Textbooks Contribute to World Understanding

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Ideas gained from school texts often shape our national policies, says Professor Quillen, School of Education, Stanford University. He describes continual efforts being made to improve textbooks.

"THE TEACHING OF HISTORY depends largely upon the textbooks used in the schools; and upon that teaching rests, to a large degree, our conception as to the character of nations and national policies." 1 This statement was written in 1917 by James T. Shotwell. Although the radio, newspaper and motion picture are powerful sources of information and shapers of attitude, this statement still contains much truth today. However, not only history textbooks, but also geography, reading, literature, language, science, mathematics and other textbooks and teaching materials affect the understanding and attitudes of youth concerning other nations, peace and war.

Childhood Attitudes Persist

Understandings and attitudes formed in childhood persist into adulthood, and the opinions and attitudes of most literate adults have been conditioned by the textbooks and teaching materials they studied in school. This fact has long been recognized.

After World War I, efforts to improve history and other textbooks as aids to peace became a world-wide movement. The International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations provided world leadership, but many national and international organizations made significant contributions. In the United States such groups as the American Association of University Women and the American Council on Education conducted extensive studies. Abroad, the work of the Norden Association in improving history textbooks has been given a large measure of credit for the understanding and cooperation that developed among the Scandinavian nations.

UNESCO WORKS TO IMPROVE TEXTBOOKS

Since World War II, international leadership in the improvement of textbooks and teaching materials as aids to international understanding has been provided by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Work on a program for the improvement of textbooks was begun while UNESCO was still operating under its Preparatory Commission. One of the organization's earliest documents was entitled, Looking at the World Through Textbooks (Doc. C/9). At the first meeting of UNESCO's General

Conference in Paris in 1946, a nine-point program for the improvement of textbooks and teaching materials was adopted and subsequent meetings of the General Conference have continued and extended this program.

Action in carrying out UNESCO's program for textbook improvement began slowly, but during the past two years it has been accelerated and several concrete things have been accomplished. One of UNESCO's main efforts is directed toward establishment of a world clearing house of information on textbook improvement. Toward this end documentation has been assembled, inquiries have been sent to member states, and bibliographies and summaries of past and present activities prepared. The UNESCO Secretariat also is seeking to provide tools that can be used by interested individuals and groups in the various nations of the world, and to stimulate and coordinate action at both national and international levels.

A Model Plan for the improvement of textbooks and teaching materials and the specifications for a study by member states of their own textbooks have been prepared and distributed. The study by member states seeks to determine the treatment in textbooks of the agencies of international cooperation since 1918. Several nations are now engaged in making this study and a few have completed it.

In 1949 UNESCO published A Handbook for the Improvement of Textbooks and Teaching Materials, which contains a history of the textbook improvement movement, a description of UNESCO's program, the various documents prepared by the Secretariat, and other materials.

The work of UNESCO in textbook improvement is not confined to the collection and preparation of documents. It works directly with occupation authorities in Germany and Japan to assist in textbook improvement. In France, preparation of an upper grades national history textbook written from a world point of view is being subsidized by UNESCO. During this past summer, a UNESCO international seminar on the improvement of textbooks was held in Belgium. This seminar provided an opportunity for experts from many nations to share experiences concerning past problems and achievements in the effort to improve textbooks and teaching materials and to make plans for future action.

Textbook Studies in the United States

The UNESCO Secretariat, operating on its very small budget, is limited severely in what it can do. Hence, ultimate success or failure of the effort to improve textbooks and teaching materials will depend largely on the support UNESCO receives from individuals and groups who can assist in achieving its ends. In the United States the American Council on Education has taken leadership in sponsoring several important studies to improve textbooks. Some of these studies were begun before UNESCO was organized and funded directly from the UNESCO Secretariat or from the International Documents Service of the Columbia University Press.

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some have been made in support of UNESCO's program.

One of the earliest American Council studies, made in cooperation with the Institute of Pacific Relations, was entitled, Treatment of Asia in American Textbooks. This study showed that textbooks tended to neglect Asia and to treat it with an imperialistic point of view. Another extensive study of the American Council was entitled, Latin America in School and College Teaching Materials. This study was supported financially by the office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. It is the most extensive textbook study that has been conducted in the United States and includes an analysis of a large number of textbooks on all levels of education, as well as biographies, motion pictures, slides, songs and music, and art objects. The report states that there was more good material available on Latin America than ever before, but there was a widespread tendency to perpetuate the "Black Legend" of Spanish colonial ineptitude, greed, and bigotry and to view Latin America in terms of the value judgments of Anglo-America.

