CHAPTER 2.

WRITING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: THE CASES OF GABBY AND ADAM

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As Dippre and Phillips (2020) explained, "When lifespan research is longitudinal and qualitative . . . it recursively, intentionally, and methodologically looks forward, backward, and across time as it works to understand the causes, triggers, and impacts on writing development in an individual life" (pp. 6-7). Lifespan approaches recognize the "complex relations of intervening variables, indirect influences, co-emerging life stories, and individuated pathways of development" (Smith, 2020, pp. 16-17) that other approaches can leave unexamined. I use temporal discourse analysis as a tool for making *some* sense of children's literacy becoming through writing.

In this chapter, I draw on two longitudinal cases studies with children from immigrant families. I explore patterns across time using the temporal discourse analysis techniques described in the previous methodological chapter. My goal is to reveal the unique sense-making journeys of Gabby and Adam—who were classmates in first grade—as they engaged in schooling and literacy learning across the first five years of a twelve-year study. Across time, Gabby moved from a notably progressive city to a conservative rural community. Gabby and Adam then attended different schools and graduated high school with different long-term goals. By focusing on two children with different becomings and life experiences, I cut "loose from our moorings of normalization into the great varieties of experience, the great varieties of trajectories, that look so different" (Bazerman, 2020, p. xii) and challenge reified models of literacy development.

As Gabby's and Adam's cases illustrate, writing and being a writer are in constant motion in relation to other ways of being and becoming literate; their becomings are "not tethered or isolated" (Smith, 2020, p. 18), but distributed across contexts—locations, genres, institutions, people, and times. Drawing on a lifespan perspective, I recognize writing as inclusive of everyday writing practices—making lists, sending text messages, posting on social networks—often relegated to the margins of scholarly discussions. For Gabby and Adam, writing contexts were sites of "ongoing change" as they moved through school, sometimes in contradiction to established, predictable, and "particular developmental

trajectories" (Dippre & Smith, 2020, p. 27). Contexts involving people, texts, and institutions were not background; they were operative influences that textured what children thought and did and what and how they read and wrote.

Thus, I trace two students across curricular opportunities, classrooms, and home spaces as I consider their literate becomings and accompanying sense-making (Smith, 2020). While a conventional analysis of qualitative data would aspire to a coherent narrative, attention to temporality complicates this possibility. In short, at any given moment particular dimensions of experience pose more or less influence and become more or less salient. Thus, researchers who aspire towards longitudinal accounts must remain aware that people's accounts of their experiences and activities are articulated, represented, and expressed at particular points in time and must be viewed as "temporary resting place(s)" (Murris, 2021, p. 230). Therefore, the words, images, and observations presented below are never considered enduring.

Fleeting meanings reflect recognitions from the past, including the past experiences of families and friends, the children's knowledge of larger social histories (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988), and their dreams for the future. Both envisionments of the future and tracings of the past are continually subject to revision, reiteration, and rejection, always located within textured contexts of experiences, texts, and people (Fenwick, 2010).

Not presenting a coherent account was difficult. In fact, scholars are trained to present coherent arguments that make particular claims. Writing this chapter entailed stepping back, resisting conclusions, and avoiding closure. I monitored my thinking, what I wrote, and the words I used to represent particular moments. As Fenwick and Landri (2012) argued, people craft provisional narratives that are made and remade across time. This "tentative and hesitant unfolding" (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013, p. 5) reflects becomings as eternally temporary and molten. Self is a jumbling of activities and meanings that produce multiple beings and eternal becomings, challenging traditional and contemporary conceptions of identity as developmental and predictable. As Fenwick (2010) noted, new possibilities for new *doings* constantly emerge in interaction with complex systems resulting in unpredictable outcomes.

I present a brief introduction to temporality as a salient dimension of the textured contexts within which people operate. I then briefly describe the methodology for the longitudinal study. Finally, I present the cases of Gabby and Adam with an eye to the discourses and practices that accompanied their being and becoming writers across time. I discuss a small subset of the writing tasks that the students completed across the first five years of the project in conjunction with other data. In a few cases, I briefly reference data collected after grade five to illustrate long-term emergences.

A BRIEF THEORETICAL FRAMING OF TEMPORALITY

I draw on the temporal theorizing of Barbara Adam (1989; 1990; 2000; 2001; 2003; 2004) to briefly focus on four claims: 1) time and meaning-making as multidimensional, complex, and intricately connected to people's experiences; 2) the past, present, and future as intertwined and inherently inseparable; 3) conceptions of time as culturally and socially negotiated; and 4) limiting, yet hegemonic, and overly-linear notions of time that can damage individual possibilities for becoming.

As I consider the becomings of children across time, I recognize time as multidimensional, complex, and intricately connected to experiences. As Adam (2004) reported, "time is embedded in the various technologies and economic relations" (p. 40) that constitute the spheres of people's lives, including society, home, nature, work, economics, and schooling. Importantly, time has multiple dimensions: tempo, timing, and temporality. Adam (2000) argued for an awareness of the complexity of time— "over and above clock and calendar time" (p. 138)—that honors the experiences and perspectives of people in sociocultural contexts. In Adam's (1989) words, time is "implicit in waiting, in planning, and in contemplating, and in guilt" (p. 468); time is both multidimensional and universal. Expanded notions of time highlight multiple and simultaneous realities that accompany social life. While Adam (1990) confronted the tendency of social science researchers to depict time as unidimensional, a lifespan approach insists that "personal experience, consciousness, existence, and context have to be taken as sources against which rational theories have to be checked" (Adam, 1989, p. 458).

