
Introduction



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Having taught many composition courses in the past ten years, we have been puzzled by some recurring and paradoxical phenomena: For example, we have noticed the bulging piles of examination copies of textbooks on the writing teachers' shelves (that indicate both the lasting generosity of publishers and the robust productivity of textbook writers), which form an odd contrast with the steadily diminishing number of textbooks that have ever found their way into the classroom. Those who are required to use a textbook, such as teaching assistants or new part-time instructors, often show so little interest in the required texts that, when the first opportunity comes, they will throw them away and pick up some handouts of their liking or compile a reader of their own for their classes. A question that we have asked again and again is, "Why is there such a discrepancy between the ostensible enthusiasm for producing and publishing textbooks and the apparent lack of enthusiasm for using them in teaching?" Related to this question are other questions: Who are the writers and publishers of the textbooks and who are the readers for whom these textbooks are intended?

Another equally baffling phenomenon: Although textbooks often function as curriculum descriptors in many writing programs, the status of textbook writing is peculiarly ambivalent in the academy. On the one hand, textbooks have been used as indexes to the composition discipline's evolution and as chronicles of the discipline's history. On the other hand, textbooks are seldom considered worthy scholarship. Their publication is often slighted by tenure and pro-

motion committees and their theoretical, pedagogical, cultural, and ideological implications are seldom explored either in print or at important academic conferences such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC).¹ What are the possible causes of such ambivalence? And what are the implications of textbooks' equivocal status in the discipline and of their impact upon scholarship and teaching in composition and rhetoric?

The few scholars who have written about the subject have observed the conspicuous lag of textbooks behind the changes that have occurred in the past three decades in composition and rhetoric.² Since the 1960s, the discipline has experienced paradigmatic shifts from current-traditional rhetoric to process and post process theories and has been enriched by postmodern and post colonial theories and research findings in disciplines such as philosophy, history, anthropology, psychology, and literacy, feminist, gender, race, and cultural studies. As composition and rhetoric becomes increasingly a more complex discipline that hosts a diversity of theories, pedagogies, and research methods, one would assume that textbooks, as part of the "disciplinary matrix," would reflect such complexities. However, a majority of college composition/rhetoric textbooks published in the past three decades have failed to fully represent the rapidly changing and richly diverse disciplinary knowledge or to translate successfully the various theories and pedagogies into effective practical approaches for the teaching of writing in colleges and universities. How are we to account for this gap? How can we effect changes?

Our attempt to address these difficult questions led to our conversation with other composition teachers and scholars and resulted in the provocative discussions collected in this volume. From different perspectives, the contributors explore and investigate the cultures, ideologies, traditions, and material and political conditions that influence the writing and publishing of textbooks. They examine a variety of textbooks—standard rhetorics, handbooks, cross-cultural anthologies, readers, and technical and argumentation textbooks—not only to seek answers to those questions that have baffled us but to raise more challenging questions about the relationship between textbooks and the cultures that produce them, the discipline of which they are an indispensable part, and the classroom in which they are to have their most tangible effects on teaching and learning. Collectively the authors attempt to revitalize the sporadic and sparse but sorely needed conversation on textbooks and the complex issues that surround them.

Of the many possible ways to organize this collection, we have chosen to organize it in four parts. The opening part provides an overview of textbooks, comprising this introduction and an essay by David Bleich. With characteristic wry humor, Bleich points out that *all* textbooks—physical science, social science, humanities, and writing—whatever their differences, retain one feature in common: the presentation takes place in the *discourse of direct instruction*. “A textbook is assumed to *tell* students what is the case, what *they* should do when they have to write essays or other kinds of papers,” Bleich notes. Textbooks in science say: this is the case in the universe. Textbooks in writing say: this is how you should write your papers. The “voices” of science and writing textbooks are declarative and directive.

