WARRINER'S, TEXTBOOKS, AND THE ALLEGED FOCUS ON STUDENT WRITING

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Arguably, John Warriner's textbooks have influenced writing instruction more than any other series at either the secondary or college level. The longevity of his books is testimony to their success. In 1948, Harcourt Brace published the first edition of Warriner's *Handbook of English*, and it spawned various series for the junior high and high school levels, series such as *English Workshop* and *Composition: Models and Exercises*. In the half a century that has passed, Warriner's textbooks (or, as they are often called, simply "*Warriner's*") have been emulated, praised, deplored, and revised—incorporating more instruction on composition while always giving sustained attention to grammar and usage. The culmination of this dynasty is *English Composition and Grammar: Benchmark Edition*, published in 1986 as the tenth edition and still in use today. Most of us are aware of John Warriner's influence, so it might come as a surprise to know that the 1986 edition is the last. Increasing competition along with the stigma of Warriner's books as being grammar-laden and antiquated has contributed to a quiet demise.

Or has it? Some names have changed, but Warriner's is not quite gone.

The publishing company of Holt, Rinehart and Winston appropriated Harcourt Brace, and in 1998 this new publishing giant replaced Warriner's *English Composition and Grammar* with *Elements of Writing*, which like its predecessor provides five "courses" (five separate texts) corresponding to grades eight

through twelve. John Warriner is one of two authors listed for *Elements of Writing*, and his co-author is one of the most influential names in modern composition studies, the late James Kinneavy. This is an interesting pairing. Is *Elements* a serious re-thinking of the traditionalist approach of *Warriner's*, or is *Elements* nothing more than a superficial re-packaging of a highly profitable series?

Even a cursory look at *Elements* reveals that an enormous amount of work and money went into it. The most conspicuous difference between *Elements* and its predecessor is that *Elements* is far more visual, with an array of colors, headings, pictures, and sophisticated design features. But distinguishing the content between the two is not so easy; both cover many of the same topics, with notable differences. And *how* they present ideas and information is yet another matter.

I wish to assist teachers in determining if *Elements* is an improvement, even though *Warriner's* is not scheduled for a new edition. A more lasting issue is considering how we determine if a given textbook sends an *appropriate* message to students and teachers. It is this issue I wish to highlight in the process of reviewing both *Warriner's* and its successor.

Many people might be surprised that these textbooks have much to say about writing, not just about the technical aspects of language. Indeed, the writing portion accounts for approximately 40% of each textbook.[1] My review will focus on the section of these textbooks that deal with actual writing—not the handbook portion covering punctuation, usage, style, and grammar. In *Elements*, the handbook portion retains the basic approach *Warriner's* has taken to mechanics, but the composition section has been significantly revised. Although much of what I will cover applies to the handbook sections as well, my emphasis is on the composition parts of the textbooks. These warrant special scrutiny because on the surface they *appear* to focus on students' writing, especially their writing processes. However, when we closely consider what it means to focus on students' own writing, these texts might not be as appropriate as they appear.

What Is an Appropriate Textbook?

What do I mean by "sending an *appropriate* message" about writing? One way to define this concept is by synthesizing teachers' and researchers' concerns about inappropriate messages sent by textbooks. I believe we can define appropriateness based on (1) a true focus on student writing and (2) an avoidance of oversimplifications.

Appropriateness can be defined in other ways. For example, *Warriner's* has been "appropriate" in that it has reflected a paradigm that dominated writing instruction in the United States for most of the twentieth century—the current-traditionalist theory of composition. Larry Johannessen's extensive review of *Warriner's* reveals the series' reliance on current-traditionalist pedagogy. *Warriner's* offers a mechanical, rule-governed approach that concentrates students' attention not on creating ideas but on creating ways to arrange and report information. As Berlin argues, this current-traditionalist approach represents the "triumph of the scientific and technical world" and values the sort of writing done in the business world (62–63). Given the rise of science, technology, and business since W.W. II, it is no surprise that *Warriner's* has been popular.