Not only is time multidimensional and intrinsically connected to people's experiences, it is also inherently complex with past, present, and future as intertwined and inseparable. As Adam explained (2004), "life involves an unbroken chain of future-oriented discussions that bring the future into the present and allow it to fade into the past" (p. 54). Past, present, and future are always co-operative, co-mingled, and co-existing. For example, "aspects of past acts need to be selected from the vastness of the totality within which past and potential acts are embedded" (p. 36). This selection not only speaks to the inherent selectivity of accessing past experiences in the present, but also the tendency for people to strategically draw on experiences that produce coherent—sometimes causal— accounts of experiences and selves (Adam, 1990). Notably, Adam maintained that "the past is revocable and as hypothetical as the future" and "continuously recreated and reformulated into a different past from the standpoint of the emergent present" (1990, p. 39). This fluid and evolving notion of the past is challenged by the past as reified and preserved through artifacts, institutions,

practices, stories, beliefs, and texts. A range of human actions—traditions, habits, goals, intentions, wishes, meanings, and values—operate and sustain hegemonic and historicized practices (Adam, 1990).

In short, culture, language, beliefs, and social practices affect how time is conceptualized and actualized within communities (Adam, 2004). The present is always defined in reference to "a particular event, system, biography or future" (Adam, 2004, p. 69) and "inseparable from our biography and biology, our context, beliefs, and values, our needs and our motives" (Adam, 1990, p. 7). Thus people, who operate within time, are "subject to conflicts that arise at the intersections of different temporal spheres" (p. 40).

Finally, discussions of time must recognize and question hegemonic, official, and overly linear notions of time that can damage individual becomings. Adam (2004) contrasted lived time with "machine time," which shifts the "experience and meaning of time towards invariability, quantity, and precise motion expressed by numbers" (p. 114). Adam (1990) explained that because schools have limited temporal resources, "they are structured to follow certain sequences and to happen at a specific rate, at a particular time, over a fixed period, and for a set number of times" (p. 105). In short, the daily timetable is designed to provide "all participants with a regular routine within which the carefully scheduled learning, teaching, examination, assessment, management, administration, cleaning, cooking, eating, and playing can proceed in an orderly and predictable manner" (p. 105). Furthermore, schools operate in alignment with age-based classes, achievement benchmarks, and temporal expectations that contradict organic learning and individualized becomings, creating stress and frustration for students and teachers (Adam, 2003). Perhaps most unsettling is the role that time plays in creating and maintaining inequitable learning opportunities (Adam, 2001). Adam (2001) argued that the task of educators is to "speak to the silences and thereby create the potential for changing social relations that reach deep into the very fabric of socio-economic inequalities" (Adam, 2001, p. 119).

A LONGITUDINAL METHODOLOGY

In the two longitudinal case studies below, I follow Gabby and Adam. Gabby's family originated in Mexico and has resided in the US for at least two generations; Adam's family came to the US from Morocco just before he started kindergarten. The larger study includes nine families who have immigrated to the United States from around the world and addressed a broad research question: *How do children in immigrant families become literate and construct literate identities?* Families were recruited through convenience sampling. I intentionally chose Gabby and Adam as they were among the students that I worked with

most closely across the study. They were in the same first-grade class. Gabby and Adam have participated in the project for 13 years and graduated from high school in June 2021; I focus on data from the first five years of the study.

My analysis draws on interviews with Gabby and Adam, their mothers, siblings, and teachers. Data include observations at home and school, artifacts created by the children (e.g., writing samples, self-portraits, maps, photographs) and conversations about those artifacts. During the first year of the study, I visited the children at home and school five times. During years two through eight, I visited three times. Starting in year nine when I moved to a different state, I visited twice annually. Data targeted spaces the families had occupied across time (i.e., home/neighborhood/school, native country/USA). Each year, members of the research team invited the children to complete the same or similar tasks. For example, we asked children to draw self-portraits to explore identities across time. Semi-structured interviews focused on school experiences, interests, literacy achievement, and literacy engagements.

Across the study, I coded interviews and field notes using *a priori* codes reflecting my research foci (e.g., child identity, home literacy practices, school literacy practices). Interviews and field notes were subsequently subjected to a grounded analysis resulting in additional codes (e.g., pop culture, technology). Artifacts were reviewed in relation to the emerging code set. In many cases, patterns suggested by interviews and observations were echoed in artifacts. At other times, artifacts complicated emerging themes.

As described in the previous chapter, coding was only partially helpful in identifying longitudinal patterns. To attend to change, consistency, and nuance across time, I attended to five types of temporal discourse: 1) the language participants used to situate themselves in time, 2.) references to the pace of schooling and school timelines, 3) comments and practices reflecting social histories, 4) repeated discourses, and 5) repeated stories involving changing or consistent meaning-making. Each case presents a different approach to school and literacy learning as the children moved through their respective becomings. As I linked these discourses and identified temporal patterns across the data set, I identified *through-lines*—repeated references to similar ideas, discoursal motifs, and imagery that recurred across the data set. Importantly these through-lines were *not* straight, incremental, or mono-directional. They were curvaceous and multi-directional through-lines that looped back on themselves. These through-lines sometimes ended and re-generated at later points in time. The through-lines are not real and do not have boundaries that separate them from other through-lines. They are not empirically established truths. Instead, through-lines are reflections of my sense-making, which serve my purpose of putting ideas on paper. Below, I present what must be

conceptualized as points in time when Gabby and members of her family described or engaged in activities that informed my sense-making of moments alongside my account of the Gabby's longitudinal becomings.

