AERA Open
January-December 2024, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 1–18
DOI: 10.1177/23328584241255631
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Rethinking College Transitions: Legitimate Peripheral Participation as a Pathway to Becoming

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This paper's purpose is to review theoretical explanations of college transitions, offer a critique of their utility, and make an explicit argument that the field of higher education would benefit from a shift from a view of transition as induction or development to transition as becoming. Moreover, we propose that the use of legitimate peripheral participation paired with transition as becoming as an emerging theoretical viewpoint that (1) points toward ways educators can shape environments that support transitions as becoming, (2) more effectively describes the lived experiences of students in transition, and (3) facilitates improved understanding, study, and implementation of student transition programs in the United States.

Keywords: *becomingist, colleges, content analysis, first-year success, higher education, legitimate peripheral participation, student development, transitions, theoretical perspectives on transition*

The college experience includes various transitions, such as entrance, moving from the first to second year, beginning or changing a major, transferring, and graduating. During these transitions, students face potentially educative challenges, including new academic expectations, increased personal responsibility for learning, new relationships, and decentralized networks of unfamiliar support resources (Tobbell & O'Donnell, 2005). Together these experiences provide opportunities for students to increase academic competence, establish new interpersonal networks, and explore emerging identities (Greenfield et al., 2013; Upcraft et al., 2005). Thus, while college transitions do include difficulty, discomfort, and unfamiliarity, they are also a powerful opportunity for students to experience meaningful learning and growth. However, transitions are too often thought of as merely problems or obstacles that somehow impede student progress. Our goal is to make the case for a new way of thinking about transitions—one that both recognizes the inherent challenges in transition and positions researchers and practitioners to better understand and leverage the opportunities for growth that come during college transitions.

At a basic level, the way transitions are conceptualized in research, theory, and practice has critical implications for student achievement and the sorts of fundamental metrics and outcomes at the foundation of any conversation about student success. Indeed, students are more likely to leave college during transitions (Schreiner, 2020). While persistence and retention rates have improved slightly, gains are spotty and dependent on field of study, full-time status, age at entry, and student race and ethnicity (National Student Clearinghouse, 2022). Ultimately, too many students still stop out during transitions. More concerning is the fact that between 30% and 40% of Latina/o, Black, and Native American students are not retained (National Student Clearinghouse, 2022). Additionally, any growth in higher education enrollments will come from minoritized and low-income students (Hussar & Bailey, 2020). Thus any conversation about transition is inherently a conversation about access and equity. When institutions fail to adequately support students in transition, they perpetuate inequities and maintain the status quo.

We acknowledge the important transitions work that has taken place over the last decades and, simultaneously, feel an urgency to respond to calls for refinement, clarification, and broadening of theorizing around transitions that contend that there is no commonly held understanding of what *transition* means (Ecclestone et al., 2010; Feiler, 2021; Gale & Parker, 2014; Gravett, 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2016). To illustrate, several basic definitions of transition are present in the literature, including experiencing internal change

(e.g., Bridges, 2004; Schlossberg et al., 1995), socialization or acculturation into college (e.g., Tinto, 1975; Weidman, 1989), or movement from one educational context to another (e.g., An & Taylor, 2019; Duncheon & Relles, 2020). Moreover, even when research on transitions has focused on one of these definitions (such as adjustment, socialization, movement, or something else), application of the definition to *transition* has been inconsistent. For instance, sometimes transition is conceptualized as the movement into new spaces *before* the adjustment (i.e., transition is the movement marked by enrollment and arrival at the university, whereas adjustment occurs afterward; see Mettler et al., 2019, p. 39), and at other times the transition is the adjustment process *after* the movement (e.g., transfer represents movement of the student before the transition, which is then defined as the adjustment needed after transfer; see Ogilvie & Knight, 2021, p. 296).

Thus the discussion of how transitions are conceptualized is not a trivial or academic matter. Good theory provides language and consistency to guide policy, practice, and pedagogy (Tagg, 2003) aimed at addressing critical issues in higher education, including issues of access, equity, and inclusion. Conversely, a lack of conceptual clarity about transitions threatens the precision of research and analysis, limits further theoretical development, and, ultimately leads to misalignment between transition programs' stated objectives and design and delivery (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; O'Donnell et al., 2016; Palmer et al., 2009).

Purpose and Argument

If we hope to address some of the most pressing issues and concerns related to college going, we need to start a different conversation about college transitions. Consequently, our aims in this paper are to

- push back on and critique the existing theoretical frameworks of transition that are most often invoked in college transition research and that are apparent in the design of programs and initiatives aimed at supporting college transitions;
- offer a new theoretical perspective on the critical role of transitions in student learning and becoming as well as recommendations for how to more effectively support student transitions that are grounded in this new theoretical perspective; and, finally,
- examine how this new theoretical framework offers guidance in addressing some of higher education's most pressing issues, including access and equity, students' increasing feelings of disconnection and isolation on their campuses, and growing concerns related to the degree to which college prepares students for future roles and tasks.

It is from this point of departure that we make the case for and propose the application of Lave and Wenger's (1991) description of learning as a process of *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP) as broadened theorizing around *transitions as becoming*. Transitions as a process of becoming has been put forward by Quinn (2010), Gale and Parker (2014), and Hamshire and Jack (2016), among others, describing students' experiences of transition as nonlinear, acentered, nonhierarchical, ever connected, ongoing, and everyday parts of the student experience (Gravett, 2021; Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018). In their description of LPP, Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to a mutually constitutive process of learning situated in communities of practice wherein novices engage with more experienced members of the community to learn ways of doing, knowing, and being via forms of authentic participation in the practices of the community. Through this process of participating with more experienced members of the community, newcomers do not simply acquire new knowledge or skill but rather become members of the community by contributing to the practices of that community.

We contend that a theory of transitions as becoming, combined with LPP, provides a novel approach to understanding transitions that offer theoretical clarity and guidance to supporting students in transition—one that responds to and honors the central needs illustrated by our review of the contemporary conversation on transitions. This reconceptualization of transitions not only provides theoretical coherence to contemporary viewpoints on the theory and practice (St. Pierre, 2016) of transition but also offers practical guidance to those who support students in transition.

(Re)Presenting the Contours of the Theoretical Landscape

As stated previously, one of our primary aims is to push back on and critique the existing theoretical frameworks of transition that are often invoked and applied in college transition research and are apparent in the practices directed at supporting students in transition. We have decided that to set the stage for our critique, we need to map the contours of the current theoretical landscape of transitions in the United States. In other words, a review of the literature is foundational to providing warrants to the claims we are making through the rhetorical arc of our arguments. While a systematic review of research and practice literature would aid in this endeavor, this is outside the scope of the current aims of our scholarly paper approach. However, our discussion requires that we do some cataloging of contemporary points of view, applications, and descriptions of the ways various perspectives are manifest in the predominant literature supporting the conversation around college transitions in the United States. Therefore, we relied on two heuristics that allowed us to map the promontories and valleys of the

landscape of the literature on theories and conceptualizations of transition.