Another way to view appropriateness is considering whether a textbook meets the needs of the teaching profession. Again, the era in which *Warriner's* appeared determined its popularity. For most of the last century, English teachers in secondary and college levels had little formal training in writing instruction. As Johannessen points out, *Warriner's* provides an accessible way to teach writing, for the book offers a clear, logical structure based on formulaic rules, genres, patterns of arrangement, grammar, and other "basic" elements of writing that together offer a sense of order in teaching and evaluating writing. *Warriner's* offers teachers a manageable way to teach something they are often not fully prepared to teach. This lack of training is itself a result of a complex history. As Donald Stewart pointed out in 1978, "Until very recently, composition research and teaching have not been considered intellectually respectable by those in power in college

English departments in this country" (186). For a range of reasons, then, *Warriner's* often took the place of an adequate preparation of teachers and delivered an appropriate message about writing in that historical context. Even with the increasing number of teachers who have received training in composition pedagogy, *Warriner's* can still be seen as appropriate because it offers a manageable system for overworked teachers trying to educate dozens of students five days a week in a stressful work environment.

But a definition of appropriateness must also be based on what the profession has indicated about effective writing instruction— not just what teachers want and need, but what research and study indicate to be coherent, sound views of writing and learning to write. The field of composition has obviously not reached total agreement about effective writing instruction, but since the late 1970s several compositionists have lamented what they see as a textbook market dominated by books that do not reflect current research or theory. I believe a synthesis of these criticisms forms a basis for determining if a textbook offers an appropriate view of writing. In synthesizing these concerns and applying them in this analysis, I note also how textbooks are influenced by their historical contexts: the competitive world of textbook publishing, the rise and decline of the current-traditionalist paradigm, and an educational system that has for decades poorly prepared teachers for writing instruction.

Until the 1970s, compositionists wanting to criticize textbooks in composition had an easy target: the lack of attention to the writing process. In 1978, Donald Stewart described the fifteen-year assault on the current-traditional paradigm that guided composition textbooks for decades and promoted a product-oriented pedagogy. Such targets are harder to find today; the process bandwagon is more than full. Other criticisms, however, have been launched against textbooks. My synthesis below reveals two overriding concerns among these seemingly different criticisms: (1) whether the book leads students to focus on their own writing and (2) the extent to which writing is over-simplified

in the process of providing an accessible sense of structure. The first issue, I believe, is the more important but difficult to separate from the second; indeed, I will argue that textbooks often divert attention away from students' writing by reducing writing to something that can be easily managed and conveniently packaged.

Criticisms of Textbooks

What Is the Text's Focus?

Kathleen Welch states that "no writing textbook will work if it is not made secondary to continuous text production by class members" (279). Textbooks that focus students' and teachers' attention on reading *about* writing, then, divert attention away from students and their own discourse. One way in which texts focus on student writers is by enabling them to compose out of their own experiences—by encouraging students to connect writing to their lives (Welch 274). Along these lines, it is difficult to focus on students' own writing if the text makes connections *only* to particular cultures or groups. Hawshee claims, for example, that one of the greatest flaws of John Hodges' *Harbrace Handbook* is that its taxonomic approach is largely based on the writing of just one group: white Appalachian students of the 1930s (511). In 1972, Mullen found that only 7.5% of the essays found in 112 composition texts were written by women. More recently, Segal notes that the situation has improved but that we still need to consider the message textbooks send about who writes and why (121). Who, for instance, are the writers behind sample essays included in textbooks, and do these essays reflect only one group, gender, or race? Cultural diversity is necessary if a textbook is to focus on the varied lives of student writers.

A related issue is how textbooks encourage students to use sample pieces of writing. Using models written by professionals, as Johannessen argues, relies on the current-traditionalist belief that students will infer abstract rules by reading and imitating professional writers (39). Such pedagogy not only minimizes

students' own writing by training them to "do what the professionals do"; it also sends the message that there are rules that can be applied to diverse situations without considering how context affects a writer's choices. Robert Root notes these problems and expresses concern about how textbooks present and then follow up sample essays. Often, texts ask students to make guesses about a writer's approach; these texts typically fail to alert students to the writer's particular audience and exigency (96–97). Such de-contextualized uses of sample readings "invite student writers to compose pieces out of nowhere" (Welch 273).

