

CHAPTER 8.

**DEEPENING AND KEEPING
THE PRESENT: GROUNDED
THEORY IN ACTION**

Ryan J. Dippre

University of Maine

And I asked myself about the present:
How wide it was, how deep it was,
How much was mine to keep.

– Kurt Vonnegut

In Chapter 7, I provided an overview of grounded theory (GT) and closed with some guidelines that lifespan writing researchers can use to make GT useful to lifespan-related questions about writing. In this chapter, I show those guidelines in action, and I use them to make sense of how one writer transformed her writing practice across contexts throughout her life. In doing so, I aim to (1) provide a useful example for future writing researchers interested in using GT to study writing through the lifespan and (2) generate some findings that future GT-driven lifespan writing research can build on. In particular, I focus on how writers come to circulate agency back to themselves, from one moment to the next, through literate action.

LIFESPAN LITERATE ACTION AND AGENCY

One of the emerging interests in my work has been how human agency shapes literate action throughout the lifespan. My understanding of agency emerges from Bazerman's (2013) uptake of Merton but makes a bit of a sharp turn through ethnomethodology. Merton's agentive vision of structured choice-making among alternatives is framed by Bazerman as follows:

. . . the social facts people perceive provide the field upon which they conceive, shape, and choose actions. In so acting they advance their own perception of the socially structured world, reinforcing that vision within the externalized world for others to interpret and respond to (p. 108).

This vision of agency—as making choices among perceived alternatives—is at the heart of my interest in how agency is taken up by writers when they perform literate action throughout the lifespan. But I’m also interested in how the perceptions they have that lead to such choice-making is constructed *just-here, just-now*, with *just-these-tools* (Garfinkel, 2002). How do people work together via interaction to establish certain social facts, take them for granted, and *then* act off of them? How do we create social conditions in which we have more (or less) capacity to act?

In exploring these questions (Dippre 2018, Dippre 2019), I refer to agency as *circulating*, as moving through talk, tools, and texts and back to individuated actors in particular circumstances. By tracing how agency circulates to and through people and objects, I can understand how literate action develops in writers over time. Because of its open-ended nature (which I describe in further detail in Chapter 4), grounded theory is a useful approach to tracing such agentic work. GT allows me to follow agency as it circulates, allowing me to code across interviews, artifacts, and observations according to a coherent logic-in-use.

In *Talk, Tools, and Texts*, I identify *circulating agency* as a rich concept, something that can serve as the basis for an eventual theory of the middle range about lifespan literate action development.¹ Circulating agency as a concept helps us pay attention to the way agency is circulated back to humans through objects. But, rather than offering explanation or understanding enough to make theoretical claims, it poses issues that researchers will need to explore in order to understand how agency circulates through the successive performance of literate action through the lifespan. In particular, by the end of *Talk, Tools, and Texts*, we still have not figured out the mechanisms through which agency is circulated. I move this notion of agency forward in this chapter by studying the writing of Anna (a pseudonym) through the sensitizing framework of what I call *autochthonously grounded theory*.² I aim to generate theory that emerges from the just-here, just-now, with-just-these-tools work of writers trying to keep literate acts going. The scope of the eventual theory moves beyond particular locales, but the

1 A note on the word “theory” so that the reader isn’t confused. Grounded theory does, indeed, generate theory: explanations of sets of data that help us understand what is happening. And my earlier work (Dippre 2019) is also interested in theory. Both grounded theory and the theory I hope to build in my future work is usefully characterized as “middle range” theory, in that both attempt to go beyond the scope of the immediate research site without creating all-encompassing grand theories. However, the theory I hope to generate in the future would be accumulations of several grounded theories of the kind that you are reading about here. So the theory that emerges from my work with Anna will eventually contribute (with other, smaller theories) to a larger, but still middle-range theory.

2 Thanks to Kelly Hartwell, August Adent, and Elizabeth Zavodny for their early work with me as I shaped up “AGT.”

initial work of the theory is keenly aware of the particular circumstances of the particular literate acts (and their products) being studied.