First, to aid in classifying and making sense of the research on transitions, we chose to use Gale and Parker's (2014) typology as a guiding framework for our mapping of the theoretical landscape of transitions in higher education. Gale and Parker offered an account of three ways transitions have been conceptualized in the research and practice literature: transitions as *induction*, *development*, and *becoming*. A comparison of the features of each perspective is presented in Supplementary Table S1 in the online version of the journal. Our aim with the use of Gale and Parker's typology is to further tease out and illustrate contemporary conceptualizations of *transitions* as they appear in the research literature while also identifying a rationale for the need for ongoing development of the theory space around transitions in the United States, particularly as it relates to *transitions as becoming*.

Second, although it was not our intent to conduct a systematic review of the literature, we wanted to operate within a framework that required us to engage with literature in a systematic way to describe the current state of the theoretical landscape in the United States that did not rely solely on literature within our own familiarity. As a result, we chose to review the research literature on student transitions in journals identified as Tier 1 by Bray and Major (2011): (1) *The Journal of Higher Education*, (2) *The Review of Higher Education*, (3) *Research in Higher Education*, (4) *Journal of College Student Development*, (5) *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, and (6) *Higher Education*. These journals represent those with the highest prestige, citations, and use among faculty in higher education programs in the United States (Bray & Major, 2011). As a result, these journals, and the ideas therein, have been given honor and esteem and represent the places where instructors most likely go to find and vet theories in the field, where graduates of higher education programs learn the "canonical" theories and form their schemas of quality of information, and where faculty will seek to publish their work in venues deemed "esteemed, visible, and influential in the field" (Bray & Major, 2011, p. 500). A list of search terms related to transitions was compiled and can be found as Appendix A in the online version of the journal.

A couple of additional explanatory notes about the choice to engage with the Bray and Major typology of journals in higher education is in order. First, the typology employed by Bray and Major (2011) was based on a survey of faculty at institutions offering graduate education in higher education. Faculty respondents were primarily White (69%) and almost exclusively from doctoral-granting institutions (94%). Moreover, while the survey did capture program faculty who were focused on administration and teaching, the perspectives of primary-role higher education practitioners were outside the frame of their study. As a result, the Bray and Major typology may exaggerate the perspectives of how those in privileged social locations (i.e., White, faculty, prestigious institutions) perceive the issue of prestige and salience in higher education research literature. Thus the choice to focus on prestigious literature, even without the limitations of the methods by which prestige was defined and designated, may have the effect of distorting the literature that we are using to map the landscape. However, at the same time, because of the prestige and the hierarchy that came about from the publication of Bray and Major's (2011) study in a highly cited journal—to wit, *The Journal of Higher Education*—the visibility of the perspectives in these journals has been elevated and makes them excellent candidates for understanding predominant perceptions in the higher education conversation, including transition. To the extent that our review is biased and incomplete, the following overview may be perceived as a caricature of the extant conversation. However, the perspectives and concepts presented herein represent significant promontories and valleys in the conceptual topography as we have encountered it; thus examples may be best understood as selected indications of these features.

The publication date of the Gale and Parker (2014) typology formed a natural point from which our review of the literature could extend (2015–2022). As we identified key transition theories and scholars referenced in the corpus of literature we reviewed, represented by their salient or repeated inclusion in studies, we made note of them and included their foundational works in the review. The sections that follow serve as a mapping of the current theoretical landscape of transitions in the United States. The exploration begins with an overview of transitions as *induction*, then turns to perspectives on transitions as *development*, and concludes with the transitions as *becoming* viewpoint.

Transitions as Induction

Earlier we mentioned descriptions of transition where students entered higher education, either as first-year or transfer students, that involved movement into a new circumstance and adjustment afterward (Mettler et al., 2019; Ogilvie & Knight, 2021). These depictions of the transitions facing college students entering unfamiliar environments are frequently presented as periods when students encounter salient and consequential physical, psychological, or social shifts in their lives (Coertjens et al., 2017; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Harper et al., 2020; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2020). Gale and Parker (2014) refer to these conceptualizations as *transitions as induction* because of their characterization of transition as a sequential process of moving into, through, and between environments, circumstances, or periods of time.

Undergirding studies that feature transitions as induction are prominent theories that describe transitions as consisting of three general phases: separation, transition, and integration (e.g., Nicholson & West, 1995; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Each perspective describes an initial phase in which students encounter unfamiliar psychological, social, and physical milieus requiring a reorganization of one's sense of self and view of the world (Coertjens et al., 2017). Next comes a period of navigation, negotiation, and meaning making characterized by discomfort, challenge, and ambivalence about the new environment (Bettencourt, 2020). Finally, each of these models describes successful endings differently, with Schlossberg (1981) referring to moving out and new beginnings and Tinto (1975, 1993) and Nicholson and West (1995) describing endings as being characterized by stability or a sense of integration. Although these final phases are labeled differently, they each represent an eventual induction into a normalized phase where students are deemed settled, socialized, or stabilized once the discrete period of the transition is complete (Coertjens et al., 2017).

Accordingly, the goals of induction-based transitions tend to be procedural and utilitarian in nature (Gale & Parker, 2014), focusing on credit accumulation (Giani, 2019; Wang et al., 2019); persistence, retention, and graduation (Li & Ortagus, 2019; Pike & Robbins, 2020); developmental course completion (Mokher & Leeds, 2018; Sanabria et al., 2020); connection with campus resources (Hatch & Garcia, 2017); or navigating institutional norms and spaces (O'Shea, 2015). For example, dual enrollment programs (i.e., that offer high school students the opportunity to earn college credit for advanced-level work) are often spoken of as initiatives that facilitate, smooth, or ease the transition from high school to college (An & Taylor, 2019; Duncheon & Relles, 2020) by allowing students to identify basic graduation requirements they can "get out of the way" prior to arrival (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015). From this inductionist perspective, transitions are framed as problems at the institution level. However, across these examples it is important to note that "educational administrators, policymakers, and advocates set the contexts within which students navigate education systems" (Kitchen et al., 2019, p. 489). Ultimately, the institution determines what knowledge, resources, and support are needed by students as well as when that assistance will come. Consequentially, the terms of transitions are set by those who hold institutional and social power. When transitions are approached in this way, orientation and induction are not "instrument[s] of teaching, so much as of socialization and reinforcing status," where students who are "inculcated in the dominant culture are most likely to succeed" (Thomas, 2002, p. 431). Contemporary researchers have noted that the continued attention to academic and social integration forms an expectation of assimilation (Tachine et al., 2017), and as Bassett (2020) pointed out, "according to Tinto's theory, the students themselves are primarily responsible for their lack of integration" (p. 355).