Is Writing Over-Simplified?

A second major thread running throughout criticisms of composition texts is reflected in this question: In seeking to distill writing into something manageable for students and teachers, has the textbook oversimplified? Writing is a messy process and concept. While trying to make sense of writing for ourselves and for students, it is tempting to reduce writing to something predictable, linear, and systematic in terms of the writing process, the genres associated with writing, and sub-skills. The pressure to create a "nuts and bolts" approach to writing is especially keen for textbooks. Textbooks in many fields, especially in math and science, have historically been viewed as resources that distill the bottom-line facts for students.

Several compositionists have criticized textbooks for oversimplifying the writing process in particular. Mike Rose examined twenty textbooks and found "rigid rules, unqualified statements," such as "You will need to make at least two drafts before submitting any paper" (66). Dan Fraizer complains that many texts superficially present the writing process as "fixed procedures" (136), while Larry Johannessen laments a mechanical presentation that suggests students should follow the same process regardless of what they write (33).

Another complaint is that the concept of genre has been carried too far, with many texts focusing on describing categories of writing more than encouraging students to engage in their own

writing situations. Or genres have been presented in ways that suggest each is more discrete and standardized than in actuality. Welch notes that Bain's "frozen modes" of discourse (in one form or another—exposition, description, narration, and argument) often become the focus of textbooks, rather than enabling students to analyze situations and discover the best means of achieving their goals (276). Writing in 1981, Rose is surprised so many books continue to use the modes, yet he notes that newer taxonomies continue to confuse students by sending the message that a genre is not adjusted to suit a particular situation (69). Johannessen similarly complains that a textbook which stresses discourse *type* over the discourse *situation* sends the message that writers can disregard audience (29).

Yet another concern over the reductiveness of textbooks is the way in which many divide writing into smaller units. Simplifying writing to a series of sub-skills or sub-structures allows students to focus on one idea at a time. However, this atomistic approach minimizes the overall purpose of writing and implies that progressing as a writer means mastering the smallest unit (words) before moving on to the largest (essays). Indeed, some texts progress from the word, to the sentence, to the paragraph, and finally to whole essay. Berlin points out the long history of current-traditionalist pedagogy and its focus on the paragraph in particular, which has often been assumed to be a "mini-essay" that follows strict rules of unity, coherence, and emphasis (68–70). As Johannessen states, the implication of this obsession with paragraphs is that "writing involves nothing more than memorizing a formula, a kind of simple addition problem" leading to the five-paragraph theme (61). Similarly, Segal notes that many textbooks will claim that global issues (such as organizing thoughts) are more important than microlevel skills (such as spelling), but these books contradict themselves by treating words before sentences, sentences before paragraphs, and paragraphs before the entire essay. The resulting message is that "writing is an accumulation of subskills organized to produce an essay as an accumulation of substructures" (Segal 117). Taken to its extreme,

a textbook can simplify writing to the point that all a writer needs to know can be condensed in an almost mathematical way, but such "tables, charts and a finite system of rules present a very limited conception of writing" (Hawshee 521).

Regardless of how writing processes and products are reduced, these attempts to simplify can shift students' and teachers' attention away from holistic issues. For most of this century, composition textbooks have been dominated by an approach that is "atomistic in perspective, dividing and subdividing the subject into many, many discrete classes, levels, figures, skills, behaviors, and rules" (Connors 188). As Welch states, "Microscopic attention kills the fluid energy of whole pieces of discourse and their relationship to issues outside the text" (276).

Synthesizing the Criticisms

In summary, compositionists' complaints against textbooks have dealt with these questions:

1. Is the focus on students' own writing?
   - Does the text direct students to their own writing or, instead, to abstract rules?
   - Does the text make connections to students' own lives, cultures, and communities, and do these connections reflect the diversity of students?
   - Are samples of writing used in ways that call for students to imitate the writing of others—or to infer rules that supposedly apply to all situations?

