

# International Handbook of Research in Professional and Practice-based Learning

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Stephen Billett • Christian Harteis • Hans Gruber  
Editors

# International Handbook of Research in Professional and Practice-based Learning

 Springer

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ISSN 2197-1951

ISBN 978-94-017-8901-1

DOI 10.1007/978-94-017-8902-8

Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg New York London

ISSN 2197-196X (electronic)

ISBN 978-94-017-8902-8 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014943258

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Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media ([www.springer.com](http://www.springer.com))

# Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the contributions of following persons to the development of this book project whose efforts directly contributed to the identification of contributors and the quality of the accepted chapters.

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Sten Ludvigsen  
Monika Nerland  
Ian Stronach  
Dineke Tigelaar

We would also like to thank the following three staff members of Springer Education, for their support, advice and contributions to the development and publication of this Handbook.

Bernadette Ohmer  
Judy Pieren  
Marianna Pascale

# Contents

## Volume 1

### Part I Professions and Professional Practice

<b>1</b>	<b>Professionalism, Profession and Professional Conduct: Towards a Basic Logical and Ethical Geography .....</b>	<b>5</b>
	David Carr	
<b>2</b>	<b>The Concept of Professionalism: Professional Work, Professional Practice and Learning.....</b>	<b>29</b>
	Julia Evetts	
<b>3</b>	<b>Moral Aspects of Professions and Professional Practice .....</b>	<b>57</b>
	Gerhard Minnameier	
<b>4</b>	<b>Professional Work and Knowledge.....</b>	<b>79</b>
	Lina Markauskaite and Peter Goodyear	
<b>5</b>	<b>Conceptions of Professional Competence .....</b>	<b>107</b>
	Martin Mulder	
<b>6</b>	<b>Becoming a Practitioner: Professional Learning as a Social Practice.....</b>	<b>139</b>
	Silvia Gherardi and Manuela Perrotta	
<b>7</b>	<b>Productive Systems of Professional Formation.....</b>	<b>163</b>
	Jim Hordern	

### Part II Research Paradigms

<b>8</b>	<b>Understanding Learning for the Professions: How Theories of Learning Explain Coping with Rapid Change.....</b>	<b>199</b>
	Erno Lehtinen, Kai Hakkarainen, and Tuire Palonen	

<b>9</b>	<b>Understanding Learning for Work: Contributions from Discourse and Interaction Analysis</b> .....	225
	Laurent Filliettaz	
<b>10</b>	<b>Research Paradigms of Practice, Work and Learning</b> .....	257
	Paul Gibbs	
<b>11</b>	<b>A Phenomenological Perspective on Researching Work and Learning</b> .....	279
	Gloria Dall’Alba and Jörgen Sandberg	
<b>12</b>	<b>The Neuronal Base of Perceptual Learning and Skill Acquisition</b> .....	305
	Mark W. Greenlee	
<b>13</b>	<b>Hierarchical Linear Models for Research on Professional Learning: Relevance and Implications</b> .....	337
	Eva Kyndt and Patrick Onghena	
<b>14</b>	<b>The Anthropological Paradigm of Practice-Based Learning</b> .....	369
	Catherine Hasse	
 <b>Part III Educational Institutions and Systems</b>		
<b>15</b>	<b>Professional Education Between School and Practice Settings: The German Dual System as an Example</b> .....	397
	Peter F.E. Sloane	
<b>16</b>	<b>The Dual System of Vocational Education and Training in Germany – What Can Be Learnt About Education for (Other) Professions</b> .....	427
	Bärbel Fürstenau, Matthias Pilz, and Philipp Gonon	
<b>17</b>	<b>From University to Professional Practice: Students as Journeymen Between Cultures of Education and Work</b> .....	461
	Madeleine Abrandt Dahlgren, Tone Dyrdal Solbrekke, Berit Karseth, and Sofia Nyström	
<b>18</b>	<b>Integrating Professional Learning Experiences Across University and Practice Settings</b> .....	485
	Stephen Billett and Sarojni Choy	
<b>19</b>	<b>Transitions to Working Life: Securing Professional Competence</b> .....	513
	Päivi Tynjälä and Jennifer M. Newton	
<b>20</b>	<b>Interprofessional Education in the Health Workplace</b> .....	535
	Elizabeth Katherine Molloy, Louise Greenstock, Patrick Fiddes, Catriona Fraser, and Peter Brooks	
<b>21</b>	<b>Medical Education</b> .....	561
	Tim Dornan and Pim W. Teunissen	