Bleich sees the authors of textbooks as teachers of the subject matter who enter the classroom in order to help teach the subject. This assumed purpose of textbooks raises several important questions for Bleich: “Entered the classroom. Why? Did this teacher not know the subject well enough? Does this teacher need a voice of direct instruction in order to conduct the class? Does this teacher need ‘teaching insurance,’ a textbook on which to fall back should his/her own pedagogy fail?” Examining two major groups of textbooks, argument and research texts, as well as the language used by their authors, Bleich launches his criticism that “the language of the text as well as the messages become part of a movement in which mercantile interests overrule pedagogical needs.” He further explains,

Because teaching is not valued in the academy, textbook writers, in their working within the textbook genre, are a class of professionals whose job it is to join the group of academics who promote the sense of writing as “one-way”—from teachers to students. The textbook author is the insurance for the inexperienced teacher.

As a result, Bleich contends, the “patronizing language of textbooks helps to perpetuate the hierarchical structures of society”: A teacher who is subject to the coercive speech of an authoritative class of people (who wrote the textbooks) takes many risks if he or she tries to teach against officially adopted textbooks. Similarly, the patronizing language of textbooks “keeps the *fact* of hierarchical difference on the table by dovetailing with the eventuality of the teachers’ final judgments counting, but the students’ judgments not counting as germane to ‘learning.’” For this reason and many others, Bleich

hopes for a fire in which we will throw in the textbooks that “are connected to a model of writing pedagogy that denigrates the professional and academic independence of teachers” and that “denigrates the subject of language use and writing by casting writing as an isolatable activity, a single skill or ability that one can practice and master in a short time.” Many of the questions Bleich raises in this chapter are also addressed from different vantage points in the subsequent chapters.

In the second part, under the rubric “Textbooks, Culture, and Ideology,” essays by Kurt Spellmeyer, Yameng Liu, Joseph Janangelo, and Lizbeth A. Bryant explore how textbooks both reflect and reproduce our culture and its ideology. In “The Great Way: Reading and Writing in Freedom,” Spellmeyer engages the reader in an eloquent and vivid narrative expressing his insight that “textbooks often play an unacknowledged social role—reinforcing an impression of total predictability in the conduct of everyday life.” He locates this predictability in our interpretation of the culture and the text, and he argues that “the greatest danger to the culture of books comes not from the electronic media but from . . . our own department of English, where critics today are much more fully allied with the party of Descartes than with the party of Augustine.” These critics try to locate within the domain of “culture” or “the text” the same kind of laws and structures that we find in the study of nature, and thus make the reader’s responses “thoroughly invariant as the interaction of chemicals or the trajectories of falling objects.” Even the post-modern academy, Spellmeyer insists, is “deeply complicit with the normalization of knowledge and of culture generally.” He says,

We may celebrate indeterminacy, marginality, and the free play of signifiers, but in our teaching and scholarship we are often breathtakingly intolerant of genuine diversity. Nowadays when we read, we do so to advance what we speak of as a “project”—Marxism, for example, or feminism, or New Historicism, and so on. To read in this way is to embrace a fairly rigid set of protocols, and, by doing so, to firm up our sense of commitment to an imagined community. Most deconstructionists will never actually meet one another face to face, but they share a desire to belong to something greater than themselves, a desire that grows stronger as our society continues to undermine the citizen’s sense of personal worth.

Because our desire is so strong to sanction truths through a “project” by institutions like the university, Spellmeyer believes that “we need always to privilege the sovereignty of the self over the claims of insti-

tutions.” He advocates an active role in reading and teaching books so that we and our students will be able to choose between the truth our institutions force on us and the truths we discover for ourselves.

Institutional interpretations of cultural texts are further problematized by Yameng Liu in “Self, Other, In-Between: Cross-Cultural Composition Readers and the Reconstruction of Cultural Identities.” Liu argues that even among those texts that direct our attention to the issue of representational (in)justice, an ultimate “reality” about the represented and the eventual accessibility of an “unbiased” portrayal of this “reality” are often quietly assumed. Because of their unwitting subscription to an essentialist conception of ethnicity and culture as mixed, coherent, clearly circumscribed entities, few of these readers have gone beyond a mere presentation of a number of well-defined, culture-specific and often incompatible perspectives for the sake of contrast and analysis. They often fail to direct students’ attention to those ontological sites where cultural identities are either constructed, negotiated, assigned, prescribed, imposed or resisted, depending on the way in which prevalent social, ideological, axiological, or political conditions are configured. Liu notes that

Whether we are aware of it or not, the terms of comparison are always at issue, and the comparability of two independently developed cultures can never be taken for granted. This further calls into question the general orientation in cross-cultural readers toward promoting “understanding,” whether of alien cultures or our own or both.