2. Does the textbook oversimplify writing?
   - Is the writing process presented as fixed steps?
   - Are genres or modes presented as monolithic? Are they presented in ways that disregard context?
   - Is learning to write presented as the mere accumulation of sub-skills? Are paragraphs or other sub-structures emphasized over larger units of discourse?

Because the first issue above is more crucial, I forefront it in the remainder of this review, for no textbook can succeed unless the student's own writing is the focus of the curriculum. Textbooks suffer from a inherent problem: Each must to some degree concentrate the student's attention on someone else's text—the textbook author's. Nonetheless, some books are more successful than others in sending attention back to student texts.

But what does it mean to involve students in their own writing? A focus on student writing cannot occur unless the second major concern with oversimplification is addressed. A focus on student writing is unlikely if, as with many textbooks, students are led to adopt a simplistic account of writing—one that misleads them about the necessity of analyzing their discourse contexts. Unfortunately, a focus on student writing is easy to confuse with other things that only superficially focus on students. For instance, a text might guide the student through the writing process students will use, make occasional references to the student's writing, and include exercises that require the student to write. Writing, however, means making decisions—not merely following formulas, rules, and templates. Choosing among options is central to writing, especially making choices about one's own process and product by considering the particular nature of one's purpose, audience, exigency, situation. A true focus on students' writing means leading students to make choices and to make these in light of their own discourse situations.

I will now examine *Warriner's* and its successor using this definition of "a focus on student writing."

An Analysis of *Warriner's*

Warriner's *English Composition and Grammar,* on the surface, seems to invite students to focus on their own writing. For example, the text suggests that students consider these questions during their own prewriting: "Why am I writing? For whom am I writing? What will I write about? What will I say? How will I say it?" (4).[2] Later, *Warriner's* explains, "For writing a personal narrative, choose a personal experience that stands out or that has

affected your behavior or ideas" (192). Regarding research papers, the book states, "As you find materials that look promising, you may be tempted merely to jot down title and author in a rough list" (239). The book is sprinkled with second-person pronouns that seem to point students to their own writing and lives.

Still, this language is not successful in truly focusing students' attention on their writing. *Warriner's* has serious shortcomings because it incorporates two approaches that together do not lend themselves to a full focus on student writing.

First, *Warriner's* attempts to be a "process" text. This has often been considered laudatory, especially in the 1980s when the last edition of the book appeared. However, a second approach of *Warriner's* is a "nuts and bolts" presentation that places students' and teachers' attention on inflexible rules, accessible tips, and fixed steps. Encouraged in large part by economics of the textbook industry, this "highly processed" distillation of the writing process leads students and teachers alike to think more about procedures than students' own writing.

Examining a sample lesson clarifies my point. In Chapter 4, students are taken through informative compositions. The chapter is divided according to steps of the writing process used throughout *Warriner's*: prewriting (including selecting subjects, considering purpose and audience, and gathering information), writing the first draft, evaluating it, revising, and proofreading. This process approach seems sensible and can possibly draw attention to students' texts and situations. By forefronting process, however, a process text can minimize other elements of writing, like situation. To make matters worse, the procedural approach of *English Composition and Grammar* in its coverage of process provides an additional level of attention to methods.

For example, the sections in Chapter 4 devoted to evaluating and revising a first draft are dominated by guidelines and commands about the writing process. Imperatives about procedures are forefronted in red print, set off with white space, and preceded by codes that alert students to their importance, such as "4i. Evaluate your first draft for content, organization, and

style" (116). A chart dominating an entire page provides criteria to assist students in evaluating their draft. These are reasonably put in the form of questions related to the student's own writing. However, this enumerated list is prefaced by a statement indicating it is a "checklist" (117), which again focuses students' attention on nutshelled procedures that seem all inclusive and invariably essential. This list is followed by two exercises. The first requires students to apply the revision guidelines to a sample draft; the second requires them to evaluate their own drafts using the guidelines. Again, this approach seems pedagogically sound, but the text gives far more attention to the first exercise, even to the point of further condensing the terse guidelines. And the second exercise is worded peculiarly: "Mark places in your draft where you should make changes, and keep the marked draft for later use" (118). This is an academic exercise of the worst kind. Students go through a potentially meaningful activity, but then are told to put their work away without a follow up on the importance of what they just did.