GABBY'S BECOMINGS

In this section, I explore through-lines and repeated motifs that marked Gabby's becomings across five years. Notably, I consider Gabby's interests at particular moments, while recognizing these as resting places for sense-making within ever-emerging through-lines of becomings. Admittedly, I was limited by what Gabby and her mother shared. Gabby's longitudinal becomings are a million times richer, deeper, and more complex than this sampling and even my full thirteen-year data set suggests. Regardless, I present this glimpse of becomings to explore how Gabby's experiences, preferences, identities, and interests resonated and served as more or less salient to her contextualized becomings across time.

In Table 2.1, I present three through-lines that emerged, recurred, and were revisited across multiple interviews with participants. In Figure 2.1, I identify drawings and writing samples that intersect with and across these through-lines. Each time these through-lines appeared in the data set, they were treated and described in different and consistent ways. Sometimes they gained momentum and became increasingly salient. At other times, their vibrancy waned. Some things seemed forgotten, only to re-emerge during future interviews. Other things took on new forms. However, at no point were these through-lines linear or causal. Early experiences did not lead to particular outcomes; instead through-lines curved, changed direction, and sometimes circled back. Through-lines spoke to temporality and inextricable networks of connections, links, evasions, and repellings that informed Gabby's becomings. Specifically, I explore through-lines related to clothing and adornment, animals, and LEGOs and *Minecraft*.

Table 2.1. Gabby's Through-lines

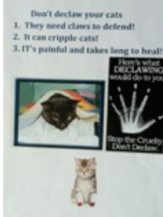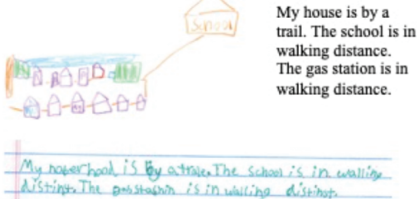| Through-lines	Artifacts	Writing Samples
Through-lines Related to Clothing and Adornment	Butterfly chair, "pink" and "fringy" girl clothes, earrings, short hair, hair dye, oversized sweatpants and sweatshirts	Grade 1: Dog poop Grade 2: House by the river Grade 3: My block Grade 4: Me
Through-lines Related to Animals	Pets, animal books, lion jigsaw puzzle, lion tapestry, animal video games	Grade 5a: Declawing Cats Grade 5b: House by the river
Through-lines Related to LEGOs and *Minecraft*	LEGOs, *Minecraft* videos, pink LEGO pieces.	

Grade 1 Through-Line: Animals/pets, mother	Grade 2 Through-Line: River & fishing, father
	My house is by the river
Grade 3 Through-Line: River & fishing, father	Grade 4 Through-Line: Tomboy, dark-colored pants and shirt, brothers
This is my block! River THIS IS MY BLOC	This is me in 4th grad. I am 10.
Grade 5a Through-Line: Animals/pets, mother	Grade 5b Through-Line: River & fishing, father
Don't declaw your cats 1. They need claws to defend! 2. It can cripple cats! 3. IT's painful and takes long to heal!	My house is by a trail. The school is in walking distance. The gas station is in walking distance.

Figure 2.1. Gabby's Writing Samples

THROUGH-LINES RELATED TO CLOTHING AND ADORNMENT

Across the five-year study, a through-line involving clothing and adornment often surfaced with Gabby and her mother. During the first year of interviews, Gabby's mother shared a photograph of Gabby sitting in a chair that resembled a large pink butterfly. As I viewed the picture, I turned to Gabby, saying "I didn't know you had a butterfly chair." Her mother explained, "[That] was when I could get her to wear pink. Now I can't. . . . We don't do girl clothes at all." Across Gabby's interviews references to "pink" invoked cultural models of femininity and girlhood. However, pink highlighted ways of being that Gabby adamantly rejected, especially when embellishing clothing. The entire time I have known Gabby, she has worn over-sized and dark-colored sweatshirts, T-shirts, and sweatpants borrowed from her older brothers. With the exception of one drawing in grade one when Gabby depicted herself wearing a red shirt and pink pants, Gabby always depicted herself wearing dark-colored shirts and pants (e.g., Figure 2.1, grades 2 & 4). Her writing typically provided few personal details. Furthermore, Gabby did not like to write and often complained when asked to write during interviews.

Across the interviews, Ms. Rodriguez often commented on Gabby's attire, identifying possible signs that Gabby might be becoming more feminine. In second grade, her mother believed that she was "slowly coming out of it [being a 'tomboy']" saying, "the other day she asked me to pierce her ears." Gabby's mother then moderated her comment saying, "But I still can't get her to put [on] the girl clothes . . . if anything looks remotely girly, fringy, she's not going for it." By grade four, Ms. Rodriguez noted that Gabby wanted "to dye her hair;" across the next two years Gabby's hair went from a bright red, to orange, to blue. Blonde or pink were never color candidates. That same year, Gabby surprised us when she begged for a curling iron; yet, when asked to choose between the curling iron and LEGO, Gabby chose the LEGO. Gabby's mother lamented, "She has no, like girly attentions" and then admitted, "I was a tomboy for many years."

As I trace through-lines, marked by recurring discourses, I observe constant negotiation. At age six, Gabby teased her older brother, saying "You play with dollies" and proudly reported, "I play with Transformers." Her words highlighted toughness: "I'm a tomboy. I like to stick around with my brothers." A year later, Gabby's mother remarked on her propensity for action, predicting that Gabby would grow up to be a fire fighter, "I can see something like fire fighter something [like] that . . . she'd get into it and the adrenaline would just go." Similarly, as reported in the previous chapter, Gabby loved fishing with her father and brothers. Doing things—especially activities associated with her brothers—attracted Gabby.