AUTOCHTHONOUSLY GROUNDED THEORY: A SENSITIZING LENS

As I have noted elsewhere (Dippre, 2019), I find it valuable when trying to understand writing through the lifespan to attend to the *lived reality*, the moment-to-moment work of making writing happen. The lived reality is the one constant we can always turn to, whatever part of the lifespan we might be studying. The lived reality, and the totality of the literate experience that individuals engage in from one moment to the next, is not something that can be directly accessed. I cannot step into the shoes of a writer and experience their life. In my work, I draw on interviews, observations, and written documents to approximate an understanding of that lived reality. I code across these artifacts to frame three aspects of literate action:

1. **Ongoing, joint action:** how social order is practiced for another first time
2. **The individuated actor:** how the challenge of each passing moment is faced in the production of writing (or work done for writing)
3. **The scenic reduction of uncertainty:** how the talk, tools, and texts brought to bear on a particular writing task are used to produce order, reduce uncertainty, and keep the act of reading and writing going

I am not looking to mark instances of these frames. That is, I do not want to read through transcripts and note “ongoing, joint action” in the margin. Rather, I examine artifacts and code by looking through these frames. I want the particular ways in which these three aspects of literate action are taken up by particular actors to be rendered through my coding.

In looking through these frames, I am looking at the autochthonous properties of how literate action was produced in a given moment: just-here, just-now, with just-these-people-and-talk-and-tools (see Garfinkel, 2002). I refer to this attention to the immediate, local production of social order as *autochthonously grounded theory* for this reason. Also, no one else in our field is weird enough to see the word *autochthonous* and say “wow, what a great name for a methodology,” so I don’t have to worry that I stole the title from someone else accidentally.

Autochthonously grounded theory will help me to trace the literate action that my research participant, Anna, recounts in her retrospective, text-based interviews. In order to set these frames—and thus this approach—into motion as a sensitizing framework (see Chapter 7), I’ve identified a few questions to help me identify the records I would like to turn into data through coding:

- What counts as writing to Anna?
- What of this writing is meaningful to Anna?
- When does/did she do it?
- Why?
- Under what circumstances?
- With what social and historical antecedents and consequences?

Note what these questions do: they help me zero in on (1) particular acts of writing by Anna and (2) the important elements that lead up to and follow from those acts of writing. So, by thinking through these questions, I can both pay attention to and see the impacts of the autochthonous properties of Anna's literate action.

INTERVIEWING ANNA AND COLLECTING RECORDS

Anna and I met soon after I moved to Maine. A middle-aged, cisgender woman from the Midwestern United States, Anna is a professor at a public university in Maine. She writes as part of her job on a regular basis, both for publication and for institutional purposes. Anna demonstrated an interest in my work on writing through the lifespan during one of our conversations, and I invited her to meet with me and discuss her writing life. She agreed, and we met multiple times across the span of four months.

I began our work together with a literacy history interview, taking handwritten notes about what she said. Once the interview was finished, I coded the interview, wrote some memos to myself, and generated some questions and guiding themes for our next interview. I emailed Anna these questions and themes as a way of setting up our next meeting. I repeated this process after each interview. Our interviews together touched on a range of topics: her upbringing, her history as a student, her family (she is married, with two children), her career, and of course her writing.

THE TRIO OF DEATH

The constant movement among interviewing, coding, and memoing certainly earned its name during my work with Anna. I struggled—as those engaged in grounded theory often do—to have the abductive breakthrough I was hoping to have, and identify a core category. But I was able to identify some insights into Anna's literate life that—I hoped—would shed light on whether and how she circulated agency through literate action.

For instance, Anna frequently—if unevenly—engaged in journal writing throughout her life. She was given a lavender journal at age seven, which she

filled with stickers, drawings, and writing over the course of a few years. When she was 14, she began filling journals in just a few months. Her journal writing did not continue at that pace throughout her life—the various demands outside of writing took her attention—but her earliest bouts with journaling served as an important starting point for what would become a more complex, reader-oriented performance of sustained literate action over time.

