Book review
Writing for Professional Development

Reviewed by: *Karen Schriver, KSA Communication Design & Research | Pittsburgh, USA*

Professionals across domains—from nursing to engineering—use writing on-the-job to communicate effectively in their workplaces. This book puts into dialog two important perspectives: learning to write professionally and writing to learn the profession. Aimed at vocational education teachers, teacher trainers across the disciplines, professional training programs, or developers of pre-professional curricula, this book could have been aptly subtitled: "Creating a professional identity at work through reflective writing."

   In this most recent volume in the Studies in Writing series, Ortoleva, Bétrancourt, and Billett bring together an international group of scholars who explore the writing skills and rhetorical sensitivities that students need to acquire as they develop themselves as professionals. With a focus on vocational education courses in fields ranging from midwifery to baking, this book offers one of the first examinations of what students need, what employers expect, and how teachers are trying to help students better realize their professional goals through writing.

Overview: Creating a professional identity through reflective writing

This edited collection consists of 18 chapters and an index. It is organized into three sections. Section one focuses on the theories and concepts that are relevant to writing for professional development. Section two is directed to how writing can be used to help students learn the subject matter, the rhetorical moves, the language, and register of their chosen profession. Section three considers ways to use writing to help students develop lifelong learning strategies and how writing about work fosters their professional expertise.

journal of WRITING RESEARCH

In the first section, the authors examine how discipline-specific writing can foster students' development of practical, conceptual, and procedural knowledge about their field. A key theme of this section is that writing can mediate learning on-the-job in productive ways.

The second section focuses on the role of reflective writing, collaborative writing, peer feedback, journal writing, and computer-supported instruction on preparing students for writing-at-work and learning-at-work. The contributors stress that if writing for professional development is to be successful, educators must carefully structure and organize relevant writing experiences for students—experiences that are grounded in the particular genres of their field of study (e.g., patient treatment reports for physical therapy clinicians and scientific technical reports for engineers). And experiences that will help them learn for themselves on-the-job (e.g., mobile learning journals for pastry chefs, reflective journal writing for midwives, videos of themselves-in-action for physical therapists, videos of worked-out case studies for business managers). The contributors suggest that teachers need to be strategic in offering support and guidance so that students understand what appropriate goals for writing are.

The third section explores how writing on-the-job can guide the acquisition of students' disciplinary expertise and enhance their professional identity. Contributors remind us that if writing is to be used to promote professional development and growth on-the-job, then researchers need a more detailed understanding of the divergent workplaces students may enter and devise situated pedagogies that are responsive to those unique settings. Little is known about the literate demands of different workplaces, making it hard chart a path toward expertise.

Chapter highlights: A reader's perspective

In *"Learning through Writing: Mimetic Processes in Action,"* Billett explores the role of observation, imitation, introspection, and rehearsal in learning to write on-the-job—what he calls mimetic processes. He contends that one's writing can change as a result of imitating the work of other writers, and that mimesis involves perspective taking, guessing intentionality, and constructing representations of another author's goals. Teachers and mentors, he argues, need to scaffold experience in ways that enable students to learn through doing writing, especially by trying out different genres, individually or in groups. Importantly, Billet points out that direct teaching and mentoring is necessary but insufficient. Additionally, students need to develop their personal noticing skills—allowing them to pay attention to the appropriate things at work and construct new knowledge for themselves on the job.

In *"Transforming Practice through Reflective Writing: A Discursive Approach,"* Vanhulle, Vité, Balslev, and Dobrowolska analyze reflective portfolios of primary and secondary Swiss school teachers as they produced narratives of situations encountered during their work. The authors employ discourse analysis for assessing

the language of teachers-in-training as they worked on building their professional identity during their apprenticeships.