The next section in Chapter 4 is similar, with another forefronted imperative followed by a chart that provides a systematic but arhetorical way to identify problems and apply ready-made techniques. For instance, if an introduction is "dull," the solution is "Begin with a general statement, an important or unusual fact, or a question" (119). On the surface, the language appears to cue students to their own writing, but the text does not cue them to their own *situations*, much less to making decisions based on these contexts. The text has already made the basic revision choices for students; a generic solution is provided.

This chart is followed by a sample paragraph that has been revised with handwritten insertions and editorial marks; two exercises follow the chart. As before, the first exercise receives more attention and takes students through six questions that, again in lock-step fashion, refer to specific revisions someone made within the sample paragraph. The second exercise ("Revising Your Exposition Composition") seems tacked on, with little attempt to involve students in their own revisions or decision making. It

refers students back to the generic list of problems/solutions—a chart that defines the problem for students and provides the "solution."

This pattern is seen throughout the *Warriner's* series: imperatives, brief explanations of these commands, nutshelled checklists or generic guidelines, and exercises that emphasize a systematic application of *Warriner's* guidelines and de-emphasize decision making. Occasionally, *Warriner's* gives more attention to students by considering their unique writing processes and situations. In helping students with a literary analysis, for example, *Warriner's* asks students to consider how much their audience knows about a given literary work (140, 142). Yet such statements are cradled by statements such as "Remember to apply the rules that govern any well-written composition" (140) or by prewriting "hints" that rarely make connections to the students' audience (141–42). Indeed, the text is so governed by discrete steps and rules that chapters are neatly compartmentalized into sub-sections. Often, these sub-sections and their ever-present guidelines focus on one aspect of writing at a time without meaningfully referring back to larger issues that govern writers' choices.

Warriner's is reductive with other aspects of writing besides process. Almost all textbooks use taxonomies in covering types of writing students might encounter. Although this approach is justifiable, a question is whether these categories are presented monolithically, as more standardized than they actually are. *Warriner's* leans in this direction. Chapter 3, for instance, discusses four types of paragraphs resembling the traditional modes: exposition, persuasion, description, and narration. From the onset, there are problems with this scheme. The book states that expository paragraphs inform or explain, while descriptive paragraphs describe a person, place, or object (62). How a descriptive paragraph can do so without also informing or explaining is not clear. Later, students learn that a descriptive paragraph is defined by a particular technique: The writer uses details that appeal to the senses to create images in the reader's

mind (79). *Why* a person describes something is, however, unclear. Early in the chapter, Warriner states that a paragraph might reflect more than one purpose, but that normally one purpose is primary. This seems sensible, yet nothing else in this chapter deals with this potential overlap of purposes, such as when it occurs or what the writer needs to consider when deciding how much overlap is too much. Rather, the chapter focuses on what are apparently distinct categories of discourse (e.g., the sub-categories of expository paragraphs).

While describing seamless categories, *Warriner's* also provides nutshelled procedures for the writing process. Together, these approaches lead students' attention away from their writing situations by focusing attention on reductive generalizations about genres and processes. Indeed, the focus on the paragraph itself is another way in which *Warriner's* creates a tidy world in which writers can break writing into manageable chunks and not have to consider the complexity of writing in contexts of their own.

Some genres in *Warriner's* are realistic. For instance, the text has a chapter on persuasion which focuses on logical reasoning and evidence. This chapter is based on a meaningful purpose and on thinking skills recognized as being crucial in diverse situations. Persuasion, simply put, is not merely an academic exercise.

Nonetheless, *Warriner's* lacks a binding principle that determines how writing can be reduced to the genres and categories found in the text. Sometimes, the chapters are based on current-traditionalist modes (as explained above), sometimes on patterns of development (as with the types of expository paragraphs), sometimes on aims (as with persuasion), and sometimes on specific types of assignments (as with critical reviews and literary analyses). The research paper stands apart from all of these schemes, as if it were an entity by itself.