Importantly, Gabby's through-lines involved people. The shirts that Gabby wore were not *like* her brothers' shirts; they *were* her brothers'. Thus, Gabby engaged with people as she negotiated possibilities and produced through-lines accompanied by sometimes fleeting becomings. For example, Ms. Rodriguez connected Gabby's tomboy stance to her own memories of being a tomboy and her recollection of growing out of that phase. While Gabby's mother watched for—perhaps hoped for—a transition from tomboy to young lady, Gabby made her own way. Her through-line was not linear; it was a multifaceted, tangential, and curvaceous series of false starts and new directions (Adam, 2004; Dippre & Smith, 2020), alongside her emerging sense of self, her memories of the past, and possibilities for future becomings. The stories her mother told, her brothers' sweatshirts, and the smiling preschooler in the butterfly chair inform this through-line, which I, as a researcher, marvel at but never fully understand.

The influence of her three older brothers could explain Gabby's tomboy stance. As her third grade teacher reported, "She puts up a good front on being a tough girl. She'll come in and talk about her brothers picking on her and doing things to her and beating her up and she's like, 'That doesn't hurt.' She's like, 'I can take it.'" However, Gabby's interest in activity is not limited to being tough and wearing her brother's shirts. Across time, Gabby has consistently engaged in

discourses that compelled me, as a researcher, to identify a through-line related to gender representation. However, this through-line was complicated by significant spaces of affiliation shared by Gabby and her mother.

THROUGH-LINES RELATED TO ANIMALS

When visiting Gabby, it was common to encounter a menagerie of pets (e.g., dogs, birds, rats, snakes, hamsters, lizards, cats and litters of kittens). Ms. Rodriguez was an ardent animal lover and often adopted unwanted pets from friends and acquaintances; Gabby was her primary accomplice. In first grade, Gabby and her mother made and hung a sign next the apartment building's mailboxes (Figure 2.2).

> TO ALL TENETS w/ Canine Pets
>
> Pick up your pet's feces
>
> **DISCARD** in the TRASH
>
> Thank you
>
> Management

Figure 2.2. Gabby's Note

Gabby's favorite activity was playing with her dog. When attending a first-grade reading intervention at school, Gabby enjoyed "fun books" that featured "lions, tigers, wolves, dogs . . . and how tigers can catch wild pigs."

In second grade, Gabby reported, "I like learning about animals and stuff . . . that's the only thing." Her favorite school library books featured color illustrations of "wild wolves" and "big cats." When asked to photograph things at home, she photographed a partially complete jigsaw puzzle and a tapestry that hung in the living room. Both pictured close-up images of a male lion.

By grade three, Gabby's favorite video game involved taking care of animals. She explained, "You gotta keep them healthy. You have to feed them and groom them, like you can give them a bath and stuff like that." In fourth grade, Gabby continued to prefer books about animals, admitting that she "read [only] some of the pages or looked at the pictures." In fifth grade, Gabby choose to write about declawing cats. She used a computer to write and illustrate the text presented in Figure 2.1 (grade 5a).

This through-line of animals involved home and school writing, picture puzzles, video games, and books. I witnessed connections—not only with animals—but also with her mother, who shared her animal affinity. Thus, while Gabby's tomboy nature often involved her brothers and invoked her mother's concern, her animal through-line complicated and supported this tomboy stance. "Big

cats" and "wild wolves" spoke to rough and tough activity, while feeding and caring for pets spoke to nurturing and her mother.

THROUGH-LINES RELATED TO LEGO AND *MINECRAFT*

Perhaps more than any other, Gabby's play with LEGO and *Minecraft* highlighted the complex, nonlinear, and unpredictable vibrancies that characterized her through-lines. Through-lines involving physical and digital building revealed moments of sense-making across gender, activity, and animals. Gabby's interest in LEGO first appeared during grade three. Her mother reported, "LEGOs is her biggest thing right now . . . that's just kind of [started] in the last couple of weeks." Gabby explained, "I can make like a cat, dog, I made a bunny, I made an office, [stuff] like that too." Ms. Rodriguez added, "She's extremely talented." Among her most impressive creations was her LEGO version of an owl from the *Clash of the Titans* movie.

Our conversation turned to the high cost of LEGO and Ms. Rodriguez explained that while a friend had given them a used set of LEGOs, she wanted to buy more, but it was "thirty-two bucks for one of those buckets" and then "they have like this tiny box of Mario [LEGOs for] fifty bucks. And I'm like, no way." Cost surfaced again when Gabby became "obsessed" with *Minecraft* during grade four. *Minecraft* is a video game that could be described as a digital version of LEGO. *Minecraft* involves players building 3D worlds. However, as Gabby lamented, *Minecraft* requires the purchase of an app that is downloaded onto an Android or iOS device. Even if Gabby's family could have afforded the program, purchasing a device to host the game was prohibitive. Thus, Gabby's engagement with *Minecraft* was limited to what she could do on her mother's cell phone—watching videos of other people playing the game on YouTube. However, this did not curb Gabby's enthusiasm.

> I'm obsessed with *Minecraft, Minecraft, Minecraft, Minecraft, Minecraft!* . . . Yeah. It's like they have people, you can build houses, you can build things that [are] pressure proof. Like you can open a door just by standing on a plate that is used by red stone. There are like little block people and they have a thing where you can put your armor on. There's leather armor, diamond armor and there is iron armor.

