

RECOMMENDATION No. 48

concerning the

PREPARATION, SELECTION AND USE OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

The International Conference on Public Education,

Convened in Geneva by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Bureau of Education, having assembled on the sixth of July, nineteen hundred and fifty-nine for its twenty-second session, adopts on the thirteenth of July, nineteen hundred and fifty-nine the following Recommendation:

The Conference,

Considering Recommendation No. 15 to the Ministries of Education concerning the drafting, utilisation and choice of school textbooks, adopted on the twenty-second of July, nineteen hundred and thirty-eight by the International Conference on Public Education at its seventh session,

Considering that, whatever method is used for the publication of school textbooks (State monopoly, completely unrestricted private initiative; a combination allowing either State control or free production; publication by private industry with the possible provision of subsidies or other facilities by public authorities), nothing should be neglected in the effort to ensure that textbooks used in primary schools correspond, in content and appearance, to the requirements of modern educational science,

Considering that, in order to meet present-day needs, close collaboration between authors, publishers and teachers is increasingly necessary,

Considering that, according to reliable estimates, the publication of school books represents half of the world book production and that textbooks are published in larger editions than any other type of work,

R 48

Considering that the procedure governing the selection of textbooks from among those published can have a direct influence on the part this teaching aid has to play in educational activity,

Considering that, from both the social and educational points of view, it is of vital importance that no pupil should be denied the opportunity of obtaining the textbooks used in each primary class,

Considering that although the most important role in class work is undoubtedly played by the teacher, the school textbook is nevertheless a valuable aid which can help him bring life to his teaching,

Considering that, generally speaking and especially in schools where the teacher is obliged to work under difficult conditions (over-large classes, one-teacher schools, etc.), the textbook is an indispensable instrument for the educator,

Considering that in some cases the school textbook is the first book to come into the home and should therefore form as it were the core of a small family library,

Considering that the school textbook is not only a teaching aid but also an important instrument of moral education, developing the pupil's social attitudes, his respect for work and a sense of brotherhood between nations,

Considering that education and culture are the most rapid and easy means of bringing nations closer and helping them to know each other, and that textbooks can contribute in the same way as the teacher's words and general attitude to greater understanding among peoples,

Considering that international assistance and collaboration can help to improve textbooks as regards their composition, publication and use,

Submits to the Ministries of Education of the different countries the following Recommendation:

Composition

1) In view of the role of school textbooks in primary education it is important that, whatever the system applied for compiling them, education authorities should pay increasing attention to the quality of these books from all points of view.

2) Especially in countries where the composition of textbooks is the prerogative of private initiative, it is advisable to ensure that books used in teaching should be of an unquestionably high scientific, educational and aesthetic standard.

3) In view of requirements both as regards the content of school textbooks and their value as aids to teaching, it is increasingly desirable that there should be collaboration during the drafting between specialists in educational research, specialists in the subjects treated and the staff who will teach them.

4) Competitions between authors or group of authors may help to improve the quality of school textbooks.

5) Especially in countries where the publishing of textbooks is the direct responsibility of a public authority, it seems desirable to appoint drafting commissions or committees to work on their composition.

6) When the composition of school textbooks is entrusted to drafting commissions or committees, these bodies ought to include, among others, primary teachers in charge of classes for the corresponding level drawn from environments as varied as possible.

7) When circumstances permit, recourse to the experimental method offers definite advantages; the preliminary use of a proposed textbook in a limited number of classes enables the opinion, suggestions and criticisms of educators who have employed it on a trial basis to be collected.

Publication

8) In countries where private initiative plays a part in the publication of textbooks for primary schools, the education authorities might arrange competitions between publishing houses for the purpose of raising the quality and reducing the cost price of the works published.

9) Whatever the practice adopted for the publication of school textbooks, it is desirable to use all possible means to continue the improvement noted during the past few years as regards typography, illustration, binding, etc.

10) In countries where production is too limited to allow every pupil to have the books required for the whole curriculum for each class, it is important to take emergency measures giving priority to textbook publication over the production of less indispensable types of school equipment.

11) In agreement with the other authorities concerned (national economy, finance, customs, etc.), the education authorities should study the means of organizing the production and possibly the importation of textbooks as efficiently as possible; this should lead to a reduction in cost and sale prices without, however, reducing the quality.

R 48

12) Countries obliged, for lack of sufficient means of production, to import school textbooks from abroad would do well to require that these be adapted as completely as possible to the country's syllabuses and to its national characteristics.

13) In countries of a centralized type where school textbooks are published for use throughout the whole national territory, it would be advisable, especially in the case of geography and natural science, to provide for adaptations which would take into account local or at least regional differences.

14) In countries' of a decentralized type which have adopted the practice of official publication of textbooks, the education authorities of the different administrative areas should agree to publish textbooks for certain subjects jointly, so that the number of copies printed may be increased and the cost price reduced.

15) Very careful attention should be given to legibility (choice of type and arrangement) especially for readers intended for the first school years.

16) Although illustrations, particularly in colour, tend to increase the price of textbooks, consideration should be given to the fact that they aid in comprehension and assimilation particularly in subjects of an abstract nature, in which case they are indispensable, and in books for beginners.

17) Since the artistic presentation of the textbook exerts a direct influence on the pupils' aesthetic education, it is desirable to follow the example of the progress made in the field of books for children's leisure reading, both recreational and instructive.

18) In view of the constant wear and tear on school textbooks, consideration should be given to the quality of the paper and to the strength of the binding.

