

Book Reviews

Approaches to Lifespan Writing Research: Generating an Actionable Coherence, edited by Ryan J. Dippre and Talinn Phillips, University Press of Colorado, 2020. 265 pp.

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During the closing speech of 2016 Dartmouth Summer Seminar for Composition Research and Conference, Charles Bazerman spoke about the Lifespan Writing Development Group that he had formed with his colleagues from various disciplines to investigate “how people find their separate paths to grow into writing creatures” (Preface xiii, 5). After attending Bazerman’s workshop and plenary speech in that conference, a group of rhetoric and writing scholars shared an interest in doing research on literacy narratives from an eclectic range of sources. In keeping with that perspective, forty composition scholars from multiple disciplines met online and face-to-face between 2017 and 2018 to draft academic papers on lifespan writing; the result is this edited collection, *Approaches to Lifespan Writing Research: Generating an Actionable Coherence (LWR)*.

Lifespan writing researchers generally cover the entire lifespan writing of one generation or “multiple generations” (6) in order to sketch a report on the rhetorical situation and the rhetorical tradition from different strata of society. Through diverse and inclusive perspectives, contributors of *LWR* focus on varied individuals’ multi-genre writing and new media literacies to “support more people becoming more versatile and capable writers” (7). To study the composition process of lifespan research writing, contributors of *LWR* used qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods of research to develop “more coherent understanding of lifespan writing” (8). Lifespan writing research acknowledges writing scholars’ general view that writing is a rigorous and complex process; therefore, an individual’s writing keeps evolving throughout their lifespan. In addition, lifespan writing research does not ignore the fact that individuals’ writing development might also be affected by relationship struggles, financial difficulties, unemployment situations, diasporic tensions, legal convictions, jail terms, career choices, childcare issues, and deteriorating mental or physical health. *LWR* contributors have also interviewed people from various backgrounds and shown that it this evolving research field requires constant investigation of individuals’ writing processes—not only from countries of the global south but also from other parts of the world. This inclusive approach promises the field of rhetoric and composition studies a nuanced understanding of lifespan writing from the global world.

LWR consists of two parts. The first part, “Embracing the Radical,” contains six chapters, and the second part, “Leveraging our Traditions,” comprises eight chapters. In addition to the two parts, *LWR* has introductory and concluding chapters jointly written by editors Ryan J. Dippre and Talinn Philips; the volume ends with Deborah Brandt’s epilogue. All contributions share three characteristics: first, they agree that lifespan writing research needs continued exploration; second, they emphasize that every phase of writing contributes to an individual’s literacy development over their life period; third, they collectively encourage readers to continue writing throughout the lifespan, for themselves and for others and in any platform of their choice.

Impressively, Yvonne Lee selected four generations of her family as her research participants. Following the interviews with her participants, Lee argues that multilingual writers from past and present generations get inspired by “multidirectional” and “multigenerational” sponsors of literacy to assimilate themselves with different surroundings over the period (139). Focusing on a single research subject rather than a family, Lauren Marshall Bowen studies an elderly man, Don, whose literacy practices alter substantially later in life. Citing Don’s renewed conceptions of literacy even when he is sixty, Bowen shows how anyone can develop their literacy in writing in a new genre at any age. Similarly, James T. Zebrosky demonstrates how an academic scholar can gain literacy in multiple genres at any career stage. For example, Zebrosky himself becomes literate about retirement plans after his formal resignation from a tenure-track position at a university where he used to teach. This chapter illustrates that individuals can take stock of their growth of literacy on any given subject/topic at any time with affordances and sponsors of literacy (156). In addition to age and growth, lifespan writing research draws attention towards people with learning difficulties and health challenges. Apryl L. Poch and colleagues posit that researchers might want to share a space with people with learning disabilities, especially people on the autism spectrum, to study how writers of various capacities approach writing in the longitudinally.

Some of the contributions of this collection broach the idea of revisiting research participants even after a manuscript on lifespan writing is published. The idea is to continuously monitor how the participants of the earlier manuscript are navigating through their writing process and share their perspective on writing as it develops. To demonstrate this idea, Lauren Rosenberg narrates her interaction with Chief, her research participant in a previously-published monograph. Revisiting Chief after the publication of that monograph gives Rosenberg new ideas to explore lifespan writing in her future research; she postulates that lifespan writing researchers could benefit from examining how life-events and life-experiences inform, encourage, and discourage everyday writers throughout their lives. Like Rosenberg and Bowen, Jeff Naftzinger

uses “a writer-informed approach” (82) to understand how everyday writers’ definition of writing diverges from scholarly assumptions about their pattern of writing. If writing scholars learn from everyday writers’ experiences, they can find new research gaps to address in lifespan writing research (81) and “may help other writers see the value of their writing and/or the value of studying that writing” (93).

Lifespan writing research includes addressing how writing participants methodize their writing processes in different contexts and situations. In order to understand how participants’ writing approaches change over time and with the influence of new ideas, Kevin Roozen examines the everyday writing of participants and observes how that writing is shaped by the past and informs the “unpredictable futures” of writers, too (245).

In the conclusion of *LWR*, the editors write, “We ask readers, then, to treat this concluding chapter as a starter pistol in what will no doubt be a long and sometimes grueling (but also incredibly rewarding) task of researching writing through the lifespan” (254). Although *LWR* has done a brilliant job of delving into lifespan writing from a diverse range, future rhetoric and writing researchers might want to address how second-language writers in English approach writing in English after they begin settling in the U.S. It will be invigorating to interview more people to understand more in-depth how immigrant and the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities approach everyday writing. Rhetoric and composition scholars will also want to continue including more participants from around the world.

Certainly, *LWR* has inspired budding researchers like me to emulate the book’s research process to reconceptualize a theory of my own on lifespan writing research. To build “stronger political will for writing research” (259), I would like to extend the conversation around lifespan writing by focusing on my own community’s approach to multilingual writing. Inspired by *LWR*, I plan to study how international students from the STEM fields approach writing during their lifespan and what methods and techniques they follow to translate their thoughts into words. By getting an overall picture of their literacy narratives, I aim to write about their rhetorical challenges, rhetorical tensions, and literacy progressions amidst their disparate personal challenges.

I would recommend that everyone new and experienced in the field of rhetoric and composition studies to read *LWR* and include it in undergraduate and graduate curricula. After poring over this book, undergraduate students might know why their individual everyday writing through their lifespan is as important as writings of their family members from different generations. Additionally, *LWR* might inspire undergraduate and graduate students to interview everyday writers, generate data from them, visit digital and physical archives to look at past artifacts to decipher the pattern of everyday writing

during major geopolitical changes, and thereby to understand how that past informs the present in lifespan research writing. We might also include *LWR* in writing, rhetoric, and culture courses and have students to interview their family members or friends and to think about writing across the curriculum in different eras and various stages of people's lives through their lifespans. To carry on the lifespan research writing project, rhetoric and composition studies scholars need to continue sharing their research findings, informing more people about the importance of writing through our lifespans, and archiving documents as important artifacts for continual explorative and diverse research projects as a part of longitudinal study from across the world.

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