Liu cogently contends that rather than attempting to teach what American and other cultures are “really” like, “students of an inter- or cross-culturally oriented composition class should be initiated into a set of problematics within which cultural identities are constituted and reconstituted through an interplay between Self and Other, identity and difference, ‘us’ and ‘them.’” He suggests that multicultural texts (1) sensitize one to deep-lying epistemological issues and hidden ethical/political dimensions of cultural interactions; (2) result in greater self-awareness of the purpose and functions of the writing course; and (3) entail a heightened sense of responsibility on the part of the editor of the textbook, the instructors and the students alike.

Reading the writing handbook as “one of the composition program’s most prominent forms of public discourse,” which “serves as an agent of social control,” Joseph Janangelo explores the ideological implications of handbooks’ narrative in “Appreciating Narratives of

Containment and Contentment: Reading the Writing Handbook as Public Discourse.” Janangelo observes that, because the writing handbook must address multiple audiences—student writers, graduate instructors, composition and literature faculty, and departmental and university administration—it “must represent a good news narrative.” Thus,

While explicitly declaring the complexity of composing and endorsing the practice of ongoing conceptual revision, these texts often offer dramatizations of student writing that conclude with conventional happy endings which suggest that composing is, after all, a linear process and that the writer will be able to effectively synthesize and present new and old ideas within the context of writing one paper.

These reductive, parodic depictions of student writing, Janangelo claims, are motivated by “the dual project of containment and contentment that writing programs feel compelled to employ in order to achieve legitimation as an intellectually credible, results-oriented field of inquiry.” By having the text show the discernible progress that a good student makes by obediently following the rules of the handbook and teacher-dictated drafting processes, the good student text serves as an exemplary narrative and shaming device that both models and moralizes the kind of writing, and writing behavior, that a program demands from its students. Further, by publishing an official example of the always-improving student text, the writing program wishes to convince the handbook’s more skeptical and powerful readers—the parents, colleagues, chairs, and administrators—that writing is a rational activity and that contentment will be the final result of effective and comprehensive literacy instruction. Janangelo concludes his analysis by alerting the reader to the ethics of recomposing the handbook narrative: It would involve abdicating historically rewarding ideologies of containment and contentment in order to tell a less secure, less clean story about revision.

Lizbeth Bryant begins “A Textbook’s Theory: Current Composition Theory in Argument Textbooks” by referring to Muriel Harris’s advice to teachers in 1986: We must be aware of students who are not of the dominant culture. Bryant insists that “part of the job of a writing teacher is not only to be aware of the differences in race and culture that might influence a student’s work but also to address these differences. Her study of argument textbooks shows that, twelve years after Harris’s warning, most textbooks failed to demonstrate an awareness of these differences. Examining argumentation

textbooks such as *Arguing in Communities* by Gary Hatch and *The Elements of Argument* by Annette Rottenberg, Bryant attempts to address these questions: What underlying epistemological, cultural, class, gender, and racial assumptions inform the text? How do these assumptions measure up to current composition theories? In teaching students how to research and write arguments, do these texts incorporate our knowledge about the differences in the literacy practices of different races, cultures, classes, and genders? She recalls her own effort at Texas A&M to build a bridge that would enable all her students to employ Western discourse patterns. She offers her advice: Be aware of these differences and allow students to let you know when they need help making the crossing to Western discourse.

