Students' Priorities as Authors of Their Own Text About Educational Psychology

Kelvin Seifert, University of Manitoba

In this study the feasibility and educational value of students' writing their own textbook was explored for a particular course in which commercial textbooks had become a normal feature. The course itself was about introductory educational psychology—a common requirement for preservice teachers in training. In lieu of buying a commercial text, students developed a table of contents for 2 editions of their own text, posted and edited sections of chapters, and assessed the results. Although the resulting books were shorter than major commercial textbooks and obviously lacked their "production features," they offered important clues to students' educational priorities. Both in choosing topics to write and in reading each other's work, students emphasized certain topics (e.g., special education and classroom management) more than did authors of commercial texts and reduced coverage of other conventional topics (e.g., instructional planning and assessment of learning). Overall, the results suggested educational advantages to students' writing their own textbooks, as well as areas where commercial publishers can make their textbooks more relevant and motivating. At the same time, however, student-written texts raised questions about coverage of content and the role of student input guiding content.

For reasons ranging from economics to beliefs about education, many university courses have relied on major commercial textbooks as a reference for students and an organizer of courses (Apple, 1987; Nicholls, 2005; Sewall, 2005). Generally, the textbooks are well-organized, and authors make every effort to write clearly. When the texts concern professional subjects, they often also provide practical advice and examples intended to reflect professional practice realistically. The choice of content, advice, and examples is usually made by authors and reviewers of early drafts of the textbook, who may or may not be practicing professionals. It is assumed that these people have had experience as teachers or at least understand teachers' typical experiences. Rarely is the development of a textbook influenced directly by its ultimate consumers, the students themselves. Whatever its pedagogical merits, the normal development strategy is convenient for publishers because it means that texts are tailored most directly to those who control sales (i.e., instructors of courses), rather than to those who primarily pay for and read the books (i.e., students).

Although the assumptions that support textbook publication may be adequate for some fields of university study, they do not seem equally plausible for all. A case in point is preservice teacher education and the teaching of one of its common elements, introductory educational psychology. This course is not only required in most teacher education programs but also commonly uses a comprehensive, commercially produced textbook. The major texts range from 600 to 800 pages and are organized into over 300 hundred topics and subtopics (see e.g., Ormrod, 2008; Slavin, 2009; Snowman, McCown, & Biehler, 2009; and Woolfolk, 2008; among others). The general topics are organized in ways that are highly similar across texts and in this way predictable (Seifert, 2006). A cursory review

of the table of contents of almost any current textbook about educational psychology shows one or two chapters about human development, major learning theories, motivation, assessment of learning, and social diversity. Many, but not all, also contain chapters about instructional planning and special education. The similarity of topics across books suggests that authors take cues from each other's books when developing their own, even if authors themselves sometimes gloss over or deny doing so (Ormrod, 2006; Woolfolk, 2008). Where differences exist, they have relatively little to do with selection of topics. They are more often about style of presentation (e.g., more "personal" or first person in tone vs. less personal) or to a lesser extent about thoroughness of presentation within particular topics (Navarro, 2006).

As a group, therefore, textbooks about educational psychology share important qualities in common. Among shared attributes that are positive, the texts are thorough and comprehensive; they attempt to present balanced accounts of issues and controversies; they attempt to identify information or ideas of broad or universal relevance; and they present ideas in accessible language. However, textbooks also share attributes that are negative, some of which are inevitable by-products of their positive qualities. Texts are criticized, for example, for being too long (a risk of being thorough), too theoretical (a risk of emphasizing broad ideas), lacking in a coherent perspective (too much balancing of perspectives), or not sensitive enough to social diversity (another by-product of focusing on the broad and universal).

Whether framed as strengths or problems, the qualities of commercial textbooks may not represent oversights by authors as much as the commercial imperatives of the textbook industry. For economic reasons, textbook publishers require large markets and centralized production. They therefore favor producing books that have wide appeal—a mandate that easily leads to long books, expensive production features, and noncommittal perspectives. At a more subtle level, commercial textbooks position readers as recipients of relatively indisputable ideas, rather than as self-constructors of knowledge (Apple, 1987). Positioning readers this way happens even when authors try to be respectful of readers and appropriately modest in their knowledge claims. To a significant extent the tendency is inevitable given the static, linear nature of textbooks: the unstated assumption of every author is—and must be—that readers will allow the author to guide their thoughts. In some fields, including educational psychology, authors may also hope for readers to question or critique the text, but questioning and critiquing are not under authors' control as fully as presenting ideas, theories, concepts, and examples. An author may include discussion questions or interactive supplements, but students cannot be counted on to respond to these, and instructors cannot be counted to encourage them to do so. Even if students do respond and thereby "think actively," their responses are usually framed by the author as primarily personal beliefs that need modification or development, not as knowledge to be respected. The author remains the authority; the student remains the learner.

