

CHAPTER 7.

LITERACY TOURS AND MATERIAL MATTERS: PRINCIPLES FOR STUDYING THE LITERATE LIVES OF OLDER ADULTS

Lauren Marshall Bowen

University of Massachusetts, Boston

This chapter proposes guiding principles for researching the literate activity and development of older adults. The Lifespan Writing Development Group (LWDG) was rightly deterred from “attempting a general, typified, age- or stage-based account” of writing development (Bazerman et al., 2018, p. 13). In alignment with this thinking, this chapter does not attempt to offer a standard characterization of “old age” as a discrete phase of writing and literacy development, but instead illustrates the need to examine old age as a part of the long view of the lifespan—without failing to account for the differences that old age can make.

Following an overview of proposed principles, this chapter illustrates the value of such principles through a mixed-methods approach featuring an observational method called the literacy tour, which, through its simultaneous emphasis on materiality and the narrative “long view” of lifelong literate development, illustrates the multifaceted role of aging in elder participants’ writing and literacy development.

THE DIFFERENCE OLD AGE MAKES: AN OVERVIEW

Experiences in old age are individually, culturally, and historically situated, yet several commonly shared realities of aging have implications for the research of writing through the lifespan. Central to this framework is the caution against either ignoring or overdetermining the role of biological aging in late-life writing. However essential the physiological dimensions are to studies of aging, focusing exclusively on the biological aspects of old age presents an impoverished view of later life stages, and, by extension, of literacy over the lifespan. For this reason, these principles for studies of writing through the lifespan account for both the biological and the sociocultural elements of aging.

PRINCIPLE 1: OLD AGE INVOLVES PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES

As with any other life stage, old age involves physiological development. Although specific physical changes differ from individual to individual in both kind and effect, most age-related change impacts the capacity to engage in literate activity and learning. Decline in visual acuity, hearing loss, fatigue, arthritis, and other common physical factors in old age can have a significant impact on the ability to engage in literate activity and learning (Weinsten & LaCoss, 1999).

Because biological aging is an ongoing and individual process of change and adaptation, the felt effects of physical change on literate activity are specific to individual experience. In some instances, physical changes may prompt the adoption of new literate activity, such as taking up audiobooks when declining eyesight makes book-reading impossible (Rumsey, 2018). In other instances, a physical change makes it impossible to continue with a treasured literate activity, such as a post-stroke tremor rendering handwriting illegible (Rosenberg, 2018). Further, age-related physical changes—and the ways those changes are experienced as constraints on literacy and learning—are correlated with non-age factors. Individuals' socioeconomic status, prior experiences with disability, race/ethnicity, gender, and other identity factors can contribute both to the onset of physiological change and the individual's ability to adapt, both physically and psychologically, to that change.

PRINCIPLE 2: OLDER PEOPLE HAVE LONG AND DEEP HISTORIES WITH LITERACY AND LEARNING

Perhaps the most obvious consideration for researching writing through the lifespan is that older people have “more lifespan” to account for in analysis of any current literate activities. Older adults have had more time to develop durable dispositions toward literacy, including values, attitudes, and beliefs about literacy and its uses. For some, longer lives bring opportunities for inhabiting a broader range of social roles; as Brandt (2018) notes, “Development comes to people through the roles they play or are expected to play at different times of life; the historical events to which they are exposed; and the reconfigured meanings and potentials that accumulate around these experiences” (2018, p. 245). As longevity improves and as cultures of work and retirement continue to change—for example, through the elimination of mandatory retirement policies—the expectations for how older people should spend their time and contribute to their communities is diversifying. Alongside this change, the diversity of roles in which older adults learn, use, and sustain literate activities is increasing. An extended life history often includes greater opportunities for exposure to major social, cultural,

and technological shifts. Given these realities, the perspective of old age may be particularly advantageous for researching writing through the lifespan.