In *"Writing as a Body-Mind Performance Learning Activity for Educational Development of Wholetheme Professional Artistry,"* Iran-Nejad discusses biofunctional science and its relation to learning. He presents a model of biofunctional understanding that may have implications for theorizing incubation. He contends that embodied cognition could guide writing in professional settings and emphasizes that writers need to practice mind-body performance. He elaborates his points with a case study of pre-service teachers who used open-ended writing prompts to reflect critically on their practices.

In *"Writing to Learn from Experience: Unguided Reflection as Meaning Making Practices for Teachers,"* Pereira, Pereira, and Cardoso make the argument that unguided reflective writing can be a powerful scaffold for novice teachers taking in-service programs. They found writing an effective tool for helping new primary and secondary teachers of Portuguese (and other languages) to learn from their practices and experiences in the classroom.

In *"Writing Reflective Learning Journals: Promoting the Use of Learning Strategies and Supporting the Development of Professional Skills,"* Mauroux, Zufferey, Rodondi, Cattaneo, Motta, and Gurtner study Swiss apprentice bakers, pastry cooks, and chefs (ages 15 to 19) who were encouraged to complete a mobile and online learning journal throughout their training as a complement to a personal recipe book. They observe that writing in their online learning journal triggered apprentices' reflective capacities (e.g., "When shaping dough, be careful not to tear it") and show how guided writing prompts (e.g., "in the following recipe, I need to be careful about…") enabled students to make their experiences explicit and reconsider their past and present ideas about each recipe they created. Reflective journals enhanced apprentices' metacognitive awareness, especially their monitoring and evaluating of the tricky aspects of carrying out recipes. Students who reflected more also got better final grades.

In *"Students' Experiences of Reflective Writing as a Tool for Learning in Physiotherapy Education,"* Kurunsaari, Tynjälä, and Piirainen study the impact of reflective writing on Finnish physiotherapy students as they worked in clinical settings. They show that a large component of becoming a professional involves documenting one's reasoning and recording the procedures used in rehabilitation and physical therapy. They asked students to reflect on video recordings of their activities at school and work. They found that students varied considerably in their attitudes about the usefulness of writing, ranging from "writing is a useless task" ("since mostly I'll be talking on the job not writing") to "writing is a tool for professional development" ("it's something I'll need to do as I become a health professional"). They conclude that teachers need better ways of helping all students recognize the potential value of writing in their professional development.

In *"Developing the Language of Midwifery through Continuity of Care Experiences,"* Glover and Sweet offer a fascinating account of Australian midwifery students and their gradual professional socialization into the practice of providing care to women during pregnancy, birthing, and the postnatal period. Using focus groups and reflective portfolios, the authors observed students over a three-year period and assessed how their language about the field changed over time. They found that students moved from describing what they were doing to evaluating their moves as they gained experience. Students shifted from using lay language to more precise biological language as they documented a birth (e.g., from "her waters have broken" to the more professional "her membranes have ruptured"). An important message from this study is that it may take up to three years before teachers observe changes in students' language and understanding of their professional culture. They argue that learning the language of the culture is important because it conveys dispositional knowledge—that is, knowledge of the values, attitudes, customs, nuances, and rituals of the field.

In *"Using Writing to Support Student Professional Development during Periods of Practical Training: A Case Study,"* Sullivan and Czigler present a case about a Swedish audiology degree program and how reflective writing was used to support students' practical training in working with the hearing of children and adults. They asked students to follow a model of reflection as they wrote; the goal was to make reflection explicit. Students' reflections were then graded. The authors found that students felt constrained by the model and were stressed by the idea of their reflections being assessed as part of their audiology degree. The authors conclude that it is important to support the development of reflective skills without making students anxious about the quality of their reflections.