Anna's earliest attempts at journaling seemed to her (in retrospect) to have an audience in mind. Notably, Anna lied in her journals at various times. There was no reason for her to do so, in Anna's mind, so the lying must have been done with an audience in mind. As she continued to journal, though, her sense of audience became more complex. The journaling first became a space for her to write to herself—a place to generate a stronger sense of self, to make sense of herself *to* herself, it seemed. Anna mentioned the journals as a way of “defining myself as introspective” while also giving her space to develop “different ways to think about myself.”

The identity work that Anna is engaged in throughout her journaling is evident, and I caught it in my coding frequently. I noted “Identity Building” as a code, something that she seemed to be doing both at the time and in her current, retrospective understanding of it. I also coded for “meaning-making writing,” which I defined as “Writing that has helped Anna make sense of herself.” Anna's identity-building (what I call identity (re)construction (Dippre, 2019)) is fascinating, of course, and it could have been a direction for the project to move in. Since this is a GT study, I had to follow the compelling data where it led, even if that led me away from agency, which I thought would be particularly visible here.

However, there was not yet anywhere particularly compelling to go with the data—or, at least, I did not see it in my notes at the time. The journals—and Anna's discussion of them—were strategic in that they made visible Anna's emerging understanding of how her identity was developed over time, but I saw little of the small, social-fact-constructing moves that would help me peg that to the production of social order. The visibility of ongoing, joint action (the first frame) was low, making a focus on identity rather difficult.

I was able to notice, in my coding, attention to how she built relationships with others through writing. She was able to engage in what I labeled as “space making” through writing: that is, she created opportunities to think to herself, to keep herself at arm's length, to communicate (when she wanted to) through writing. Mentions of space making also happened around acts of what I coded as “enjoying,”³ or discussions of positive experiences with writing. So Anna seemed

3 Not all of my initial codes are gold.

to be crafting social interactions with and through writing, which also seemed to lead to her enjoying it further. I started to get a sense that this might impact how she circulated agency to herself in various social encounters, and that I might be moving toward a breakthrough.

Just as I started to get that sense, though, I was reminded why I labeled this process the “Trio of Death.” I noted a code that I referred to as “powering through,” which I defined as “continuing on something despite uncertainty and/or unhappiness.” Anna, at several points in our meetings, identified some uncertainty or unhappiness in her life and just tried to, in my words, power through it. Although this ended well much of the time—for instance, she confesses to not understanding much about graduate school when she was accepted, but “powered through” and ended up with a Ph.D.—I was not sure how that resonated with agency, and it seemed to knock me off of my selective coding. Could the creation of an artifact cataloguing unhappiness or uncertainty then be circulated back to one’s self, only to have nothing change, and still count as agency? I was not sure.

RENDERING CODES AND A TENTATIVE CORE CATEGORY

Other attempts at moving toward a core category were similar failures. Or, at least, that’s how I felt while I was enduring the difficulties of the Trio of Death. But the attempts, while themselves unsuccessful, ended up leading me to a core category in an unexpected way. I was working on a presentation on grounded theory for Talinn Phillips’ methods course, and my notes and coding were on the table next to me while I was putting together a PowerPoint presentation. Like many presenters, I had initially developed an eight-hour presentation for what was supposed to be a fifteen-minute talk, and I was trying to winnow down what I had to say.

I had been tinkering with a PowerPoint slide that was particularly troublesome, and I sat back and let my mind wander for a moment. Or, rather, my mind wandered of its own accord, whether I wanted to or not. Whatever the reason, I glanced to my left, and saw my latest attempt at selective coding. I thought to myself “huh, Anna’s really messing around with time through her writing.” Then I shook myself, turned back to the PowerPoint, and kept working.