PRINCIPLE 3: IDEOLOGIES OF AGING SHAPE PERCEPTIONS OF AND EXPECTATIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS

Although not often recognized as such, aging is also a process of socialization: we learn how to be old (Cruikshank, 2009). This learning occurs, in part, through encounters with meanings of old age and aging that circulate within a curriculum of aging, the assemblage of historically and culturally situated discourses that define and promote values, attitudes, and beliefs about old age (Bowen, 2012). The language and literacy practices of older people quickly become entangled with the curriculum of aging, which not only shapes elders' literate lives, but also inflects the ways that elders' lives are seen (or not seen), represented, and interpreted—even in ways that we represent ourselves as aging individuals.

For instance, prominent in a contemporary U.S. curriculum of aging is a decline ideology, through which old age, and everything that comes with it, is necessarily framed in terms of loss (Gullette, 1997). The decline ideology of aging gained prominence in the mid-nineteenth century, as industrial capitalism increased value in labor that was fast, accurate, and consistent; workers whose bodies could not move fast enough—especially older and/or disabled workers—were devalued. As characterized by age historian Thomas R. Cole (1992), the nineteenth-century embrace of industrial values fostered a suspicion of old age:

Westward migration, the growth of cities, the rise of manufacturing, and the creation of national transportation, communication, and financial networks testified to liberal capitalism's economic power. . . . Enormous material progress revealed its dark side—fear of decline, of degeneration, of being left behind. (p. 74)

This fear of decline was amplified by the professionalization of modern medicine, which granted institutional legitimacy to medicine's centuries-old habit of pathologizing old age. Within this sociocultural context, inevitable physiological changes associated with aging become conflated with decline in all aspects of human experience, and the decline ideology of aging propagates adverse beliefs about old people: that they are senile; that they are nonsexual beings; that they are culturally irrelevant; and, most germane to lifespan writing studies, that they are incapable of and/or disinterested in learning.

The decline ideology of aging is germane to studies of writing development through the lifespan in at least two ways. First, elder participants of lifespan research

may have internalized cultural lessons about being old that impact their literate activity: for instance, they anticipate age-related limitations on new learning and development, and thus do not choose to engage in activities that would mark, for the purposes of lifespan research, new development or change. Alternatively, older participants may be highly sensitive to the decline ideology of aging, such that they make choices to avoid the perception of being in decline. Second, researchers, too, may be predisposed to the decline narrative, and either overdetermine the role of biological aging in literate activity and development, or else altogether ignore older adulthood as a part of the developmental trajectory. Therefore, while attending to and acknowledging the role of the aging body, which inevitably includes some reduction of physical and/or cognitive capacities, studies of writers in later life must also be conscious of the constraining effects of a decline ideology of old age.

In sum, I propose that studies of older adults' literate activity should:

1. Attend to the impact that age-related physiological change might have on the capacity for literate activity and learning, while also contextualizing the actual impact of physiological changes on literacy from the larger context of an individual life.
2. Contextualize late-life choices, behaviors, and orientations toward literacy within the larger context of the lifespan, including prominent social roles inhabited over a lifetime. This can best be accomplished by adopting capacious views of literacy, writing, and development in order to recognize specific late-life choices and behaviors (including decisions not to write) as a part of the lifelong trajectory of literacy development.
3. Interrogate the ideologies of aging that shape the values and perceptions of older adults' literate activity.

Given the above principles, studies of older adults' literacies require methodological orientations toward corporeal and material dimensions of literacy; toward the "long view" of literate history; and toward the ideological dimensions of literate activity and experience. In an effort to model ways of addressing the above principles through research design, I present an overview of a mixed methods approach that combines life story interviews with the spatially-oriented interview method I call literacy tours, followed by a brief overview of a case study to illustrate this method in use.

LIFE STORIES AND LITERACY TOURS: TOWARD A METHODOLOGY OF MATERIAL MEANDERING

Retrospective narrative accounts of an entire life—as used in what is sometimes called life story research (Atkinson, 1998; Cohler & Hostetler, 2003; Bertaux &

Kohli, 1984) and as illustrated in the influential grounded theory work of Deborah Brandt (2001)—lend themselves well to accounting for the sociocultural and ideological contexts of development. As Knappik (this volume) reminds us, cultural frameworks both limit and generate the stories we tell about our lives. Shaped by social and developmental contexts, life stories are not told the same way over an entire lifetime and can therefore provide important evidence of the ideological and social underpinnings of a particular moment on the developmental timeline.