Gabby's interest in *Minecraft* continued through middle school alongside her continuing enthusiasm for LEGO.

When I visited the family, I would often bring Gabby books related to *Minecraft* or sets of LEGO. When Gabby was in sixth grade, I brought her a set of

LEGO that could be used to make a farm with animals. Gabby was excited and immediately poured the LEGO onto the floor. As she dug through the pieces, she pulled out the pink LEGO pieces that, according to the instructions, could be used to make a pig. She placed them in a pile, commenting "I'm leaving all the pink [LEGO] . . . This is going to go bye-bye. . . . I don't want these." I replied, "Whatever you don't want you can just trash." While Gabby decided not to discard the pink LEGO, she made it clear that they would be used sparingly. Her love of LEGO was complicated by the pinkness of the pieces to the degree that even the possibility of making a pig was over-ridden by the objectionable nature of pink.

By exploring discourses related to gender, animals, and LEGO across time, I witnessed the continual emergence, negotiation, intersection, and repellation of through-lines that marked Gabby's becomings. These through-lines were textured and contextualized by the events and practices of her experiences. They were expressed in what Gabby said, did, and wrote and in the recurring motifs, words and representations of her writing samples. Consistencies were suggested and plateaus formed, but moments of sense-making were always tentative and eternally emerging, fading, evaporating, re-emerging, and/or strengthening. There was no clear linear path among or across the through-lines. No coherent narrative emerged (Dippre & Smith, 2020). There were false starts, increasing saliencies, and unpredictable stops. While encountered in the present, through-lines are always informed by past meanings—butterfly chairs, litters of kittens, LEGO, and family members—alongside future possibilities (Adam, 2004).

ADAM'S BECOMINGS

As for Gabby, temporal discourse analysis revealed through-lines that accompanied Adam's becomings that were richer, deeper, and more complex than the data below suggests. I present this glimpse of through-lines to attend to strands of becomings that Adam referenced across time. While Gabby's through-lines rarely involved reading and writing, and she often deflected our questions about literacy, Adam highlighted texts and literacy practices; texts appeared in the pictures he drew and the photographs he took. Across the five years, Adam's texts included books, video games, comics, a letter from President Obama, websites, and wall-hangings.

In Table 2.2, I present three recurring through-lines across Adam's interviews. As Adam treated topics across time, some gained momentum, while others waned and seemed forgotten only to re-emerge. Like Gabby's becomings, Adam's through-lines were curvaceous and reiterative; they looped back and propelled forward and were neither linear nor causal. Early experiences did not predict later outcomes. Adam's data spoke to the complexity of being human and networks that surrounded, constituted, and informed his becomings.

Specifically, I explore Adam's through-lines related to accomplishment, super-heroes and video games, and Morocco and Adam's Muslim faith. Figure 2.3 presents a sampling of Adam's writing and drawing during elementary school.

Table 2.2. Adam's Through-lines

Through-lines	Artifacts	Writing Samples (Figure 2.3)
Through-lines Related to Accomplishment	Long chapter books, one million words, complicated books, reading levels, Harry Potter book, soccer uniform, sports medals, first grade self-portrait	Grade 1: Self-Portrait and Eid Grade 2a: Self-Portrait, Narina and Basketball
Through-lines Related to Super-heroes and Video Games	Superhero movies, video games, laptop, mother's cell phone, comics, mythology-themed books, educational videos, Netflix	Grade 2b: Moroccan Beach Grade 3: Moroccan Mosque Grade 4: Moroccan Beach Grade 5: Moroccan Castle
Through-lines Related to Morocco and Adam's Muslim Faith	First grade self-portrait, drawing of the mosque, slaughtered sheep, the ninety-nine names of Allah, Moroccan fabrics, Adam's map of his school, Arabic news broadcasts, letter and photo from President Obama	

Figure 2.3. Adam's Through-line Writing Samples

THROUGH-LINES RELATED TO ACCOMPLISHMENT

When asked why Adam considered himself a good reader, he routinely voiced discourses that referenced books:

> Adam (grade 3): [I am a good reader] because I am in eighth grade reading [level]. . . . . Because I read long chapter books.
>
> Adam (grade 4): Yeah [I am a good reader]. One time, I had to read one million words.
>
> Adam (grade 4): I read a lot. And I am starting to read like a bunch of chapter books.
>
> Adam (grade 5): [I am a good reader] because I read a really complicated book.

Across these accounts, discoursal through-lines highlighted the qualities of the books Adam had read, which he described as "long chapter books," "really complicated books," and books with "one million words." These textual qualities convey meanings about both the books and about Adam. In Adam's second grade self-portrait (Figure 2.3, grade 2a), Adam's face is flagged on both sides by the word "Narnia", referencing a book series that he admitted was beyond his second-grade reading ability. Adam claimed to read "a lot" and a "bunch" of books. Claims of proficiency extended to writing with Adam describing himself as a good writer because "I type a lot."

Adam often presented texts and avid reading as evidence of competence. As his third-grade teacher explained, Adam "would run [and get] or [pretend to] read a really hard book that he couldn't really read. So, it was that kind of insecurity, that sometimes he just needed to be [seen as] smart." His sixth-grade teacher agreed, describing him as "a very proud individual." Regardless, Adam's teachers confirmed his claims of being a skilled reader, describing his "greatest success" as reading (grade one teacher), noting that he had "progressed in reading and math and writing" (grade three teacher), and stating "he's above grade level" (grade five teacher). In short, Adam worked to convey messages of competence to his classmates and teachers presenting a through-line of discourses and artifacts to present himself as a skilled reader at school and during our interviews.