**22 A Phenomenographic Way of Seeing and Developing Professional Learning** ..... 591  
 Ming Fai Pang

**23 Changing Cultures of Knowledge and Professional Learning** ..... 611  
 Monika Nerland and Karen Jensen

**Volume 2**

**Part IV Practice-Based Learning Activities**

**24 Identity and Agency in Professional Learning** ..... 645  
 Anneli Eteläpelto, Katja Vähäsantanen, Päivi Hökkä,  
 and Susanna Paloniemi

**25 Simulation Learning** ..... 673  
 Jan Breckwoldt, Hans Gruber, and Andreas Wittmann

**26 Learning from Errors at Work** ..... 699  
 Christian Harteis and Johannes Bauer

**27 Learning in the Circumstances of Professional Practice** ..... 733  
 Stephen Billett and Raymond Smith

**28 Apprenticeship as a Model for Learning in and Through Professional Practice** ..... 759  
 Geoffrey Gowlland

**29 Implicit Knowledge and Work Performance** ..... 781  
 Britta Herbig and Andreas Müller

**30 Intuition in Professional and Practice-Based Learning** ..... 807  
 Eugene Sadler-Smith

**31 An Organisational Perspective on Professionals’ Learning** ..... 835  
 Bente Elkjaer and Ulrik Brandi

**32 Professional Learning in the Ambulance Service** ..... 857  
 Morten Sommer

**33 Mimetic Learning at Work: Learning Through and Across Professional Working Lives** ..... 887  
 Stephen Billett

**Part V Implementing and Supporting Professional Learning**

**34 Professional Development and the Profession** ..... 915  
 Anton Havnes and Jens-Christian Smeby

**35 The Real Professional is a Learning Professional** ..... 955  
 P. Robert-Jan Simons and Manon C.P. Ruijters

<b>36</b>	<b>Team Learning in Education and Professional Organisations .....</b>	<b>987</b>
	Filip Dochy, David Gijbels, Elisabeth Raes, and Eva Kyndt	
<b>37</b>	<b>Teams, Communities of Practice, and Knowledge Networks as Locations for Learning Professional Practice .....</b>	<b>1021</b>
	Victoria J. Marsick, Andrew K. Shiotani, and Martha A. Gephart	
<b>38</b>	<b>The Role of Human Resource Development in Organizational Change: Professional Development Strategies of Employees, Managers and HRD Practitioners .....</b>	<b>1043</b>
	Rob F. Poell and Ferd J. Van Der Krogt	
<b>39</b>	<b>Mentoring as a Strategy for Facilitating Learning: Protégé and Mentor Perspectives .....</b>	<b>1071</b>
	Lillian Turner de Tormes Eby, B. Lindsay Brown, and Kerrin George	
<b>40</b>	<b>The New Professionalism: An Exploration of Vocational Education and Training Teachers in England .....</b>	<b>1099</b>
	James Avis and Kevin Orr	
<b>41</b>	<b>Older Professionals, Learning and Practice .....</b>	<b>1125</b>
	Tarja Irene Tikkanen and Stephen Billett	
<b>42</b>	<b>Promoting Practice-Based Innovation Through Learning at Work .....</b>	<b>1161</b>
	Per-Erik Ellström and Per Nilsen	
<b>43</b>	<b>Technology-Enhanced Professional Learning .....</b>	<b>1187</b>
	Allison Littlejohn and Anoush Margaryan	
<b>Part VI Assessing Professional Learning</b>		
<b>44</b>	<b>Evaluating Professional Learning .....</b>	<b>1215</b>
	Thomas R. Guskey	
<b>45</b>	<b>Assessment of Professional Competence .....</b>	<b>1237</b>
	Dineke E.H. Tigelaar and Cees P.M. van der Vleuten	
<b>46</b>	<b>Assessment of Professionals' Continuous Learning in Practice.....</b>	<b>1271</b>
	Tara J. Fenwick	
<b>47</b>	<b>The Influence of Evidence-Based Decisions by Collaborative Teacher Teams on Student Achievement .....</b>	<b>1299</b>
	Patrick Griffin, Esther Care, Judith Crigan, Pamela Robertson, Zhonghua Zhang, and Alejandra Arratia-Martinez	
<b>48</b>	<b>Large-Scale Assessment of Vocational Education and Training .....</b>	<b>1333</b>
	Frank Achtenhagen and Esther Winther	
	<b>Index .....</b>	<b>1355</b>