True, students might not recognize this lack of taxonomic coherence, but the implicit message is that these categories do not reinforce one other, that they never overlap, and that these categories simply "are" and should not be questioned. As with fixed procedures, a set of fixed categories implies that decision

making is not an important part of students' writing. This focus on categories, rules, hints, and—in particular—procedures is only superficially focused on students' own writing.

An Analysis of Kinneavy & *Warriner's*

James Kinneavy's theory of discourse provides a framework for much of *Elements of Writing*. According to this theory, *everything* in a piece of discourse is determined by its aim; all matters of style, structure, and logic ultimately rest on the one particular aim that controls the text (Kinneavy 48–49). Kinneavy's theory also asserts that there are four basic aims (persuasive, expressive, referential, and literary), and each aim forefronts one particular aspect of a communication situation—either the audience, the writer/speaker, reality, or the text itself (38–39).

Although this theory has influenced not only textbooks but research, some critics have noted its limitations. Fulkerson argues that Kinneavy overgeneralizes the cause/effect relationship between the aim of a text and its structure, style, or logic. For instance, Fulkerson notes that various texts sharing a similar structure might have different aims, while texts with the same aim might have different structures (47). In addition, O'Banion has criticized Kinneavy for emphasizing finished texts while neglecting the processes that created them (196–97).

Elements of Writing, despite shortcomings of Kinneavy's theory, provides a significant focus on students' own writing. Whereas a principal framework for *Warriner's* is the writing process, *Elements of Writing* gives just as much attention to the writer's situation (broken down into the classical components of writer, audience, subject, and language) as well as to the aims of writing. This "triumvirate" of process, situation, and aim balances textbook procedures for going through the writing process with equally important issues of why a person writes—and in what contexts. While *Elements* offers condensed advice, tips, guidelines, and rules, it is not dominated by fixed steps that minimize decision making.

Early within each version of *Elements*, the authors provide a framework that not only offers coherence throughout the text but

that alerts students to two ways to think about writing: general assumptions writers can make about writing and specific assumptions they can make based on their specific context. These two views are not in opposition; they can work together.[3] For instance, when providing what seems initially to be a traditional overview of the writing process, Warriner and Kinneavy explain that "there is no right or wrong way to go through the process" but that "most writers work through the same basic steps" of prewriting, writing, evaluating/revising, and proofreading/publishing (6). Shortly, the authors explain that "every writer writes for a very specific reason" but that "each specific reason will fall within four basic purposes" of expression, exposition, persuasion, and literature (20). In discussing paragraphs, the authors point out general suggestions for paragraphs as well as diverse ways in which these suggestions are manifested (57). In such ways, *Elements* helps reconcile two perspectives: (1) that there are common assumptions about writing which frequently cut across situations and (2) that each context has its special demands that writers should use to tailor these common assumptions. A sample chapter illustrates this important point.

Chapter 6 examines informative writing. Gone are the conspicuous imperatives highlighted on the pages of *Warriner's*. *Elements* offers nutshelled tips and guidelines, but where *Warriner's* quickly moves to these early in each chapter (usually within the first two pages), *Elements* first takes students through an understanding of the complexities of informative writing by using examples, exploratory exercises, and discussions of subject, purpose, and audience as they relate to informative discourse. Indeed, it is some twelve pages into this thirty-five page chapter before anything akin to nutshelled procedures is presented.

This chapter's examples of writing present another interesting difference between *Elements* and *English Composition and Grammar*. *Elements* uses far more examples. My knee-jerk reaction was this approach might, as Segal suggests, succumb to the traditional pedagogy of providing models that students imitate or that are provided in hopes they will infer supposedly universal principles

of good writing. However, these examples are used to prompt students to consider their own writing as well as help them understand and apply the abstract principles of aim, process, and situation covered elsewhere in the text. For example, the chapter on informative writing begins with a fictional passage by R. A. Sasaki in which three girls are contrasted. This passage is followed by questions prompting students to consider their own uniqueness. Other questions alert them to the fact this passage is taken from a literary work yet still has a strong informative purpose, thereby illustrating how a text can have different aims. Later, a newspaper article illustrates a point about comparison/contrast. It is followed by questions on the author's situation and choices, but these in turn are followed by another example that illustrates an alternative approach to comparison/contrast. In such ways, the chapter clarifies procedural strategies but also shows there are options writers must choose from to fit their situation.