Like Gabby's connections to her father, mother, and brothers, Adam's textual through-lines connected to family members. Adam's attraction to long books and reading levels echoed comments from his older sister, Laila. When Adam was in second grade, Laila proudly described herself as a good reader, "because I finished a book that has 380 pages in like four days." Two years later, Adam claimed that he was "winning" a competition with his sister, explaining "it's a Harry Potter book. Yeah, I am better than her. I am already at page one hundred

something." For Adam and his sister, long books, reading a lot, and reading quickly were markers of reading ability.

In addition to Adam's literacy accomplishments, Adam often voiced discourses of achievement in relation to sports and artistic abilities. In fact, Adam sometimes shifted our discussions of his reading prowess to his accomplishments in sports, especially soccer. For example, in grade three, Adam claimed "I don't like writing" explaining, "It is just something I don't like and it gets my hand tired." Adam then redirected the conversation with the *non sequitur* "I *also* play soccer" and enthusiastically described his community soccer team as a "*real* flag team." The following year when asked if he read more than the other kids in his class, Adam responded, "Yeah" and again redirected our conversation saying, "I'm probably the best swimmer in my family. I'm faster than Laila." When asked in grade two to take photographs of favorite possessions, Adam photographed the medals he had won for basketball and running (also see Figure 2.3, grade 2a), saying "I really like my medals."

Adam's competitive tendencies were evident when he reflected on his self-portrait commenting "I messed up. . . . I can do better." He then compared himself to his cousin, who could "draw a picture almost like it's a camera took a picture." That same year, Adam and I revisited a self-portrait that Adam had drawn two years earlier. Adam laughed, commenting "That's more like a bad drawing."

Across the interviews, Adam engaged with discourses and markers of accomplishment. Significantly, Adam's sister, his father, his cousin, his teachers, and I were all part of the textured context that framed Adam's through-line of accomplishment. Adam used things (e.g., books, medals) as evidence of ability, he compared himself to the textual doings of his sister, father, and cousin. Thus, things, people, discourses, and activities intermix, defying linear trajectories and definitive predictions (Adam, 2000; 2004). Books were part of Adam's through-line of accomplishment, conveying meanings to his teachers, family, himself, and me. Adam's focus on competence and accomplishment may have links to his early fascination with superheroes, as described below.

THROUGH-LINES RELATED TO
SUPERHEROES AND TECHNOLOGY

Across the five years, Adam's through-lines sometimes took new directions. For example, in early elementary school Adam was enthusiastic about superheroes and video games. Adam's mother shared pictures of Adam as a smiling kindergartener wearing a Superman shirt. Two years later, Adam identified "The Amazing Spiderman" as his favorite movie and reported that he liked "Batman and Thor and Captain Incredible, too." He was watching the Avengers movie

on his laptop, which he also used to play the video games that were popular with his classmates.

Thus, I was surprised when in grade four Adam reported that he rarely used technology and cleverly reported, "I use my brain." Across grades four and five, Adam increasingly reported little interest in—and perhaps a rejection of—technology.

> Adam (grade 4): You know I am not really a laptop person. I'm not an electronic person. I really don't use the computer. I am more of an outdoor person.
> Adam (grade 5): Yeah, there's games on it [his mom's cell phone], but I don't really play games on it. I just use it [as a phone].
> Adam (grade 5): But even if it [his computer] was working, I still wouldn't use it that much.

By grade five, Adam only used his laptop for school assignments.

Adam's through-line of superheroes led to hard-copy "comics [graphic novels]" including the *Amulet Series* (Kbuishi & Caffoe, 2008-present). Through these texts was a partial re-emergence of Adam's earlier interest in superheroes. For example, Adam excitedly explained that the protagonist in the Amulet series was "a stone keeper . . . it's like a hero except like she's controlled by a stone." He then clarified, "it's a girl and there is a generation of stone keepers and she's not like technically a hero but like she does save people because she has powers." Adam's description of the Amulet series inspired me to ask if the Amulet comics included mythological characters from the books he had been reading a year earlier. Adam responded, "no" but then noted that he was "waiting for a book that's coming in [the] Percy Jackson [series]," which features characters from Greek mythology.

Across this through-line of superheroes and technology, there are circulating and sometimes recursive vacillations among superheroes, mythological characters, comics, books, video games, movies, and technological devices. By fifth grade, the movies and video games that Adam enjoyed in earlier years were replaced by *Amulets* comics, featuring a hero who is "not like technically a hero" and books with mythological characters. At various points in time, Adam assumed "temporary resting place(s)" (Murris, 2021, p. 230), yet his through-line continued to emerge and re-emerge with tendrils reaching forward and backward and in different directions across past, present, and future (Dippre & Smith, 2020; Adam, 2004).

By grade six, Adam reported, "Well, I used to want to watch like science videos . . . and like educational videos [on my computer] to like help me in school." Adam

then pointed to his laptop saying, "I don't use this. I'm more, I'm still an outdoor person." Across these through-lines, Adam used discourses and activities to make various claims: wearing his Spiderman shirt (kindergarten), "I am not really a laptop person" (grade four), and "I'm still an outdoor person" (grade six). However, affinities continued to emerge and re-emerge. For example, in sixth grade Adam continued to watch a few superhero shows on Netflix and competed with a friend to see who could be the first to watch the entire Green Arrow superhero series. This competition harkens back to both his interest in superheroes and competitions with his sister. As I continued to follow Adam across time, a through-line related to Morocco and his Muslim faith expanded in new directions highlighting history, Middle-Eastern politics, and environmental issues.