For about a minute, anyway, until I realized what had happened: *time* was at the heart of the agency in the writing that Anna was doing. It was about pausing time, living in the important moments in her life, filling them out with as much detail as she could muster, so that she could then turn to use that detail to inform what she did later on. To reference the Vonnegut quote at the start of this chapter, she was mining the depths of the present as a means of enriching

her life, or her understanding of her life. By freezing a moment, enriching it, and elaborating on it through her writing (particularly her journaling, although this extended also to letter writing to friends and family), Anna was able to not only understand particular moments in her life in more nuanced ways, but that nuance could be drawn upon in future literate acts in ways that allowed Anna to circulate agency back to herself.

This abductive insight was crucial to helping me understand the work that Anna's writing did for her, and how it bolstered her sense of agency not only in the production of writing but, much like Frank (Dippre, 2018), in her recurring interactions with friends and family. Anna would—in a code I developed—“endow value” on a particular moment through her writing, with both the value-endowing and the subsequent use of that value being agentive acts. She saw it as “preserving something” in a way that “lends you more control.” By giving “a moment that's passed something of value” through writing, she could make use of that value at a later production of literate (or other social) action.

Keeping in mind Deborah Brandt's (2021) focus on *action* via coding, I referred to Anna's act as “deepening.” “Deepening,” here, is a way to keep my focus on the work that Anna is doing to mine the depths of a moment, to “endow value” and “preserve something” through her act of writing. This seemed to be a useful way to describe my core category for the moment, but I also sensed it was lacking in some way. Anna did, indeed, deepen the present through her writing, but she also *made use of* that writing later on, and the word “deepening” did not capture that very well. The term worked for the moment, though, as I sought to round out my sense of what it might, indeed, mean to deepen a moment for Anna.

I roped in a few other codes to align with deepening, though I was unsure at this point how they all related to one another. Much like with “deepening,” I focused on the act of writing, rather than what Anna would come to do with that writing. I identified the following codes as relating to the work of deepening:

- Space making: Creating opportunities to think via writing
- Connecting: Writing to make connections with others visible (to herself or to others)
- Endowing value: Deliberately making a moment more meaningful by writing about it
- Gaining control: Using writing to transform an experience into something of greater value

I dropped “Gaining control,” as the distinction between that and “Endowing value” was without a difference. That left “space making,” “connecting,” and “endowing value” as codes related to “deepening.”

These three selective codes served as intensifiers of an act of deepening the present. For instance, Anna mentioned a feeling of control that writing helped her get over an unhappy relationship she was in during her college years. The writing endowed value not to the relationship but to her unhappiness, and gave her the space from the relationship she needed to sort it out. The presence of both codes in this particular writing experience made for a more intense act of deepening. In this framing, then, all three codes could be present at once in a discussion of Anna's acts of deepening the present.

RETURNING TO RECORDS AND CONSTRUCTING FURTHER DATA

A selective coding of my notes from the interviews confirmed, for me, two things. First, that the core category I had identified seemed to be a recurring phenomenon in the records. Second, it confirmed that the phenomenon was happening *frequently enough* that the records were useful to analyze through the core category. At this point, though, the confirmation was more of a hunch. I could point to the number of lines that the deepening addressed through one code or another (65 / 233), but that is only a starting point. And, besides, I still had the other, currently unaddressed half of the equation to worry about: what Anna did *after* she deepened the moment. I would have to return to the bigger set of my records and construct more data to sort this out.

I turned, then, to my interview recordings. I organized them into meaning units (that is, units of analysis bound by the intentionality that Anna seemed to be working to convey) in order to better get a sense of how saturated my data was with the core category. This process gave me a greater number of more nuanced units to attend to, which I could use to apply my coding a bit more carefully. The smaller units would also allow me to extend the “deepening” category into what Anna does subsequently, as her acts of deepening become, through writing, available to her to use.

A problem that emerged from me at this stage of coding was the separation between the deepening of the present and its consequences. Anna was able to articulate with precision some specific acts of deepening the present—a letter to her mother, or child, or some journaling to herself about a particular moment. Her articulation of how she was able to draw on those moments, however, proved more general. The strategic research materials of her discussions of deepening the present, in other words, was not matched with equally strategic research materials in the consequences of those acts of deepening the present.