In the next part, “Textbooks and Pedagogy,” Michael W. Kleine, Fredric G. Gale, and Xin Liu Gale examine the relationship between composition theory, pedagogy, their representations in composition texts, and the influence of textbooks on teaching. In “Teaching from a Single Textbook ‘Rhetoric’: The Potential Heaviness of the Book,” Kleine problematizes the uncritical use of “a rhetoric” in first-year writing courses. After examining a number of popular first-year rhetoric texts to reveal their ideological affiliations, he observes that most advance a single version of rhetoric and that few ask students to examine critically the rhetoric that is being advanced. What is troubling about this kind of textbook, he says, “is not that it is arbitrary and persuasive, but that it too often postures . . . as a kind of transcendent discourse, free of values and persuasive force—really not a discourse at all, but a foundational truth.” Students who were taught from these textbooks struggled to apply “book advice” that didn’t fit their own processes, ideologies, or aims, but neither their teacher nor their textbook encouraged them to resist or revise that advice.

Kleine uses several carefully analyzed case studies and his contrastive teaching of rhetoric to show how we can work together with our students to discover several rhetorical systems—not several heavy textbooks—that would enable students to examine the ideological and ethical implications of their communication, “to challenge,” as he says, “the potential heaviness of the single, authoritative textbook.” He argues that we also need rhetoric textbooks that provide a basis for resisting or revising their own agendas.

In “Imitations of Life: Technical Writing Textbooks and the Social Context,” Fredric Gale argues that technical writing textbooks fail to prepare students for the demands of writing in the workplace

despite the efforts of teachers in recent years to mimic the social and, particularly, the collaborative nature of writing tasks within organizations. This failure of technical writing textbooks, he claims, occurs "because their authors adopt the objectivist perspective of most business and governmental organizations, a view in which writing is not the social act that composition theory maintains it is." After discussing the theoretical and pedagogical literature regarding technical writing collaboration in the workplace and in the classroom, Gale analyzes an array of textbooks and concludes that they do not prepare students for careers "specifically because they do not adequately address the many constraints and conflicts . . . which real writers will face in the workplace, and they do not require students to deal with them in writing assignments." Gale suggests as an improvement fewer and more rhetorically complex assignments which require students to engage in a "conjunctive task." Conjunctive tasks require students to be involved in the entire process of writing and emphasize more collaborative planning and less easily divisible writing tasks.

In "The 'Full Toolbox' and Critical Thinking: Conflicts and Contradictions in *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*," Xin Liu Gale examines and problematizes assumptions underlying the *Guide*, especially the contradiction between the text's ostensible endorsement of critical thinking and its actual construal of the textbook as a "full toolbox"—a hodgepodge of everything that encourages anything but critical thinking. This toolbox mentality, she argues, leads to the conception of discursive practice as decontextualized writing assignments that ignore the social, political, and rhetorical contexts of writing. It also results in the text's simplistic, authoritarian, and often biased representation of the complex issues and theories of composition and rhetoric. Because the *Guide* perceives writing as a rule-abiding, direction-following, and authority-obeying activity, it represents an "*ex post facto* descriptive tradition"—as Robert Connors terms it—that is in conflict with the intellectual traditions of composition and rhetoric in the 1990s. Gale urges that we reconsider the goals of first-year writing courses and study the textbook culture so we can write textbooks that truly represent the "disciplinary matrix" of our discipline, textbooks that will help both teachers and students recognize the importance as well as the complexities of reading, writing, and thinking. What we need are textbooks that will help develop students' critical reading, writing, and thinking abilities not only as students in the college classroom but as responsible and active citizens in society.

In the fourth and last part, "Material and Political Conditions of Publishing Textbooks," the authors investigate the social, political, intellectual, and historical contexts in which composition textbooks are written and published. Peter Mortensen's "Of Handbooks and Handbags: Composition Textbook Publishing after the Deal Decade" presents an alarming picture of publishers of composition texts being acquired one after another by the increasingly merging and expanding corporations whose sole concern is profit. In the wake of the "deal decade" of the 1980s when the shift from managerial (editorial) to shareholder control occurred in these corporations, Mortensen posits, not only the definition of textbooks changed but how and why they are made became different. His research into these changes sheds light on the conflicting forces at work that shape and reshape composition textbook publishing and the culture of composition textbooks. Emerging from this research is a sense of urgency that compels Mortensen to argue that we need more textbooks that draw insights from cultural studies and from studies in folk and popular culture. These texts, as well as our teaching, should "lead students to interrogate the possibility that their course material is embedded in an economy that is anything but nurturing of their hopes and aspirations."