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# Introduction

The need for both a thorough and robust initial preparation as well as provision supporting ongoing learning has become essential for the professions within the last decades. This is because the requirements for occupational practice continue to become more complex and demanding, and more frequently transform as labour markets have dramatically changed, and the requirements for practice continually change. Moreover, across western countries with advanced industrial economies, the key growth in employment can be found in occupations that are referred to as para-professional and professional occupations. Hence, there is a growing demand for both initial learning and ongoing development for professional occupations. In all, increases in demand for occupational development, transitions in individuals' occupational careers, and changing requirements for occupational activities and tasks make for both thorough initial preparation and ongoing learning throughout professionals' working lives essential now. Furthermore, as changes in these occupations' requirements for performance are usually manifested in particular set of everyday work tasks, both initial preparation and professional development provisions wholly located in educational institutions decrease in their salience. Correspondingly, learning and development experiences in and as part of professional activities has increased in their salience, and are often included within both initial and professional development programs. Consequently, educational provisions for the professions now focus increasingly on the analysis and the support of learning for, within and throughout professional lives, and often include practice-based experiences. It follows, therefore, that research on professional and practice-based learning is emerging as a crucial topic within educational enquiry, and one whose findings requires to be broadly considered, widely disseminated and acted upon in educational programs seeking to prepare individuals for professional occupations and then sustaining their employability across lengthening professional lives.

Associated with these educational goals are a range of scientific challenges and important focuses within the field of professional learning that warrant being further understood. These include understanding and making explicit the complex and massive knowledge that is required for professional practice and identifying ways in which this knowledge can best be initially learnt and developed further across

professional lives. For instance, conceptually, major issues for a handbook on research in professional and practice-based learning are analytical explications of those processes that support learning at an individual and an organisational level. Associated procedural issues include understanding how learning experiences and educational processes might best be aligned or integrated to support this professional learning, again at the individual workers' level as well as on organisational level of enterprises.

However, the increase in numbers and concentration of professional workers, and their need for ongoing development, demands a comprehensive handbook comprising contributions that speak directly to theoretical and empirical research on professional learning issues, and that can be considered as key reference for international scientific and educational community. Therefore, given these growing needs and sets of important educational challenges, it is only now necessary and timely to bring together what is currently known about professional work, processes for initial and ongoing development of the capacities required for effective professional practice and a specific consideration on practice-based learning in the form of a comprehensive handbook. This handbook aims to fill this gap, and, thereby, augment the existing Springer series (i.e. International Handbooks of Education). The intention with this handbook is to establish a strong research-based platform for informed discussion of the variety of concepts and practices associated with professional education and professionals' learning that focus on both the individual development of professionals and the organisation of professional life and educational experiences to support and sustain that learning, and with a particular emphasis on that learning arising through practice-based experiences. The key premise of this handbook is that during both initial and ongoing professional development, individual learning processes are influenced and shaped through their professional environment and practices. Moreover, in turn, the practice and processes of learning through practice are shaped by their development, all of which are required to be understood through a range of research orientations, methods and findings. All of this means this handbook necessarily engages a wide range of scholars whose research orientations, disciplines and perspectives are quite diverse. Contributions reporting research on the individual development in professional contexts are incorporated into the handbook as is research on the social embedding of practice in professional domains. The need to engage with this range of distinct contributions as well as being comprehensive required careful scoping and selection of contributors who are able to provide chapters that comprehensively inform the particular area or issue they address and which in turn have informed the development of the structure and organisation of the handbook's content.

Moreover, there are no restrictions in the area of relevant occupations or conceptual or procedural approaches to conform to those of the editors. Instead, an inclusive approach towards the project of research in professional learning is necessary and is adopted in selecting appropriate contributors and secure comprehensive and well-developed responses from them. In these ways, the handbook brings together the contributions of key international researchers across its two volumes of consolidated work. For this purpose, researchers from a range of disciplines make

contributions that are integrated into the text. The contributors include those from education, studies of the professions, anthropology, sociology, cognitive and social psychology, amongst others. Moreover, the book seeks to be inclusive in its scope. In this way, the handbook also aims at addressing professional learning in institutions of higher and vocational education as well as the practice settings where professionals work and learn, focussing on both initial and ongoing development. In all, the handbook provides a platform for between almost 50 contributions from selected and invited researchers in associated fields to present and discuss research highly focused and detailed analyses through their chapters.