At a broad level this positioning may seem inevitable and natural, but it has potential for implying disrespect for students' prior knowledge and experience, and therefore for undermining students' motivation to learn educational psychology. In practice, however, the negative effects are

often mitigated by instructors and students. Instructors may, for example, critique ideas found in the text (e.g., "Piaget's theory is useful, but I think that the author and a lot of teachers make too much out of it."). Their critiques suggest that the author is not necessarily the final or only authority about educational psychology. Students, for their own part, may choose not to take some parts of the textbook seriously or even to read all of the parts assigned. Skimping on assigned reading may happen for various reasons, of course, but the effect is to reduce the importance of the author's words to the students. In a sense, therefore, textbook authors compete for students' attention and take their places alongside other voices competing for that attention.

Given these dynamics, it should not be surprising if education students tend to value text-based courses such as educational psychology less than other parts of teacher education, such as curriculum studies and practice teaching. Reviews of teacher education suggest that this is indeed the case (Floden & Meniketti, 2005; Zeichner, 2005). In these latter areas, students' prior knowledge can add to their learning more directly and be more easily recognized by others as fully legitimate. In the areas of curriculum and practice teaching, psychological resistance may seem both less necessary and less attractive.

An obvious, though possibly naïve remedy for the limitations of commercial textbooks might be to dispense with such books altogether and simply to ask students to write their own reference book. In principle, student authoring should empower students' learning and lead to a text that students regard as highly relevant to their needs. It should also ensure that students invest in the nature and development of the text. On the face of it, therefore, student authoring should be a motivating way to learn about educational psychology. Instead of thinking of themselves as consumers of others' knowledge, students could—at least ideally—think of themselves as creators of knowledge that they truly value.

However, there are obvious cautions about student authoring. First, would a student-written text provide adequate coverage of the field of educational psychology? If a class divided up the work of writing, for example, each individual might overfocus on the special section for which he or she was responsible and not attend enough to the topics written by others. Instructional strategies would be needed to counteract any tendency to overspecialize. Second, would students know enough to make wise choices about content? Perhaps some would choose a topic only because it was convenient, easy to research, or already familiar, and not because they judged a topic important for professional development. It might simply be unreasonable to expect students to know what to include in a textbook because students, by definition, do not know the field already. Third, even if the other problems could be solved, would students have writing skills sufficient to create a readable textbook—even one meant for each others' use? Because anecdotal evidence as well as research on writing suggests that many students struggle with expository composition (Creme & Lea, 2008), there is good reason to expect difficulties for some student authors.

As important as these concerns are, there are ways to deal with all of them and, therefore, reason to consider student-written textbooks as a strategy for dealing with the limitations of commercial textbooks. Simple strategies exist, for example, to ensure that students read broadly about educational

psychology. Students can be assigned to read or to edit each other's contributions to the text, for example, or they can be simply assigned a variety of supplementary readings for the course. Difficulties with writing, furthermore, are not exclusive to student-written textbooks: They are widespread in university classes, whatever the genre that reading or writing assignments take. The fact that a student-written text might be less than polished does not mean that such a text cannot or should not be attempted; authentic writing is a positive learning strategy even when the writing needs editing (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2006). In addition, less-than-polished writing can be useful or informative to fellow students, even if imperfect.

Method

With these possibilities and cautions in mind, I undertook a 2-year study of how my own university students designed and wrote their own textbook about educational psychology. No commercially published textbook was assigned for purchase or even assigned for reading. Instead students were supported in creating and publishing their own text. This task constituted about one half of students' assigned work for the course (the other half involved inquiry based on responses to a book-length case study of a teacher's life and work; discussion of it can be found at my website: (http://home.cc.umanitoba/ca/~seifert/studentwrittentext.html). The actual writing and publishing used a *wiki* platform, software that allows multiple users to write and edit each other's web pages. [A well-known example of a wiki is the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org>), but many others exist.] This article reports and assesses the results of the students' work during each of the 2 years of the study.

The Course, the Students, and the Instructor

The students were registered for one of three possible sections of a course called "Psychology of Learning," required of all preservice teachers at a comprehensive, public university. Like most introductory courses in educational psychology, this one provided a broad survey of the field, touching on topics of learning, development, motivation, and assessment of learning. In addition it covered topics related to instructional planning and to the teaching of children with special needs. The course comprised 18 two-hour sessions; for two sections these were concentrated in one semester, but for a third section the same number of sessions was spread over two semesters.

Because of admission requirements at their particular university, the students all possessed a previous Bachelor's degree in a field normally taught in public schools (history, English, science). In this sense they were more "educated" than many undergraduate students and resembled many Master's-level students in age and life experience. Some students had previous experience working with children (e.g., as an instructional assistant in public school) or with adults (e.g., in a previous career in business), though none had actual classroom teaching experience. As it happened, timetabling circumstances meant that all of the student authors were expecting to teach in the primary grades of school (kindergarten through fourth grade)—a circumstance that may have affected their content priorities, as discussed later.

As already mentioned, I was the instructor in the study and I am also the author of this article. As instructor, I had considerable experience with introductory educational psychology. I had taught the

course more than 75 times over 35 years to a wide variety of students (not just those focused on the primary grades). I had also authored commercially published textbooks about educational psychology (Seifert, 1991, 1999) and child development (Seifert & Hoffnung, 2000; Seifert, Hoffnung, & Hoffnung, 2001). I, therefore, had an unusual degree of familiarity with the topics and subtopics contained in major commercial textbooks about educational psychology, including awareness of the characteristics of the major individual texts.

