

ARTIFACTS OF THE TEACHING OF WRITING: CURRICULUM GUIDES, TEXTBOOKS, AND HANDBOOKS

Guest Editor's Introduction
Gail Stygall

The genesis of this issue of the *Journal of Teaching Writing* stems from two courses that I teach at the University of Washington, one in preparing middle school and high school teachers to teach writing, the other in preparing new teaching assistants to teach first-year composition. In the decade that I have been teaching first one and then the other of these courses, I have asked new and would-be teachers to analyze the material artifacts of teaching writing—assignments, program descriptions, course and curricular guides, and textbooks. The students in these courses have surprised and delighted me with the materials they have discovered and analyzed, and they are the inspiration for the articles in this issue.

The world of writing teachers is deeply material. Our desks are stacked with this material life—papers, curriculum guides, assignment sheets, course plans, and, of course, textbooks—rhetorics, readers, and handbooks. Our students write and give us their work. Our schools, universities, departments of public instruction, and higher education boards generate curriculum and course guides. Our national organizations generate assessment standards in response to state government initiatives. We and our

colleagues develop assignments and course plans. And for any of us engaged in textbook selection, whether the multiple year selections of public schools or the often annual selection at colleges and universities, we know that we will be deluged with examination copies of textbooks, as well as flooded with all the possible add-ons—teachers’ manuals, support guides, sample assignments, related computer programs, and diagnostic tests. Most of us draw what we need from these educational artifacts and ignore the rest. But given the materiality of the writing teacher’s world, it is surprising that we devote so little scholarly attention to their uses and their ideologies.

With relatively little of our time dedicated to analysis of those artifacts, we may miss the intersection of specific artifacts with economic and political history of the time and place in which the artifacts are produced. Two recent dissertations help elaborate that claim. Using college composition instruction at three Upper South colleges between 1930 and 1945, Gina Claywell argues that examining composition at specific sites will provide a richer, more situated history of composition instruction, one that goes beyond famous rhetoricians and textbooks in the aggregate. D’Ann George’s similar study of composition instruction at Bryn Mawr between 1885 and 1916 includes an analysis of the portability of Harvard’s writing program through her discussion of Howard Savage’s appointment to Bryn Mawr’s Essay Department. Claywell links the study of specific sites of composition instruction with the personal, but specific sites also invoke economic and political history. George links the curriculum at Bryn Mawr with its impact on women’s voices. Both of these studies suggest that teaching writing is situated and local, dependent on particular teachers and artifacts of teaching writing.

While there has been a great deal of scholarly discussion of textbooks and handbooks—Richard Ohmann on the common advice of textbooks, Robert Connors on handbooks and composition textbooks,¹ and Debra Hawhee on the *Harbrace Handbook* editions—most of these resources survey the books or editions across time and project the student as “everystudent.”

From George L. Dillon's *Constructing Texts*, published in 1981, to Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality*, published in 1992, textbooks and handbooks figure most prominently into the construction of rhetoric and composition as an academic discipline. Dillon and Faigley both operate from a discourse and language perspective, Dillon examining handbooks for conventions, Faigley assessing textbooks in Chapter 5 of *Fragments* from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. Connors, in a more prototypical analysis, surveys 19th and 20th century textbooks, examines their publishing histories, and finds a pattern relating type of textbook to the availability of trained composition teachers: The less trained (or more indifferent) the available teachers of writing, the more "teacher-proof" and less rhetorical the textbook. For Connors, the examination of textbooks provides a means of analyzing the formation of the field of rhetoric and composition. Students are discussed in the aggregate, in percentages of students in the college-aged population attending college or actual numbers of students attending college.