Toward this end, then I turned to *theoretical* sampling, which allowed me to draw on my emerging theory to direct additional data collection. This came

about in an additional look through interview material that I had set aside. While reviewing some of my earlier codes, I noticed that some of the meaning units I had coded as “identity building” had a connection to some of the acts of deepening the present that I had identified, and that those message units had more information for me about the consequences of these moments of deepening. I had sort of pushed these units to the side, since they were related to identity and thus perhaps useful in a future, different core category.

But with those meaning units at my disposal, two things happened. First, I gained information that I needed to round out the theory. Second, I was able to develop a theory that had greater coverage of the available meaning units. The finding increased both my coverage and the power of my emerging grounded theory.

My rounded-out grounded theory turned out to be a two-step process. First, Anna would *deepen* the present through writing with different degrees of intensity depending on the three variables (space making / endowing value / connecting). Then, once the present had been deepened, Anna would *keep* the present in a future moment, also with different degrees of intensity based on a new subset of codes. By processing a moment through deepening / keeping, Anna was able to circulate agency through her writing and back to herself in a range of times and places. In the next section, I trace the acts of deepening and keeping that she engages in to highlight the role of this core category in Anna’s life.

A note, before we move on. The chapter to this point has focused on my own work to generate theory. This is a deliberate choice, in keeping with the aims of this volume. In the next section, however, I turn from my methodological choice-making to Anna’s work as a writer throughout her life. I try to demonstrate how Anna circulates agency to herself, in part, through the manipulation of time. The findings from my work with Anna are both confirmation of the usefulness of an autochthonously grounded theory approach and a genuine insight that later, more expansive work may build from as we continue to learn more about writing through the lifespan.

ANALYSIS THROUGH A CORE CATEGORY

Table 8.1 provides a visual of the theory. Deepening and keeping are symmetrical in that, just as deepening contains three intensifiers, so does keeping. In fact, as I demonstrate below, the intensity of the deepening has, at least for Anna, resonated with the intensity of the keeping. That is, intensity at one end of the process leads to intensity at the other end. To be sure, however, the intensifiers of the two stages of the process do not line up with one another. There’s no predictive value in what, for instance, space making will intensify in the “keeping” side of the process. Below, I trace out several prominent acts of deepening and

keeping, as well as how they impact the literate action that Anna performs. The particular literate acts I have chosen to emphasize are from different parts of her life but are often in response to rather significant life events. Several examples I reference focus on the writing that Anna did to and about her mother throughout her illness and passing several years ago.

Table 8.1. A Theory of Deepening / Keeping

Deepening	leads to	Keeping
Space making Value endowing Connecting		Sharing Transforming Professionalizing

Step 1: Deepening the Present. The first step of this complex series of literate acts for Anna is to recognize, in her interactions with others and the world, the important nature of a particular moment. This may be something she identifies ahead of time, or something she recognizes after the fact. A long vacation with her mother, for example, was a moment that seemed, even before it began, to be important and worth chronicling to her. Other moments in her life had their importance signaled after the fact—for instance, writing about an experience of a track meet after it happened. Anna did not *know* that the experience would be worth recording before it happened but was moved to after the fact.

Anna’s act of deepening a moment—that is, of mining the depths of a personal experience—happens with and through writing, although the extent of that writing can vary widely. For instance, Anna might do something as brief as a short entry in a journal—or, in one case, saving a piece of someone else’s writing (her mother’s) to deepen her experience of understanding her mother’s life (see Figure 8.1). Anna’s writing (as well as her engagement with her mother’s writing) allowed her to not only understand herself better, but those she cares about. In Figure 8.1, we see the literate action of another as a mechanism for Anna to understand (along with other artifacts and writings) her mother’s illness through her mother’s eyes.

