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Re-write or be written out: moving a textbook through changing paradigms

Citation: Stewart, Colin (2011). Re-write or be written out: moving a textbook through changing paradigms. IARTEM e-Journal 4 (1) 74 – 99 (Abstract) (Article)

Abstract

This paper responds to Paxton's lament that suggests there is a 'deafening silence' between those who author, edit and publish textbooks and the teachers and students who use them.

The writer of a textbook that has been through three editions over twenty years necessarily adapts the book to changing teaching paradigms and evolving conceptions of what defines the core teaching of a subject. There are even changes in the expectations of what a textbook should be and do – especially if those twenty years span the emergence of the internet.

This article charts the writing process for the three editions of the Australian Media Studies textbook *Media: new ways and meanings*, and places the book within the context of the emblematic discourses or paradigms of the subject in each time period. It examines the significant changes in thinking about the pedagogy of media studies subjects that have occurred over this period in all Australian states, and the role of a textbook in both reflecting and leading these changes.

Key informant interviews were held in two Australian states to ascertain the role of the book within its context. As part of the writing process for the third edition of the textbook, an internet survey of media teachers in two Australian states, together with a focus group and several descriptive surveys aimed to find out what teachers wanted in a contemporary media studies textbook, and to involve them in the selection of content.

The research presented here suggests that there were several paradigm shifts in Australian media studies and that various authors and the textbooks they wrote participated in, and to some extent shaped these. The research also suggests that the perceived role of textbooks in media studies subjects varies to some extent between the three main Australian states that have formal media studies subjects. Findings also suggest that the role of textbooks has changed over time as teachers demand more recontextualisation, and as textbooks incorporate more visual and multimedia material

Key Words: Media studies, Textbooks, Media education, Textbook design