In *"Individual and Collaborative Writing-to-Learn Activities in Vocational Education: An Overview of Different Instructional Strategies,"* Cattaneo and Boldrini assessed the impact of several writing-to-learn strategies on the written reflections of apprentice business employees in a Swiss vocational education and training program. They studied three teaching scenarios for promoting students' reflective activities based on ideas about collaborative writing, scaffolded reflective prompts, and error detection as a means to promote procedural learning. In a series of nicely designed experiments, they tested their ideas about the three scenarios. The authors found that students' collaborative experiences tended to foster improvements in their individual reflective writing. They showed that highly structured reflective prompts helped students to reflect more deeply on their professional experiences than less structured prompts. They also found that using videos of worked-out examples of incorrect professional procedures helped students not only to diagnose more procedural problems than students who saw correct procedures, but also to say how and why such errors could be avoided. Their work underscores the power of self-explanation in learning for professional development.

In *"Computer-Supported Collaborative Writing for Professional Development,"* Ortoleva and Bétrancourt explore ways that computer networks can support the development of on-the-job skills. The authors portray professional development as a frequently isolating experience and discuss the need for social support in carrying out learning activities. Asynchronous online discussions (e.g., wikis, blogs, e-portfolios, list servs) are presented as ways of building of communities of practice that foster individual professional development. They studied the collaborative discussions of teacher education and health care students as they co-constructed decisions about their professional life. They found that using wikis reduced some students' isolation during learning, but others preferred to work alone and were reluctant users of wikis. The quality of interaction online proved to be crucial. The authors recommend that teachers alternate between moderating structured online discussions that focus on divergent responses and structured discussions that lead to agreement and consensus.

In *"Professional Text Genres: Writing Standards in Vocational Education,"* Neumann considers whether students across the European Union are actually trained on texts relevant to their professional development. She poses three questions about German vocational education: (1) Do secondary schools prepare students for writing in their professions? (2) What genres are relevant to workplace settings? and (3) Do students competencies upon graduation match companies' expectations? She found that schools, especially at the Gymnasium level, were doing a good job of preparing students. She observed that teachers tended to emphasize oral communication at the expense of writing (e.g., talking to customers over the telephone instead of the more frequent task of writing an email). Perhaps not surprisingly, she found a mismatch between what companies wanted from students and the skills students possessed.

In *"Learning to Write as a Professional: Engineers and Health Professionals in the United Kingdom and Germany,"* Breuer, Newman, and Newman surveyed the professional education of engineers and health professionals from the UK and Germany. They observed that novice writers might master the professional register of their field (e.g., genre-specific vocabulary), but fail to realize the rhetorical moves of particular genres within their field. They found that German schools emphasized term papers while UK schools focused on essays, proposals, and design briefs. They conclude that too few genres were being taught and little feedback was provided except end-of-paper marks. Surprisingly, in some cases when students came to the workplace unprepared to write on the job, companies seemed not to care. The authors reported on a German engineering firm that did not want its employees to participate in their study because participants might grow to recognize that they needed better communication skills and then might ask for training that managers were unwilling to provide. Employers felt that being a good engineer meant being good with numbers not with words.

In *"Teaching Writing in Australian Vocational Education and Training Contexts: The Need for a New Professional Development Approach and Commitment,"* Kelly is motivated by survey findings that consistently show that about half of Australian

adults need to improve their language, literacy, and numeracy skills. These low literacy levels have had an impact on the readiness of the workforce. As a result, the Australian government funded initiatives to create better resources for teachers of language and literacy. The author evaluated the resources available for writing teachers of engineering students and concluded that they are neither up-to-date nor reflective of current research. To design better resources for trainers, she recommends the use of authentic workplace texts combined with evidence-based advice from current research in literacy and functional linguistics.

In *"Becoming Brave Writers and Writing Teachers: Teachers Recognizing Emotional Dimensions of Writing and Transforming their Classroom Instruction,"* Woodard argues for research on the role of affect and emotions in writing. She presents three case studies of teachers from elementary, middle, and high school classrooms from New York City as they participated in writing groups designed to encourage reflection on writing and teaching writing. The author examined the emotions salient to the teachers as they wrote, shared their writing, and taught writing. In all three cases, writing transformed teachers' practices as they allowed themselves to become more vulnerable in their classrooms by writing alongside students and sharing their own writing practices. The author concludes that we need to take seriously how becoming a writing teacher includes developing an identity as a professional educator, which involves emotions and feelings about what it means to be a writing teacher.

