the complex wayfinding of writers' lives as well as interrogate the racist assumptions and practices that are still a part of much educational activity.

Some readers of this volume might also wonder about similarities and differences between wayfinding and improvisation, a concept highlighted in the introduction to this volume; we do see overlaps between the terms. Phillips and Dippre (this volume) describe improvisation as an approach where the performer has deep knowledge of techniques through extended practice, and is therefore prepared to recombine or reconfigure or renew them in order to respond to new information, new collaborators, new challenges. Similarly, a wayfinder can follow signposted cues to accomplish established goals but can also respond to the serendipitous. Where they differ: wayfinding also implies identifying pathways for others to follow and retrace, laying down new signposts as new possibilities are discovered, developed, constructed. Many of our students and alumni mention being highly responsive to their families and communities, and they readily share how they achieve their goals. Improvisation implies living in the serendipitous.

As researchers, we certainly engaged in our share of improvisation. When we started the project, we drew upon our own previous research experiences, and we looked to established research projects to identify elements that might be used to discuss the writing lives of millennials. We asked the scholars behind the Revisualizing Composition Project (Moore et al., 2016) to share their research questions and survey platform with us, so that we could deliberately replicate some of the elements and eventually compare the responses of our participants with theirs. Likewise, we looked to the Pew Foundation for survey questions about media use that could be replicated in order to define our survey population, and to compare that population with the Pew Foundation's findings (which the Pew Foundation's copyright statement allows). Not least, we took up a question from the Meaningful Writing Project because it seemed to us to be especially insightful. In other words, there were elements in the research around us that we reconstituted into our own project. In that sense, we were improvisationists. We have responded to serendipitous opportunities, ranging from feedback at conferences to advice from our graduate student assistants to, especially, the generous and unexpected responses from our participants.

But we are also creating pathways—research orientations—for other researchers who are taking up the idea of wayfinding to explain the combination of traditional and serendipitous paths that they are noticing in their own participants. Such development is moving our project from its own form of improvisational wayfinding toward a methodology to understand the phenomenology of writing experiences.

Ultimately, we believe that wayfinding as a methodology has the possibility of illuminating different ways of understanding writing throughout the lifespan, not just in the years immediately following graduation from college. While our participants were most likely no more than thirty years of age, we anticipate that the activities of wayfinding—particularly orienting oneself toward writing tasks and experiencing serendipitous re-orientations toward such tasks, as well as encountering openings to new and unexpected ways of composing—are common to the experience of writing at numerous points in one's life. For instance, the writers described by Lauren Rosenberg (2015) in *The Desire for Literacy: Writing in The Lives of Adult Learners*, as well as Chris Anson's (2016) auto-ethnographic experience detailed in "The Pop Warner Chronicles: A Case Study in Contextual Adaptation and the Transfer of Writing Ability," can all usefully be described, understood, and theorized through wayfinding. With that said, we might underscore how the attention wayfinding brings to *serendipity* might be particularly useful for understanding and conceptualizing writing experiences of those who are working (professionally, personally, or civically) in contexts in which writing tools, technologies, and platforms are rapidly changing or developing. We look forward to seeing how wayfinding develops as a theoretical and conceptual tool useful for a range of lifespan writing studies.

For now, we have chosen to focus on the first decade post-graduation, a pivotal time in the development of writers as they are making the transition from curricular to professional, career, personal, civic, and other domains in which the need for effective and ever-changing forms of communication are met with unexpected desires, opportunities, and potentialities for using writing— to connect with others, to discover and explore new passions, to build worlds through words and other media. Julissa's exploration of video is an extension of her creativity, expanding her social circle, and possibly enhancing her ability to earn money. Francine marshals narrative to think through how she might effect positive change in an educational institution. These are examples of alumni discovering ways to change their worlds through writing. It may be that the primary orientation of wayfinding is toward hope—toward a belief in the ongoing potentiality of writing itself.

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