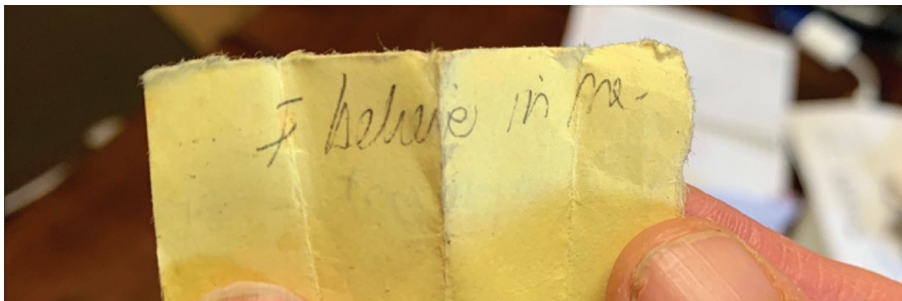


Figure 8.1. Anna’s Mother’s Writing

But Anna could do more—and did do more—than just record small notes (or hang on to the notes of others) here and there. She could also engage in *space making*, creating opportunities for her to think with and through her writing. These structured opportunities to write—at the time of our work together, it was in the early morning—would let her explore the space of a past moment, what that moment meant to her, and how she might better understand the experience.

Anna could also do this writing as a means of *connecting* with others, to make her relationship(s) with them more visible. This could be something that she writes to herself, but that is oriented to making sense of connections she has to others. She seems to work, in some of her journals, to make sense of her relationships among herself and her sister and mother. Other times, this connecting work is articulated with *an intention of sharing* with others (though, to be clear, she has not yet done so at the “deepening” stage). For instance, Anna has a collection of letters that she has written to her daughter on her birthday, so that her daughter can, later in life, have a sense of her life through her mother’s eyes (as well as their relationship). The letters, she says, highlight something “that’s intersubjective” about their lives, and that also “conveys who she is at that time.” Anna also writes letters to other friends and family.

Finally, Anna can intensify her act of deepening by adding value to a moment, by speculating, exploring, or otherwise challenging the seeming mundaneness of a given act by linking it to broader themes, more complex histories, or perhaps more current events. This, as the reader may suspect, can coincide with acts of connecting, but it can also stand apart: it may be something that Anna experiences in the act of her writing, but that she is using to make sense of things to herself, rather than to others (or her connections with others). These acts of endowing meaning, as she says in one interview, are a way “to preserve something” in a way that “lends you more control.” This act of controlled preservation “lends a moment that’s passed something of value” that she can take up and use again. Once that moment has value, Anna has a number of ways of using that value to circulate agency to herself in future activities.

Step 2: Keeping the Present. Once the present has been *deepened* through writing by Anna, that moment has transformed into a tool, a potential way to make sure that, in a future, related moment, Anna will be able to circulate agency back to herself in order to pursue particular goals. *Keeping*, unlike *deepening*, is less concerned with an enriching of the past and more with the accomplishment of social action in the present. When Anna engages in acts of *keeping*, she is pulling these past movements forward in time—and, in doing so, creating conditions in which she can act through various talk, tools, and texts.

Anna’s work on *keeping* is often tied to her journal writing, a practice she began when she was a teenager. This journal writing has been a regular presence

in her life, although her journal writing seems to increase at some points and decrease at others. For instance, when she was in high school and college, “journal-writing remained really important” to her, and she “would—especially in the summer months—[she] would fill up a journal in maybe two or three months.” Much like my other research participants who engage in journal writing (see, for instance, Dippre, 2021), Anna’s journal writing has moved from physical journals to computer entries.

Anna’s act of keeping can be a simple one: she can simply draw on her past writing to help her act in a current moment in a straightforward way, such as by confirming certain events in the past during an act of writing (“writing” here broadly construed—this could be a journal entry, an email, a letter, etc.). But Anna can also intensify this act of keeping in several ways. She might choose to *share* writing with others. As Anna points out, “I’m not as private as some people would be with this private writing.” This writing can be something that she intended to share (and thus was written for a particular audience) or writing that seems, to her, to be worth sharing. Such sharing circulates agency back to Anna because it becomes a shared resource between her and another that helps her with the goal of a particular interaction or set of interactions.