I, therefore, had a dual role, serving as both teacher educator and principal investigator of an action research project. The duality created a potential conflict of interest: As a teacher, I was in a position to evaluate the quality of students' work, but as an investigator, I was in a position to publicize the work, whatever its quality. Violating the privacy of evaluations of students' work was avoided by confining analysis of the students' textbooks to their publicly posted table of contents (TCs) and to group statistics about preferred topics. Also included were students' written comments about individual textbook articles and about the text writing assignment itself. These were analyzed and are presented here, however, in ways that disguise the identities of individual students and student authors. No independent analysis (e.g., by other instructors) of the quality of students' articles was included in this particular research study, even though in the long run such analysis will obviously be important for assessing the educational value of student-written textbooks. (The resulting wiki and textbook, without evaluation, is available online at <http://ltc.umanitoba.ca/wiki/wiki/Educational_psychology>.)

Procedures: Year 1
In Year 1, two sections of the psychology of learning course participated, with enrollments of 32 and 33 students, respectively. I provided students in each of the sections with a list of 155 suggested topics about educational psychology developed from my lengthy teaching and textbook-writing experience. The topics represented a composite of topics found in a variety of commercial textbooks about introductory educational psychology. In general, therefore, the list resembled a TCs for a generic textbook in this field, though it was explicitly designed not to parallel any particular existing textbook precisely.

After I had provided a brief explanation of the topics, students signed up to write a section of 1,200–1,500 words on one of the topics. Most students chose a topic from my list, although a few proposed different topics of their own. Some degree of leeway was possible in choosing and crafting topics. Up to three students were allowed to write about any one topic. This fact that led to overlap between certain articles but often less than might be expected. Individuals were free to design their presentation of a topic as they saw fit, and therefore they often approached the same topic from different perspectives or with different priorities. In keeping with this freedom, the titles of the articles that were finally written frequently differed from the titles and terms that I offered on my initial topic list. In general there were many more possible topics than students to write about them, therefore many topics on the initially presented list remained unclaimed. Most of these, though not all, were removed from the final posted TC.

After writing and posting their textbook sections online, students chose, read, and edited a section written by one

other student. They used the wiki editing functions to facilitate this task. Editing was required to be *significant*, meaning that students had either to add about 30% more material to the original article or to change an equivalent amount of material. They also were required to add resources (usually relevant external websites) and links that cross-referenced their edited section to other relevant parts of the textbook. These steps were intended to reduce the tendency toward overspecialization of attention inherent in dividing a large writing task among many individual authors.

Procedures: Year 2

The procedures for Year 1 gave students significant freedom to choose and craft particular topics and ensured broad coverage in the final textbook as a whole. However, it limited students' freedom to some extent because the original list of 155 possible topics had been devised by me, after all, not the students. The procedures also focused students' attention on their personal contributions at the expense of attending to the book as a whole. Although overspecialization was dealt with partially by students' editing each others' contributions and by their adding cross-links within the text, these steps did not fully remedy the problem of overspecialization. Although no formal assessment of students' reading of the overall textbook was made, other research suggests that students in this sort of group work tend to focus on their personal contributions and very little on others' contributions (Bonk, Lee, Kim, & Lin, 2008; Rafael & Neto, 2007; Stevens & Slavin, 1995).

In Year 2, therefore, two procedural changes were made to ensure that coverage was not only provided in the textbook but also experienced by students in their reading for the course. The first change was to

devote more time to designing the contents of the book. Working in small groups, students were assigned to "design a complete Table of Contents for an ideal textbook about educational psychology." To support this task, I provided photocopies of the TCs of four major textbooks (those by Woolfolk, Ormrod, Snowman, and Slavin) and put sample copies of these and other textbooks on reserve in the university library. Students were also referred to the TC of the earlier edition of the online textbook developed in Year 1. Significant class time (parts of class sessions spanning 6 weeks) was allotted to developing a TC for their own textbook. Students individually also chose two or three sections of their proposed TC on which they preferred to write.

As the instructor, I examined the several TCs that resulted from the groups' work to identify overlaps and conflicts in content and assigned students particular topics to write about. As it turned out, there were no significant conflicts among groups in content proposed, though the TCs did overlap somewhat in several places (e.g., more than one group proposed topics related to special education). I was therefore able to create a master TCs from students' collective proposals. Because students had indicated more than one topic preference, I was also able to assign students to individual topics with little difficulty. The resulting composite TC was posted on the students' wiki shortly after the groups submitted their proposals. I also grouped articles that were loosely related into chapters; it is important to note, though, that I, as instructor, created the final chapter titles, not the students.

The second procedural change in Year 2 had to do with students' reading tasks. Late in the course, after writing and posting their textbook contributions,

students were assigned to read the entire textbook—the articles written by all classmates—and to select three that they considered especially useful for their purposes as future teachers. They then wrote a brief essay to explain the reasons for their choices. The meaning of "especially useful" was left deliberately open for individuals to explain. This task therefore ensured a broader reading about educational psychology than had happened in Year 1. At the same time it provided additional information about students' content priorities—about why they regarded some topics as valuable—or not.