Reflecting their ideological contexts in form and theme, life stories carry ideologies of aging and literacy, alike. Yet, life story narratives elicited during interviews are distinct in character from those stories told independently of the research scene. Interviews are not neutral data collection tools, but are themselves particular genres or communication events bearing conventions and norms that influence the kinds of questions researchers ask and the responses participants give (Briggs, 1986). Life stories are co-constructed narratives that can reproduce the ideological framework of both the participant and the researcher, and as such, the design and representation of narrative writing research follow and establish aesthetic patterns that, in part, “we have been acculturated to tell” (Journet, 2012, p. 16). Researchers are always at risk of allowing unrecognized assumptions about old age and aging—assumptions informed by a curriculum of aging, which propagates decline ideology—to guide a priori decisions about what merits our attention and analysis.

In response to this dilemma, I will describe and illustrate the use of a supplemental qualitative data collection method, the literacy tour, which I first developed as a means of attending to materiality and embodiment in a study of older adults and digital literacies (Bowen, 2011). Much like other interview techniques used by writing studies research, such as writing process drawings (Prior & Shipka, 2003), video recording (Rule, 2018), and visual-mapping (Workman, this volume), literacy tours are an alternative interview method for eliciting writers’ tacit knowledge. The method itself is simple: a participant leads the researcher on a narrated walk-through of the physical and sometimes virtual spaces in which they engage in literate activity. Participants can be prompted (e.g., “Can you show me where you usually set up your laptop?”), but touring moments can also happen organically, perhaps even interrupting the flow of a traditional interview. During tours, the researcher may ask questions about particular objects that catch their attention, but for the most part, the researcher’s role is similar to that of a tourist: to look, listen, take notes, snap pictures, and record video of what participants choose to show.

The literacy tour as a supplement to the life narrative interview provides at least two distinct advantages for researching writing through the lifespan. First,

the introduction of the literacy tour as a data collection tool interrupts the interview scene—and the assumptions that might otherwise be embedded within the interview script itself—by introducing the genre of the guided tour. Prompted by the presence (or absence) of objects in a particular space, the literacy tour provides a means through which to divert the traditional interview exchange and elicit details about a life story that might not otherwise appear in the interchanges of an interview.

In the context of archival research, Kirsch & Rohan (2008) identify openness to serendipity as a necessary dimension of historical research. Recounting the serendipitous trail of research on physician and women's rights advocate Mary Bennett Ritter, whose papers are kept at the archives at the University of California Berkeley campus, Kirsch explains that, while serendipity cannot simply be arranged, "one can be open to the possibility" (Kirsch & Rohan, 2008, p. 20). Kirsch (Kirsch & Rohan, 2008) describes how her ability to attain a fuller, more contextualized understanding of Ritter's life came from "the simple fact of being there," as taking campus tours, exploring nearby trails, and walking local streets made it possible for Kirsch to more fully understand the local knowledge that was assumed by the documents she encountered. Likewise, literacy tours provide an expansive—and often serendipitous—framework through which to contextualize and further prompt life narrative data gathered through interviews. In this way, researchers may be better able to grasp how participants experience aging, both within and in tandem with the stories about the life course that they have been acculturated to tell.

The spatial orientation of the literacy tour offers a second advantage to lifespan writing research through opportunities for deeper analysis of the role of materiality in literacy development—which, in turn, opens up opportunities to further examine age identity and age ideology. Literacy tours are oriented toward what Brodkey (1987) calls *scenes of writing*, or what Cydney Alexis (2016) conceptualizes as a *writing habitat*. Recent writing studies research has already found writing habitats—and objects found within them—to be important to the study of writing processes. Rule (2018) proposes the study of "writing's rooms" as a means of "budg[ing] the clingy assumption that composing processes are ultimately only linear, goal-directed mental action" (p. 405), thereby adopting new materialism's expanded sense of agency, which extends to nonhuman artifacts and material environments. Literacy tours are, in other words, a way of capturing and examining environmental contexts as "active agents" in literate activity (Dippre & Smith, this volume).