Lucille Schultz provides a similar history of composition texts in the elementary and high schools during the 19th century in her book, *The Young Composers: Composition's Beginnings in Nineteenth-Century Schools*; but her account is inflected with the accents of class, particularly when she discusses writing textbook iconography. In one example, Schultz presents an illustration of a shabby, wood home, with a woman washing clothes in a tub, surrounded by four small children, one still in a cradle. Students are asked to "give a history" or a "story" of the family depicted (105). Schultz comments:

Although more children were attending school at the end of the century, and children of the poor were more likely to be among the student population than they would have been earlier in the century, the reader of this text is still invited "to imagine" the inside of the house of the poor family. The student reading the text is also being taught more than one kind of language lesson: on the one hand, the student is

being invited to write original composition; on the other hand, the student is asked to pass judgment on the family living in poverty . . . (106)

Despite these types of contradictions, Schultz argues that the school curriculum “was more encouraging of innovation than the university setting” (151), and because of that ability to innovate, the schools were able to reject abstract models of writing much earlier than colleges, making a space, however small, for students of the working class. When compared to the college-level texts, Schultz finds a number of differences in the texts for school children, including a strong theme of reform as the educational franchise expanded. For Schultz, the analysis of textbooks provides a means of analyzing both how composition was taught before college in the 19th century and a means of tracking understandings of how to educate children, but this analysis remains focused on the textbooks themselves.

Two more recent articles on textbooks and handbooks manifest both the broad strokes of the long view of history with “everystudent” and a theoretical perspective on what textbooks and handbooks “do” to students, grounding their analysis in critical theory. Debra Hawhee’s recent analysis of the *Harbrace Handbook* editions extends the historical analysis to a specific set of textbook artifacts and concentrates on the Foucauldian disciplining of students and teachers through the marking and correcting of student writing. Drawing deeply on the historical archives of the papers of John C. Hodge, the original author of the *Harbrace*, she concludes that the *Harbrace* is representative of the forces that keep students in a perpetual state of needing remediation. And while Hawhee is concerned with the overall effect of such handbook construction on the construction of student subjectivities, she is less attentive to differences in impact on distinctive groups of students.

Sandra Jamieson, in her article “Composition Readers and the Construction of Identity,” does concentrate on the impact of textbooks on students who do not match the race, ethnicity,

gender or nationality called into being by the selections in the readers and the apparatus associated with the essay selections. In discussing the inclusion of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" and E. B. White's "Once More to the Lake" in many composition readers, Jamieson reports on assignments that divert students' attention from the issues these essays raise. As Jamieson says,

A stunning example is the suggestion following Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" that students "select an activity which offends [them], such as people who throw trash from their car windows or surly and rude salesclerks [and] offer an exaggerated alternative to improve the situation (Lester 361). . . . Instead of being asked to consider issues raised in the text, such as the hypocrisy with which we treat poverty, exploitation, and student, students are invited to use satire to expose trivial issues—thus littering and homelessness can be easily equated. (160)

Jamieson cautions us that unless we recognize what student identities are invoked by the composition readers and their apparatus, we may fail to teach all of our students. Even with this important analysis, Jamieson's discussion is still focused on students in the abstract, though they are now more diverse, and the analysis is not attached to a particular site of teaching.

If analysis of textbooks and handbooks—albeit from the long, historical view and "everystudent" perspective—has received attention in the field of teaching writing, analysis of curricular materials is much less visible. Though work focused on particular teachers of writing and rhetoric, such as Robin Varnum's *Fencing with Words*, does include analysis of curricular materials, such as course descriptions, student papers, and internal memos, extending the range of analysis of artifacts of teaching writing, the analysis and critique of curriculum guides is little present in histories of composition. Two books in rhetoric and composition do focus on curriculum, and both take the long, historical view: David R. Russell's *Writing in the Academic Disciplines*, published in

1991, and Katherine H. Adams's *Progressive Politics and the Training of America's Persuaders*, published in 1999. Nonetheless, these books represent exceptional cases. A much stronger tradition of critical analysis of curriculum is present in the field of education, even though teachers of writing work with similar documents on a daily basis.² Curriculum guides—produced by state departments of public instruction, higher education boards, and even local programs—are one of the most ubiquitous contemporary artifacts of teaching writing. Moreover, with the advent of “accountability” and “standards” issues, more of us are finding ourselves handed documents that outline what achievements in writing our students are supposed to meet.

