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Eliot F. Rendleman

Studies on Textbooks for Writing Instruction: Course Readers, Composition Books, Rhetorics, and Handbooks

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Since the time of ancient and classical rhetoricians, teachers have critiqued and studied rhetorics, rules handbooks, and composition textbooks for various reasons. Historians have examined textbooks to understand the development of the discipline of rhetoric and composition. Compositionists have examined textbooks to verify that they reflect contemporary theory and practice. Still others have theorized and investigated the ideological functions, learning outcomes, and publishing and adoption practices related to textbooks. Writing program administrators, who must prescribe and/or recommend textbooks to their teaching staff, will find in this bibliography annotations to help them make decisions for adoption and recommendations.

The 23 entries in this bibliography focus on the study of textbooks used in writing instruction. Some of the articles and book chapters theorize with limited and representative data sets, while others theorize with extensive and quantifiable data sets. Despite the level of theory and degree of data, the entries here represent only a fraction of the studies dedicated to the analysis of textbooks, or studies that contain only a minor section related to the issue of textbooks. Currently one can find 862 records on CompPile using the keyword search 'textbook,' and 82 records delimiting that with the keyword 'data.'" One can also find online Rebecca Moore Howard's "Textbooks: A bibliography for composition and rhetoric," which lists 84 entries without annotations. Thus, this bibliography is a springboard for further reading.

The entries are organized into five parts. The first part annotates three representative histories, that is, the history of textbooks and the discipline, the history of a single handbook, and the history of a marginalized set of texts. The second part includes studies that critique the general nature of textbooks or the results of implementing textbooks in specific types of writing classroom. The third part annotates studies that examine the degree textbooks reflect contemporary composition and linguistic theory and practice. The fourth part contains scholarship that critique the ideological functions of textbooks, that is, how they might reproduce the oppressive or limiting hierarchies related to race, class, and gender. Finally, part five contains studies related to issues of publishing. To one degree or another, WPAs should find all the entries useful as they make textbook adoption, prescription, and recommendation decisions for their particular programs.

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Part 1. Textbook History and the History of Composition

Connors, Robert

Textbooks and the evolution of the discipline

College Composition and Communication 37.2 (1986), 178-94

The author presents a history of the relationship of textbooks and the discipline of rhetoric and composition from 1820 to the present. The history is developed from publication data, textbook contents, and socio-economic data. The author argues that a growing population of students and colleges during the 19th century forced undertrained teachers to depend on textbooks to give them pedagogical guidance in rhetoric and writing. The guidance often came in the form of questions, assignments, and illustrations contained in the books, which rhetorical treatises prior to 1820 lacked. Exercises and drills that focused on sentences became an addition to composition textbooks because of the perceived literacy crisis in the late 19th century. Thus, the content of textbooks during the 1800s that was influenced by the exigencies of the times has formed the expectations of how to teach writing and what a textbook should contain for future generations of teachers.

KEYWORDS: textbook, history, profession, 19th-20th-century, teacher-training, literacy, crisis, exercise, drill, teacher-load

Hawhee, Debra

Composition history and the Harbrace College Handbook.

College Composition and Communication 50.3 (1999), 504-23.

The author's research of John Harbrace's personal letters, manuscript marginalia, book prefaces, rules, and lessons, uncovers an intention to change student-readers with rural and working class linguistic knowledge, abilities, and values into subjects with urban and middle class linguistic knowledge, abilities, and values through the discursive disciplining precepts and lessons of the *Harbrace Handbook*. The author illustrates how the discursive process of disciplining student-readers might work and argues how Harbrace's discourse abstractly constructs the character or subjectivity we call "student" as a lacking entity in need of middle class discipline.

KEYWORDS: profession, history, textbook, Harbrace College Handbook, subjectivity, disciplinary, handbook, social-class

Schultz, Lucille

Elaborating our history: A look at mid-19th century first books of composition

College Composition and Communication 45.1 (1994), 10-30

The author contributes to the history of textbooks and composition with an analysis of five representative texts published between 1838 and 1955. These texts, the author claims, reflect a marginal pedagogy that was an alternative to the popular current-traditional pedagogy of the time. The author argues that these marginal texts promoted what we know as the basic concepts of contemporary writing process and student voice. The books relied on illustrations for instruction, and the author claims that this reliance on illustrations in American writing textbooks partly came from the disciples of the Swiss education reformer Johann Pestalozzi. Pestalozzi and his disciples encouraged school-age children to learn about their world through articulating their observations. The author's discovery of the nineteenth century use of visuals in composition textbooks and the use of visuals in contemporary books presents a coherent trace for understanding the discipline of composition and the origins of one of its pedagogical practices.