As an environment in which someone typically writes, the writing habitat is "populated . . . with objects," shaped by preferences, and host to routinized behaviors (Alexis, 2016, p. 83). During literacy tours, participants show me

predictably literacy-related objects, such as books, computers, writing instruments, and notebooks, as well as less obviously literacy-related artifacts: photographs, chairs, maps, model vehicles, clocks, and other objects. These material discoveries reflect the ways in which “[e]verything matters to writing; all matter is fair game” (Micciche, 2014, p. 491). Focusing on the objects that populate writing habitats has made it possible for writing studies researchers to identify how objects insert themselves into a writer’s processes, tuning consciousness and managing affect in ways that facilitate or even disrupt textual production, as writers actively recruit objects to mediate a writing process: a timer on a microwave to regulate writing time (Prior & Shipka, 2003); a distraction-free digital writing environment to direct attention (Ching, 2018); dogs to provide calming companionship and a perhaps-welcome interruption (Blewett et al., 2016). For the purposes of researching writing development through the lifespan, attention to the minutiae of writing habitats is useful for considering the ideological context in which writers write: the objects and spaces of writing habitats reflect the beliefs, values, and attitudes of the humans who designed them (Alexis, 2016). Further still, literacy tours embrace the new materialist view of writing as “a curatorial, distributed act” and as a process of “curating materials to create narrative, identity, community, or other significant meanings” (Micciche, 2014, p. 494). The literacy tour is a direct methodological response to this understanding of writing as curation—not just curation of words, source materials, or writing technologies, but also as curation of environments, narratives, and selves.

Alongside the life narrative, literacy tours help researchers to account for material and ideological contexts of literate activity and narrative research. Touring has the potential to disrupt the literacy narratives that researchers and participants have been acculturated to tell, and the materialist orientation of touring brings the ecologies of writing development more sharply into focus. In the next section, I present the case study of a 78-year-old retired electrical engineer named Don. Although not originally designed as a study of writing development, the methods by which I came to understand Don’s literate life illustrate a means of accounting for the decline ideology of old age in the literate lives of older people.

CASE STUDY: DON

Don shared his story with me when I met him in 2010, in his sunny house in an economically depressed manufacturing town in the northeastern United States. After his wife greeted me warmly at the door, Don led me to a finished basement, which had been designed by and for him, alone. Knowing that I

was primarily interested in his digital literacy practices, Don seated himself at a workstation which boasted a desktop computer with dual monitors and shared his story.

DON'S LIFE STORY

Born in 1930, Don was raised by his grandparents in a New England island fishing village. Don's grandfather worked in the upper echelons of a steamship company that shuttled passengers to and from the island in the early 1900s, until a bridge was built to connect the island to the mainland, after which he worked as custodian of the village school. Don recalls, with deep admiration, his grandfather's pursuit of photography. After high school, Don followed his grandfather into a short-term career producing photographic postcards of local nautical icons.

In 1950, the Korean War prompted Don to join the Air Force, through which he attended "electronic school" and learned about radio technologies before being stationed in New Mexico to work on emergency communications. In 1954, Don took advantage of the GI Bill and enrolled in an electrical engineering program at a state university. In the summer months, Don would return to familiar territory and install and maintain airplane guidance systems throughout the eastern United States. After successfully completing his degree, Don worked for a major defense contractor, teaching air force technicians across the country how to use fire control systems electronics. While stationed in his home state during one teaching job, Don met and married his wife.

Spurred by the launch of Sputnik, Don's company transferred him to field service in order to lab test Syncom—a NASA-run satellite project that would yield the first orbiting geosynchronous communications satellite. Following the Communications Satellite Act of 1962, Don signed on as a satellite engineer for COMSAT, overseeing the construction of "earth stations" out of Washington, DC, and eventually became an assistant station manager at one of these sites until a new earth station opened in his home state, where he would serve as manager for the remainder of his career. When Don retired at age 60, he "went out, closed the door, so to speak, and never looked back."