When seen through this theoretical lens, programs designed to support students in transition are typically embedded at *transition points* (Carpenter et al., 2018; Sanagavarapu et al., 2019) or *critical junctures* (Hartman et al., 2021; Park et al., 2022; Tholen et al., 2022) along the college pathway as students encounter situational shifts. Further, support for transitions frequently occurs via formal, scripted introductions to resources, procedures, and policies through such practices as academic advising (Demetriou et al., 2017; Hatch & Garcia, 2017), new student orientation (Linley, 2017; Sun et al., 2016), or first-year seminars (Culver & Bowman, 2020; Young, 2020). Often these induction or socialization activities invite students to complete a variety of onboarding processes, including course registration, tours of campus resource providers, and tutorials on campus systems, such as learning management systems.

Transitions as Development

The second type of conceptualization put forward by Gale and Parker (2014) presents transitions as developmental in nature. As a psychosocial process, *transition as development* is concerned with navigating sociocultural dynamics, including norms, expectations, and purpose, to move from one stable state of development to the next (Little & Mitchell, 2018; Selznick et al., 2019; Sharma & Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018; S. S. Shim et al., 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2019). Accordingly, development-based characterizations of transitions depict movement through discontinuous stages rather than relatively smooth periods of adjustment (Coertjens et al., 2017; W. J. Shim & Perez, 2018). For example, concerns with students' identity during transitions have been characterized in terms of their civic, career, major, or transfer status (see M. R. Johnson & Ferguson, 2018; Musoba et al., 2018; K. N. Smith & Gayles, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). In these instances, student identity is described in discrete and singular terms, and development is seen as movement in consecutive and irreversible succession, frequently illustrated as movement from one stage to the next (Coertjens et al., 2017; Shalka, 2019).

The role of time in conceptualizations of transition as development stands in contrast to that of transition as induction. In the induction perspective, time bounds and defines the transition itself (i.e., beginning, middle, and end). In contrast, through a developmental lens, time itself does not "guarantee transition to the next stage" (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 742). Rather, the focus shifts to leveraging available time to optimize development. This perspective is evident in the concepts of involvement (Astin, 1984), student engagement (Kuh et al., 2008), and thriving (Schreiner et al., 2020), which are used widely to describe, study, and understand student

transitions as developmental experiences (see An & Taylor, 2019; S. R. Johnson & Stage, 2018; Niehaus, 2017; Pérez, 2017; Trolian, 2019; Turk & González Canché, 2019). At the core of these perspectives is a recognition (1) that time is a fixed and scarce resource and (2) that the qualitative features of an educational experience will maximize student outcomes (i.e., improved learning and development through transitions) that occur during a specified timeframe.

When transition is viewed as individual development, transitional issues are conceptualized as internal or student-level problems (Gale & Parker, 2014), although these challenges frequently result from institutional features and institution-level responses that are developed to respond to these challenges. For instance, in Tinto's (1975) frequently cited model of student departure, students' successful persistence in the institution is predicated on sociocultural expectations expressed as an individual's commitment to both personal and institutional goals as well as social and academic integration. Recent research drawing on subsequent revisions and critiques of Tinto's framework (e.g. Braxton et al., 2004; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1993) also represent transition as development by emphasizing the importance of psychosocial processes such as sense of belonging or psychological sense of community (see Duran et al., 2020; Murdock-Perriera et al., 2019; Oxendine et al., 2020; Pokorny et al., 2017; Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020; Tachine et al., 2017), which is conceived as the individual's relationship to the educational environment.

Moreover, in our review we encountered many studies on transitions that are representative of the experiences that students from minoritized and oppressed backgrounds have had, including Latina/o (Cuevas, 2020; Nuñez & Sansone, 2016; Pérez, 2017), Indigenous (Fish & Syed, 2018; Oxendine et al., 2020; Tachine et al., 2017), Black or African American (Griffin & McIntosh, 2015; Means et al., 2016; Shirley, 2021; Zerquera, 2019), gender identity (Flint et al., 2019; Goldberg et al., 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Swisher, 2020), ability (Miller, 2017), neurodiversity (Clouder et al., 2020; Cox, Nachman, et al., 2020; Cox, Thompson, et al., 2017), veteran status (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Lim et al., 2018; Sansone & Segura, 2020; Stone, 2017), and first-generation status (Becker et al., 2017; Harper et al., 2020; Palbusa & Gauvain, 2017), among others. While not exhaustive of all socialized identity groups, this corpus of research demonstrates that for members of minoritized and historically oppressed groups in higher education such as these, the developmental process of transition is not straightforward or to be taken for granted. In Gale and Parker's (2014) description of the transition as development perspective, students are frequently required to adopt identities that are more in line with dominant social groups than with their familiar ways of knowing, doing, and being. This expectation to shift one's identity to fit in with the existing community offers pseudobelonging and threatens students' existing identity. Therefore, descriptions of transitions that do not explicitly attend to the power dynamics around student identities gloss over a critical aspect of the nature of transitions and may, in fact, contribute to increased marginalization.

Transitions as Becoming

The third type of conceptualization Gale and Parker (2014) described was what they referred to as *transitions as becoming*. Becoming has its roots in writings by Heidegger (Hamshire & Jack, 2016) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987; Gravett, 2021) and is concerned with the self as a fluid, changing being in the world (Barnett, 2009; Gale & Parker, 2014; Hamshire & Jack, 2016). Because of the evolving and subjective nature of student experiences in transitions, becomingist perspectives assert that "higher education [is] part of the whole life of the student, which notices and views the granularity of students' lived experience" (Taylor & Harris-Evans, 2018, p. 1256). Transitions as becoming suggest that "the process of coming to know has person-forming properties" and "that knowing has implications for becoming" (Barnett, 2009, p. 435). Thus the ability of students to successfully enter a new educational environment involves more than learning about or engaging with new rules, tools, skills, and processes or even taking up a new identity. Rather it "is also about the making of [their] selves, in a process of becoming" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 91).

To foreground our discussion of how transitions as becoming appear in contemporary research, we offer the following key elements of the transitions as becoming point of view. First, transition is not static; rather, it is an ongoing and ever-present process situated in the everydayness of students' lived experience. Because transition deals with the capability to navigate change, it suggests active engagement of the learner with the structured learning environment as well as the possibility of movement within this capability to navigate change. Second, because of the dynamism and multicomplexity present in the everyday experiences of students, identity is in flux and in constant (re)negotiation. Third, the everydayness of the becoming in transition comes through the everydayness of participating in the activities of the college with others in the community. In other words, the doing (in community) catalyzes and situates the becoming. Fourth, transitions are multilocational and involve individuals in moving in and out of and assuming varied positionalities within multiple communities. Fifth, in the case of transition to university, transition represents the mutually constituted relationship between students and the institution. Moreover, because the institution is comprised of individuals, such as faculty, staff, administrators, and other students, it is important to signal that both micro-level relationships (person to person) as well as macro-level relationships (person to

organization) are present and important in transitions. As a result, this perspective invites us to attend to the role of power in the relationship between the student and the institution and its actors. This requires educational environments and the people who make up those environments to be engaging, open, and accepting of the individual (Gravett, 2021).