KEYWORDS: textbook, history, 19th-20-century, USA, marginality, Johann Pestalozzi, observation, graphics, profession

Part 2. General Critiques and Textbook Implementation

Clines, Ray

Beliefs about textbooks: Implications for writing instruction

ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 381 784 (1995)

The author conveys the general research findings of studies in social psychology about students' interaction with textbooks. The author reports that students will learn best from textbooks if the content is in accordance with their beliefs and knowledge base, easy to perceive and comprehensible, and appropriately challenging at students' cognitive levels. Additionally, students must possess a sense of ownership of the text. Based on the research in social psychology on textbooks, the author concludes that in student-centered writing classrooms, where the central text is student writing, students will be more open to sometimes difficult and even contradictory concepts the textbooks present.

KEYWORDS: textbook, student-opinion, research-agenda, review-of-research, data, implication, social, psychology, ownership, student-knowledge, student-centered

Friend, Christina M.

Using inquiry to improve students' critical thinking and writing skills on essay exams

ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 334 601 (1990)

The researcher reports on the results from using two methods to prepare students for taking essay exams. The researcher used these methods with thirteen classes of freshman composition at the University of Oklahoma. One method of essay exam instruction uses textbooks that contain writing tips and sample example questions and responses students could imitate in preparation. The other method of essay exam instruction, inquiry method, uses teachers students particular skills that include coping with constraints, preparing and remembering content material, analyzing questions, and writing with minimal revision. Analysis using a T-test showed both methods improve students essay exam results, but the inquiry method was more successful.

KEYWORDS: pre-post, essay-exam, gain, data, contrast-group, University of Oklahoma, FYC, inquiry, textbook

Rose, Mike

Sophisticated, ineffective books. The dismantling of process in composition texts

College Composition and Communication 32.1 (1981), 65-74

From his examination of 20 promotional writing textbooks, the author finds that the advice textbook authors present for the composing process consists of linear, systematic procedures that limit the recursive and sometimes wandering behavior of novice and expert writers need to compose effective written discourse. The author warns that textbooks similar to his 20 might limit students' notion of what writing is about. The author suggests that the types of textbooks he criticizes should be replaced by texts for teachers, containing contemporary composition theory on the writing process and information about different types of student learner. He suggests for students packets of writing process exercises and interdisciplinary material that teachers would prescribe, according to the needs of each student.

KEYWORDS: textbook-analysis, discourse-analysis, process, current-traditional, linear, recursive, critique, interdisciplinary, individual-differences

Rose, Mike

Speculations on process knowledge and the textbook's static page

College Composition and Communication 34.2 (1983), 208-13

The author theorizes that the writing process is too complex of a process to teach entirely by the lessons of textbooks. The author argues that textbooks often teach a single approach to invention, drafting, and revision, while many approaches might exist for different types of students. Even heuristics, such as tagmemics, are distorted in writing textbooks, which are supposed to be a “flexible, yielding, multi-optioned” approach to composition processes. Furthermore, textbooks treat writing as a simple and closed system of problem solving, reflecting contemporary results of research in cognitive psychology. The author concludes with a call for research on the cognitive effects of student interaction with composition textbooks.

KEYWORDS: process, textbook, conflict, pedagogy, heuristics, tagmemics, flexibility, problem-solving, research-agenda

Part 3. Reflection of Composition Theory and Practice

Allen, Harold

Freshman textbooks in the light of linguistics

College Composition and Communication 5.1 (1954), 16-19

The author investigates the influence of linguistic research of Standard English usage on freshman composition textbooks. The author analyzes nine areas of linguistic usage and instruction in twelve representative texts that were published between 1950 and 1953. The nine areas include classification of usage, verb and pronoun usage with indefinites, form of gerund modifiers, the problem of idiom, functional change of a structural signal, functional change of word meaning (e.g., nominalization and verbalization), semantic shift, foreign plurals (e.g., *data*), and regional use of expression. The author concludes that the then current representative texts are “fair to good” in presenting contemporary linguistic usage, though the books still contain “misleading information” (19). The author admits that readers should expect a “lag” or gap between current linguistic research on usage and freshman composition textbook content, yet he suggests that this can change with the participation of textbook authors, publishers, instructors, and graduate students.