Happily retired for nearly two decades, Don's electronics engineering life was hardly over. In his basement den, Don would use his computer to organize digital photos he took (mostly of the island where he grew up), to shop online, and to play single-player CD-ROM flight simulator and golf games. Occasionally, he would help his daughter fix her own computers to remove viruses and malware, and perform basic hardware upgrades or repairs to computers for himself or his friends.

DON'S LITERACY TOUR

Guiding me on a tour of his PC, Don spent a good deal of time clicking through file folders on his desktop to show his carefully ordered filing system, and eventually set one folder of his own digital photos to play as an automatic slideshow while we talked. Frequently, Don interrupted our interview to point to one of the photos rotating through the slideshow. Most photos were landscapes he had recently taken of the island where he grew up, as well as photos of bridges. Don shared lessons about the architecture of each bridge as it appeared on screen.

After his PC tour was complete, Don pulled a palm-sized “flip phone” out of a messenger bag on the floor. Clamshell-style phones were still common, but the first Apple iPhone had already been released in 2007, and earlier mass market smartphones such as the BlackBerry were nearly at their peak and had already sparked complaints about smartphone addiction (Richtel, 2007). Don spent this brief “stop” on our tour by talking about his adult daughter:

She gets wrapped up in this iPod iTunes stuff and downloads tunes and she has a little pod that will play the things into earphones and they'll have a little picture and so forth, and she tries to explain it to me. She uses a BlackBerry, and I don't care. My cell phone is just a little thing like this. Right now, it's not on. It's got that thing, takes pictures, you know? I don't care. All I want to do is to be able to call and be able to receive a call. And then I found that this thing opened up [flips open his phone], now if I want to do text and crap like that, I can, but I don't. I don't care about that stuff.

Shifting to a walking tour of the basement, Don showed me some predictable literacy objects, including nonfiction books on subjects closely related to his career interests and expertise, such as theoretical physics, astronomy, and operating system guides. In passing, Don turned to a set of models suspended from the ceiling on fishing line. The models included a lobster boat, an airplane, and the International Space Station. All were left as unfinished balsa wood skeletons. While presenting the models to me, Don explained, “I didn't want to put skin on them or fabric because it would hide the mechanical structure.”

EXTENDING AND COMPLICATING NARRATIVE THROUGH THE LITERACY TOUR

Studies of older people—including those who, like Don, do not claim to do much writing of any sort—have a great deal to tell us about writing and literacy

development over the lifespan. In order to recognize the value of such cases, we need expansive frameworks (Principle 2, above) that capture what Brandt (2018) describes as “powerful aspects of writing development that are easy to miss when developmental models are too simple, too narrow, too linear, or too disconnected from context” (p. 244). Life story data provides one avenue for gathering evidence of many such easy-to-miss aspects, including the role of ideologies of old age and aging. It is noteworthy that Don’s life story is heavily populated with technologies and career milestones rather than human relationships. The narrative’s heavy emphasis on career replicates the cultural scripts for elder men who, according to gerontologist Ruth Ray (2000), have been acculturated to focus their life stories on career milestones rather than people. This culturally appropriate narrative helpfully illuminates what Brandt calls the “role of role” in literacy over the life course (2018, p. 251). Don’s account traces his inhabited social roles, made available to him as a straight, white, middle-class, cisgender man at particular sociocultural moments: the Korean War, the birth of satellite communications, the rise of home computing. As with other adults, Don’s earlier social roles continue to hold meaning in later life, even when those roles are no longer institutionally recognized. Retired, Don continues inhabiting his role of technology expert, continually upgrading his home computer, snapping and displaying digital photos, and by fixing his friends’ and family members’ devices.