Data Analysis

Summary descriptions of the TCs were developed for both student textbooks and for two commercial textbooks (Ormrod, 2008; Woolfolk, Winne, & Perry, 2009). The summaries followed commonly recommended procedures of content analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Neuendorf, 2002). (See Note #1 for a complete explanation of the data analysis procedures.) Terms in the TCs were grouped into 13 general categories according to their usual meaning within educational psychology (see Table 4 for a list of the categories). A profile of the content emphasis of each TC, including the students', was constructed by compiling the frequencies of the categories for each TC.

The articles recommended by students in Year 2 were classified according to the same 13 categories used for analyzing the TCs. (See Note #2 for a complete explanation of the procedure.) Each article was given a score based on how often it was recommended by students, and the resulting scores and categories provided an indication of students' content priorities. The profile was distinct from the profile implied by analysis of the students' TCs.

Results

Tables 1 summarizes the TCs of the first and second student-written editions (to save space, the TC of the 2nd ed. has been abridged). The first edition, created by two sections of "Psychology of Learning," was organized into 6 chapters, with 65 sections for the book as a whole. The second edition, created by only one section of the course, was organized into 7 chapters and 28 sections. Obviously both editions were much shorter than commercial textbooks: The first was about 25% as long, and the second was about 15% as long. Their brevity reflected the numbers of student authors available, as well as the constraints that I placed on the length and number of contributions per student. It is noteworthy that both editions covered a broad range of topics and that most of these resembled topics commonly found in commercial textbooks.

Table 2 lists the 13 categories used to organize the TCs and shows frequencies of the categories for the four textbooks. As the table shows, the frequencies varied from one textbook to another, in some cases by a ratio of 2:1 or more. In both editions of the students' textbooks, in particular, the categories of *special education* and *theories* occurred two to three times more often than in the TC of either Woolfolk or Ormrod. The categories of *assessment* and *classroom management,* on the other hand, occurred only half as often as in the TC of either Woolfolk or Ormrod.

Table 3 lists the topics (but not the original titles) of articles written for the students' 2nd ed., grouped according to the same classification scheme for categorizing the TCs. As with the TCs, article titles were assigned to topic categories based on the major intent of the actual article, even when terms in a title might sometimes refer to another category when used in some other

Table 1. *Table of Contents of Students' Textbooks*

Students' *Educational Psychology, 1ˢᵗ ed.* (65 student authors)	Students' *Educational Psychology, 2ⁿᵈ ed.* (28 student authors)
Chapter 1: The Learning Process 　　Behaviorism: Changes in what students do 　　Operant conditioning 　　Information processing and cognitive theory Chapter 2: Student Development 　　Physical and motor skill development during the school years 　　Cognitive development: The theory of Jean Piaget 　　Social development 　　Moral development: Forming a sense of rights and responsibilities Chapter 3: Student Diversity 　　Emotional intelligence 　　Gender differences in the classroom 　　Differences in cultural expectations and styles 　　Effects of poverty on children and learning 　　Physical health and learning 　　Family life 　　Assessing learning with diverse learners Chapter 4: Students With Special Educational Needs 　　Responsibilities of teachers for students with disabilities 　　Learning disabilities 　　Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder 　　Intellectual disabilities 　　Behavioral disorders 　　Students with gifts and talents Chapter 5: Motivation 　　Motivation as goals 　　Situational interest vs. personal interest 　　Learned helplessness and self-efficacy 　　Self-determination and intrinsic motivation (Parts 1 & 2) Chapter 6: Classroom Management 　　Establishing daily procedures and routines 　　Establishing classroom rules (Parts 1 & 2) 　　Eye contact 　　Communicating with parents and caregivers (Parts 1 & 2) 　　Ignoring misbehavior 　　Conflict resolution and problem solving (Parts 1 & 2)	Chapter 1: Theories of Development 　　Behaviorism 　　Piaget & Vygotsky Chapter 2: Supporting and Managing the Classroom Environment 　　Classroom community 　　Play 　　Emergent curriculum 　　Reinforcement, positive and negative 　　Discipline Chapter 3: Motivation 　　Extrinsic–Intrinsic motivation 　　Creativity 　　Self-efficacy 　　Classroom management and motivation Chapter 4: Social Relationships 　　Diversity: Ethnic and cultural 　　Relax: Getting to know, think about, & enjoy your students 　　Peer relationships 　　Respect: Among students, teachers, and the community 　　Bullying 　　Role of school counselors Chapter 5: Instruction 　　Modeling & the role model 　　Mastery learning 　　Technology: Advantages–Disadvantages Chapter 6: Inclusive Special Education 　　The inclusive classroom: Disability and accessibility 　　Understanding different types of physical and intellectual disabilities 　　Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder 　　Learning disabilities 　　Flexibility in teaching children with special needs Chapter 7: Assessment 　　Pros–Cons of holding students back 　　Types of assessments 　　Assessing students with special needs

context. The table also shows the frequencies with which each category of article was recommended by fellow students. (To preserve the privacy of students, the vote count or "popularity" is displayed only for categories, not for individual articles.) As the figures in the table show, *classroom management* accounted for over a third of the recommendations; this category, together with *motivation,* accounted for almost half of them; and four categories *(classroom management*, *motivation*, *social*, and *instructional planning)* accounted for 80% of all recommendations. At the other end of the popularity scale, *theories* and *assessment* accounted for only 2.5% and 3.8% of all recommendations, respectively.