In *"Researcher Professional Development through Writing: A Negotiation Perspective,"* Ray Smith offered a case study of 12 people engaged in routine on-the-job tasks over an 18-month period. He then focused his own writing process as a researcher (writing up the case) and argued that writing can be used to help develop one's professional identity and promote one's personal development. He elaborates the ways in which being a researcher involved negotiating personal and professional worlds, developing personal standards for research quality and refining understandings of the scientific criteria by which research is evaluated.

In *"Becoming an Academic: Reflective Writing and Professional Development,"* Badenhorst, Joy, Penney, Pickett, Hesson, Young, McLeod, Vaandering, and Li explore the role of reflective practice in helping novice academics negotiate the demands of becoming a professional. The authors studied how novice faculty developed coping skills as they forged their professional identity at a Canadian university. Participant faculty took part in a writing group in which they reflected on their experience of "becoming an academic" once a week over a five-month period. The authors found the writing group encouraged novice faculty to reflect on the shifting boundaries between personal/professional, work/home, and novice/expert. The weekly writing group gave faculty a safe space to hear each other's stories and allowed members to explore emotions not often voiced in academic spaces.

In *"Constructing Professional Communication Identity through the Final Client Deliverable: The Multimodal Investigation Report,"* Grant describes a case study of

two South African accounting students as they collaborated on a report about their university's environmental practices. The author focused on students' evolving visual and verbal texts, with the aim of understanding their decision-making and semiotic choices as they drafted the text, tables, and photographs. The author employed discourse analysis to carefully assess students' final reports, tracing their textual and graphic moves, and tracking their developing sense of professional identity.

Shortcomings of the collection

A limitation of the book's coverage is that very few of the contributors made contact with the literature on professional writing, information design, and technical communication—all of which are relevant to writing for professional development. This body of research could have supplemented contributors' ideas about writing in the professions—providing richer source materials from which to discuss issues such as the following:

- Professional genres (Bhatia, 1993; Boettger, 2014; Freedman & Adam, 1996; Miller, 1984)
- Multimodality, information design, and visual communication (Carliner, 2000; Malamed, 2009; Schriver, 1997; 2012)
- Perceptions of errors in writing on-the-job (Gray & Heuser, 2003)
- Developing rhetorical skills for workplace writing (Katz, 1998; Savage & Dragga, 2000)
- Transitioning from school to the workplace (Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Beaufort, 2000)
- Workplace cultures (Henry, 2000; Schriver, 2015)

Unfortunately, there are also problems of editing and design at the macro-level and micro-level.

Macro-level problems. The book's three sections (previewed in the introduction) are not signaled in the table of contents of the printed ebook and they should be. The three sections are not mentioned on the Brill Online website either. The flat hierarchy presented in the table of contents is misleading, masking the different emphases intended by the editors and the relations among the chapters. At a very basic level, the reader cannot tell when one section ends and the next begins.

There are no standardized chapter abstracts or overviews, rendering it difficult to grasp the big picture. The authors did write overviews for their chapters, which appear on the Brill Online website, but rather mysteriously, have not been included in the actual book. The online version does not allow potential buyers of the book to peruse one PDF with all of the abstracts. One must navigate to a separate page for each of the 18 chapters and then click on the abstract. These poor information design

and user interface choices make for a frustrating reader experience using the paper or online version.

Even the date of publication is inconsistent, with 2015 online and 2016 in the ebook. This introduces unnecessary noise into the system when other scholars try to cite the book.

There is no name index. The subject index is less than two pages for a book of 382 pages. What a pity.