THROUGH-LINES RELATED TO MOROCCO AND ADAM'S MUSLIM FAITH

Returning to Adam's six-year-old self-portrait (Figure 2.3, grade 1)—which he later described as a "bad drawing"—we see Adam's smiling face surrounded by the sun and birds. When asked about the drawing, Adam explained, "I was looking in the sky and dreaming that I was in Morocco that there was eleven birds and two trees and I loved my grandma that died and right now she is with Allah and I made a big smile on Eid [*Day of Celebration*] and that's all." Adam's self-portrait and his talk highlighted joyous memories of sunny days in Morocco and a past Eid Celebration. Significantly, this first grade drawing brought together Morocco and Adam's Muslim faith through connections to his grandmother's passing.

Adam's Muslim faith was a recurring motif that assumed different forms and led in multiple directions. In third grade, when asked to draw a picture of Morocco, Adam drew the image presented in Figure 2.2 (grade three) explaining, "[It's] the world's second biggest mosque and nice scenery of Morocco and how cool Moroccans are. Moroccans are cool because we build a lot of cool stuff like big zoos and mosques." The Mosque and Morocco are connected, as are "nice scenery" and "big zoos." Discourses of Adam's pride in reading big books and winning medals are evident in Adam's pride in being Moroccan (Figure 2.3, grades 2b, 3, 4, & 5).

Significantly, the Mosque was the primary social space for Adam and his family. When Adam was in second grade, he participated in an Eid a-Adha celebration with his uncle in which the men slaughtered a sheep. Adam was excited and recounted the gory details of the slaughter to Rohany, a Muslim research team member. He reported, "We said *Bismillah* (In the name of Allah) and cut the sheep's throat quickly with a sharp knife. My uncle cut out the stomach and

took the inside organs out." Adam reported, "I pulled down the sheep's skin." As he concluded, he proudly proclaimed, "Now, I'm a man." Through-lines of faith and Morocco involved family members, people at the Mosque, and the meanings that accompanied Eid, the sheep's slaughter and becoming a man. This through-line cut across the Mosque and family (also see Figure 2.3, grade 1).

Home—Adam's family's small apartment—also reflected his Muslim faith and Moroccan heritage. The furnishing featured Moroccan fabrics and a Moroccan melody alerted family members when it was time to pray. In third grade, Adam reported on his first experience of fasting for a full day during Ramadan: "It's just like you eat before four o'clock, morning, and you just fast the whole day. And then when it's like, eight o'clock [at night], you eat." When asked to photograph some of his favorite things at home, he photographed the television set, his laptop, money that he had saved, and a large panel of Arabic text that hung in his living room. Adam explained, "It's the ninety-nine names of God." While Adam knew what the text represented, he admitted that he could not read the words, saying "I never memorized them." Regardless, this text held meaning. Adam's home space was distinctly different from school spaces, where Adam was one of very few Muslim students.

When asked in fifth grade to draw a map of his school, Adam identified the cardinal directions on his drawing. Adam explained that knowing these directions was essential in order to direct his prayers towards Mecca. He explained,

> My teacher told me where North is and I just figured out the
> rest. So that is North, East, Southeast, West (Adam pointed
> to the directions on his map as he spoke). When asked if he
> prayed during school, Adam responded "No," explaining, "I
> would but it is not like the right times because when we have
> the first prayer, it is during school. I have that during math
> and sometimes during the test, so I can't.

Adam's mother was sitting nearby as we spoke. She understood Adam's reluctance, saying, "I know, the kids like at this age . . . even [in] the home [I have to remind him to] 'Go pray, go pray.' So of course in school, he can forget. Maybe when he grows up." Here, we witness the complexities of prayer at school. Adam was clearly aware of when and in what direction he should be praying; he noted, "I would feel more comfortable in doing it [if everyone were praying at school]." Prayer and faith contributed to a through-line of family, peers, teachers, and the physical spaces that simultaneously propelled and repelled Adam toward and away from prayer.

Starting in grade three, Adam's connections to Morocco and Islam emerged in an unpredicted direction. In short, Adam was becoming increasingly politically

aware as he drew on historical events, conversations with family members, and interactions at the Mosque with Muslims from around the world. In addition, Adam was watching Arabic cable television news with his mother "to see what's happening, like in Morocco [and] Syria." Adam explained "Libya is free, but Syria is not. They having a war right now." He contrasted the political systems in Morocco and the United States, saying "Our [Moroccan] King is very good. He gives like poor people like houses . . . . We have a king and in every city he has a castle. And then [for] every castle he has guards. So he does not have to get scared. Like there's 500 guards all over his castle" (Figure 2.3, grade 5).

In fifth grade, Adam attended a "rally for Palestine" at the state capital saying, "'cause all that stuff is happening, it's really sad [so] we were downtown at [the] Capital, and they were doing a protest." Adam was concerned about the historical annexation of Palestinian territory by Israel, although as Adam noted, Palestinians had been living on the land for "more than like 2000 years." He worried that so many Palestinians had been killed recently, saying "they don't have the right to kill a few million [people]."