Note that students' recommendations are not necessarily consistent with the priorities implied by the frequency of topics chosen for the students' TCs. This point is illustrated in Table 4, which shows the Pearson product–moment correlations among all four TCs with each other as well as with the students' recommendations. As the table shows, all TCs—including the students'—correlated significantly ($p < .01$) with each other, varying between 0.64 (Ormrod with students' first edition) and 0.84 (Ormrod with Woolfolk). Yet no TC correlated significantly with the students' recommendations (−0.13 to 0.33). Possible reasons for this pattern are discussed in the next section, along with implications both for teaching educational psychology and for publishing textbooks about educational psychology.

Analysis of students' written explanations of their recommendations revealed two major themes: quality of writing and inherent value for teaching. Sometimes articles were recommended, that is, simply because they were perceived as well written, regardless of topic.

At other times articles were recommended because their topic was perceived as essential to successful teaching. The themes were mentioned with about equal frequency, though value to teaching was discussed at more length, on average, than quality of writing. Of the 84 articles recommended, 75 mentioned value to teaching at least briefly, and 67 mentioned quality of writing at least briefly (many mentioned both factors). Comments about the value of teaching, however, averaged more than 200 words per recommendation, whereas comments about quality of writing averaged less than 100 words. Assuming that students were candid in their written explanations, their recommendations of articles therefore seemed primarily concerned with the importance of the topics to teaching. In this sense they seemed to be valid indicators of content priorities—possibly more valid than the students' TCs. This and related points are discussed further in the next sections.

Table 2. *Frequency of Categories in Table of Contents*

Category	1/e (%)	2/e (%)	Woolfolk's study (%)	Ormrod's study (%)
Assessment	3.7	4.5	10.2	10.2
Basic	24.1	14.9	23.1	12.5
Classroom management	4.8	4.5	10.9	9.8
Cognitive	10.7	16.4	14.5	14.0
Diversity	10.7	7.5	7.3	10.0
Family	7	0	1.4	1.2
Instructional planning	0	6	4.6	4.0
Miscellaneous	0	0	0.5	0.5
Motivation	8.6	10.4	7.0	9.2
Physical	4.3	1.5	0.4	0.9
Social	4.3	6	7.4	8.8
Special education	10.2	17.9	5.5	5.8
Teaching	0	0	0.6	1.7
Theories	11.8	10.4	6.5	11.2

Note.   1/e = first edition. 2/e = second edition.

Table 3. *Frequency of Categories in Students' Recommendations*

Category	Frequency recommended	All recommendations(%)
Assessment	3	3.8
Classroom management	28	35.4
Diversity	3	3.8
Instructional planning	9	11.4
Motivation	15	19.0
Social	12	15.2
Special education	7	8.9
Theories & Theorists	2	2.5
Total recommendations:	79	100.0

Table 4. *Pearson Product–Moment Correlations: Four Tables of Contents (TCs) and Recommendations*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Students's 1/e TC	—	0.72*	−0.13	0.77*	0.64*
2. Students's 2/e TC		—	0.14	0.66*	0.71*
3. Recommendations			—	0.20	0.34
4. Woolfolk's TC				—	0.84*
5. Ormrod's TC					—

Note.   1/e = first edition. 2/e = second edition.
*$p < .01$

Educational Significance

When asked to design an ideal textbook about educational psychology, students created a document that resembled major existing published textbooks much more than when asked to recommend parts of their textbook that they consider especially valuable or important. Results of the design task correlated with existing textbooks significantly, but results of the recommendation task, as well as explanations of the latter, did not. If the two tasks can be regarded as forms of a triangulation for discovering students' "true" priorities about educational psychology, then the two sources of information do overlap in some ways but also seem to require interpretation to reconcile the differences between them. Priorities expressed in TC design were not necessarily the priorities expressed in recommendations.

Triangulating Students' Recommendations

Clues for reconciling the differences can be found in the context of each of the students' tasks—in the constraints and opportunities that each task provided. In the first task, students acted as authors, even though they had little experience with or knowledge of academic educational psychology. They therefore relied on any prior knowledge of textbook design and any

documents at hand that seemed relevant. Prominent among the latter were existing published textbooks in the field, including the specific texts and TCs that the instructor recommended as potentially helpful in designing their own TCs. Because these materials were the primary "mental furniture" with which students worked, it is not surprising that students' own design for a text resembled previously published, successful books. Borrowing organizational ideas from these sources was understandable even though the instructor repeatedly encouraged students to identify and emphasize topics that they valued personally, regardless of their presence, absence, or emphasis in commercial textbooks. Despite this encouragement, students very sensibly realized that departing substantially from conventional textbook coverage might make them seem ignorant of what a "real" textbook about educational psychology is supposed to look like.