The central emphasis of the transitions as becoming perspective is the complexity and fluidity present in students' lived experiences (Gale & Parker, 2014). This perspective stands in contrast to inductionist and developmentalist perspectives and holds that transitions are not neatly bound or localized in place and time by beginnings or endings. Students do not simply enter institutions of higher education, stay in those spaces, and experience learning in an institutional vacuum; rather, they frequently move back and forth, in and out of a variety of spaces (Bowman et al., 2019; Kitchen et al., 2019; O'Shea, 2015; Trede & McEwen, 2015). For example, a student might simultaneously occupy multiple communities—family, work, religious congregation, etc.—each with its own culture, makeup, and orientation to higher education (Kiyama & Harper, 2018; Mayhew et al., 2020; Museus et al., 2017; O'Shea, 2016). As such, learning and development do not occur in linear, nonregressive forms; instead, identity is multifaceted and consistently (re)negotiated as students move between physical, social, and psychological spaces (e.g., Fish & Syed, 2018; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Martin, 2015; McHenry-Sorber & Swisher, 2020; Posselt & Nuñez, 2022). Moreover, transitions and the tensions they represent are no longer conceived as singular and episodic events; rather, they are fluid, ever-present, and everyday features of any learning environment because students are engaging in ongoing participation across various communities and learning environments.

The transitions as becoming perspective highlights the ongoing and ever-present identity shifts that college students experience. Fish and Syed (2018) pointed to the bicultural nature of Native American student identities during transitions: being oriented to both the tribal and the dominant culture. For these students, shifts in identity were ever present and complex during their arrival and persistence at college. They negotiated their relationship with the tribe—family, ancestors, and land—and culture and spirituality as well as contending with ongoing colonialism and pressures to assimilate. Similarly, O'Shea (2016) described the tensions present in first-in-family university women who found themselves constantly (re)negotiating multiple identities as they entered and exited university environments. O'Shea's illustrations of these students' lives carried a reminder that every exit from one environment was an entrance to somewhere else. Thus transition was a frequent, even everyday occurrence. Moreover, the students in O'Shea's study described a longitudinal shift in identity as well, a sense of pride in what they were able to accomplish and who they were able to become.

This perspective acknowledges that transitions can be full of anxiety and risk and are often challenging, unsettling, or troublesome experiences. Indeed, the anxiety and risk, while difficult to negotiate, can be transformative and catalyze new learning (O'Shea, 2016; Tett et al., 2017). As a result, this perspective rejects the notion that transitions *necessarily* represent crises or problems that must be solved, removed, or eased. In fact, there is evidence that becoming might be forestalled if the discomfort that comes with the unfamiliarity and challenge of participating in a new community and navigating its practices is not addressed. For example, Tett et al. (2017) reported that post-traditional students entering university encountered challenges that threatened their sense of belonging and self-efficacy. Yet students described how their sense of self changed as they were able to overcome the challenges. Further, students described how the challenges, and their ability to face them, shaped their relationships and, later, their work lives. Participation and engagement with the challenging aspects of the transition led to a more critical form of being that opened "wider horizons of possibility" (Tett et al., 2017, p. 404). The idea that challenge can be a productive part of growth is not exclusive to the becomingist perspective; it is also present in the developmentalist view. The key to seeing transitions as becoming is recognizing that challenges, risk, and uncertainty can point to complex, messy, and nonlinear departures of possibility (Gravett, 2021).

An understanding of how college transitions contribute to student becoming highlights that higher education "needs greater openness and flexibility" (Quinn, 2010, p. 127) in providing environments, activities, and communities that support becoming. As such, this is an aspirational and emergent space on the landscape of transition scholarship in which more theorizing and research need to be done. Based on our review of the landscape of the conversation on college transitions, we echo Gale and Parker's viewpoint and seek to move the transitions as becoming conversation forward. To that end, in the following section we outline several critiques of current conceptualizations of transitions that highlight the importance of this work.

Mind the Gaps: Critique of the Current Landscape

Based on our review of the conceptual topography of transitions in higher education in the United States, we have found that the models of transition that continue to inform research, policy, and practice are both dated and heavily critiqued. Conversely, there are alternative models of transition that, while less prominent, are harmonious with the vision of transitions as becoming that we have articulated and that provide further illustration and context of these ideas. It is in this spirit that we offer four key critiques of the present landscape.

First, when transitions are viewed as induction or development, they may be conceptualized as problems to be

solved rather than as potentially transformative learning opportunities. As a result, transition concerns are frequently reduced to a set of procedures, sequences, and tasks rather than being conceived as integral aspects of the process of learning and becoming. Similarly, student support is frequently intended to "remove challenges," "ease transitions," and "accommodate students," suggesting that transitions require something separate from our planned learning processes. In short, transitions are often viewed as something to "get through" so that students can get on with the process of real learning. We argue, instead, that learning, transition, and navigating unfamiliarity are inseparably linked and key aspects of the process of becoming.

Similarly, our second critique is that current transition theories fail to account for and describe the role of relationships, community, and belonging in transitions. For example, many first-year objectives for institutions are focused on creating a sense of community for students (see Means & Pyne, 2017; Pérez, 2017; Young, 2020). However, much scholarship on the first year continues to narrowly define community as the social ties that develop in an induction activity or course (e.g., orientation, first-year seminar, peer group) or as a group of first-year students (see R. A. Smith, 2018). Kezar and Kitchen (2020) argued for the expansive view of community in transitions because "student experiences in multiple contexts within and beyond college (e.g., classroom, family, living spaces, college events) shape their learning, development, and outcomes" (p. 225). Therefore, *community* must simultaneously include and extend beyond the *local community* of the first-year seminar classroom or orientation group to a broader community grounded in the aims, purposes, values, and activities of the institution as well as including and extending notions of community beyond campus (see Fish & Syed, 2018; Hallett et al., 2020; Rodriguez & Mallinckrodt, 2021).

Third, the literature on college transitions (re)presents a dialectic: on one hand, theory, definitions, and conceptualizations of transitions are presented in identity-neutral ways, whereas, on the other hand, research using the lens of identity illustrates how transition is not always straightforward or something that "just happens" for students from groups historically underrepresented in higher education, including Black (e.g., Means et al., 2016; Shirley, 2021), Indigenous (e.g., Fish & Syed, 2018; Tachine et al., 2017), and Latina/o students (e.g., Cuevas, 2020; Pérez, 2017). Students' multifaceted and interwoven identities call for transition theory and practice that are inclusive, relevant, and connected to students' lives (Barry, 2005; Gale & Parker, 2014; Miles, 2000). In addition, transition theory should attend to the "dialectical relationship between [students] and the socially structured world of the university" (Tett et al., 2017, p. 403). This is particularly important when it comes to considering identity-conscious approaches to transitions because the terms of the transition are set by those who hold power (Kitchen et al., 2019; Quinn, 2010).