As our eyes shift from the corporate world to our discipline, James Thomas Zebroski's study explores ways in which community emerges, is recognized and recognizes itself as such, and articulates its identity over time, through texts/textuality, including textbooks. In "Textbook Advertisements in the Formation of Composition: 1969-1990," his empirical study of ads in the journal *College Composition and Communication* for textbooks over a span of three decades raises interesting questions about the usefulness of generalizations like "expressivism" as a historical fact. His analysis highlights how textbooks represent the discipline of composition studies and how textbooks *function* in various contexts: in the classroom, at the departmental or program level, within a university, in connection to curricular practices, and as part of the social formation of the discipline. Using textbook advertisements as an index to and indication of the discipline's major interests in a certain historical period, Zebroski renders a different picture of composition textbooks, which, he asserts, are "incredibly adept at moving fast on a current fad."

As a most appropriate continuation and complement of Zebroski's diachronic study of textbooks, "Writing *Writing Lives*: The Collaborative Production of a Composition Text in a Large First-Year Writing Program," by Sara Garnes, David Humphries, Vic

Mortimer, Jennifer Phegley, and Kathleen Wallace, outlines the many constraints and obstacles they encountered and finally overcame in producing a college composition textbook published in 1996. Garnes and Wallace are Director and Assistant Director of the First-Year Writing Program at Ohio State University (OSU). They and their collaborators (graduate students at OSU working as Writing Program Assistants) tell the story of their experience in editing a textbook/sourcebook that collects essays, short stories, and poetry on the theme of literacy. They discuss the unique features of this project that includes so many writers and contributors and that actually arose out of the first-year composition course administered and taught by the authors. This chapter provides a unique look at the material conditions of writing and publishing as Garnes and her collaborators turn a custom-published text used solely in their program into a textbook published by St. Martin's Press for a national market, the royalties to be returned to the program. In the section, "Preparing the Manuscript: Negotiations and Compromises," the writers detail the many compromises—some of them wrenching—they were obliged to make in order to satisfy "the force of the traditions of the textbook genre." The authors believe that their project is not yet complete, and they express hope and concern for its future in the hands of their successors, especially the graduate teaching assistants. They summarize the experience with a warning: The project will provide "the occasion to persuade other composition teachers of the value of [our] program's approaches to teaching first-year writing, but it would also no doubt guarantee a brush with the powers of publishers and with issues of authorship."

In summary, we hope that this collection of essays serves as a start toward a more systematic and sustained inquiry into the questions that teachers and scholars of composition and rhetoric have been concerned about: What role do textbooks play in the writing classroom, the curriculum of the writing program, the English Department, the institution of higher learning, and the larger cultural context? How do textbooks relate to the dominant ideology and to the mainstream culture? To the discipline's theory, research, scholarship, and practice? To the discipline's evolution, history, and self-perception? To the teachers of composition and rhetoric, their working conditions, and their professional and socioeconomic status? What are the forces that influence and shape the writing, production, and adoption of textbooks?

As teachers and scholars in composition and rhetoric continue to reread and reinvent our discipline, we cannot afford to neglect the

dynamic role textbooks play in conserving, challenging, and transforming the academic culture, the discipline, and the tradition of teaching writing. As we move into the twenty-first century, we also need to inquire into computer technology and textbooks, an area that this book leaves unexplored. If the insights of the contributors in this volume are pertinent and worth noting, we must then continue to push ahead on the trail that is only partly broken by the forerunners in the field.

Notes

1. A brief search in the CCCC programs since 1991 has yielded only one panel presentation (in 1997) on textbooks.
2. For more discussions of works by Robert Connors, Sharon Crowley, Lester Faigley, and others, see Chapter 9 of this volume.