Unfortunately, *Elements* is not consistent in terms of attending to students' own writing. Students should consider not just a process but their own contexts and options in making decisions, but *Elements* often does not focus students' attention on these aspects. At times, a sample essay by a professional writer is followed by a student example prefaced with "You may want to follow the basic framework in the following writer's model" (298). In *Elements*, the problem/situation chart in *Warriner's* treatment of revision is re-tooled slightly but still presents a generic procedure to "pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses." Little attention is given to writers' audience or situation (266–67).

Similarly, *Elements* gives the special attention to the paragraph that Johannessen criticized in *Warriner's* as embodying current-traditionalist assumptions. The modes, for instance, are still discussed within the context of paragraph writing. Indeed, Kinneavy and Warriner's chapter on paragraphs is dominated by reductive categories and sub-categories of paragraph structures. Still, the treatment is less reductive and naive than *Warriner's*.

Elements states, for example, that the student can "have more than one purpose (and more than one strategy of development) in a paragraph" (82).

The predominant scheme for categorization in *Elements*, Kinneavy's theory of aims seems more sensible and certainly more coherent than the incongruous genres and taxonomies within *Warriner's*. *Elements* does cover patterns of development, but with attention to explaining how this taxonomy differs from the aim-based taxonomy. In addition, *Elements* goes to greater lengths to show that the categories based on the writer's aim allow for diversity, rather than being monolithic. Each aim-based chapter lists, for example, various forms of writing associated with the aim being discussed. While introducing literary writing, Chapter 5 lists assorted genres such as mystery novels, songs, poems, comic strips, and fables.

In general, *Elements* poses questions that call for student writers to think about making choices based on their own situations rather than simply following a nutshelled list of generic procedures. In assisting students with pre-writing for a story, *Elements* poses questions about characters (168–69). Such questioning is used in *Warriner's* discussion of story writing, yet *Warriner's* draws on language such as "use this framework" (206) as opposed to less authoritative language found in *Elements*, such as "Here are some questions to help you create your characters" (168). Admittedly, students might ignore such qualifiers and jump straight to the conspicuous lists of questions and suggestions, but taken with other features of the textbook, these qualifiers contribute to an overall message. With *Elements*, the steps of the writing process are blended with aim-based genres that in turn are merged with the rhetorical analysis of situations. These facets of the book shift the focus to students' own acts of making decisions for their own writing situations.

Elements seeks in other ways to move attention away from abstract principles and toward student writers. It occasionally includes a brief section entitled "Reflecting on Your Writing," which asks students to write about their processes and situations

for a given assignment; the text then cues students to keep these reflections in a portfolio. Even without this reflective writing, a portfolio provides a way for students to think about their unique development as writers. Another common section is "Making Connections," which asks students to consider how a given lesson can be extended to situations outside the composition classroom—especially to classes in other disciplines. By means of these "Making Connections" sections, *Elements* encourages students to go beyond textbook abstractions and focus on diverse situations of their own. At times, *Elements* alerts students to collaborative writing, which tends to encourage students to put abstract principles into practice by working with other student writers— again focusing on students' writing and their situations.

Finally, it is important to note the lengths *Elements* takes to connect not only to students' lives but to their diverse communities. The sample readings are especially interesting. In *Warriner's*, the sample authors are de-personalized. It is difficult to relate to diverse cultures if the writers and writings lack a voice reflecting a culture. In *Elements*, many if not most of the passages, stories, and essays are clearly linked to diverse cultures. Indeed, diversity is frequently illustrated in graphic form, with accompanying drawings and photographs of Native Americans, women, people with physical disabilities, African Americans, writers of assorted ages, landscapes from around the world, urban as well as suburban and rural settings, and other facets of diverse contexts and communities.