The handbook comprises two volumes, with six sections each with distinct themes, three each per volume, with a total of 48 chapters. Each of these two volumes has an overarching purpose and the parts within them are directed towards describing, elaborating and articulating key aspects of that purpose. The contributors to this Handbook are drawn from across a range of countries and continents, languages, disciplines and fields of study. These volumes and the contributing sectors are now briefly introduced.

## **Volume 1 – Scientific and Institutional Framework**

The first volume sets out the scientific institutional framework through which professions can be understood, their purposes identified and investigated, the kinds of practices that are organised and enacted to develop the capacities required to practice them. Central to these practices are the provision of practice-based experiences which are central to developing the kinds of capacities required for effective professional practice. The three parts comprising this volume are entitled: (i) Professions and professional practice; (ii) Research paradigms; and (iii) Educational institutions and systems. The focuses for those parts are briefly outlined below.

*Professions and professional practice:* This part comprises contributions that advance accounts of what constitutes the professions, professional practice and how the practice of professions is enacted in the workplace. These contributions explicitly address what constitutes professions and professional practice, including its ethical dimensions. Considerations are also given here to the formation of professions and the way professional associations and professionals serve and sustain the standing of the professions. In doing so, this part sets out something of the concepts, thematic issues and premises for considering what constitutes the professions and their formation.

*Research paradigms:* This part comprises contributions outlining the diverse theoretical and conceptual accounts of understanding both professions and professional learning, and that indicate the scope of methodological approaches to investigating both the professions and professional learning. These approaches are represented by accounts of methods and paradigms which are used to engage in scientific enquiry associated with what constitutes professional work and its learning. Key and contrasting methods are included, illustrated and discussed in this part.

*Educational institutions and systems:* This part comprises contributions identifying the educational purposes and processes (i.e. curriculum and pedagogy) used by educational institutions to prepare professionals and then maintain their competence across their working lives. Featured here are selected accounts of the way educational systems have been organised and enacted to secure professional learning outcomes and what kinds of conceptions of curriculum and curriculum practices are utilised in securing effective professional capacities through educational institutions and systems.

## **Volume 2 – Learning, Education and Assessment in and for the Professions**

This second volume focuses on procedural issues associated with learning for and through professional practice. This includes a necessary but central consideration of the role which practice-based learning experiences play in the formation of national capacities. Moreover, attention is given to the design and implementation of experiences that support professional learning both through initial preparation and ongoing development across professional lives. Concluding here is also a set of considerations about the assessment of learning experiences and the evaluation of professional education provisions. The three parts comprising this volume are entitled: (i) Practice-based learning activities; (ii) Implementing and supporting professional learning; and (iii) Assessing professional learning.

*Practice-based learning activities:* This part comprises reviews and analyses of the current state of research on work related learning activities occurring outside educational institutions – e.g. workplaces, everyday life, private environments – covering intentional as well as incidental learning. Central to this part is understanding, illustrating and elaborating the roles which practice-based learning activities play in the development of occupational identity and capacities as well as being utilised as sites for ongoing professional learning across lengthening working lives. Included here are contributions that utilise the educational lexicon and discourse to understand, legitimate and illustrate the ways which practice-based activities and experiences are central to professional formation.

*Implementing and supporting professional learning:* This part comprises research reporting on processes of and practices for the ongoing development of professional competence, with a particular emphasis on how this kind of learning arises through practice-based strategies. The strategies comprise a range of curriculum and pedagogies practices which can be used to secure professional capacities and identities. These include considerations of the goals and purposes for professional education and further development, and the way in which practices such as mentoring, the use of teams and the actions of professionals themselves are central to securing initial and ongoing professional competence.

*Assessing professional learning:* This part addresses research on issues of judging, evaluating, monitoring, and assessing professional learning. The chapters address evaluation processes on the micro-, meso-, and macro level of analysis by exploring methodological and normative issues of work related judgement processes. Research which reports the ways in which professional learning can be assessed and the means by which the assessment progresses feature within this final part. This featuring largely focuses on making judgements about what constitutes professional competence, means for validly and reliably assessing that learning, and extends through to considerations and practices associated with the evaluation of education programs, provisions of educational institutions and other kinds of experiences that seek to secure, certify and order professional knowledge.

Through the focus of these volumes and the structuring of these contributions, what is provided within this International Handbook of Research into professional and Practice Based Learning is an attempt to provide a comprehensive, albeit not exhaustive, resource which provides an informed account of the field which builds upon a scientific and institutional heritage and seeks to use that heritage to inform how provisions for the initial and ongoing learning professionals can be ordered, enacted, supported and assessed.

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December 2013

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