The act of keeping can also be intensified by *transforming* through the originally deepened moment. The work of particular journal entries, letters, etc.—by the act of deepening a moment—come to show Anna a new sense of who she is.⁴ In other words, her writing has transformed her into a different person, one who acts in certain ways and does certain things, and so these pieces of writing become an anchoring point for those new actions. Her writing to and about her mother during her illness, for instance, “created another dynamic” in the relationship she had with her, transforming not only that relationship but, through that transformation, her sense of who she was when she was engaging with and around others.

The reader might note that Anna seems capable of stacking these intensifiers. She can share her writing and, in that act of sharing, highlight a transformed self. So her actions and the materials around her (in this case, the writing) work together to intensify an act of keeping. The third intensifier, *professionalizing*, can also be either stacked or stand on its own. One of the interesting insights in Anna’s writing was the cross-pollination of her personal and professional writing. Anna saw her professional writing not as entirely separate from her personal writing—and, over the years, she came to see the two as more deeply intertwined acts of “artistry.” Anna was thus able to draw on those past moments of her

⁴ Note the connection here to identity (re)construction (Dippre, 2019). This may serve as a valuable starting point for putting agency circulation into conversation with this concept in the future.

personal experiences to generate text (chapters, talks, etc.) that could put her in a position to continue on her professional pathway. She could make “something happen through writing” in many lifeworlds that could be professionalized into something generative for her career.

We can see, in this articulation of the autochthonously grounded theory, a pattern of Anna’s work with and through writing to deepen and then, later on, keep a moment through the performance of literate action. To paraphrase Glaser (1998), through deepening and keeping, Anna’s attention to moments *processes out* in ongoing, moment-to-moment, material work of literate action. As this happens, Anna is able to circulate agency to herself in new and varied ways, for individual, social, and professional purposes.

SATURATION

The core category of *deepening/keeping* seems to have sufficiently saturated my available data. The theory provides sufficient power to help me understand how Anna’s literate life has developed in at least one sense. Furthermore, it has helped me to understand how Anna accumulates and works with agency (again, in at least one sense). I expect and hope to work with Anna in the future, to understand more of the complexity of her literate life. Deepening/keeping will serve as a useful sensitizing framework when I turn to that work in the future.

FROM CONCEPT TO THEORY

At this point, I am comfortable identifying *deepening/keeping* as a theory in a small-t, grounded theory sense of the word: something that provides some explanation of how writers can manipulate one moment to circulate agency back to themselves in a future moment. As I hoped it would, the theory adds some dimensionality to the robust concept of *circulating agency*, and it gives us a mechanism to attend to (time), a lens to look at the mechanism (a particular moment) and a series of questions (articulated below) to explore in future studies.

But, do we have enough information, now, to raise *circulating agency* from a concept to a more comprehensive theory? One that, though wider in scope than deepening/keeping, still serves as a middle range theory? No. We’re not there. Not yet. What I can see through my interviews with Anna is how she was able to use writing to *deepen* the present, how she was able to enrich a moment through writing, capture more of it, and *keep* it meaningful to her in multiple ways throughout her life. The act of deepening the present became a way for her to carry a moment of action, through reflection, into the future: both her thinking (that is, about a particular moment—say, an interaction with her mother) and her actual practice

of literate action (the writing that does the work of deepening the moment) become tools for her to circulate agency back to herself in future situations.

All of this helps me understand how Anna (and other writers) might create conditions for agency in the future by deepening a moment through writing. It has certainly sharpened the image of agency circulation that my earlier work (Dippre, 2019) began to trace. But the image of circulating agency, though sharper, remains quite blurry. Anna is able to deepen a moment through writing, sure. But why? How might deepening one moment interact with other deepened moments? What are the consequences of this writing both one moment at a time and collectively for Anna's development of literate action and the overall rich complexity of her life?

These outstanding questions lead me to conclude that a theory of the scope I hope to build has not yet emerged. Progress continues, to be sure, and the connection between lifelong literate agency and the articulation of a particular moment is worth looking further into. We now know, thanks to Anna's willingness to work with me, how time can be manipulated through writing, and how that manipulation can become a tool for increased agency in future moments. We may not yet have arrived at a theory with the broad (but still middle-range) scope I'm looking for, but we're far closer than in 2019. And, crucially, what we have is usable for future research.