KEYWORDS: linguistics, textbook-analysis, FYC, SWE, discourse-analysis, data, syntax, 1950-1953, usage, grammar, misleading, scholarship, currency, change

Hartnett, Carolyn G.

Themes in English handbooks

ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 417 416 (1997)

The researcher compares what authors of writing handbooks and textbooks think students should know about writing to the criteria of writing skills set by the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP). The researcher examined a total of 19 texts, including eight

comprehensive textbooks, seven concise editions, and three handbooks. The article summarizes the new and traditional writing pedagogy in the handbooks, the current writing research in the authors' comments but not recognized in the student pages, and what functional linguistics can contribute. The researcher concludes that Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) can contribute where the sample texts lack in instruction: purpose, genre, "flow of information," and meaning-verb relations.

KEYWORDS: assessment, access, Texas Academic Skills Program, standards, textbook-analysis, handbook-analysis, needs-analysis, data, handbook, systemic functional linguistics, information-flow, genre

Perrin, Robert

What handbooks tell us about teaching writing with word-processing programs

Computers and Composition 6.1 (1988), 15-26

The researcher reports on the coverage of word processing in ten composition books published in 1985 and 1986. Nine major publishers produce the books. The article includes the author's analytical table of results. Based on the analysis, the researcher concludes that word processing advice is available but it is inconsistent. Two textbooks offer substantial advice on word processing, prewriting, and revision, while most offer perfunctory and superficial advice. The researcher recommends that teacher's give students hints, tips, and strategies; provide discussions of word processing; discuss word processing positively; and notify authors and publishers about the lack of substantial word processing advice.

KEYWORDS: computer, word-processing, handbook, practice, textbook-analysis, data, frequency, negative, handbook

Stewart, Donald

Composition textbooks and the assault on tradition

College Composition and Communication 29.2 (1978), 171-176

Stewart claims that mid-1970s writing textbooks reflect the influences of the unsuccessful current-traditional pedagogy. The author analyzes editions of 34 writing textbooks that sold over 100,000 copies; finds only seven books from his sample that contain some evidence of being influenced by current composition theory. Stewart concludes that it is not the publishers or textbook writers who are to blame, since they only produce what is demanded of them, but rather (1) he accuses writing teachers for the problem by not keeping up with history and current theory; and (2) he accuses English departments for not creating graduate programs to study composition history and theory.

KEYWORDS: textbook, current-traditional, invention, pre-writing, tagmemic, talk-write, Zoellner, Winston Weathers, style, rhetoric, formalist, process

Stewart, Donald

Textbooks revisited

In Moran, Michael G.; Ronald F. Lunsford (Eds.), *Research in composition and rhetoric: A bibliographic sourcebook*; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press (1984), 453-468

“Textbooks Revisited” is a follow-up study of Stewart’s 1978 “Composition Textbooks and the Assault on Tradition.” The author examines 32 textbooks and finds that some inroads are “being made with innovative books that include current theory. However, the majority of writing textbooks, at least those he examined, still subscribe to current-traditional pedagogy.

KEYWORDS: textbook-analysis, data, innovation, current-traditional, process

Ross, Christine

Education reform and the limits of discourse: Rereading collaborative revision of a composition program’s textbook

College Composition and Communication 55.2 (2003), 302-29

The article argues that the conscious and proclaimed adherence to contemporary composition theory may not align with program and classroom practice. The article reports that while the members of the Composition Program at University of California at Irvine collectively professed process pedagogy, the editions of the program’s in-house guide to writing reflect revisions toward a product-oriented pedagogy. The author arrives at this conclusion from a review of four editions of the program’s guide to writing. The article presents evidence from the guide’s writing assignments, reading assignments, and assessment guidelines.