This issue of the *Journal of Teaching Writing* examines curriculum guidelines, textbooks, and handbooks, with each article a case study of a specific location of students, of textbook authors, and of recommended curriculum. The articles are arranged chronologically, starting with the late 19th century curriculum for writing at Indian Boarding Schools, and ending with the late 20th century U.S. Secretary of Labor's vocational and technical curriculum for workplace literacy. Each of the five articles attends to the question of audience for these artifacts of teaching writing, asking who is served by the particular construction of students, teachers, and institutions. The review-essay in this issue also takes up the question of audience and construction of the student writer.

Writing instruction continues to differ by ethnicity and socioeconomic status—as Sandra Jamieson's analysis of “writing identities” in composition readers demonstrates—and the curriculum for Native American students in Indian Boarding Schools at the turn of the century is no exception. Deborah Miranda's article, “‘A String of Textbooks’: Artifacts of Composition Pedagogy in Indian Boarding Schools,” examines two artifacts of teaching writing: the curriculum guide and the textbook. As Miranda's analysis indicates, the curriculum stressed industry and good work habits, similar to the curriculum guides for late 19th century immigrants to the United States, and

relegates writing to the end of a long list of goals of instruction. Moreover, as Miranda discusses, the mismatch between material artifacts, such as the reader selected, and the student population was considerable, with the legacy of this type of instruction and these artifacts of teaching writing remaining with us, as suggested by Paul G. Zolbrod's "Teaching on the Margins," a poignant description of the current Navajo community college conditions.

In the second article of the issue, Suzanne Bordelon's "Gertrude Buck's Approach to Argumentation: Preparing Women for a More Active and Vocal Role in a Democracy," we see how the trends of textbook publishing may be countered in situated, local sites. Though Robert Connors's analysis of late 19th century rhetoric in colleges suggests a retreat from argumentation and agonistic debate, in Bordelon's article we find an embracing of argumentation and debate in a women's college. Bordelon examines a number of artifacts of teaching writing, Buck's textbooks and course manual, student correspondence, and yearbooks among them. This article also carefully analyzes the intertwining of Buck's political beliefs—especially about women's suffrage—with the teaching materials she uses and the particularities of teaching women at Vassar in the era.

If Debra Hawhee's article on the *Harbrace Handbooks* provides us with an overall frame for analyzing handbooks, Nicole Merola's examination of the actual exercises in the 1941–46 editions of the *Harbrace* extends the analysis into the specific means of disciplining students. Merola notes both what is present and what is absent in the apparatus of the handbook, pointing to what type of student is unthinkable in the world of this handbook—the immigrant student whose first language is not English, the black student, and the Native American student, as well as the woman student.

Larry Beason's article on the *Warriner's* series of junior high and high school textbooks—published from 1948 through the 10th edition in 1986—and the recent attempt to meld contemporary composition theory into the ultimate traditional textbook asks us to consider the impact of the publishing industry on the publication of writing textbooks. Beason also offers us a set of

guidelines for consideration of a textbook, with a concerted focus on two key questions: is the focus on students' writing and is the act of writing oversimplified? Using these key questions, Beason analyzes the 10th edition of Warriner's *English Composition and Grammar* and its successor, *Elements of Writing*.

