

# Writing about Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

Creating and Contributing to Scholarly Conversations  
across a Range of Genres

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## CHAPTER 30

### CONCLUSION

#### *Reflecting on the Potential of Writing about Learning and Teaching*

*We revisit the key issues we have raised, speaking again of the principles, and end with an invitation for those who read this book. (Phillips and Bunda 2018, 89)*

The Latin roots of the word conclusion are “to shut” (*claudere*) and “to convince.” A conclusion is, in both senses, a closing. While some things, such as events, come to a close simply because they are over, the conclusion of an academic text draws to an intentional close. At the same time, as Louise Phillips and Tracey Bunda note in their book on storying as research, a conclusion is an opportunity to revisit, to speak again, and to invite readers into ongoing dialogue. In this final chapter, we conclude intentionally—deliberately and with awareness—in the same way we have endeavored to write throughout this text, to name and to make visible the process in which we are engaged: a writing process that is a learning process and an act of communication. Due to its length, a book requires a more extensive revisiting than some other genres of what has carried us to this conclusion. And so, we begin with the beginning.

#### **Revisiting, Reviewing, and Reinterpreting Our Overarching Themes**

We argued in our introduction that contributing to and creating scholarly conversations and fostering identities are best achieved by

publishing in a wide range of genres. Our own stories and those of the many writers we include throughout the chapters of this book illustrate that there is no one right way to join, contribute to, benefit from, or create scholarly conversations about learning and teaching, and the identity—or identities—you develop through your engagement will evolve over time. Indeed, the richness of the opportunities afforded by the expanding set of acceptable writing genres and the increasing recognition of the validity of different identities mean that academic writing is a more open and inclusive process than it has been in the past.

Who you are as a scholar and what and how you choose to write will influence the ways that scholarly writing about learning and teaching continue to evolve. That reality will affect you personally, and it will shape the world of scholarly publication. Every choice you make as a scholar both reflects your values and builds values-based practice, and conceptualizing writing as a learning process ensures that both you and those who read your writing continue to learn. These dynamic, dialogic processes can support your particular process of “self-authoring a professional identity as an educator” (Gunersel, Barnett, and Etienne 2013, 35) and, concurrently, your identity as a scholar of learning and teaching.

Throughout this book we have both offered advice and posed questions, alternating between informing and querying in an attempt to enact a dynamic, dialogic process that we capture in the metaphor of conversation. Writing is contributing to and creating conversations, but of course not everyone has equal access to every conversation, and even once in, not everyone is attended to with the same respect as everyone else. Our hope is that, by legitimating and advocating a wider range of genres for academic writing, we can open conversations about learning and teaching to a wider range of participants—a widening that is more inclusive and equitable as well as more educative for everyone.

Because identity is a complex intersection of how you see yourself and how you are seen by others, it is never fixed; it is, rather, contextual, relational, and evolving. Likewise, what and how we write for

any given publication is never the final iteration; it is one in a series of versions of what matters to us and what we want to share with others. This is partly why writing is always a learning process. But writing to learn also means taking risks, composing texts that take you beyond where you might feel you are. These forays may inspire new internal realizations as well as new connections with others.

### **Revisiting, Reviewing, and Reinterpreting Our Practical Advice**

Interwoven with these larger themes of contributing to and creating conversations and fostering identities, explored in [part 2](#) of this book, are more practical questions, addressed in [part 3](#): What are your motivations for writing? Will you write alone or with others? How will you decide what outlet is the best venue for any given piece of writing? How will you prepare for your writing process? Intersecting with these questions are decisions about genre, some of which you can choose to write in and some of which will be required of you. How to make even the required writing joyful and fulfilling is important for sustaining your own energy and for making academic writing a more engaging and affirming experience for everyone.

The when, where, and how of writing, which we address in [part 5](#), has similarities and differences across genres and across writers. The advice we offer and the questions we pose about allotting time and choosing space to write, writing and rewriting your draft, becoming an engaging writer, and developing a network of critical friends are meant to offer a set of considerations but also signal that you may make your own choices about these aspects of writing. Our conclusion, then, in relation to these practical aspects of writing, is that it is *your process that matters*. It's not that you can work entirely in isolation; rather, it is that you can be intentional and idiosyncratic even while being an engaged member of a community.

