

---

---

## Book Review

# Expertise in Second Language Writing Instruction: Conceptual and Empirical Understandings

Alan Hirvela & Diane D. Belcher (Eds.). Routledge (2024).  
(270 pages). ISBN: 9781032607719 Price: \$126 (27,183 yen)

Reviewed by Chie Ogawa

*Faculty of Cultural Studies, Kyoto Sangyo University*

As a teacher, I have often aspired to become an “expert.” Yet over time, I have simply grown more experienced, which raises the question: Are accumulated experiences enough to qualify one as an expert? *Expertise in Second Language Writing Instruction: Conceptual and Empirical Understandings* addresses this question directly. Edited by Alan Hirvela and Diane Belcher, the volume is the first comprehensive publication devoted specifically to L2 writing teacher expertise. Bringing together 18 contributors across 11 chapters, it offers conceptual, empirical, and classroom-based perspectives. Hirvela and Belcher (2022) previously called for collective efforts to clarify what constitutes expertise in L2 writing instruction; this volume is a response to that call. The book will interest scholars of L2 writing, teacher educators, and postgraduate students in applied linguistics and related fields. By exploring both theoretical understandings and lived teaching practices, it provides readers with a timely contribution to ongoing debates about what it means to be an “expert” teacher of L2 writing.

In the opening chapter, Hirvela and Belcher underscore a major research gap concerning L2 writing teacher expertise. They argue defining expertise is inherently difficult because teaching contexts are complex and resist simple

binaries such as novice versus experienced. Rather than being measured by years of teaching or a fixed set of skills, expertise is better understood through the lens of adaptive expertise. Adaptive experts are those who reflect on their instructions, re-examine teaching practices, and make developmental transitions across diverse teaching contexts. In contrast, routine experts rely on repeated practices and familiar tasks. Crucially, adaptive expertise incorporates routine elements, since effective teachers must also manage everyday instructional demands. The use of the adaptive expertise model situates the volume as an important contribution to current L2 writing scholarship.

The book is divided into two main parts. Part I, “Accounts of L2 Writing Teacher Expertise Learning Experiences”, examines how teachers’ experiences shape the growth of their expertise. The chapters address varied contexts, including pre-service and in-service teacher education, ESL and EFL classrooms, teacher-researcher collaborations, and doctoral supervision. The contributions employ both empirical and conceptual approaches.

Part II, “Classroom-Based Studies of Teacher Expertise Learning”, shifts the focus to classroom instruction in specific contexts. These chapters investigate writing teachers’ expertise in lesson planning, teaching methods, reference to source use, and teaching synthesis writing. Using qualitative data such as interviews, case studies, classroom observations, and focus group interviews, authors highlight how writing teachers develop expertise in teaching elements that are essential to L2 writing. The teaching contexts include EFL writing classes in a Japanese university, digital multimodal composing (DMC) in Hong Kong, ESL Composition Program in the U.S., and an EAP Program in the U.S.

A particularly relevant chapter for *OnCUE Journal* readers is Chapter 8, “From Routine Expertise to Adaptive Expertise in L2 Writing Instruction: A Case Study of an EFL Teacher at a Japanese University.” In this case study, Asaba examines a Japanese female writing teacher with over 30 years of experience and illustrates how she adapted her knowledge and practices to meet students’ needs. For instance, while she initially relied heavily on translation methods in her writing class, her study abroad experience in the U.S. inspired her to adopt new approaches that better supported student learning goals. The adaptive expertise

framework proved useful for examining how her career trajectory enabled her to move beyond routine practices toward greater instructional flexibility.

The central aim of the volume is to conceptualize and empirically examine what constitutes expertise in L2 writing instruction. By addressing both theoretical perspectives and classroom-based practices, the book provides a comprehensive understanding of how teachers develop expertise and how such expertise can be recognized, nurtured, and sustained. Most chapters draw on qualitative approaches, in part because the development of adaptive expertise cannot be reduced to numbers or measured quantitatively. This is because researchers view expertise as a process of development on a continuum, not a state, therefore, qualitative analysis might be more suitable to explore the adaptive expertise.

Studies in applied linguistics and related fields have traditionally concentrated on English teaching in higher education contexts. While this volume includes contributors working in diverse settings such as Hong Kong, Japan, Turkey, and the United States, all of the chapters explore expertise in English-language teaching. Perspectives from teachers of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) would have broadened its relevance. Moreover, in today's rapidly changing educational landscape—including the growing influence of generative AI—language teachers are encountering new challenges in how expertise is enacted in multimodal and technology-mediated writing. In the Afterword of the volume, Lee underscores the need for writing teachers to continually update their professional knowledge and skills in response to these shifts. While the volume touches on such concerns, these emerging issues are only indirectly addressed, leaving valuable opportunities for further exploration in future research.

Overall, *Expertise in Second Language Writing Instruction* is a significant and timely contribution to L2 writing scholarship. It will be of particular benefit to language teachers engaged in writing instruction, as well as teachers interested in professional development. For practitioners, the case studies and classroom-based analyses provide concrete insights into how expertise can be cultivated through reflection, adaptation, and responsiveness to teaching contexts and students' needs. For researchers, the conceptual framing of adaptive expertise

offers a productive lens for examining teacher development.

I found the book both instructive and inspiring. As a pre-service teacher educator working in a teacher license course, I found this volume a reminder that expertise is not a destination but an ongoing process of growth, reflection and adaptation. The teaching of L2 writing encompasses a wide range of skills—from producing accurate sentences to organizing coherent argumentative essays, producing research papers, and guiding students in composing dissertations. Developing the expertise to teach these elements requires significant time, effort, and sustained professional engagement, extending beyond writing itself to broader aspects of teaching based on learning objectives and proficiency levels. I recommend the book as a valuable resource for courses on teacher education, professional development workshops, and as a reference for researchers exploring expertise in applied linguistics. Despite some limitations in scope, it convincingly advances the ongoing conversation on what it means to be, and to become, an expert in L2 writing instruction.

## References

Hirvela, A., & Belcher, D. (2022). Expertise in L2 writing instruction: The road less travelled. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 58, 100936. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2022.100936>

## Author bio

*Chie Ogawa is an associate professor at Kyoto Sangyo University where she has been involved in teacher education in the Faculty of Cultural Studies. Her research interests include task-based language teaching, speaking assessment, and teacher education. [chieog@cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp](mailto:chieog@cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp)*

**Received:** September 30, 2025

**Accepted:** November 9, 2025