The system could very well revolutionize the content of books and the tools of the book business much like ATMs have changed banking. Accounting data like sales, store billings, copyright fees for anthologized texts, and author royalties would be available instantaneously. Funds would transfer with similar speed. Publishers may choose to make chapters of books available at prorated costs, allow professors to download free copies, or even allow users to print or copy certain sections of text, such as forms or study guides. Other changes could include the elimination of printing and binding, understocks, overstocks, freight, returns, shrinkage, damaged books, used books, the resale of comp copies, copyright violation, and deforestation.

And the eventual elimination of the college store? Not likely, says Saigh. The college store "remains a completely logical location for Microtome kiosks." Stores will, as today, receive a percentage of each sale of each book. Libraries, too, can have Microtome kiosks, but books from those machines will "erase" themselves after a predetermined period. Saigh anticipates a far smaller charge for a borrowed book than a purchased one, thus providing a cost recovery mechanism for libraries as well as an incentive for publishers to brings books to libraries via VPR.

"VPR, in essence, is a conduit for publishers," says Saigh. "We're neutral. Our business mission is not to be 'a publisher' but rather to provide book dissemination for publishers. Our goals are to make and save money for publishers, for stores, and for readers in general. Our focus is on reading and books."

Having displayed prototypes of the VPR Mentor, VPR Scholar, and VPR Link at CAMEX 1992 in New Orleans, VPR Systems, Ltd. will undergo the first phase of their rollout in January 1993 with a test market of four or five campuses. In September of that year, the company hopes to be at the college stores and libraries of approximately 250 colleges and universities.

THE SITUATIONAL ASPECT OF WRITER'S BLOCK

By Susan X Day, TAA #414

Third in a Series

Susie Day received her bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Illinois State University (1971, 1973), has been an instructor and lecturer there since 1973, has written or co-authored twelve college textbooks in the field of English, and has nevertheless managed to lead an exciting and varied life. Susie is now studying to be a psychotherapist; her thesis research concerns writer's block. With a colleague in psychology, she is currently writing a text on psychology of women.

The first two articles in this series (*TAA Report* July and October 1992) concerned emotional and cognitive factors that contribute to writer's block. In this final article, I will take up a factor that affects us all as writers of long, complex, and mainly self-paced projects: our current situation.

Psychologist Kurt Lewin, in the 1950s, directed attention to the fact that an individual is always behaving *within* an environment, and the two may be inseparable. Lewin called the total environment the *field*, and his approach is called field theory. The writing task itself is part of our environment. For example, consider the difference between writing a business letter and writing the opening of a chapter in a textbook. Watching you at one of these jobs, we might conclude that you are a fluent, fast, and confident writer, while if we viewed you in the other situation, you would look like a struggling, anxious, or even avoidant writer. We could not accurately label you as either type without knowing the situation. And which task evokes which behavior is an entirely individual matter.

Your larger situation also affects your writing behavior. Lynn Z. Bloom observed and interviewed two blocked dissertation writers over periods of two and four years. One completed her dissertation, and the other has not.

Sarah, who finally finished her dissertation with the help of counseling, was in a typical situation: after finishing her course work at an excellent school, she got a teaching appointment at another university and intended to write her dissertation while teaching. However, her conscientiousness (class preparation, paper grading, and committee involvement) in her new job not only swallowed her time but earned her opportunities to get administrative experience that she felt she should not turn down, which took more time.

The demands of her work site were imminent, while the dissertation work languished with both pressures and rewards remote. The work she did do was "procrastination in the name of preparation" (Bloom's words), as she collected materials and reorganized her paper endlessly. With counseling and a newly formed dissertation support group on her work campus, she was able to complete her project.

The demands of other work, especially teaching, are mixed blessings for textbook writers. While we get much of our inspiration about what belongs in a text from our teaching, at the same time the job puts us in a situation where the writing keeps getting pushed to the bottom of the "To Do" list, with other tasks more pressing. Many of us never get around to publishing

continued

WORKS BY MEMBERS

Sally Wendkos Olds
TAA #470

Human Development, fifth edition, by Sally Wendkos Olds and Diane E. Papalia. McGraw-Hill.

The publisher reports that the book has been adopted at 500 colleges around the United States, in addition to adoptions in other countries. The book has been translated into Spanish, French and Chinese and is the leading text in its field of lifespan development. A sixth edition is scheduled for publication late in 1994. The sixth edition of these authors' first book, *A Child's World: Infancy Through Adolescence*, has just been published.

Sandra Reynolds Grabowski
TAA #1274

Principles of Anatomy and Physiology, seventh edition, by Tortora and Grabowski, Harper Collins College Publishers.

Sandy Grabowski is a new co-author for this edition. The publication has culminated in an end to a "three-year gestation period," according to her. This edition features an enhanced coverage of physiology, a revised art program and an unparalleled ancillary program, according to the publisher.

until our teaching loads decrease with seniority--and then we risk losing contact with the very students who comprise our audience. In my own area, for example, very few authors of freshman composition texts are actually still teaching English 101. They have moved on to teach courses in which the paper load is lighter, and they have time to write.

Another situational constraint on a teacher who would like to write textbooks is the school's attitudes toward the accomplishment. Luckily, at Illinois State University's English Department, textbooks are regarded as legitimate scholarly pursuits and count in our ratings as both teachers and scholars. However, many departments are not this enlightened. Thus, a professor seeking promotion and tenure will be encouraged to channel energy into more esoteric projects.

Like Sarah, textbook writers often suffer from their distance from advisors and supporters, especially when they don't have co-authors. The isolated situation is discouraging. Decisions that might be made in an hour of brainstorming with a peer become lengthy struggles when we are alone. Our relations with our editors are complicated by distance, the press of their other projects, and the disconcerting turnovers in the publishing industry. One of the major benefits of TAA is the easing of our isolation.

Even with the problems of exile, dissertation writers usually finish their projects in cases where job retention or betterment depends upon it. Without this exigency, they usually don't finish. Exigency rarely motivates textbook writers: how many of your colleagues say that they "always wanted to write a textbook, but never got around to it"? Their jobs clearly didn't hinge on that book. We choose our priorities based on immediate pressures.

Many people are unable or unwilling to choose their priorities freely. Lynn Z. Bloom's second case study falls into this group: Bloom titles the narrative "Ellen: A Study in Contextual Interference." Ellen had two children during her nine years in graduate school; her family pattern assigned her the caretaking of the children and the household. In the family's small apartment, there was no space where she could leave her materials out between writing sessions, and her husband, the breadwinner, did not see Ellen's work as a high priority. She also had no training in how to pursue an extended research project, and her advisor assumed that his graduate students knew how. Bloom writes, "To resolve Ellen's writing problems would require a marriage therapist in addition to a writing specialist."

The duties of a wife and mother are major contextual barriers to women's writing, a problem eloquently described in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Sara Ruddick and Pamela Daniel's *Working It Out* (1977) and Tillie Olsen's *Silences* (1965). *Silences* includes the duties of sister and daughter, as well, as Olsen gives examples like Dorothy Wordsworth and Alice James, who devoted themselves to the comfort of the brilliant men in their families.