Selection

19) In countries where the publication of textbooks for primary schools is the prerogative of private industry, or is not the exclusive responsibility of the education authorities, one of the best means of ensuring that textbooks used are of good quality is to draw up and keep up to date lists of selected works from which a final choice should be made for each school or group of schools.

20) Committees appointed to draw up lists of selected textbooks should be completely objective in their choice, taking into account educational and scientific quality, presentation and sale price, as well as pos-

sible reactions on the part of parents; such committees should in any case include representatives of the primary teaching staff.

21) Where the teacher is left free to choose the textbooks he will use, it is desirable, in the interest of the pupils and of the teaching in general, that every means should be employed to ensure the suitability of the teacher's choice and to preserve the normal progression of instruction from one class to the next.

Distribution and purchase

22) The free distribution of textbooks to all primary school pupils is the logical corollary of the principle of compulsory schooling.

23) In countries where, for financial reasons, this principle cannot be fully applied, free textbooks should be supplied as widely as possible for all those categories of children who have difficulty in obtaining them; to this end the education authorities and the teaching staff, in collaboration with parent's associations and school cooperatives should find means to provide free textbooks for children who are unable to buy them themselves.

24) It is desirable that textbooks, particularly those for the last primary school year, should remain the property of the pupil, so that he may build up around them a small personal library, which would help to cultivate in him the taste and respect for books and a love of culture.

25) When free textbooks are supplied to primary school pupils as a loan, appropriate hygienic measures should be taken before the books are put back into circulation; the state of each volume should also be verified to make sure that it is fit for re-utilization.

26) When responsibility for obtaining textbooks lies with the child's parents or guardians, special steps should be introduced, even the regulation of the sale price, to ensure that the purchase of textbooks is not too heavy a burden.

Textbooks and teaching methods

27) Primary school textbooks should reflect the progress made in educational science, facilitate the application of methods based on child psychology and correspond to the use which teachers and pupils will make of them.

R 48

28) The author of textbooks should aim not only at a logical arrangement of the subject matter but also, and above all, at adapting his material to the interests and mental capacity of the pupil.

29) The school textbook should offer a body of facts, ideas and suggestions; the material it provides (texts, documents, illustrations, maps, diagrams, questions, etc.) should also make possible or even necessary the use of methods which will encourage an exchange of ideas between the teacher and his pupils.

30) Everything possible should be done to see that information given in textbooks corresponds to the facts and is kept up to date, particularly as regards statistics and scientific concepts.

31) School textbooks should not refer to subject matter which is not in the syllabus used for the classes for which they are intended.

32) The school textbook is an aid for both teacher and pupils and should not be considered as an easy way out; the teacher should aim at bringing out and imparting an understanding of the main ideas in the book, which for the pupil will act as a guide and aid to memory.

33) Where appropriate to the subject or the method of instruction, each lesson or chapter in textbooks might well be followed by a series of questions and a list of activities or practical work designed to check and consolidate what has been learnt and to help train the child's mind and develop his abilities.

34) The textbook should not be used solely for the acquisition of basic ideas and the memorization of essential notions, but whenever appropriate to the subject it should contain a selection of extracts from specialized works in order to encourage the personal acquisition of knowledge and open up the mind to wider horizons.

35) Particular care should be given to the vocabulary and modes of expression used in textbooks for primary schools, so that difficulties of comprehension are not added to those arising from the knowledge to be assimilated.

36) New textbooks should be introduced at the same time as new syllabuses when the latter present differences of spirit or appreciable changes as compared with those which were used before.

37) In addition to the textbooks distributed to pupils individually it is desirable to place works of reference at their disposal, in order to give them a taste for personal research, the school or class library becomes in this way an indispensable addition to the textbook.

38) The trend apparent in several countries towards the general use of teaching guides or teacher's handbooks worked out in close relation to the textbooks used in class is to be encouraged.

Textbooks and international cooperation

39) Primary school textbooks should play a constructive part in the field of international understanding, with a view to fostering universal brotherhood and effective cooperation between nations; it is therefore important for all countries to take direct or indirect steps to see that the various textbooks are free from any element which might prejudice understanding between nations, social groups, races or religions.

40) It is highly desirable that joint committees of educators should be formed, as has already been done by many countries, with the purpose of eliminating from school textbooks anything which might harm mutual understanding among their respective peoples; regional or international educational organizations are in a particularly good position to encourage the formation of such joint committees.

41) School textbooks should be imbued with a spirit of sincere respect for other peoples and with the idea of international cooperation and understanding, and should, where appropriate, supply more detailed information about other countries and the role of international organizations.

42) International collections of school textbooks have rendered, and should do so still more in the future, great service to authors and editors; education authorities, teachers, authors and editors should be aware of the existence of these international collections.

43) It is obviously an advantage for international collections of school textbooks to be as complete or as representative as possible; methods, not necessarily the same for all countries, of attaining this end and of keeping the collections up to date should be worked out.

44) National and international centres of educational documentation should keep textbook collections up to date and organize the exchange of textbooks among the various countries concerned.

45) Temporary exhibitions of school textbooks containing specimens of textbooks in use abroad as well as those employed in the country are one of the most effective means of helping the improvement of textbooks from every aspect.

R 48

46) When undertaking the revision of school textbooks those responsible for the new editions would do well either to send specialists to consult existing international collections of textbooks or to borrow specimen copies of textbooks in use in other countries.

47) International organizations and inter-governmental bodies should arrange, as part of their technical assistance programmes, to send experts in primary textbook composition and publication to countries requesting it.