Adopting the success story arc reflective of his own values, Don’s life story presents an uninterrupted chain of roles, each building on the previous one, carrying forward through retirement. With the literacy tour, however, Don’s streamlined chronology of his lifespan must expand lifewide, as he accounts for the material environment that he has curated for himself. The space—located down a flight of stairs, absent of assistive devices—indicates that physiological changes have not yet required much adaptation of Don’s literate activity (Principle 1, above); instead, Don’s technology and literacy habitat in retirement, with its maps and photos of the island where he grew up, slideshow of bridge photos, and bare model vehicles, reveal what Barton and Hamilton (1998, p. 75) call “ruling passions”: those near-obsessive motifs in human lives that become important to understanding dispositions and motivations for literate activity and learning. The place of honor Don creates for his digital photo collection and the choice to display skeletal balsa wood models become significant indices of Don’s disposition toward technology. As a tour guide, Don curates a sense of himself not just as a successful engineer, but as someone who has, over his lifespan, composed more comfortably with hardware than with words, and who is more interested in curating technology than in using it to mediate social relationships. We see, in other words, evidence that the salient

aspect of Don's literate activity is extending his habits of "geeking out" and "messaging around" (Horst et al., 2013) with technology and composing with materials and images.

The literacy tour also yields evidence of the social and cultural role of old age and aging in Don's literate life. His demonstration of the cell phone provides a case in point. As a tour guide, Don did not tell me when he bought the phone, why he bought that particular phone, or whom he might want to communicate with it, nor did he present the phone with the same reverence as he did more beloved objects in his room. Speaking from the perspective of a historical moment when smartphones and text messaging were rapidly gaining popularity alongside social networking platforms like MySpace and Facebook, Don's tour became less about his own phone and more about his daughter's iPod and BlackBerry. Don described, but did not demonstrate, what his phone could do, and showed that he did not "care about that stuff."

In this moment of the tour, we begin to see how ideologies of aging might play a part in constructing and interpreting Don's literacy values (Principle 3, above). As a white middle-class man who has inhabited the role of father, engineer, teacher, and repairman, Don's role as expert has been secure throughout his adulthood. However, in presenting his cell phone, Don's tour needed to account for a technological development that positioned his daughter as expert and he as novice ("she tries to explain it to me"), thus reversing roles that normative age identity and familial roles (and, perhaps too, gender identity) otherwise prescribed for him. As Rumsey's (2018) research on the literacy practices of elders finds, old age amid bodily and technological change brings new kinds of developmental opportunities and the chance to make agentic choices: to adopt new practices, to adapt familiar ones, or to alienate oneself from new changes. Consciously aware of the different choices younger generations were making in 2010, Don opts for "alienation," dismissing those emergent literacies that, to him, have no significant value. By describing his daughter as "wrapped up" in her mobile technology, by referring to mobile tech as "stuff" and "crap," and by overtly stating that he could make another choice but did not care to, Don's tour presentation strives to cast his unwillingness to use a phone not as inability, but disinterest—and, too, as a marker of generational distinction that maintains a comfortable age identity, and keeps the decline narrative of aging out of his account of literate activity.

As Don's case reveals, the three principles proposed at the beginning of this chapter steer toward a flexible, multidimensional framework. By attending to writing habitats and individuals' accounting of them, we are able to access the material, corporeal elements of literacy in later life, without falling into the decline ideology trap that would conflate old age with bodily incapacity.

In turn, this methodological resistance to the decline ideology of aging supports capacious definitions of writing and development. The LWDG defined writing development by its association with “a reorganization or realignment of previous experience that registers through writing or in a changed relationship to writing”—in short, development correlates with achievement of, or pursuit of, change (Bazerman et al., 2018, p. 7). However, as studies of older adults have already begun to show, demonstrating change in behavior in later life may provide an incomplete picture of the agentic literate choices older adults—particularly elderly adults—often make. In this way, studies of older adults as representatives of a later stage in the literate lifespan can mark developmental change in terms other than decline and loss—where even moments of “not-writing” can become a valuable piece of the writing-through-the-lifespan picture.

CONCLUSION

Because age is both a biological phase of human life and a social category bearing normative expectations, studies of writing through the lifespan need methods that account for the material and ideological dimensions of literate activity. Narrative-based methods, such as the life story interview, in combination with materialist (but still narrative-driven) methods like literacy tours, provide a means of gathering evidence of age ideology and age identity with a “long view” lens. Taking the material environment of literate activity as its primary focus, the literacy tour captures the ideological dimensions of literacy as it is reflected in the design, selection, and arrangement of objects in the space. How those objects are used, cherished, hidden, or ignored all provide important evidence of a lifetime of forming particular attitudes, values, and beliefs relevant both to literacy and to aging.

