

## **Central Queensland University, Australia**

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### **Editorial introduction**

#### **Textbooks and educational texts in the 21st century: writing, publishing and reading**

One of the most remarkable features of Australia's higher educational publishing industry is that it has not disappeared into the 'internet trash compactor' (Eptstein 2001). It is, in fact, alive and healthy. Higher educational publishing comprises a significant percentage of Australian national publishing outputs. Of this, textbooks are an important component. In tertiary education alone, some 3.1 million textbooks were published/sold in Australia in 2011. In that year, tertiary sales of textbooks and professional materials reached A\$155 million. Tertiary educational publishing currently represents about 30 per cent of Australia's publishing output. Furthermore, spending on textbooks remained fairly constant from 2007 to 2010 despite the increasing quantity of digital resources developed by universities in Australia.

Textbook writers come from all disciplinary fields, as textbooks are produced by both specialist and occasional writers, editors and publishers. Interestingly, the creative arts represents only a small percent of published Australian textbooks and very few are written by academics from the field of creative writing. Professional writing is only slightly better represented by Australian textbooks, although how-to manuals of creative writing appear regularly. While textbook authors often include cutting-edge research in their volumes, textbooks (as other educational materials) are not counted in the annual government assessment exercises of research outputs in Australia, the UK or New Zealand, or in the government's ERA evaluation of research excellence in Australia. Yet writing a textbook is a creative exercise both in authorship and research.

Educational publishing is itself entering the 'age of uncertainty' according to Utrecht University's Arno Reints (2013). For educational publishers and the authors of educational materials, this uncertainty stems from a range of rapid changes in the educational and publishing environment. These include: new pedagogical demands from teaching staff and students who want instant information and are becoming increasingly used to getting it for free; and the long term consequences of new learning devices on teachers and learners (and as a result, on teaching and learning). This has involved publishers in developing and producing learning resources for a generation that are securely located in high media environments and, accustomed to playing complex games, espouse fun as a critical goal for their learning. There are also significant changes in the economics of higher education that educational publishers are having to take into account, as online learning delivery becomes more

common and widespread. This is spearheaded by such innovations as MOOCs and proprietary software supporting mass online and free provision of resources.

Underpinning these international uncertainties are local Australian ones. Changes to funding environments are affecting the disciplines and sub-disciplines taught at tertiary (and secondary) level. The proposals of the Australian Law Reform Commission to amend the law to end statutory licences and, with this, the flow of photocopying funds to publishers and authors (and, therefore) Australian educational publishing is also providing a challenge to current educational publishing.

Given the size, complexity and importance of Australia's higher education publishing industry, and the multidimensional roles that authors and other creators play in it, we believe the sector needs a more directed and focused approach to research on the creation and provision of higher education teaching and learning materials. Not only is this a relatively neglected area of writing and publishing research, the current changes shaping educational publishing are also raising a series of new research questions for the teachers and students in higher education, and in the educational publishing industry that supports them. With a focus on the tertiary sector, these questions include:

- What role do higher education teaching and learning materials play in student learning and achievement?
- What do teachers and learners need and want? And what will they pay for?
- How do educational publishers compete with open access educational resources and repositories?
- How do commercial educational publishers and their materials link with, and align to, the materials produced internally by universities?
- What future business model will frame producing content for sale to support teaching and learning?
- Who will write and produce these texts, and who provide the future market for these texts?

As the issue of textbooks has been an unexplored topic in *TEXT*, the editors of this Special issue invited articles on a wide range of topics in relation to textbooks and the production of education materials more broadly. This included: reading, writing, editing and publishing textbooks; the role of textbooks in disciplinary discourse; the use of textbooks in the writing classroom; guides for intending tertiary textbook authors; inclusivity and the representation of the other in textbooks and other educational materials; plurality in tertiary teaching and learning materials; working across genres; changes in the publishing industry and its implications for authors; textbooks as research outputs in the category of non-traditional research outputs; writing the future: tertiary digital texts and technology; creativity and textbooks; textbook voice; and, textbooks and the writer's life.

Our authors responded with a wide and fascinating range of new and important research on textbook writing and production. Reporting on a study of the learning resources that are provided for students in university courses in the humanities and

sciences, Bruce Knight and co-editor of this special issue, Mike Horsley, explore the relationships between e-learning and textbooks designed to support student learning in higher education. With a focus on how aspects of the learning environment and its learning ecology interact in shaping student experiences of learning, they also explore how students shape the opportunities provided by the university and its teaching and course design staff.