Our fourth and final critique is that institutional approaches to student transitions tend to be rather self-serving in that they structure transition experiences in ways that prioritize institutional objectives and interests over students' personal goals and objectives. For example, this becomes evident when institutions design one-size-fits-all orientation or first-year experience programming that treats students as a monolithic group, all with the same needs and interests. Research, policy, and practice grounded in this traditional perspective of transitions can, ironically, lead students to feel marginalized as they engage in activities and programming intended to simply settle, socialize, or offer decontextualized stability that ultimately serves institutional interests. Indeed, at times, institutions may unwittingly relegate students in transition to the margins "by involving [them] in the community of [higher education] in some ways while keeping them at arm's length in others" (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007, pp. 317–318). We cannot simply assume that "because students are at university they sit inside or are located within the university boundaries" (Palmer et al., 2009, p. 39). Students are often aware of this subtle denial of access and maintenance of peripherality, which lead to confusion and anger (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Moreover, institutions are rarely structured to reward faculty, staff, and administrators for moving students toward more centralized positions within academic communities given institutions' widespread focus on the common transactional and procedural goals of retention, persistence, and graduation (Kinzie, 2020; Mokher & Leeds, 2018). Consequently, there is a need for new perspectives on transition that consider both institutional needs (e.g., retention, persistence, graduation) and the importance of creating agentic space for students to shape their transition experiences in ways that align with the aspirations and hopes they have for college.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation: Toward a Theory of Transitions as Becoming

To this point we have argued that a reconceptualization of theorizing around transitions should attend to issues of identity, relationships, community, and becoming. Accordingly, we propose the application of Lave and Wenger's (1991) description of learning as a process of *situated learning* and *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP) as a broadened theorizing around transitions as becoming. Lave and Wenger (1991) defined *learning* as the process by which individuals move toward full participation in the practices of a community in increasingly skillful and intentional ways. Thus learning is *situated* and linked with both identity and community membership and shapes who learners are, what they can do, and how they engage with others in their various communities. Consequently, if we assume that transition is a process

of gaining and sustaining membership in a new community, LPP serves as a useful guide in understanding the transitions of students, including the processes by which they become experienced students capable of both academic and social success in their new environments.

Situated Learning and LPP

LPP is an integrated framework of three interrelated components. First, *legitimate* refers to the need to provide newcomers with opportunities to participate in authentic experiences that lead to increasing competence and familiarity with the knowledge, activities, and discourses of the community. It is worth noting here that our use of the term *legitimate* refers to the nature of the participation in the community of practice to capture a sense of activities that are authentic and genuine. We recognize the problematic usages of terms such as *legitimate* when applied to those who are minoritized and have been excluded historically. In balancing the need to both use inclusive language and ground our argument in the scholarship on LPP, we have maintained the original term while naming and acknowledging the problematic misapplication of the term *legitimate* either in interpretation or in practice. Second, *peripheral* implies that learners occupy a less central yet visible and necessary position in the community. Rather than marginalizing newcomers, peripherality should provide access to people, conversations, resources, and experiences that position novices for progressively advanced forms of participation, more sophisticated ways of knowing, and increasingly complex skills. Finally, *participation* signals that learning occurs as neophytes engage in the meaningful practices of their new community, albeit from positions appropriate to their skills and experience (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In other words, "learning cannot be separated from the context in which it takes place" (Caffarella & Merriam, 1999, p. 63). Further, learning represents a movement by the learner from a position as a consumer or acquirer of knowledge on the periphery to a producer and participator in increasingly empowered positions in the community. Taken holistically, this framework describes the conditions under which transitions as becoming are most likely to occur, namely through newcomers' participation in meaningful practices with others in the community.

A Critical View of LPP and Becoming: Tensions and Hybridization of Perspectives

In service of an informed advocacy for a view of transitions combining LPP and becoming and their application in higher education, we now acknowledge the critiques of LPP (see Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Gourlay, 2009; Lea, 2005) and how responses to the critiques align with becomingist perspectives. We outline four general areas in which criticisms of LPP can be organized: (1) power and authority, (2) agency and contributions of newcomers, (3) indeterminacy, instability, and contradictions, and (4) identity and struggle.

Concerns have been raised with where LPP stops short of accounting for power and authority. These arise from Wenger's (1998) later conceptualizations of communities of practice as learning communities in higher education, which have neglected key aspects of institutional realities including the acquisition and holding of power and authority, contested issues such as what counts as knowledge and how meaning is made and negotiated, and how participants are "excluded at the boundaries" (p. 184) from participation in the practices of the community (Lea, 2005). This is connected to the notions of agency and contributions of newcomers to the community of practice. Because higher education entails complex power relations such as those described in LPP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007), it is often unclear how institutions and higher education practitioners are set up to provide newcomers with opportunities to innovate and initiate change (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Gourlay, 2009; Lea, 2005). Our review of the transitions literature showed that institutions are falling short of providing opportunities for students from minoritized or historically oppressed and excluded backgrounds to show up authentically, to participate meaningfully, and to make contributions to the campus community. Moreover, incoming students typically will interact more with other peripheral members of the institution (e.g., student services staff, departmental administrative assistants, automated learning management systems) than faculty as experts, giving rise to the question of whether the institution acts as a community of practice as it is frequently conceived (Gourlay, 2009; Lea, 2005).

Another concern with LPP is how it addresses issues of indeterminacy, instability, and contradictions (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999; Gourlay, 2009). This stems from the description of learning and development as one-way movement from the periphery to the center of a community of practice. "What seems to be missing is movement outward and in unexpected directions: questioning of authority, criticism, innovation, initiation of change. Instability and inner contradictions of practice are all but missing" (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p. 12). Moreover, indeterminacy and contradiction are expressed and compounded as institutions welcome new students to campus—here power relations are present again—and engage in practices that limit student movement in the community of practice in any direction, in or out (Lea, 2005). Gourlay (2009) suggested that descriptions of LPP fall short of capturing the complexity of new students' academic experiences, which are often characterized by indeterminacy and an emotional destabilization due to the struggles around adopting new identities. With Gourlay, we assert that navigating these tensions and

instabilities is an essential part of engaging in academic activities and processes of becoming.

While these critiques might point to LPP as inductionist or developmentalist, we would suggest that these critiques are fair insomuch as they are often not explicitly pursued in the original description of the theory. Simultaneously, we contend that many of these perspectives are based on reductionist readings of Lave and Wenger's (1991) original descriptions. For example, Lave and Wenger (1991) point to the "contradictions inherent in learning, and the relations of the resulting conflicts to the development of identity and the transformation of practice" (p. 91). Moreover, Wenger (1998) later described the learning that takes place in communities of practice in becomingist terms: "[learning], in its deepest sense . . . concerns the opening of identities—exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state. . . . It places students on an outbound trajectory toward a broad field of possible identities. [Learning] is not merely formative—it is transformative" (p. 263).