Later during that same interview, Adam's interest in politics surfaced. He was excited about a signed letter and photograph that he had received from President Obama after his class had written letters to the President. Adam's letter addressed bullying. When I photographed the letter for our data set, Adam suggested, "you should [also] take a picture of his [Obama's] picture." Adam enthusiastically pointed to the letter adding, "And that's his signature." While at the time these texts seemed to be a novelty, across time Adam's political interests gained traction and emerged in various directions as Adam moved through middle and high school. For example, in eighth-grade, Adam was highly critical of President Trump and wrote a powerful argumentative essay about the war in Syria. In later years, Adam proposed Muslim-oriented and environmentally-conscious businesses and made critical comparisons between the media attention paid to the burning of Notre Dame Cathedral and the burning of Mosques.

Across time, I observed a through-line related to Morocco and Islam. This through-line incorporated multiple directions—religious practices, current events, politics, and affinity with the local Muslim community. Moroccan accomplishments like the building of great Mosques reverberate with Adam's pride in being an accomplished reader and writer. Not only do we observe emergences and connections, but I also observed connections across through-lines (Adam, 2000; 2004). This focus on political interests emerged alongside the fading of superheroes and video games as well as technology being reserved for academic purposes. However, these trends were neither stable nor consistent. There were ruptures, redirections, and reiterations that trouble singular and linear developmental claims (Dippre & Smith, 2020; Smith, 2020).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite sitting in the same first grade classroom, Gabby's and Adam's becomings took very different directions and involved unique through-lines contextualized by textured interactions with people, practices, and events. Temporal discourse analysis allowed me to attend to how Gabby and Adam situated themselves in time and revealed patterns across time as they spoke, wrote, drew, and acted. These through-lines involved temporal words, references to social histories, and repeated and/or revised words and stories. Significantly, across these cases we see becomings with both limitless possibilities and differential limits. Adam's through-lines were packed with texts and competitive doings—activities that resonated with school and operated as capital within academic spaces. In contrast, Gabby's through-lines were connected to family, pets, and physical activities. Academic interests and investment were over-shadowed by the vibrancy of Gabby's makings, buildings, and doings. While both becomings were packed with possibilities, as an observer, I witnessed differing resonances with schools and teachers.

Importantly, this analysis required a particular confluence of data, analytics, and my own positionality relative to participants' stories and their becomings. Specifically, the longitudinal nature of the data set and a research design that highlighted stasis and change over time created a context in which through-lines might be both visible and salient. However, it was through my analysis—temporal discourse analysis—that I intentionally and explicitly attended to what emerged, changed, and was revisited across time. The through-lines presented above required me to assume observational, tentative, and flexible positionings. These through-lines did not align with expected trajectories and were not framed by models of causality. In many ways, they defied contemporary discourses about what education is and should be. I am less interested in whether Gabby or Adam met standards or benchmarks and much more interested in who they were and who they continue to become.

I am inspired by Dippre's and Phillips's (2020) metaphor of murmuration as described by Bazerman (2020). They explain that the "order that emerges and coordinates motion in a flock forms not because any of the birds have a spatial sense of the whole or a plan for coordinated movement. The order emerges because each is attuned to the movement of a few and its close neighbors" (p. xii). As with the other authors who have contributed to this volume, I place my trust in this power of "murmuration" (Dippre & Phillips, 2020). I recognize that it operated within textured contexts and across the literacy, writing, and life experiences of Gabby and Adam as they moved from grade one through grade five. It also operated across and through the methodological and theoretical

murmuration of methodologies, ideas, patterns, researcher positionalities, and insights from fellow contributors to this volume.

Children and researchers do not operate as individuals in separate spaces; instead, we participate in emerging becomings of writing flows, practices, venues, and ventures that bring us together and move us apart. As Bazerman (2020) reminded us, "writing evolves, textual worlds evolve, the social worlds that writing is a part of evolve, people evolve as writers, and our research to understand this emergent world itself evolves" (p. xiii). We contribute not only to a self-organizing assemblage of thought and sense-making, but also to phenomena of "patterned fluid beauty" (Bazerman, 2020, xii). This is what draws us to this scholarship and to the colleagues whose work we find inspiring.

So, what does this mean for researchers with an interest in lifespan writing research? While books could be written on the subject, I humbly offer the following:

1. Listen closely, and when possible, use multiple forms of data (drawings, writing, spoken words) that provide multiple ways for participants to convey their sense-makings.
2. Stay flexible and honor the tentativeness of all data, recognizing data as located within being and within longer chains of becomings.
3. Jettison limiting and prescriptive notions of what people, including yourself as a researcher, should be at particular points in becomings.
4. Relish differences, unique becomings, and emerging possibilities.

Bazerman and his colleagues (2018) described the "interwoven effects of history, people, linguistic resources and material contexts" (p. 26) and recognized that "individual writing development will always bear the marks of larger arrangements by which the powers of writing are being harnessed as economic, political, and cultural assets" (p. 27). Like Bazerman and his colleagues (2018), I worry that "socially diminished environments of examination by distant examiners [in schools] may become influential social contexts for writing development, constraining more local and more engaging writing activities" (pp. 22-23). This may be particularly true for Gabby, whose through-lines were not consistently recognized or celebrated at school.

In closing, I note the failure of linear accounts to make sense of Gabby's and Adam's directions, redirections, and lost and resumed through-lines that were apparent across time. As Deleuze and Guattari (1988) argued, becomings are always rhizomatic, moving in unpredictable and unintentional directions; they are underground and emerging, non-hierarchical, and continually (re)forming, and ever-emerging. The past—Gabby's mother's experience of being a tomboy and Adam's memories of beaches in Morocco—were woven into the present

and operated with possible futures in view. There is no "smooth continuous manifold" (Barad, 2013, p. 18) for longitudinal researchers to identify, name, or explain. Becomings simply *are*.

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