There is no biographical or contact information for the contributors, asking readers to search the Web to find out where the authors are from. These omissions not only damage the text's accessibility, they also prevent prevent readers from gaining familiarity with the authors and their body of work.

Micro-level problems. The book has many typos and spelling mistakes. There are words running together, unsightly page breaks, excessively long paragraphs, misspelled names in references, and random line breaks in the references.

The format of tables and graphs is inconsistent, even within the same chapter. Some tables are distributed over two pages without a signal that they continue; in fact, the first page of such tables typically has too much blank space at the bottom of the page, which signals the end of the table, not its middle.

Taken together, these macro-level and micro-level problems make for a less than satisfying reading or browsing experience. Moreover, the errors of omission and comission make one wonder how much attention was paid to editing this book about professional writing. When academic books ignore the editing and design features of the text, they do so at their own peril, perhaps alienating the very readership they hope to attract.

Strengths of the collection

This book extends our understanding of the power of written reflection and of how self-assessment can open up paths to situated learning. I found the range of cases to be quite compelling and think audiences interested in literacy and writing studies more generally will appreciate this book for it demonstrates how writing can make a difference in peoples' professional lives. The book suggests ways to equip students with the competencies they need for transitioning to the world of work and for further developing their communication skills and disciplinary knowledge at work.

The contributors also show that reflective writing can help students develop sensitivity to noticing key features of their workplace—prompting them to pay attention to the relevant characteristics of their work and construct new knowledge for themselves on-the-job. The book provides evidence-based accounts of professional development and the ways in which reflection can promote intentional learning. The book shows that writing can enable students to transform their knowledge of their fields through introspection and action. The cases presented in

this book also tell us quite clearly that students' knowledge transformation does not come quickly. It may take years before students show evidence of self-reflection and consolidation of their learning.

Despite its stylistic and information design problems, I liked this book and it deserves your attention. For many years teachers and researchers have been talking about the role that writing can play in enculturating students into their disciplines, but often that talk is abstract and devoid of particulars and nuance. This book can help us move beyond vague claims about writing-to-learn on-the-job to understanding some of the specific ways that writing can foster professional growth and expertise.

Pedagogical insights

Taking the chapters together, a number of valuable conclusions about teaching and learning can be drawn. The contributors to this volume would likely agree with the following insights about writing for professional development:

- Learning occurs not only in the formal classroom; it also arises informally as we construe experience and construct knowledge from experience. Affect and motivation play a central role as learners engage in what Schön (1983) called the swampy trenches of the world of practice.

- Not any writing prompt will foster student reflection; the more effective prompts tend to be structured and open-ended rather than close-ended. While close-ended questions promote reporting of on-the-job tasks and activities, carefully constructed open-ended questions do a better job of eliciting reflection about problems and activities. Reflection may enable students to deal more effectively with unfamiliar zones of the swamp (Schön, 1987).

- Not any sequence of writing activities will move students to reflect on their activities; they must be purposefully ordered, structured and spaced, with adequate scaffolding and feedback along the way. There is still a powerful role for teachers in encouraging Schön's notion of reflection-in-action.

- An important index of students' professional development is the acquisition of professional "insider" language. Growth in acquiring professional language can be tracked and measured empirically. Discourse analysis and computational linguistics are useful tools in tracking linguistic growth.

- Students may have an inadequate sense of what appropriate goals for their writing are (Wallace & Hayes, 1991; Hayes, Flower, Schriver, Stratman, & Carey, 1987). They may view their goal as composing error-free text rather than as exploring professional issues or problems. Teachers can intervene at each stage of the writing process to help students shape personal goals for their writing. Teachers can also help students distinguish goals for writing for personal growth from those for composing texts on-the-job.

- Employers may expect students to come to the workplace with ready-to-use writing and design skills as well as knowledge of typical business genres. Teachers can play a powerful role in giving students practice in business genres and in cultivating student awareness of what employers expect of their writing,

visual design, and oral communication skills. Teachers also need better understanding of why organizations typically value certain characteristics of writing over others (e.g., clarity, concision, and correctness).

