



Introduction

Iron sharpens iron; scholar, the scholar.

William Drummond¹

Publish or perish. Sure, there's that. Newly minted assistant professors understand they must publish, and likely publish a lot, to attain tenure. Graduate students understand this too, as they sow publication seeds well before graduation, hoping for an early harvest and fertile job prospects. But employment yearnings and tenure trepidation are not the only publication starters. Many scholars, green and seasoned alike, relish the scientific process – raising new and important questions, designing solution-seeking studies, and offering game-changing implications for practitioners. A few scholars are particularly good at this. They break new ground and do it again and again. Their names and ideas are ubiquitous in scientific journals and scholarly books. They scoff at publish or perish. To them, it's publish and flourish. But, how? How are they so productive? What separates them from the rest?

Meet the Productive Scholars

Colleagues and I sought to find out how expert scholars are so productive by investigating the best of the best in my own field of educational psychology. Beginning in 2000, I coauthored the first of seven qualitative studies investigating highly productive educational psychologists to understand their backgrounds and methods and to pass along advice to emerging and seasoned scholars alike. That first study¹ investigated the top three scholars emerging from a survey of educational psychologists. They were Richard Anderson, Richard Mayer, and Michael Pressley. The next study² identified and investigated the four leading educational psychology scholars at the time: Patricia Alexander, Richard Mayer, Dale Schunk, and Barry Zimmerman.

The third study³ investigated a highly productive cohort of German educational psychologists associated with Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich: Heinz Mandl, Hans Gruber, Alexander Renkl, and Frank Fischer. The fourth study⁴ investigated top female educational psychologists in Europe and the United States. They were Patricia Alexander, Carol Dweck, Jacquelynne Eccles, Mareike Kunter, and Tamara van Gog. The fifth study⁵ focused on early-career award-winning scholars, recognized by the American Psychological Association and the American Educational Research Association (AERA), to unearth the roots of early success. Those scholars were Rebecca Collie, Logan Fiorella, Doug Lombardi, Sabina Neugebauer, Erika Patall, and Ming-Te Wang. The sixth study⁶ explored successful graduate student scholars, namely four recent Graduate Research Excellence Award winners from AERA Division C, to understand which graduate school factors align with success. They were Hyewon Lee, Hyun Ji Lee, Carly Robinson, and Sirui Wan. A seventh study⁷ focused on a single productive scholar, John Glover, by interviewing three of his former collaborators. I also conducted unpublished interviews with two AERA award-winning diversity and inclusion psychologists: Carol D. Lee and Zeus Leonardo. Finally, I also draw from interviews that Hefer Bembenutty conducted for his book on contemporary pioneers in teaching and learning.⁸ Some of those pioneers I had interviewed previously (Eccles, Alexander, and Zimmerman) and others I had not (David Berliner, James Banks, Karen Harris, John Hattie, Marilla Svinicki, Brian Coppola, and Ivar Braten). A thumbnail sketch for each of these thirty-four productive scholars appears in the Appendix. This sketch serves as a source you can return to throughout the book to remember who's who.

For this book, I also draw from my research on talent development,⁹ which includes (a) interviews with dozens of national and world-class experts or Olympic medalists, their parents, and coaches spanning numerous domains such as chess, baton twirling, rodeo, music, photography, swimming, fencing, spelling, and figure skating, to name a few, and (b) interviews with those still producing creative works in their wisdom years,¹⁰ such as Rich Mayer (again), PBS news anchor Judy Woodruff, and the Wander Women who quit their jobs, sold their homes, and set off exploring the American wilderness. Finally, I draw from my own forty-year academic career as a six-time book author, top 2 percent most-cited researcher worldwide,¹¹ journal editor of

Educational Psychology Review, creator of the SOAR (Select, Organize, Associate, Regulate) Teaching and Learning Method,¹² chair of my college's promotion and tenure committee, and Academic Success Director at the University of Nebraska to offer a bit of personal scholarly advice.

This wide-ranging collection of talent stories and advice you're about to read transcends domains. What I learned investigating productive scholars in educational psychology likely holds for most productive scholars from astronomy to zoology. Moreover, *Be a More Productive Scholar* uncovers the pathways to scholarly success for emerging scholars at the graduate school or assistant professor trailhead, seasoned scholars well on the way, and those nearing their wisdom years finish. The book lends a hand to all travelers, including those from underrepresented groups encountering structural barriers to those seemingly born into their talent domains. Pathways as far-ranging as professional training, mentorship, work habits, research management, writing strategies, life routines, collaboration, support networks, failure framing, and many others are revealed using data, stories, advice, and quotations culled from my investigations of productive scholars, other talent-related work, and my personal journey.

Because each section in the book is meant to be self-standing and a quick go-to resource for readers seeking advice about a particular topic, some ideas, stories, and quotations appear more than once throughout the book because they are germane to more than one topic. Please think of such repetition as opportunities for increased learning, knowing that "No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man."¹³

Seek the Hidden Curriculum. Look at That. It's All Right Here

Rebecca Collie credits much of her scholarly success to the mentors who taught her the "hidden curriculum in academia," the insider knowledge that helped her avoid dead ends and saved her "years-worth of wasted time."¹ One bit of insider information Collie received dealt with how to interpret and react to journal reviewer feedback following a manuscript submission. In this case, she learned that a revise-and-resubmit decision with massive comments was actually a positive outcome. Her foot was in the door, and it was time to get busy making revisions and push through.

Collie pointed out that many assistant professors are not well versed on the workings of academia and have to “navigate the hidden curriculum on your own.” Collie said, “You might wonder, ‘Do I do it this way or that way? I guess I have to try it this way.’ Then if it doesn’t work, you have to go back and do it the other way.”²

Collie’s right. Graduate school mentors and senior colleagues might not have time to direct you, or falsely believe that you already know the ropes, leaving you to trial-and-error it. Or they may dispense unnecessary and ridiculous advice as a teaching supervisor did for me as I was about to teach my first college class as a teaching assistant. The supervisor said, “Don’t be up there itchin’ and a-scratchin’ like some damn baseball player.” Okay . . .

That’s the purpose of this book. To reveal the hidden curriculum, the insider information needed to succeed as an academic scholar. Things your doctoral advisor and senior colleagues never told you or might not even know. And I promise, all the advice is much better than refraining from itchin’ and a-scratchin’.

References

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Meet the Productive Scholars

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