Founding editor of *TEXT*, Nigel Krauth opens up the discussion of what a textbook might be, using a study of that journal to examine the possibility that such an online academic peer-reviewed resource might operate as a textbook. Using concepts of communities of practice, Krauth examines the role *TEXT* has taken in its community, analyses *TEXT* editorial practices and compares this with that of textbook editors, and compares elements of textbook production and usage with *TEXT*'s profile. Finally, Krauth looks briefly at the migration of textbooks from paper to smart applications and how this relates to *TEXT* as textbook.

A number of authors have considered individual textbooks from the authorial point of view. Steven Pace discusses the evolution of a free, online, self-published web design textbook over its fifteen-year history. This article examines in detail the factors that influenced the development of Pace's textbook and identifies the benefits for students and teacher. It concludes by probing the viability of this model for other academics and institutions.

Noting that public relations is a relatively new discipline in the Australian academy, with an even younger literature, Jane Johnston traces the development of this literature in Australia. Johnson incorporates a case study of the production of the first 21st century textbook in public relations in Australia, co-edited by Clara Zawawi and the author, tracing its journey through an examination of the changing higher education research, publishing and writing environment.

With Margaret McAllister, Donna Lee Brien (the second co-editor of this issue) reports on a learning design project that creatively (re)uses readily available examples of creative writing as learning resources in training for the health professions. As capable health professionals possess interpersonal and critical thinking skills as well as has technical competence, the authors posit that illness memoirs, if selected and framed correctly, can provide core learning materials in this area.

Emily M Gray and Deana Leahy continue this interest in cross-disciplinary perspectives with their analysis of a series of health education textbooks. In their study, Gray and Leahy pay particular attention to the ways in which dominant knowledges about gender and (hetero)sexuality are (re)produced within textbooks, and make recommendations for their deployment within the health education classroom.

Addressing an issue that is at the heart of educational materials – communication – Philippa Mules proposes that changes in the way we produce, consume and distribute personal communication are subtly mediating new perceptions about communication appropriateness and literacy. While not denying that ideational content is an important carrier of meaning, Mules argues that it is the changing material composition of

screen based (as opposed to paper based) personal correspondence that is challenging traditional perceptions.

Clive Graham moves the reader to a consideration of educational materials at the global level, considering the impact that the sustained global economic uncertainty post-2008 has had on undergraduate university textbooks in the emerging age of ubiquitous knowledge, competency-based higher education and massive open online courses (MOOCs).

Penny Martin closes this issue with her review of the history of the Australian Educational Publishing awards, arguing that these awards have extended the scope, and raised the quality, of Australian educational publishing.

We hope that you enjoy this collection and that it encourages more serious research on this important topic.

In closing this editorial, we would like to thank the referees and authors for not only their academic rigour and engagement with this topic, but collegiality in supporting academic research and publication.

### Works cited

Epstein, J 2001 *Book matters* New York: WW Norton

Reints, Arno 2013 'What works and why: educational publishing in an age of uncertainty' Keynote presentation, 12<sup>th</sup> International association conference on textbooks and educational media, Ostrava: Czech Republic, September

*Mike Horsley is Director of the Learning Teaching Education Research Centre at Central Queensland University. He is the current president of the International Association for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media (IARTEM) and lead editor of the IARTEM eJournal, a peer reviewed journal disseminating research on textbooks, teaching and learning materials in education and educational media. He has advised many international governments on textbook policy, and has assisted universities and government to establish research on textbooks and educational media – projects funded by international donors such as the Asian Development bank, the World Bank and UNESCO. He is currently publishing books on digital textbooks and the use of eye tracking methodologies in learning and educational research. In 2006 Mike won an ARC Linkage grant with the Australian Publishers Association to 'investigate access and equity in the provision of classroom teaching and learning resources to Australian schools'. His most recent ARC Linkage grant with Education Queensland is exploring the 'strategies that teachers use with struggling readers' and the classroom teaching and learning materials these teachers use for this purpose.*

*Donna Lee Brien is Professor of Creative Industries, Assistant Dean (Postgraduate and Research), Creative and Performing Arts, and Chair of the Creative and Performing Arts Research Group for the Learning and Teaching Education Research Centre at Central Queensland University. A chief investigator on a new nationally funded project developing a MOOC on creativity for postgraduate coursework*

*students, Donna has been a key project team member of three nationally funded learning and teaching projects. These are: Examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts: process, practice and standards; CreateEd: strengthening learning and teaching leadership in the creative arts; and the Australian postgraduate writers network. With a special interest in research writing and publishing, Donna is a member of the editorial advisory boards of a number of national and international journals and is the Commissioning Editor of Special Issues for TEXT journal. Past President of the national peak body, the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, Donna is widely published, with over 120 refereed scholarly publications.*