Thus these critiques open viewpoints that allow us to build on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and combine their theoretical perspective with the notion of transitions as becoming presented by Gale and Parker (2014). We present the following section as an exploration of the description of learning through LPP and becoming and describe the implications for higher education transitions. We hope that by combining the theoretical perspectives of LPP with transitions as becoming we can move these ideas forward, perhaps achieving the hybridization that was suggested by Engeström and Miettinen (1999) to expand activity-based perspectives.

Implications of Becoming and LPP for Higher Education Transitions

We find this description of learning particularly useful when it comes to understanding the transitions of college students. Viewed through the lens of becoming and LPP, transitions are inseparable from meaningful learning and are characterized not merely by the acquisition of new knowledge or skill but also by the degree to which students in transition are enabled to participate with more experienced students, faculty, and staff in the intellectual life of the institution. This positions our understanding of transitions as situated in communities of practice in the institution. Students will encounter multiple communities of practice in which they will transition and become, such as academic disciplines, peer leadership roles, undergraduate research, and internships. Learning in each of these communities of practice is situated in the practices of each community, and, therefore, so is transition.

Defining transitions in this way does not minimize the need for foundational knowledge or skill among new students. Rather, it calls for a shift in focus from procedure, knowledge, and skill acquisition as the primary outcomes of transition programs (where the means have become the ends) to an emphasis on providing new students with opportunities to engage with others in the practices that both require and develop foundational knowledge and skill. Also of critical importance is that new students be provided with the opportunity to engage in *doing* alongside more seasoned members of the community, echoing Astin's (1985) assertion that "students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133). Because learning new knowledge and skill is one part of the transition, the ability to participate and become in the community requires attention to the relationships and meaning making that are part of the experience of transitioning. As such, legitimate peripheral participation suggests a shift away from defining the curriculum of college as a set of courses or a list of bits of knowledge or skill (i.e., things that faculty or staff *do to* or *impose on students*) to a systematic and integrated plan that describes the forms of involvement that help students become participants in the legitimate academic life of the campus (Tagg, 2003).

Moreover, contemporary transition programs are frequently grounded in inductionist and developmentalist perspectives, where the primary objective is to minimize transitional "problems" by providing low-stakes and often contrived opportunities for students to become oriented to higher education practices (Hatch et al., 2018) or develop a bounded set of core "first-year skills," abilities, or outcomes. However, the practices associated with these programs are often so far removed from legitimate college activities as to have little future utility, leaving students feeling infantilized, marginalized, and frustrated (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). For example, a common outcome of first-year programs is the development of writing skills (Young & Skidmore, 2019). Many first-year courses and programs spend time talking about the importance of writing or pointing students to the writing center rather than engaging students in the practice of producing a high-quality written assignment. Similarly, the writing that is required of students in these courses or programs is so unlike the writing they will do beyond the first year as to lose all practicality. Consequently, students rightly question how well the first-year experience is preparing them for the challenges that lie ahead (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

In contrast, a general education experience informed by the key elements of becoming and LPP would be focused on inviting students to become part of the academic community by engaging them in high-level thinking, doing, and learning. Although students would be introduced to new knowledge and ideas, acquiring this knowledge would take a back seat to engaging in practices of writing, speaking, and discussing contemporary issues in specific disciplines as well as grappling with ill-defined, multifaceted, and interdisciplinary problems. Further, students would participate in these practices alongside experienced faculty members, well-trained peer educators, and others who could serve as

master learners while modeling and supporting participation in these practices. Finally, these types of general education experiences would engage students in highly collaborative and experiential forms of learning to, again, align with the type of learning engaged in by more seasoned members of the academic community.

In sum, we argue that supporting college transitions requires (1) meaningful engagement (2) with faculty and peers (3) in activities authentic to the practices of the community that (4) introduce new students to the knowledge, skills, tools, and mindsets that, over time, (5) move them toward increasingly complex and advanced participation in the campus community. Thus, supporting college transitions depends on providing students with access to the activities, people, information, tools, and resources that facilitate their participation in the same pursuit of learning and becoming in which other members of the campus community are involved. For example, as students occupy positions of increasingly meaningful participation (e.g., a first-year student who serves as a teaching assistant during their second semester and meets regularly with the instructor, provides in-class instruction, and responds to student writing), they move from novice student to experienced learner or from peripheral to fuller forms of participation. This trajectory of increasing participation results in increased knowledge, skill, self-efficacy, and membership in the intellectual community (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). In contrast, when students are denied access to authentic forms of participation, their learning is limited (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

The combination of LPP and becoming builds on more common theories of transition and provides additional insight into several key findings in higher education research. First, it provides a strong rationale for the importance of meaningful student–faculty interaction (Kuh, 2013) that has appeared repeatedly in the research literature as being a key factor in a multiplicity of student success outcomes (see Mayhew et al., 2016; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Second, LPP expands on and connects with concepts of community and sense of belonging as central to the learning experience (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and is representative of the calls for theory and practice that are inclusive, relevant, and connected to students' lives (Barry, 2005; Gale & Parker, 2014; Miles, 2000). Finally, LPP is connected to research that shows that student outcomes, such as thriving, are improved among students in transition when they experience and feel a personal sense of community and belonging on campus (Schreiner et al., 2020; Tachine et al., 2017; Young et al., 2015).

Discussion

The conceptualization of transition we have presented is rarely mentioned in the research, practice, or policy literature on college transitions, the first-year experience, or student success in the United States. In response to calls for broadened and more critical theorizing on transitions (Gale & Parker, 2014; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007), we finish by articulating two main implications for theory, research, and practice that can be drawn from our analysis of current theorizing around transitions and the case for LPP combined with transitions as becoming as a useful framework for understanding and supporting transitions.

Rethinking Transitions Theory

The field of higher education would benefit from a conceptual and philosophical shift regarding the phenomenon of transitions. Specifically, we suggest that scholars and practitioners shift from a view of transitions as *induction* or *development* to *transitions as becoming*. Gale and Parker (2014) noted that much policy, research, and practice are rooted in conceptualizations of transitions as induction and development. However, becomingist positions are not a wholesale rejection of these other approaches. For example, they acknowledge that new knowledge, personal development, and measurable markers of success (such as retention and persistence) are desirable objectives of higher education. Despite being less prevalent and well understood, becomingist approaches have the potential to "reinvigorate the field with new and innovative ideas" (Gale & Parker, 2014, p. 747) and elevate our sights beyond simple measures of survival (e.g., retention and persistence) to aspirational measures related to thriving and transformation.