The second task—recommending valuable articles and justifying their choices—did not pose this same constraint. In doing this task, students worked primarily with two well-defined resources: a textbook already designed and written (their own) and their personal concerns and values about teaching. Because they had to justify their choice of preferred articles, students were less likely to choose merely shallow or thoughtless choices (though not impossible).

Departing from the emphases found in conventional published textbooks therefore carried less risk of making a student seem foolish or ignorant. On the face of it, therefore, the students' recommendations seem likely to be more valid than students' TCs as indicators of students' priorities about educational psychology.

Although there is no way to test this interpretation definitively, indirect evidence for it exists in the students' written justifications for choices among recommended articles. In general the justifications were principled and consistent with each other: Articles were judged favorably if they dealt with a teaching problem of concern (e.g., classroom management), were well-written, or both. In no case was a recommendation justified because the topic was typically published in a commercial textbook or because it conformed to any other canon of psychology. This fact may not be surprising, given that students lacked experience and knowledge of the typical canon of educational psychology. Although the evidence is suggestive, it is nonetheless only circumstantial because students in the study were not actually interviewed about their motives or prior knowledge. Future research would benefit by adding interviews about these factors, or at least by adding open-ended written surveys, to establish students' motives and starting knowledge more clearly. Presumably, students would respond to interviews or surveys in direct, honest ways—though note that ambiguities might still remain about whether students shape or edit interview responses to fit what they expect interviewers want to hear. If I, the interviewer, were not also the students' instructor (as in this study), then students' self-editing might be reduced significantly, and interviewers might be able to collect richer information about students' viewpoints.

Until interviews with students can corroborate this interpretation, however, it is premature to assume that one source—the TCs or the students' recommendations—offers better evidence of priorities than the other. For now the impression about students' priorities that is most warranted is simply this: that students' apparent priorities depend on how the priorities are assessed—through either designing a text (the TC task) or reading and recommending peers' articles (the recommendation task). For 12 out of the 13 categories of topics, students' priorities differed from those of authors of commercial textbooks, but not in systematic ways. Whether students recommended more, less, or the same amount of coverage as commercial authors depended on how the students were asked to show their preferences.

There was, however, one exception to the above generalization: the category of *assessment of learning.* Whether in designing their TCs or in making recommendations of each other's articles, students gave low priority to this particular topic. The students' textbooks gave only about 4% of their coverage to this topic, and likewise students ranked this topic highly in about 4% of their recommendations. In contrast this category received one of the largest amounts of coverage in both commercial textbooks (over 10% of their space). The students' low ranking of the category therefore deserves attention and explanation even now, in the absence of direct interviews.

Why was assessment not rated more highly by students? It is possible that their consistent ratings happened simply by chance; with thirteen categories of terms,

random variation might itself create an impression of consistency in at least one category. However, it is also possible that the apparent rejection of assessment was deliberate and meaningful to the students.

What might students mean by relegating assessment to a minor part of the students' textbook? As noted earlier, the particular students in this study were enrolled in courses focused exclusively on teaching the early grades (kindergarten through fourth grade) and generally intended to teach only in the early grades once they graduated. Many students also had prior experience working exclusively with the very young. It seems likely that these circumstances affected their content priorities about educational psychology and contributed to negative biases about assessment. The early years program followed by the students included no course per se about assessment of learning; instead curriculum instructors presented their own ideas about assessment in the context of the various curriculum courses. Their ideas generally supported relatively nontraditional, process-oriented views of assessment—ones that emphasized portfolios, for example, and other informal and process-oriented forms of evaluation. They were also generally critical of traditional paper-and-pencil testing and most especially of standardized, government-sponsored assessments of learning recently instituted for early years children. Given these circumstances, students may have been avoiding what they perceived, rightly or wrongly, to be a negative topic, classroom assessment. Although interviews of the students would help to establish whether this explanation is indeed accurate, there is already research evidence that suggests its plausibility. In a review of preservice and novice teachers' attitudes about the effectiveness of classroom assessment, for

example, Hamilton (2006) found that preservice teachers struggled consciously and "passionately" with contradictions between supporting children's individual development and what they perceived as the judgmental stance required in most forms of assessment. The students' dilemmas were felt for all forms of assessment, but they were felt most acutely when reflecting on standardized, high-stakes testing (e.g., those related to No Child Left Behind initiatives). Regarding the latter, feelings verged on hostility.

In some ways teacher education itself may contribute to the dilemmas. The B.Ed. program taken by students in this study was not unique in emphasizing the importance of fostering children's independence and development and in minimizing attention to assessment. Following on recommendations by Feiman-Nemser (2001), for example, Mewborn and Stinson (2007) described in ethnographic detail how preservice teachers were guided in one teacher education program to focus thoroughly on development of personal beliefs about good teaching. Notable in the program was an absence of evaluation of the preservice teachers' success as this large task, as well as silence about whether the preservice teachers' reflections included developing, changing, or both, their beliefs about assessment. Judging by the account, the topic of assessment was avoided.