The most recent of the American Council studies to be reported is entitled, Intergroup Relations in Teaching Materials. This was an extended study supported by a grant from the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The study revealed that there was little intentional bias in textbooks toward minority groups but that there were serious errors of omission and some inaccurate and prejudicial material.

One of the studies in which the American Council participated represented international cooperation in textbook improvement. It was conducted by the Canada-United States Committee on Education and reported under the title, A Study of National History Textbooks Used in the Schools of Canada and the United States. In this study, educators from the United States and Canada analyzed the treatment of Canada in American history textbooks and the treatment of the United States in Canadian history textbooks. The main conclusion of the study of American history textbooks was that the treatment of Canada suffered by omission and unbalance. The report recommended specific content on Canada for inclusion in textbooks.

During the past three years the U. S. National Commission for UNESCO has been giving direction to the carrying out of UNESCO's program for textbook improvement within the United States. In 1947, the National Commission requested the American Council on Education to make a survey of the textbook improvement movement in the United States and to draft a model

plan for textbook analysis. The American Council, in turn, requested the author of this article to prepare a report on the above topics, and this report was published under the title, Textbook Improvement and International Understanding. The report was prepared under the direction of the Committee on International Education and Cultural Relations of the Council, and it contains a more extended analysis and appraisal of the studies referred to above, as well as many others.

The study of the treatment of agencies of international cooperation since 1918, requested by UNESCO, has been conducted in the United States through the cooperation of the U. S. National Commission, the Office of Education, and the American Council on Education, with financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation. This study was conducted under the direction of Dr. Dorothy McClure of the U. S. Office of Education with the assistance of a small staff and the counsel of an Advisory Board. The report is completed and is being published by the U. S. National Commission. It analyzes and appraises the treatment of international agencies, with particular reference to the UN, in American and world history textbooks and makes specific recommendations for improvement.

The U. S. National Commission requested the University of Illinois to assist in the orientation of the United States members of the UNESCO seminar on textbook improvement held last summer in Belgium. Hence, the university held a conference last spring which consisted of a group of historians, geographers, educators, and editors interested in textbook improvement and the group from the United States that had been selected to attend the seminar. There were extended discussions of the kinds of questions that should be studied in the seminar and plans were made to utilize the seminar members extensively as leaders in textbook improvement during the coming year.

HOW EDUCATORS CAN HELP

This article has attempted to summarize briefly the efforts that are being made to improve textbooks and teaching materials as aids to world understanding. The question remaining is: What can curriculum workers, supervisors, and teachers contribute to the improvement of textbooks? Some of the concrete things that can be done are to:

1. Examine carefully the various studies referred to in this article and others that are available, in order to become aware of the kinds of things in textbooks and teaching materials that contribute to misunderstanding and prejudice.

2. Utilize basic studies and other references to become familiar with the kind of content that leads to international understanding and cooperation.

3. Analyze the curriculum in our schools in order to eliminate negative material and to introduce wherever possible experiences, content and materials that will contribute to international understanding.

4. Utilize effective criteria concerning international and intergroup relations in the selection of textbooks and teaching materials. Some of the criteria recommended by UNESCO in its
Model Plan are:

5. Participate in making textbook studies and in the preparation of adequate textbooks and teaching materials.  
6. Continue to keep informed about efforts to improve textbooks and teaching materials and help to inform others.  

The achievement and maintenance of peace is the greatest challenge of our times. In the long run, textbooks and teaching materials will make an important contribution to the development of the understandings and attitudes necessary to secure and maintain a peaceful world. UNESCO is exercising effective leadership in the improvement of textbooks at the international level, and the U. S. National Commission and many individuals and groups are working at the task within the United States. But the improvement of textbooks requires the cooperation of many people—teachers, school administrators, authors, editors, and school book publishers. Such work must also have the sympathetic understanding and support of lay leaders.

One of the major problems is to get an effective use of the knowledge that is already available. In the United States our textbooks are relatively good. They display very little deliberate bias and their treatment of other countries is generally accurate and sympathetic. However, the studies that have already been made show that there are some deficiencies both in omission and commission. It is important that textbook authors, editors, and publishers working closely with teachers, school administrators and public leaders continue their efforts to improve textbooks and teaching materials in order to make them more effective aids to international understanding, cooperation, and peace.

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