The practical translation of transitions as becoming has had limited adoption in the research and practice literature (for additional information, see Appendix B in the online version of the journal). Baker and Irwin (2021) described the transitions as becoming typology as useful for differentiation between conceptual perspectives represented in existing research and practice but found that it falls short of providing a theoretical pathway to understanding "students' real-time transitions into (and through, out of and sometimes back into) higher education, and what impacts upon, facilitates or constrains these shifts" (p. 79). Combining LPP and transitions as becoming offers some pathways for application. With Lave and Wenger (1991), Sfard (1998), and Sanders (2018), we argue that the learning we aspire to in higher education—for students, faculty, and staff—is better described as the ongoing process of greater forms of participation in all the various communities of which students are a part. This obviously includes the campus learning community but also extends to communities that students participate in outside of their school life. For example, it is important that any conceptualization of transitions acknowledges the important roles home communities play in students' lives and the contributions they make to successful transitions (Berger & Milem, 1999; Rucks-Ahidiana & Bork, 2020).

Finally, higher education has an obligation to offer students experiences that provide preparation for full participation in future communities (e.g., neighborhoods, schools, businesses, civic organizations, etc.). For example, high-impact practices, such as undergraduate research or service learning, provide opportunities for new students to be involved with more experienced peers and faculty or staff mentors. These experiences, when offered early in students' careers, can provide peripheral participation that then turns into deeper forms of engagement both while a student is on campus and also once the student transitions into new communities such as graduate school or a career. Simply put, this year's students will be more experienced students next year and can provide meaningful leadership and contributions to the program, leading to more sustainable and ever-evolving communities. From this perspective, transitions are not isolated events that students encounter at particular points in their college experience. Rather, students are always in a state of transition because they are continually engaged in the process of learning and becoming. Thus *transitions are inseparable from meaningful learning and participation*. Consequently, an institution's success in supporting student transitions might be evaluated by the degree to which students are provided with opportunities to engage in authentic learning activities alongside more experienced members of the campus community rather than measures of static induction, development, or achievement of outcomes.

An Example of Rethinking Transitions as Becoming: New Student Orientation. For example, new student orientation and welcome week programming are often approached as a time to deliver large amounts of content to students related to academic advisement policies, graduation requirements, where campus resources are located, and a long list of other bits of information. Undergirding this approach is a theoretical assumption that orientation is about induction.

In contrast, imagine what it would be like if, instead, orientation was seen as an opportunity to involve new students in participating in the kind of thinking, dialogue, and problem solving that they will encounter in their coursework. Through this becomingist paradigm, the opening convocation speaker, like a skilled writer or producer, could introduce an element of intrigue, tension, or conflict during their remarks. For example, campus leaders at Utah State University use the opening session of orientation to invite students to reflect on the differences between being a *student* and being a *learner* (for more on this idea, see Sanders, 2018). This tension between seeing learning as either an obligatory hoop-jumping exercise (the *student* perspective) or an opportunity to grow and become (the *learner* perspective) could serve as an overarching theme for orientation. Students could then be invited to use orientation as an opportunity to grapple with, debate, reflect on, and seek new understanding about this question (i.e., What is the difference between a student and a learner? And why should I care?).

Various aspects of the orientation experience that follow could then provide opportunities for students to participate in wrestling with that tension, question, or problem. This could involve visits to campus resources that could play a key role in helping students understand the importance of seeking help or support; small, faculty-led discussions that use the lens of faculty members' discipline to illustrate the differences between students and learners; or reflective conversations or debates facilitated by orientation leaders during lunch. Finally, some sort of culminating activity where students can somehow share or articulate what they have learned relative to the overarching theme could be provided to culminate the experience.

Students could still engage in inductionistic activities that familiarize them with policies, practices, and campus buildings, but orientation could be much more than this and provide early opportunities for *becoming a learner* and participating in the sorts of practices that learners on their campus actually participate in—wrestling with difficult questions, examining questions through disciplinary lenses, engaging in spirited debate and dialogue, and more. Through this lens, supporting students in transition might be seen not merely as utilitarian or pragmatic work but rather as a process of designing an aesthetic and educative experience that invites students to begin participating with others in their community in legitimate learning practices (Bunting, 2012; Parrish, 2009). Additionally, combining LPP and the becomingist perspective allows for wide application and reconsideration based on the multidirectional nature of common transitions that students encounter. As Gale and Parker (2014) signal, inductionist and developmentalist conceptions of transitions favor "vertical" transitions, that is, moving forward from one setting to another, in a process of progress and pressure to abandon previous communities and leave prior identities behind (e.g., entering or exiting university, moving from year one to year two, or vertical transfer from a two-year college to a four-year university). In contrast, the becomingist conceptualization gives space to understand synchronic, lateral, or horizontal transitions such as moving back and forth between home and college, swirling between colleges, "reverse transfer," and changing major in a new light. Ultimately, research and policy efforts would be better served, and more creative questions and solutions would emerge if the perspectives in this paper were brought to bear on these transitions.

Participation, Peripherality, and Power

Transitions conceived through the lenses of LPP and becoming provide institutional guidance in how to navigate creating structures that offer *peripherality versus marginalization* in issues of transition. While *productive peripherality*

can provide a safe and authentic space for learning in unfamiliar settings, institutional actors often inadvertently engage in practices that *marginalize students* by creating barriers to community membership. This creates a contradiction as the institution makes a promise, both implicit and explicit, that progress toward full participation is possible yet holds students in marginalized spaces. It follows that when institutions do not deliver on the promises they make about what students should expect, students' experience becomes *miseducative* (Dewey, 1997/1938), and the result is that they are less likely to persist and may exhibit lower levels of thriving (Braxton et al., 2004; Young et al., 2015)—the opposite of what is intended in transition programming.

Creating Spaces to Allow Authentic Student Becoming in Transitions. The additive value of the becomingist approach through the lens of LPP suggests that joining academic communities of practice should not require students to abandon old communities or key relationships. Critiques of many inductionist—and, to some extent, developmentalist—perspectives point out that students might have to abandon identities or communities to be fully integrated into a college or university (Hurtado & Carter 1997; Tierney, 1992; Yosso, 2005). Inductionist and developmentalist points of view that hold separation and integration as key features, as well as their resulting practices, serve to perpetuate marginalization among students who choose not to separate or to fully integrate. Moving into communities of practice and engaging in new conceptions of self, therein, can be seen as additive and do not necessitate the negation of earlier identities. When students are allowed to show up in new higher education spaces in authentic ways and bring with them prior experiences and identities, their presence serves to revitalize, strengthen, and diversify the new community of practice they are joining. However, due to historical exclusion and normative pressures present in higher education, the prospects of "bringing one's authentic self" to higher education can be fraught for members of racially minoritized groups and women (Harden, 2019). Thus institutions of higher education must work hard to create spaces and cultures where students are not only allowed but also encouraged to engage authentically. This is not inevitable and requires educators to pay sustained and intentional attention to the cultures of inclusion present in campus communities.