Avoidance may contribute to de facto persistence of "old fashioned" (judgment oriented) beliefs about assessment. Such at least was implied by a study of experienced teachers in the United Kingdom by Marshall and Drummond (2006). This study focused on modifying teachers' assessment of students toward what they called "assessment for learning," which were practices that promoted

students' autonomy by continually providing information to students about their progress and specific learning needs. The researchers were primarily concerned with identifying qualities of teachers successful with assessment, the very existence of the study implied that most teachers initially view assessment as judgments of students (assessment of learning) rather than as support for students (assessment for learning). If this attitude were not prevalent to begin with, there would have been no need to study why select teachers adopt progressive practices.

Implications for Teaching Educational Psychology

Even though students' priorities can be clarified further by additional studies, the current study itself has implications for both the teaching of educational psychology and the publication of textbooks about educational psychology. With regard to teaching educational psychology, the study suggests that creating student-written textbook can be an effective tool in preservice teacher education, assigned either as a supplement to a traditional commercial textbook or even as its replacement. For it to be effective, however, requires giving students both ample time to formulate their goals for the book, as well as incentives for reading and reflecting on the entire book rather than on just their own contributions. In this study, for example, students had about 6 weeks to prepare the initial table of contents, and they wrote brief assessments of several classmates' articles. These arrangements seemed adequate, though no doubt other arrangements are also worth exploring.

In addition to class time, students would benefit from discussion of the nature of textbooks as a literary and rhetorical form—how textbooks compare with research reports and fictional works, and how authors' values, commitments, and personal histories influence content and style. There is ample literature about these topics, much of it written with university students, if not preservice teachers, in mind (Barton, 2007; Collins & Blot, 2003). Textbook literacy cannot be left unexamined because it guides students' decisions in designing their own book and affects their interpretations of what they and their classmates write.

In the present study, no attention was given to these matters, and students therefore had to rely on their preexisting ideas about textbooks, which presumably were undeveloped, stereotyped, or both. This circumstance may have rendered the text-writing assignment relatively uninteresting or unmotivating. It should be noted that in class, students occasionally complained about the assignment being "too theoretical" and not grounded well enough in their immediate concerns about learning to teach. Final student evaluations confirmed that many students felt similarly: creating a textbook did not focus their attention enough on issues of daily teaching. Although perceptions of excessive theory are common in preservice teacher education courses, they seemed to the instructor to be more frequent than usual in this case.

Development of a critical knowledge of textbooks—their status as forms of literacy—would free students more fully from stereotyped notions of what textbook prose should look like and be interpreted by readers. Broader, flexible notions of textbook literacy in turn would make writing such a book both more motivating and more truly diagnostic of students' priorities about educational psychology. Because students vary in many ways, the chances are that their true content priorities will vary as well.

If students are freed of stereotyped constraints about the purposes of textbooks, their personal diversity might be expressed more fully in self-designed TCs, in their recommendations about textbook topics, or both. Urban students who are aiming to teach high school, for example, might express different priorities for learning educational psychology than would rural students who are aiming to teach the primary grades. Such differences would be relatively easy to accommodate if students designed their own textbook about the field. They would be harder to accommodate if students all learned from a single, "universal" volume, such as is normally provided by commercial publishers. In that case differentiating instruction will be more challenging.

With a universal text, fewer chapters or sections may be assigned by the instructor (or read by students even if assigned), simply because more parts of the book may be considered not relevant. An instructor may feel compelled to assign additional readings to compensate for mismatches between students' priorities and those of the textbook. In addition, the instructor may have to work harder to convince students that ideas presented in the text as universal really do apply to the personal and work circumstances of students. In one way or another, all of these challenges are instances of the oft-noted gap between theory and practice in education—between academic knowledge of educational psychology, in this case, and personally constructed professional knowledge and commitments.

Implications for Publishing Textbooks About Educational Psychology

Publishers of textbooks about educational psychology or related fields can therefore provide more effective books if they respond to students' priorities directly, and not simply as they are filtered through the recommendations of instructors. As this study suggests, students have identifiable priorities about content, and these do not necessarily match the priorities found in existing major textbooks. If students recommend classroom management consistently, as in this study, then publishers may want to expand coverage of this topic well beyond what is found in current educational psychology texts. If they avoid prioritizing the assessment of learning consistently, then publishers may want to encourage authors who can explicitly acknowledge and respect students' reasons for the avoidance, while also honoring instructors' desire (assuming it exists) to make assessment an important topic of introductory educational psychology.

More challenging for publishers will be topics that are favored by some groups of students but not by others. What if one group of preservice students (future kindergarten teachers, let us suppose) favors play or inquiry as a learning medium, but another group (future high school physics teachers, let us suppose) favors direct teaching and assessment of learning? In cases like these, it will be important for publishers to experiment with business models that deemphasize a one-content-fits-all product and that support individualization of content as strongly as possible.

