

Emerson, Lisa. *The Forgotten Tribe: Scientists as Writers*.
University Press of Colorado, 2017. 240 pp. ISBN-13:
978-1607326434

Reviewed by Christina Montgomery

In “The Good Writer: Virtue Ethics and the Teaching of Writing,” John Duffy writes, “to write is to make choices, and to teach writing is to teach rationales for making such choices” (229). Duffy explores those choices and how they inform virtue ethics. He argues that writing teachers are already teaching virtue but need to understand this aspect of their teaching in a more meaningful way. By doing so, Duffy suggests not only will teachers better understand themselves and their practices, but they will also help students become more powerful writers. Michael Carter also argues in “Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines” that by having a deeper understanding of practice, teachers can help students get a better sense of the connection between knowledge creation and writing. He suggests a “division between writing in the disciplines and writing outside the disciplines” and argues that this division prevents us from recognizing more effective writing practices within specific disciplines (385). Carter posits that this division is related to how faculty learn to write in their own disciplines and that “they are unable to see that writing itself is specific to the discipline” (385). Duffy and Carter are both trying to get at the importance of *how* teachers of writing in various fields come to their attitudes about knowledge and learning and believe this directly influences their own writing and teaching practices. This conversation about knowledge, writing, and teaching is an important one in academia and directly affects not only writing in the disciplines but also writing outside academia. Lisa Emerson’s book, *The Forgotten Tribe: Scientists as Writers*, builds on Duffy and Carter’s ideas and the larger conversation about writer identity by examining a collection of literacy narratives and uncovering the way scientists see themselves as writers and professionals.

In her book, Emerson aims to both dispel the widely-held notion that scientists are not writers and to better comprehend how scientists' views of their writing histories and experiences shape both their future success as writers and how those histories better inform how to teach and engage future scientists through writing. Over a period of six years, Emerson collected 106 interviews of scientists from three groups: senior scientists, emerging scientists, and doctoral students. Emerson acknowledges that this book is not "a typical scholarly book" but a collection of stories from the scientists' points of view. This genre, she believes, is important in arriving at a new way of identifying scientists' relationships with writing. In the book, she provides extended, transcribed, and edited narratives of nineteen of the interviewed scientists. Emerson organizes the interviews into five groups, which are set up as chapters: "Public-focused writing, the reluctant writer, the writing community, the development of the scientific writer, and creative writing" (23). Each chapter is a collection of three to five narratives that are representative of that theme. Emerson arranges the text in this way to "invite the reader into the scientists' experience of writing and learning to write within a disciplinary context" (23).

In the final chapter, Emerson analyzes the literacy stories of the scientists to identify patterns and trends and to understand the effect of scientists' views of themselves as writers. First, she categorizes the scientists' writing experiences into four quadrants based on themes she observes in the narratives: "Quadrant 1: Early Influences" addresses childhood and undergraduate experiences with writing, "Quadrant 2: Learning to Write Science" concerns writing in graduate school, "Quadrant 3: Attitudes" focuses on the emotional effect of writing, and "Quadrant 4: Beliefs" relates to identity and how the scientists see their roles. Within the quadrants, Emerson then correlates responses based on the scientists' assigned group (senior scientists, emerging scientists, or doctoral students). In addition, she looks at writing support by gender.

Emerson's study has four significant implications: (1) learning to write in the sciences begins in K-12 and influences scientists' attitudes about writing; (2) despite WAC/WID curriculums, and

the research which supports writing in the disciplines, the scientists felt that they did not learn the ways of writing as undergraduates; (3) mentorship in doctoral programs is not giving graduate students the necessary writing support; and (4) scientists stay narrowly focused on academic writing instead of venturing into other disciplines or into the public sphere (202-07). Based on these findings, Emerson details several potential implications for writing instruction, but perhaps most important is re-seeing writing in the sciences not as an outside disciplinary practice but as a complementary one. Doing this, Emerson suggests, has “exciting possibilities for collaboration and pedagogy” (208). She also proposes implications for student writers in the sciences, including the importance of their voices in the discipline and reconsidering their own attitudes and beliefs about writing.

This book is a valuable resource for writing program administrators; faculty who teach writing in any discipline; K-12 educators, particularly those in English and science; and students who have an interest in science. Emerson’s findings suggest that having positive experiences with writing in childhood and in the pre-doctorate phase will result in scientists having better attitudes about writing and being more productive as writers in their careers (185). This finding alone is enough to make this book a must-read for educators and students. Teachers, in turn, will better understand how they can work with writing in the sciences throughout a student’s educational career. Students will better comprehend writing as a disciplinary necessity and see the value of advocating for writing support.

Overall, Emerson’s text uncovers new ways of seeing and understanding the scientist as a writer. She dispels the stereotype of the scientist as someone who can’t write by portraying the scientist as an individual who has experiences, beliefs, and attitudes about writing that are not dissimilar from those of writers in any other field. Emerson’s presentation of “the researcher as storyteller” works effectively to show readers the mindset of these scientists as writers, and many readers will see their own struggles with writing mirrored in these narratives (19). Emerson’s text is an

important contribution to the conversation about how identity as a writer and one's history and experiences with writing directly influence writing success in one's professional life, whether that be in the public sphere or as an educator.

Works Cited

- Carter, Michael. "Ways of Knowing, Doing, and Writing in the Disciplines." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 58, no. 3, Feb. 2007, pp. 385-416.
- Duffy, John. "The Good Writer: Virtue Ethics and the Teaching of Writing." *College English*, vol. 79, no. 3, Jan. 2017, pp. 229-50, <http://www.ncte.org/journals/ce/issues/v79-3>. Accessed 15 Jan. 2017.