This long view approach re-integrates old age into the development picture, after modern conceptions of old age as foremost a medical and social problem long ago marked it as the provenance of gerontology rather than writing, human development, or education. And still, the materialist bent of the literacy tour also presents a tangible means of addressing the unique conditions of old age. The literate habitats one curates are, in part, responsive to the changes brought on by advancing age. This might include the presence of adaptive or assistive tools to support age-related physical decline, but it also includes tools and habits that are pointedly absent or obscured, such as Don’s cell phone. By orienting life story research to the curation of material environments, the literacy tour can begin to trace the agentic choices that elder adults make, either with or against the mainstream of mass literacy. The focus on curated environments (which may well extend to environments which one is not able to curate) elicits

important evidence of the “tacit knowledge” of writing and literacy (Roozen, 2016), including the dispositional and affective dimensions of literacy that have been built up over a lifetime, from youth to the present. In Don’s case, the interest in “messaging around” and “geeking out” with technology (Horst et al., 2013), an orientation toward technology—introduced early by a tech-oriented grandfather and sustained in a government-sponsored career in electronic and satellite engineering—takes priority over using technology for the purposes of inscription.

Studies of older populations that strive to acknowledge old age as part of an entire lifespan, but which also acknowledge the biological and sociocultural dimensions that mark old age as a distinct phase of human life, reinforce a need for capacious definitions of writing and of development. Given what cases like Don’s have to teach us, literate development must be marked not only in evidence of a changed relationship to writing (Bazerman et al., 2018), but in agentive choices about literate activity made in response to the course of a particular human life—including “changes that occur in relationships between people and their life worlds over time” (Brandt, 2018, p. 245). While the decline ideology of aging might otherwise mark later life as a period of stagnation and regression, research on writing development through the lifespan should mark not only moments when literate activity exhibits something new or different, but also moments when literate activity does not outwardly appear to change, as when Don makes an agentive choice not to write text messages.

In committing to a project that includes the study of writing at all ages, from birth to death, the Writing through the Lifespan Collaboration has taken an enormous—and historic—first step. But there is more yet that we might do. Consider Smith’s call (this volume) to examine writing not just in, but across: How might the Lifespan Collaboration remain alert to the social and ideological dimensions of aging not only in a variety of age groups, but across them? Age—not just old age—always carries ideological weight, as all age groups, birth cohorts, and generations are imbued with cultural meaning. As the Lifespan Collaboration aims for actionable coherence, it is important that we continue to resist a normative stance by deepening our understanding of the impact of age ideology on literacy, both as a practice and as a subject of study.

REFERENCES

- Alexis, C. (2016). The material culture of writing: Objects, habitats, and identities in practice. In S. Barnett & C. Boyle (Eds.), *Rhetoric, through everyday things* (pp. 83-95). University of Alabama Press.
- Atkinson, R. (1998). *The life story interview*. Sage.

- Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (1998). *Local literacies: Reading and writing in one community*. Routledge.
- Bazerman, C., Applebee, A. N., Berninger, V. W., Brandt, D., Graham, S., Jeffery, J. V., Matsuda, P. K., Murphy, S., Rowe, D. W., Schleppegrell, M., & Wilcox, K. C. (Eds.). (2018). *The Lifespan development of writing*. National Council of Teachers of English.
- Bertaux, D., & Kohli, M. (1984). The life story approach: A continental view. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10, 215-237.
- Blewett, K., Morris, J., & Rule, H. J. (2016). Composing environments: The materiality of reading and writing. *CEA Critic*, 78(1), 24-44. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cea.2016.0007>
- Bowen, L. M. (2011). Resisting age bias in digital literacy research. *College Composition and Communication*, 62(4), 586-607.
- Bowen, L. M. (2012). Beyond repair: Literacy, technology, and a curriculum of aging. *College English*, 74(5), 437-457.
- Brandt, D. (2001). *Literacy in American Lives*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brandt, D. (2018). Writing development and life-course development: The case of working adults. In C. Bazerman, A. N. Applebee, V. W. Berninger, D. Brandt, S. Graham, J. V. Jeffery, P. K. Matsuda, S. Murphy, D. W. Rowe, M. Schleppegrell, & K. C. Wilcox (Eds.), *The Lifespan development of writing* (pp. 244-271). National Council of Teachers of English.
- Briggs, C. L. (1986). *Learning how to ask: A sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brodkey, L. (1987). Modernism and the scene(s) of writing. *College English*, 49(4), 396-418. <https://doi.org/10.2307/377850>
- Ching, K. L. (2018). Tools matter: Mediated writing activity in alternative digital environments. *Written Communication*, 35(3), 344-375. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088318773741>
- Cohler, B. J., & Hostetler, A. (2003). Linking life course and life story: Social change and the narrative study of lives over time. In J. T. Mortimer & M. J. Shanahan (Eds.), *Handbook of the life course* (pp. 555-576). Kluwer Academic/Plenum.
- Cole, T. R. (1992). *The journey of life: A cultural history of aging in America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cruikshank, M. (2009). *Learning to be old: Gender, culture, and aging*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gullette, M. M. (1997). *Aged by culture*. University of Chicago Press.
- Horst, H. A., Herr-Stephenson, B., & Robinson, L. (2013). Media ecologies. In M. Itō, S. Baumer, M. Bittanti, d. boyd, R. Cody, B. Herr-Stephenson, H. A. Horst, P. G. Lange, D. Mahendran, K. Z. Martínez, C. J. Pascoe, D. Perkel, L. Robinson, C. Sims, & L. Tripp, (Eds.), *Hanging out, messing around, and geeking out: Kids living and learning with new media* (pp. 29-78). MIT Press.
- Journet, D. (2012). Narrative turns in writing studies research. In L. Nickoson & M. P. Sheridan (Eds.), *Writing studies research in practice: Methods and methodologies* (pp. 13-24). Southern Illinois University Press.

- Kirsch, G. E. (2008). Being on location: Serendipity, place, and archival research. In G. E. Kirsch & L. Rohan (Eds.), *Beyond the archives: Research as a lived process* (pp. 20-27). Southern Illinois University Press.
- Kirsch, G. E., & Rohan, L. (2008). Introduction: The role of serendipity, family connections, and cultural memory in historical research. In G. E. Kirsch & L. Rohan (Eds.), *Beyond the archives: Research as a lived process* (pp. 1-10). Southern Illinois University Press.
- Micciche, L. R. (2014). Writing material. *College English*, 76(6), 488-505.
- Prior, P., & Shipka, J. (2003). Chronotopic lamination: Tracing the contours of literate activity. In C. Bazerman & D. R. Russell (Eds.), *Writing selves, writing societies: Research from activity perspectives* (pp. 180-238). The WAC Clearinghouse; Mind, Culture, and Activity. <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/selves-societies/>
- Ray, R. E. (2000). *Beyond nostalgia: Aging and life-story writing*. University of Virginia Press.
- Roozen, K. (2016). Reflective interviewing: Methodological moves for tracing tacit knowledge and challenging chronotopic representations. In K. B. Yancey (Ed.), *A rhetoric of reflection* (pp. 250-268). Utah State University Press.
- Rosenberg, L. (2018). "Still learning": One couple's literacy development in older adulthood. *Literacy in Composition Studies*, 6(2), 18-35. <http://licsjournal.org/OJS/index.php/LiCS/article/view/200/248>
- Rule, H. J. (2018). Writing's rooms. *College Composition and Communication*, 69(3), 402-432.
- Rumsey, S. K. (2018). Holding on to literacies: Older Adult narratives of literacy and agency. *Literacy in Composition Studies*, 6(1), 81-104. <http://licsjournal.org/OJS/index.php/LiCS/article/view/181/235>
- Weinstein, G., & LaCoss, S. (1999). Literacy and older adults. In D. A. Wagner, R. R. Venezky, & B. V. Street (Eds.), *Literacy: An international handbook* (pp. 318-323). Routledge.