An example might be helpful to illustrate what we mean by creating spaces that allow students to show up authentically. Historically, the most common type of first-year seminar was what has been termed an *extended orientation course* and is focused on providing students with college survival or college success skills and resources (Barefoot, 1992; Greenfield, et al, 2013; Young, 2020). While the prevalence of this type of first-year seminar seems to be decreasing (Young & Skidmore, 2019), this model is still very common across U.S. institutions of higher education. The vast majority of these extended-orientation-style seminars tend to employ an inductionistic approach and, as we outlined earlier in this paper, serve not so much as "instrument[s] of teaching . . . as of socialization and reinforcing status," where students who are "inculcated in the dominant culture are most likely to succeed" (Thomas, 2002, p. 431). Quite simply, this approach to transitions operationalized in a traditional first-year seminar assumes that all students should adopt the culturally dominant approach to "success" or "survival."

Alternatively, a becomingist approach to the first-year seminar could, among other things, seek to honor students' diverse ways of knowing and prior experiences with and models of good learning. To return to the theme of students versus learners that we introduced previously, a first-year seminar instructor could engage students in reflecting on great learners they know from their prior communities (ideally, learners outside of formal educational environments). This could be a faith leader, family member, mentor in their home community, or even a historical figure from their cultural tradition who, in the students' estimation, embodies the characteristics and traits of a great learner. Students could share these examples in small groups, work collaboratively to identify shared characteristics across their narratives, and then report on their learning in short oral reports to the class or by listing these characteristics in some way that makes their learning visible to the rest of the class (e.g., large sticky notes, shared Google document, Mentimeter, etc.).

This is a simple example, but we hope that it illustrates that a first-year seminar class can help students become learners by helping them access prior funds of knowledge (Gonzales et al., 2006) from prior communities and identities located outside the traditional school landscape and then integrating that knowledge with the experiences and knowledge of peers to consider what sort of learner they hope to be in their new institutional community. Rather than abandoning prior communities and identities, students are encouraged to draw on these communities and identities to inform how they can successfully navigate the transitions associated with the first year of college.

Connections and Relationships to Communities in Transition. Naturally, as students grow and become and assume new forms of identity and being, they will have to engage in renegotiations of their connections. However, what we would advocate through this point of view is that the individual has agency for who they are becoming and how it influences their relationships. Because research has shown that the support from home communities can be a powerful force in the transition experiences of students (Fish & Syed, 2018; Kezar & Kitchen, 2020; Rodriguez & Mallinckrodt, 2021), educators ought to consider the roles that student participation in other communities play as they enter college. For instance, to refer to the involved parent of a student from a communitarian background as a "helicopter parent" serves

as a protective function of a closed community of practice. It also strips the student of agency because participation necessitates the abandonment or bracketing of previously existing relationships and constitutes the design or execution of a miseducative educational environment. Thus this perspective illuminates the need for institutions as communities of practice to change and adapt to better provide culturally responsive and inclusive transition experiences for students (Bamber & Tett, 2000; Hurtado et al., 2012; Museus et al., 2017).

An approach to parent involvement grounded in LPP, becoming, and inclusion will look for ways to invite parents to be legitimate participants in the students' college experience. For example, parent orientation can be conceived to keep parents busy in unimportant tasks—what we hope you now see as a form of *illegitimate* participation to invoke Lave and Wenger's (1991) language—so as to keep them from "distracting" or pulling students away from their own orientation participation. Or, instead, parent orientation can be designed with the goal of inviting parents to be fuller participants in their student's education by equipping parents with knowledge and skill they can draw on when their student encounters their first failed exam, feelings of isolation, and so on.

For example, in new student orientation programming at Brigham Young University, efforts are being made to provide parents with educational sessions that subtly introduce them to key research on learning mindsets, engage them in reflecting on how they can use this understanding to more intentionally share their own growth mindset experiences with their students, and provide them with simple conversational tools to help students respond more productively when they encounter disappointments, perceived failures, or other challenges common to the first year of college. The goal is to recognize the essential role parents play as partners and members of students' learning community, involve them in the orientation process in legitimate ways, and invite and prepare them to participate with their students in navigating challenges.

Attending to Issues of Power in Transition. Finally, the ideas of *communities of practice*, *legitimacy*, and *peripherality* can be exclusive and laden with power. While we acknowledge that power dynamics are natural and can be components of a productive educational experience, we do not present them as necessarily unproblematic. For instance, we have made references to "authentic" and "genuine" practices of the community. This hearkens back to the earlier assertion that, too often, the terms of transitions are set and maintained by the institution and those who hold social power (Kitchen et al., 2019; Quinn, 2010). As O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) note, "legitimate peripherality entails complex power relations" (p. 326). LPP provides a lens for understanding the complex power relations present in the asymmetries that exist when newcomers enter communities of practice and engage with more experienced peers, staff, and faculty. This lens can be a useful way to shed light on the presence and features of the underlying structures and sources of power (e.g., expertise, legitimacy). According to O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) again: "When peripherality is a position from which an individual can move forward toward fuller participation, it is an empowered position. When peripherality is a position from which an individual is prevented from fuller participation, it is disempowering" (p. 326).

Again, this is especially troubling if the students who are maintained on the periphery are racially and ethnically minoritized students or those from low-income backgrounds—those who have been historically marginalized in higher education—or if the most authentic and impactful participation opportunities are offered to students whose identities provide privileged access to specialized programs, such as honors, leadership, or undergraduate research. For example, peer leadership experiences can serve as powerful opportunities for students to serve their peers, contribute to the work of the institution, and develop essential leadership skills. However, if these opportunities do not provide compensation, require an excessive amount of time, or are only offered during traditional 9–5 working hours, specific parts of the student population will be excluded.

LPP and becoming, taken together, highlight our responsibility as educators to use and distribute power in appropriate and educative ways; we have the choice to organize environments in higher education as systems of social mobility or structures designed to maintain White supremacy and oppression via upholding the status quo.

Conclusion

In outlining the case for *why* a reconceptualization of student transitions is necessary as well as *how* transitions as becoming and LPP provide an integrated theoretical basis on which we can build and improve practice, policy, and research on students in transition, we recognize that this is merely a first step. We envision future work that seeks to explore ways in which (1) students are experiencing the phenomenon of transitions as becoming, (2) educators are shaping inclusive learning spaces that engage students in the authentic practices of the academic community, and (3) theory space can be expanded and built on the aspirational ideas set forth in this paper. We fully expect that as we engage in this work, many of the descriptions of transitions as becoming will evolve as the contours of the landscape emerge. It is our contention that to understand transitions as a process of becoming using these frameworks is to understand learning processes more accurately as people actually experience them and will result in improved learning environments in higher education. Most important, application of these frameworks to refine existing transition programming,

eliminate programming that marginalizes and excludes, and develop new programming focused on becoming will make good on the promises of transformation and belonging that we make when students join us as members of our learning communities.

Acknowledgments

We're grateful to the members of the transitions theory review research team who helped us comb through so many journal articles: Alana Hadley Long, Aaron George, Mark Jestel, Kevin Crawford, and Jessica Moore.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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