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE?: LIFESPAN LITERATE ACTION, AGENCY, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

My work with Anna demonstrates just how much there is we can learn about how writers manipulate time through writing. How can moments be frozen, enriched, and explored through writing in ways that support (or suppress) agency in future moments? What we see with Anna is likely just the tip of the iceberg. She was able to zero in on particular moments of her life and flesh them out through writing, learning more about the important moments in her life both during and after the production of literate action she engaged in. Studying with writers doing other kinds of writing—and perhaps deepening moments that are important to them (or not) in other ways—might help us see the many possibilities of messing with time that are available.

Future research might also take on a study of lower-stakes acts of deepening the present. What might the relationship be between Anna engaging in thoughtful writing about moments with her mother and someone, say, taking thorough notes at an orientation? Emotionally, these two moments are quite different. But practically, in terms of how people circulate agency back to themselves, what might we learn by putting these side by side? How might we get a better sense

of the multifaceted nature of what it means to deepen a moment in ways that promote future agency? Additional work through autochthonously grounded theory with multiple writers, generating codes, categories, and insights one writer at a time, can help us to explore these questions further.

We also need to consider how the ongoing work of writers to (re)construct their identities (Dippre, 2019) each next first time they perform literate action relates (or doesn't) to the agency that they circulate to themselves. How does identity (re)construction support or restrict agency, and vice versa? In what ways do we transform our sense(s) of who we are (or who we pretend to be) in order to circulate agency back to ourselves? How might we forego agency in order to (re)construct a particular identity or identities in a moment?

Finally, the ethnomethodological and sociohistoric threads that shape this study offer potential links for setting the future work I have outlined above to other approaches to study literate action (Bazerman, 2013), literate activity (Prior, 1998), and literate practices (Roozen & Erickson, 2017). Following these threads can help us to identify the limits of autochthonously grounded theory—what gets missed in this particular process of data construction and analysis, and how it might be further buttressed by additional theoretical complication. With the suggestions I make above, the rich image of theory can be sharpened into a coherent theory, one that not only helps us to understand the role of agency in the production of literate action, but that also helps us to productively interfere with student writing as teachers of writing through our crafting of assignments, curricula, and feedback.

REFERENCES

- Bazerman, C. (2013). *A theory of literate action: Literate action*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2013.4791>
- Brandt, D. (2021). Studying writing sociologically. In K. Blewett, C. Donahue, & C. Monroe (Eds.), *The expanding universe of writing studies: Higher education writing research* (pp. 261-270). Peter Lang.
- Dippre, R. J. (2018). Faith, squirrels, and artwork: The expansive agency of textual coordination in the literate action of older writers. *Literacy in Composition Studies*, 6(2), 76-93. <https://doi.org/10.21623/1.6.2.6>
- Dippre, R. J. (2019). *Talk, tools, and texts: A logic-in-use for studying lifespan literate action development*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.37514/PRA-B.2019.0384>
- Dippre, R. J. (2021). Haikus, lists, submarine maintenance, and *Star Trek*: Tracing the rambling paths of writing development. In K. Blewett, C. Donahue, & C. Monroe (Eds.), *The expanding universe of writing studies: Higher education writing research* (pp. 383-399). Peter Lang.

- Garfinkel, H. (2002). *Ethnomethodology's program: Working out Durkheim's aphorism*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Glaser, B. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Sociology Press.
- Prior, P. (1998). *Writing/disciplinarity: A sociohistoric account of literate activity in the academy*. Routledge.
- Roozen, K. R., & Erickson, J. (2017). *Expanding literate landscapes: Persons, practices, and sociohistoric perspectives of disciplinary development*. The Computers and Composition Digital Press; Utah State University Press.
- Vonnegut, K. (1994). *Slaughterhouse-Five: A Novel*. Modern Library.