Kirk Branch's article, "What Work Requires of Schools: Literacy and Control in Education for the 'High Performance Workplace,'" returns us to curriculum guides, this time to the vocational and technical literacy curriculum initiated in the late 1980's and early 1990's under the U.S. Department of Labor, SCANS, the Secretary of Labor's Committee for Achieving Necessary Skills, and its Northwest variant, NWB, Northwest Workplace Basics. Eerily similar to the Indian Boarding School curriculum of a century earlier, SCANS and NWB are more concerned with producing correct attitudes than literacy. While composition journals rarely publish articles on the curriculum or writing practices of technical and vocational colleges, Branch's analysis reminds us that we all need to notice the absence of actual literacy work in these formulations of educational goals. Although targeted for vocational and technical colleges, the SCANS curriculum has leaked into the community college curriculum in Washington state, a phenomena I observe when reviewing course materials for transfer credit.

In the review-essay for this issue, Mark Wiley inspects four of the books often used to train teachers of writing: Tom Romano's *Writing with Passion*, Nancy Atwell's *In the Middle*, James D. Williams's *Preparing to Teach Writing*, and Victor Villanueva's collection, *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*. As with several of the previous articles, Wiley is concerned with the students who are not present in these texts and the impact of that absence on the training of new teachers of writing. The issue closes with five short reviews of books on revision, assessment, and the role of theory in contemporary composition. Andy Crockett's review of Nancy Welch's *Getting Restless* provides the perspective of the teacher of English composition in Japan. On assessment, Irene Clark reviews Kathleen Blake Yancey and Irwin Weiser's

collection, *Situating Portfolios: Four Perspectives*; Joan Hawthorne reviews Maureen McLaughlin and MaryEllen Vogt's *Portfolios in Teacher Education*; and Paul Chambers reviews the MLA collection, *Assessment of Writing: Politics, Policies, Practices*, edited by Edward M. White, William D. Lutz, and Sandra Kamusikiri. The closing piece is Peter Vandenberg's review of Sidney Dobrin's *Constructing Knowledges: The Politics of Theory-Building and Pedagogy in Composition*.

Articles in this issue bring the critical analysis of the artifacts of teaching writing back to the classrooms, programs, and institutions in which they are enacted, appropriate, it seems to me, for the *Journal of Teaching Writing*. And I hope you'll enjoy the issue as much as I enjoyed editing it.

NOTES

¹ Connors provides an extended history of United States composition textbooks in his book *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997.

² Considerable work in critical pedagogy focuses on curriculum. Indeed, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Michael Apple have served in schools of education in departments of curriculum and instruction. For examples of this work, see Michael Apple's *Ideology and Curriculum*, 2nd ed., New York: Routledge, 1990, and Michael W. Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith's *The Politics of the Textbook*, New York: Routledge, 1991.

WORKS CITED

- Adams, Katherine H. *Progressive Politics and the Training of America's Persuaders*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1999.
- Claywell, Gina Smith. "A Qualitative Approach to First-Year Composition in the Upper South from 1930 to 1945." DAI 57A (Jan. 1997): 2911.
- Connors, Robert J. *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997.
- Dillon, George L. *Constructing Texts: Elements of a Theory of Composition and Style*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1981.
- Faigley, Lester. *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992.
- George, D'Ann Pletcher. "The Bryn Mawr Woman: Composition and the Composing of a Voice during the M. Carey Thomas Years, 1995-1916." DAI 58A (Oct. 1997): 1263.

- Hawhee, Debra. "Composition History and the *Harbrace College Handbook*." *CCC* 50.3 (Feb. 1999): 504–523.
- Jamieson, Sandra. "Composition Readers and the Construction of Identity." In *Writing in Multicultural Settings*. Eds. Carol Severino, Juan C. Guerra, and Johnnella E. Butler. New York: MLA, 1997. 150–171.
- Ohmann, Richard. *English in America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976.
- Russell, David R. *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870–1990: A Curricular History*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1991.
- Schultz, Lucille M. *The Young Composers: Composition's Beginnings in Nineteenth-Century Schools*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1999.
- Zolbrod, Paul G. "Teaching on the Margin: Notes from a Classroom at Navajo Community College." *Profession* 1999 (1999): 180–92.