KEYWORDS: curriculum, textbook, reform, case-study, data, pedagogy

Part 4. Ideological Effects

Bleich, David

In case of fire, throw in (what to do with textbooks once you switch to sourcebooks)

In Xin Liu Gale; Fredric Gale (Eds.), *(Re)Visioning composition textbooks: Conflicts of culture, ideology, and pedagogy*; Albany: State University of New York Press (1999), 15-42

The author examines three categories of writing textbooks. The books on argument include four representative texts. The books on research and broad writing situations include three texts. Source books—that is, books with essays and teaching apparatus and those without teaching apparatus—constitute the third group, of which he analyzed five texts. According to the author’s analysis, textbook discourse “does not invite the textbook readers to reconsider the knowledge, add to it, or change it” (17) and “The declarative and imperative moods of textbooks are related to the lack of experience of most writing teachers” (18). This approach, claims the author, creates an ideological framework “to suppress reference to context, to separate writing into an activity which various academic, corporate, and social interests can control” (41). In the end, the author advocates sourcebooks that include works about language and social issues and exclude editorial teaching apparatus.

KEYWORDS: textbook-analysis, sourcebook, critique, transformative, tone, imperative, ideology, social, control

Faigley, Lester

The conflicting rhetoric of writing textbooks

In *Fragments of rationality: Postmodernity and the subject of composition*; Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press (1992), 132-162

The author examines in this chapter three textbooks for writing instruction: a popular style guide, a business writing textbook, and a process pedagogy book. For an interpretation of the various lessons and heuristics, the author concludes that the contradictory guidance or the mixed messages conditions the obedient, rational subject, prepared for working within the conflicts and contradictory messages of dominant, capitalist and corporate America.

KEYWORDS: political, subjectivity, subject-position, ideology, textbook-analysis, classroom, ethical, capitalism, Marxism, style-manual, bizcom, process, obedience

Gershuny, H. Lee

English handbooks 1979-85: Case studies in sexist and nonsexist usage

In Frank, Francine Wattman; Paula A. Treichler (Eds.), *Language, gender, and professional writing: Theoretical and guidelines for nonsexist usage*; New York: Modern Language Association of America (1989), 95-104

The researcher reports the results of a study on linguistic stereotyping in thirteen English handbooks that were published 1979-1985. The researcher examined the texts to see if authors recognized and discussed the social implications of language, the nature of linguistic sexism, and the alternatives to sexist language. The researcher investigated the treatment of connotations related to gender, pronoun agreement and the pseudogeneric

pronominal he, diction and glossary usage, prefix address or title of addressee in business letters, and illustrative material. The researcher discovered that the majority of handbooks in the study do not treat the social implications of language, undermine the guidelines for non-sexist language, and/or subsume the discussion under a broader topic. The researcher offers suggestions to textbook authors and reviewers.

KEYWORDS: nonsexist, sexist language, gender, handbook, textbook, history, 1979-1985, data, handbook

Mitchell, Felicia

College English handbooks and pronominal usage guidelines: Mixed reactions to nonsexist language

Women and Language 15.2 (1992), 37-41

The researcher analyzed in 25 popular college handbooks the rules for nonsexist language, particularly focusing on the use of the pronouns she and he. The researcher finds rules for using nonsexist language and an inconsistency in advice to meet the criteria of nonsexist language. The researcher also argues that the tone of authors and the discussions about style and clarity over social convention appear to trivialize the goal of nonsexist language. The research presents examples of nonsexist advice and tone that undermines the advice, but the research does not quantify the instances of each.

KEYWORDS: textbook, handbook, sexist language, nonsexist, bias, pronoun, data, guidelines, handbook

Ohmann, Richard

Freshman composition and administered thought

In *English in America: A radical view of the profession, with a new introduction*; New York: Oxford University Press (1996), 133-171

The author presents in this chapter an analysis of invention exercises and drafting rules in 14 composition textbooks, and he concludes that the books encourage writing and a type of student writer that preserves the white-collar, middle class status quo of the 1960s and 1970s American economic and political system.

KEYWORDS: political, USA, Marxism, capitalism, ideology, social-class, economic, white-collar, middle-class, democracy, textbook-analysis, invention, data

Sakita, Tomoko I.

Sexism in Japanese English education: A survey of EFL texts

Women and Language 18.2 (1995), 5-12

The researcher reports on a study of sexism in 10 textbooks used in Japan to teach English to junior and senior high school Japanese students. The books were published between 1989 and 1992. The texts are for students at the introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels of English education. The features of content the investigator analyzed include the number of female and male characters in randomly selected stories, the number of female and male characters in exercises and model sentences, the qualifications of major and minor female and male characters, visuals with no linguistic clues, the adjectives used to qualify female and male characters throughout all stories and instructional apparatus, the activities and topics in the instructional apparatus, the pronouns referring to animals, miscellaneous text not easily categorized, and the year the textbooks were written and adopted. The author presents tables that quantify the results for each level of book. Based on the numbers for female and male visibility in texts, occupational roles, and gender-stereotyped images, the author concludes that Japanese English Textbooks are sexist.