- There may be a role for practicing the imitation of well-written workplace texts when learning to write on-the-job. Students may acquire some knowledge of conventions, style and syntax by simulating good examples. At the same time, they need to recognize the characteristics of poorly written texts in their field; in this way, they can better identify problems that may creep into their own writing.

- Teachers tend to agree that good professional writing is complex cognitive, social, and cultural practice. But to be convincing in a classroom of pre-professionals, teachers need richer data about how writing actually transpires in workplace contexts, particularly as people write alone or together in groups; see, for example, Leijten, Van Waes, Schriver, & Hayes (2014).

Perhaps the biggest contribution of this book is that it brings to the fore the need for evidence-based accounts of how writing can mediate students' professional development—both personal growth within their chosen field and growth as a team member on-the-job. The book's contributors make an excellent start in mapping out strategies and techniques for fostering and tracking students' professional growth.

References

Anson, C. M., & Forsberg, L. L. (1990). Moving beyond the academic community: Transitional stages in professional writing. *Written Communication, 7*(2), 200–231.

Beaufort, A. (2000). Learning the trade: A social apprenticeship model for gaining writing expertise. *Written Communication, 17*(2), 185-223.

Bhatia, V. K. (1993). *Analyzing genre: Language use in professional settings*. London: Longman.

Boettger, R. K. (2014). Explicitly teaching five technical genres to English first-language adults in a multi-major technical writing course. *Journal of Writing Research, 6*(1), 29-59.

Carliner, S. (2000). Physical, cognitive, and affective: A three-part framework for information design. *Technical Communication, 47*(4), 561-576.

Freedman, A., & Adam, C. (1996). Learning to write professionally: "Situated learning" and the transition from university to professional discourse. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 10* (Oct.), 395-427.

Gray, L. S., & Heuser, P. (2003). Nonacademic professionals' perceptions of usage errors. *Journal of Basic Writing, 22*(1), 50-70.

Hayes, J. R., Flower, L., Schriver, K. A., Stratman, J. F., & Carey, L. (1987). Cognitive processes in revision. In S. Rosenberg (Ed.), *Advances in applied psycholinguistics* (Vol. 2: Reading, writing, and language processing, pp. 176–240). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Henry, J. (2000). *Writing workplace cultures: An archeology of professional writing*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Katz, S. M. (1998). A newcomer gains power: An analysis of the role of rhetorical expertise. *Journal of Business Communication, 35*(4), 419-442.

Leijten, M., Van Waes, L., Schriver, K., & Hayes, J. R. (2014). Writing in the workplace: Constructing documents using multiple digital sources. *Journal of Writing Research, 5*(3), 285-337.

Malamed, C. (2009). *Visual language for designers: Principles for creating graphics that people understand*. Beverly, MA: Rockport Publishers.

Miller, C. R. (1984). Genre as social action. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 70*, 151–167.

Savage, G. J., Sullvan, D. L., & Dragga, S. (2000). *Writing a professional life: Stories of technical communicators on and off the job*. New York, NY: Pearson: Allyn & Bacon Series in Technical Communication.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schriver, K. (2015). The rhetoric of redesign in bureaucratic settings. In J. Frascara (Ed.), *Information design as principled action: Making information accessible, relevant, understandable, and usable* (pp. 173-184). Champaign, IL: Common Ground Publishing LLC.

Schriver, K. A. (1997). *Dynamics in document design: Creating texts for readers*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Schriver, K. A. (2012). What we know about expertise in professional communication. In V. W. Berninger (Ed.), *Past, present, and future contributions of cognitive writing research to cognitive psychology* (pp. 275-312). New York, NY: Psychology Press.

Wallace, D., & Hayes, J. R. (1991). Redefining revision for freshmen. *Research in the Teaching of English, 25*(1), 54-66.