The final phase of your writing journey (for any given piece of writing)—which includes preparing for submission and submitting the piece, responding to reviewers and dealing with rejection, and promoting your published work and developing a publication

plan—is one you will experience over and over: a mini version of the larger cycle of writing for publication. **Part 6**, then, in addition to addressing a particular form of conclusion, is also a reminder that each conclusion precedes another commencement: every closure makes way for a new exploration or analysis to begin.

**Part 4**, the section of the book that deals with the “across genres” component of our book’s title, addresses selected phases and aspects of writing in different genres. Conclusions across genres vary and may include one or more of these forms of intentional closure:

- Restating and reinforcing the main points of your argument
- Proposing possible directions for future research
- Re-delineating a new conceptual frame for analyzing literature
- Naming the implications of your findings for others in different contexts
- Specifying what you learned from which others could benefit
- Articulating the call to action or advice that arises from your expressed opinion
- Inviting reflections from others regarding what they are taking away from your presentation
- Stating clearly the message you want readers to take from your story or blog
- Reiterating why readers should believe the argument you have made.

What all these different kinds of conclusions have in common, though, is that they guide readers in how to think about what they just read. They close and aim to convince, and they do so in a way consistent with the genre. Dolores Black, Sally Brown, Abby Day, and Phil Race (1998, 116) offer a helpful reminder about conclusions:

**Take particular care with the wording of your conclusions.** These are the parts of your work which may be most likely to be quoted by others, and you need to protect yourself from the position of having to live with words which you would prefer to have been different.

## Multiple Conclusions and Final Thoughts

Looking at the list above of the various forms conclusions might take, we strive here to enact a version of as many of them as we can. Thus far we have restated and reinforced the main points of our argument, attempting to follow Wendy Belcher's (2009, 217–8) advice:

A good conclusion is one that summarizes your argument and its significance in a powerful way. The conclusion should restate the article's relevance to the scholarly literature and debate. Although the conclusion does not introduce new arguments, it does point beyond the article to the larger context or the more general case. It does not merely repeat the introduction, but takes a step back, out of the bigger picture and states why the argument matters in the larger scheme of things.

In terms of possible directions for future research, we hope scholars will both engage in systematic studies and gather more stories of the range of purposes, strategies, and lived experiences of academic writers. As signaled in chapters 1 and 11, we encourage scholars to share and publish writing in genres on learning and teaching we have not covered in this text. For example, pieces on writing teaching portfolios, annotated syllabi, how-to guides, and grant proposals. We also encourage you to experiment with podcasts and vodcasts. All of these are also part of ongoing conversations about learning and teaching.

Our conceptual frame, which brings together the concepts of writing as contributing to and creating scholarly conversations, writing as fostering identities, and writing as a learning process, highlights the mutually informing nature of the professional and the personal. Every choice you make, or how you proceed when you do not have a choice, will influence who you become as a scholar and as an author about learning and teaching.

In writing our conclusion as a deliberate and self-aware enactment of and reflection on conclusions, we endeavored to follow the advice of Black et al (1998, 116):

**Decide which one impression you would like your readers to go away with.** Ask yourself “If there’s only one thing they will remember, what do I want it to be?” This is likely to be the most suitable basis for your final words.

The one thing we hope you will remember after having read or dipped into this book is that writing for publication is not simply producing a text but is, rather, a complex process of contributing to and creating conversations, forging an identity aligned to your values, and embracing an opportunity for ongoing learning.

We have noted throughout how much we have learned through writing this book together and inviting the wisdom of so many other writers to bring these ideas to life. We knew that we knew something about academic writing, but mapping what we knew and having to write our way toward understanding what we didn’t know was at once an invigorating, humbling, sometimes exhausting, but ultimately inspiring experience. We hope you will be encouraged and emboldened by the advice we offer and the questions we pose to self-author and re-write yourself as you, in turn, offer and explore understandings of learning and teaching in higher education. The possibilities are endless. Thank you for reading (and writing!).

### **Over to You**

That is all from us. We are turning it over to you one last time with these final questions:

- What conclusions do you draw from having read this book, and what are the main messages that you take away?
- What themes guide—or could guide—your writing practice?
- What was reaffirmed for you about the way you approach writing about learning and teaching?
- What changes will you make to the way you write about learning and teaching in higher education?
- How will you ensure that you continue to grow as a writer, both creating and contributing to ongoing and new conversations?



Remember that the discussion questions are also posted on the [book's website](#). We hope that you will use them to continue this conversation with others!