Publishers have already taken steps in this direction by offering to print "customized" editions of textbooks— printing and binding a set of chapters from a larger book that an adopting instructor chooses. This practice is also facilitated by "modularization" of content (creating very short chapters). So far these steps have had only modest market success, possibly because they still draw on content that is

initially written to be as fully universal as possible. Even more innovative steps therefore remain to be taken. The strengths of the Internet, in particular, have not yet been exploited fully. Internet resource centers for teaching educational psychology, for example, can be created akin to existing resource centers for teaching introductory psychology (see http://intropsychresources.com) and other specializations within psychology (see http://personalitypedagogy.arcadia.edu or http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/crow). Such centers can potentially offer even more resources from a wider range of contributors than existing proprietary websites keyed to just one textbook and thus offer individualized materials to a greater degree than in the past. Wikis and blogs provide easy-to-use tools for collecting and publicizing such materials. In particular, as shown in this study, wikis work well for critiquing textbooks and for adding material to them, and in these ways they work well for tailoring the emphasis of such texts to local needs. The textbooks thus critiqued and enhanced can be student written, as in this study, or written by expert authors and published commercially.

Such changes will necessitate new business models for textbook publishing. Instead of a single large text filled with many features as the centerpiece of a textbook package, for example, perhaps the individualized extras need to be treated as the most valuable features and therefore the most marketable. The text itself would be relatively small and inexpensive by current standards, but it would point toward ancillary features that would be tailor-made for identifiable adopters, and for which they would have to pay. Examples of this sort of business model have already proved successful in other major products that use the Internet. Adobe Acrobat essentially gives its widely used PDF file reader software away, for example, and it makes money instead by selling "ancillaries" that facilitate desk-top publishing and the writing of PDF files. Likewise Google simply gives away its browser, making money from selling advertisements and other individualized enhancements to its services. In both cases the central product is simple, broadly useful, and free; it simultaneously serves the public and leads individuals to services that not only more tailor-made but also more profitable.

In any case, instructors of educational psychology are responsible not for the success of the publishing industry but for the success of students. Given this role, it seems important to take into account students' priorities about the content of this field, however they are expressed or implied. The present study demonstrated two ways to do so—using a wiki-based to design a student-written textbook and asking students to reflect on their own priorities among topics about educational psychology. It also suggested that classroom management in particular may hold special importance for preservice students and that greater coverage of this topic in introductory educational psychology may therefore be welcomed. For reasons already indicated, however, this last conclusion needs further investigation. More thorough triangulation of students' priorities, through interviews or surveys, should provide instructors with even better advice about what they ought to be teaching.

Notes

1. Data analysis of the TCs consisted of the following steps:

a. Every TC was transcribed into a simple Word document format;

b. Each meaningful term in the TC was listed and counted by using the "find and replace" scanning function of Word (though a few terms were excluded from the listing, as explained below);

c. Terms were grouped into one of 13 general categories according to their meaning within educational psychology (see Table 4 for explanations of the categories);

d. Terms with ambiguous meanings were classified *more* than once according to the main purpose implied by the context of each occurrence [e.g., occurrences of the term *attention* were classified three ways depending on its context of usage: (a) as related to special education, as in *attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder*; (b) as related to cognition, as in information processing; or (c) as related to classroom management, as in ensuring orderly learning in class.];

e. The frequency of each category was tallied for each TC, and the relative frequency of the category was indicated by converting the frequencies to percentages of occurrences of all categories;

f. A profile of the content emphasis of each TC was constructed by compiling the relative frequencies of the categories for each TC;

g. The content emphases of TCs were compared by examining the profiles of TCs for the students' texts and the two commercial texts (Ormrod, 2008; and Woolfolk et al., 2009).

Note that prepositions and conjunctions (e.g., the words *what, the, an, of, but)* were omitted from analysis, as were a few words that lacked unique meaning within educational psychology (e.g., in the TC heading, *So you want to become a teacher,* the words *want* and *become* were omitted, but not the word *teacher).* To ensure comparability between students' and commercial texts, in addition, terms from chapter titles were also omitted. These had been devised by the instructor for the

students' texts, but (obviously) not for the commercial texts.

2. Classifying students' recommendations about topics for educational psychology consisted of the following steps:

Each student-written article received a score based on how often it was recommended by other students. Each of the 13 *categories* then received a score equal to the sum of the scores of the articles belonging to that category. No attempt was made to differentiate among first, second, and third choices of articles, even though students were allowed to recommend and rank three articles. Each type of recommendation was weighted equally. The resulting frequencies of the categories, expressed as percentages, provided a representation of students' content priorities—one distinct from the choices implied by the students' TCs, and which therefore "triangulated" those choices. Reasons for students' recommendations were assessed by analyzing students' essays that explained their choice of articles. Coding of the essays followed steps commonly used in the qualitative analysis of written discourse (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007): Terms recurring in the essays were identified, and closely related terms were grouped into dimensions or themes.

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Kelvin Seifert is professor of educational psychology at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. His research interests include the personal identity development of teachers, the impact of peers in preservice teacher education, and the development of effective strategies of blended learning. He is also the author of four university textbooks (with Houghton Mifflin, in traditional print format) about educational psychology and developmental psychology. During his career of over 35 years, he has taught introductory educational psychology over 75 times.