Some might wonder if the references to WAC, portfolios, and cultural diversity are simply faddish, nothing more than tokenism. Although motives are hard to discern, the sensitive treatment of these varied elements is sustained throughout *Elements,* with depth and consistency. The result is an improvement over the bland approach of *Warriner's* that presents writing in a way that minimizes the connections to students' lives.

Contexts for "Success"

To be successful, textbooks must succeed in two contexts: (1) a classroom context in which textbooks are aimed at improving student learning and (2) a marketplace context in which textbooks are expected to generate financial profit. These contexts often overlap but may conflict, especially when an approach has historically sold well but is not well supported by research. The pairing of Warriner and Kinneavy, which might seem surprising initially, symbolizes these competing contexts. John Warriner's prescriptive approach has a history of dominating the market, while James Kinneavy's legacy is a contemporary perspective that is complex yet offers salient structure for many textbooks, researchers, and teachers.

The marketing and pedagogical contexts are, however, not true dichotomies, as Ross Winterowd has noted (142). What textbooks sell must have pedagogical value or teachers will not use them, yet textbooks sell not only because of their promise for enhancing learning but because they reflect paradigms that are comfortably familiar for teachers and enormously profitable for publishers, because they are easy to use, and because they have a history of being adopted as primary texts—just to name a few contextual factors that go beyond pedagogical soundness in determining what sells.

Others have lamented the lack of theory in composition texts. A textbook such as *Warriner's*, for example, might seem to put process theory into practice. Yet the context of the marketplace may promote the creation of textbooks that simplify theory to provide users with a sense of order for the messy, subjective, and often unpredictable act of writing. The most up-to-date theory of composition is likely to be compromised by a competing theory of textbook economics.

We also must consider what sorts of classroom practices are encouraged by textbooks. Textbooks such as *Warriner's* can lead to an emphasis on structure, rules, and lockstep procedures, rather than focusing activities around students or realistic communication situations. Although a teacher can adapt a book to suit a certain

philosophy of composition, *Warriner's* is conducive to classroom activities involving memorization, tests over rules, standardized exercises and steps for writing, and writing at the paragraph level. Kinneavy's and Warriner's book, however, does not so easily translate into pre-determined classroom procedures because it avoids rule-based, systematic notions of writing. *Elements* is far more likely to lead to hands-on exploration of plans, drafts, and sample essays for which there is no "answer key." And *Elements* is far more likely to lead to speculation in the classroom about writing in diverse contexts and for diverse audiences. Neither exploration nor speculation is conducive to ready-made syllabi, lesson plans, and quizzes, so it is in some ways harder to envision how *Warriner's* might be used. For some, such open-endedness will be a drawback, but many teachers will find it liberating in developing workshops, organic discussions, and active-learning activities.

In determining whether a textbook promotes the curriculum and daily activities that lead to a rich perspective of writing, we need to consider what it means for a textbook to focus on writing and what we mean by writing. Some textbooks imply that writing is *just* patterns of organization, *just* paragraphs, and *just* the writing process—to name a few marketable simplifications. If textbooks are *too* simple to follow and implement, they do not reflect what we know about the complexities of writing that has emerged from some four decades of study within the composition discipline.

NOTES

[1] For example, 42% of the 1,081 pages in Level 5 of *Elements* is devoted to actual composition, with 38% devoted to grammar, usage, style, and spelling. With *Warriner's*, 38% of its 775 pages deals with composition, with 44% devoted to grammar, usage, style, and spelling. *Elements* seems a much longer text, but most additional pages can be attributed to format changes and graphics.

[2] All references are to the Fifth Course text for both *English Composition and Grammar* and *Elements of Writing*. Because each of these two series strives for a consistent format and pedagogy, the Fifth Course of each is representative of the approaches taken by the two series throughout the various levels.

[3] This complementary view of "generic" and "specific" skills is well articulated by Carter, who takes a cross-disciplinary look at how experts in various endeavors draw on general strategies that they refine based on specific situations.

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