KEYWORDS: sexist, racism, ESL, EFL, textbook-analysis, women, Japanese-English, data, survey

Welch, Kathleen

Ideology and freshman textbook production: The place of theory in writing pedagogy

College Composition and Communication 38.3 (1987), 269-282

Welch argues that textbooks do not reflect current composition theory and practice. What she often finds in her investigation of an indeterminate number of books is a contemporary presentation of the classical canons of invention, arrangement, and style (not memory and delivery), the modes of discourse (exposition, description, narration, and argument), or a combination of the three canons and modes. These presentations, Welch claims, more often than not, go unquestioned or unchallenged by composition practitioners and their unconscious theory. Composition teachers share a system of beliefs with publishers that the presentation of these unconscious theories is the best way to teach students writing. Welch demonstrates that writing textbook ideology perpetuates an ignorance of the complexity of language and composing processes, especially among new teachers in training. The author seems to blame teachers and training programs for the problem with textbooks.

KEYWORDS: FYC, textbook, production, theory, pedagogy, ideology

Part 5: Publishing

Beason, Larry

A canon for argumentation?

ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 404 646 (1997)

The researcher concludes from a content analysis of 24 argument texts that textbook writers have not created a canon for arguments. The researcher examined 1,152 essays presented by the books, or approximately 48 essays for each textbook. Most essays only appeared one time in each book. Only 61 essays appeared more than one time, or 5.3 % of the total number of essays examined. Four of the sample texts contain seven of the argument model essays. The researcher claims the seven essays may appear because of their commonalities: explicit controversial issue, strong evidence that supports the author's position, and located in timely issues and exigencies.

KEYWORDS: textbook-analysis, anthology, readings, essay, anthology, selection, data, frequency, argumentation, model-essay, criteria

Bloom, Lynn

The essay canon

College English 61.4 (1999), 401-430

The article establishes the nature of the teaching canon of course readers used in composition classes and discusses the pedagogical implications of the readings and instructional apparatus of the books. The author's sample course readers include textbooks for basic writing, regular freshman composition, discipline-based, or writing-across-the-curriculum courses. Also, the sample included canonical essayists that had been reprinted a minimum of twenty times. These criteria created an 18.6 percent sample of the total number of volumes (1,750) published between 1946 and 1996. Based on the instructional apparatus of the sample texts, and illustrated with an example from an edition of *The Norton Reader*, the author claims the questions and prompts of course readers tend to encourage superficial thinking and a type of passivity with the model readings. The passivity emerges from that habit of students being asked to analyze and imitate rhetorical strategies without having them consider ulterior motives or ideological effects of canonical essays.

KEYWORDS: essay, readings, syllabus, history, data, frequency, essay, anthology, FYC, canon, curriculum

Miles, Libby

Constructing composition: Reproduction and WPA agency in textbook publishing

WPA: Writing Program Administration 24.1/2 (2000), 27-51

Based on personal experience and interviews with workers throughout the hierarchy of three composition textbook publishing companies, the author argues that the problems with textbooks exist in a complex system of publishing and implementation, and they emerge from the decisions and actions of many participants: publishers, editors, academic consultants, reviewers, authors, writing program administrators, and teachers. The author categorizes the problems as deproduction and reproduction. The problem of deproduction occurs when the studies of textbooks are decontextualized, ignoring the variables of a publishing and implementation system or process that influence their content. The problem of reproduction occurs when textbooks reiterate cultural and theoretical ideology. In the end, the author reports that the interviewees agreed that WPAs have the most “sway” in textbook publishing practices. Thus, the author argues WPAs should take the lead in textbook reforms, proposing several “constellations” of actions. To effect change, WPAs could help publishers create more appropriate definitions of market segments. Another way WPAs can promote change in textbook publishing is involve students and graduate teaching assistants in the review process.

KEYWORDS: WPA, textbook, ‘agency, publishing, interview, editor-opinion, publisher-opinion, WPA, author-opinion, ‘deproduction’, decontextualization, reproduction, ideology, cultural, change, recommendation