

Letters from Abroad

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UNESCO's Program for Textbook Improvement

The work of UNESCO represents the joint efforts of many nations in dealing with educational issues, including what goes on in the schools of the world. In an earlier issue I. James Quillen discussed efforts at textbook improvement, both national and international. In this article Richard M. Perdeu, an American member of the UNESCO staff, Educational Department, discusses additional past accomplishments and further plans for textbook improvement throughout the world.

—GHF.

UNESCO's program for textbook improvement is based on the belief that statesmen and educators can unite in an international effort to improve textbooks for better world understanding. The original textbook program was largely planned by I. James Quillen of Stanford University, whose work in UNESCO in 1948-49 involved the preparation of *A Handbook for the Improvement of Textbooks and Teaching Materials* (UNESCO Publication No. 368, Paris, 1949). This work summarizes textbook revision activities since 1918, outlines UNESCO's plans and suggests techniques for analyzing the contribution made by textbooks to international understanding.

Campaign on Four Fronts

Beginning in the Spring of 1949, UNESCO's textbook work has stressed four lines of activity.

- *Studies by the Member States.*

On April 13, 1949, an invitation was sent to the UN member states to analyze their textbooks and teaching materials as to their contribution to international understanding. This was to be accomplished through setting up a national textbook committee which would prepare a report and submit it to UNESCO. It was suggested that these studies begin with textbook treatment of the

international organizations active since 1918, such as the League of Nations and the United Nations. Since most countries' textbooks have been deficient in this respect, it seemed to the planners to represent a universal starting point for improvement of textbooks. Replies to UNESCO's invitation were overwhelmingly favorable toward the project.

First report to UNESCO, that of Norway, was dated February 1, 1950. By October, final reports had been received from Austria and the United States of America, and preliminary reports had come from France and New Zealand. Other reports are expected to arrive soon.

The United States report is entitled, "The Treatment of International Agencies of Cooperation in School History Textbooks in the United States." In scope and in technique, it is an outstanding contribution to UNESCO's work.

- *Mutual (or Bilateral) Textbook Studies.*

Textbook improvement studies by professional groups in neighboring countries had already been successfully conducted in four cases: the Nordic countries, Germany and Britain, Germany and France, and Canada and the United States. UNESCO sought to encourage this type of activity by making

contacts between interested groups and by publishing the booklet on the Nordic experiment by Haakon Vigander, *Mutual Revision of History Textbooks in the Nordic Countries* (UNESCO/ED/78, Paris, July 15, 1950).

• *A Clearing-House of Textbook Improvement Information.*

UNESCO has sought to establish and maintain a center of essential information on the experts, organizations and publications interested in the field of textbook improvement for use by the member states and all interested persons. Thus far, UNESCO has not attempted to establish a library of textbooks, relying instead upon the library of the International Bureau of Education at Geneva.

• *An International Seminar on Textbook Improvement.*

The high point of the first phase of the textbook campaign was the seminar

held in Brussels in July-August, 1950. Some forty-six representatives from twenty-four countries participated in a six weeks' workshop on textbook problems. In addition to highly important individual values gained, participants prepared group reports which summarized their conclusions and contained many individual research studies.

Another immediate result of the seminar was a set of plans for nine new bilateral textbook exchanges, involving educational groups between the following countries: United States—France, United States—Germany, Belgium—Holland, Belgium—France, Germany—Austria, Germany—Switzerland, Germany—Norway, Germany—Holland, and Germany—Sweden.

United States participants were individuals directly involved in the preparation and use of history texts in elementary and high schools, colleges and



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universities. UNESCO is publishing a booklet on the Brussels seminar under the title, *Better History Textbooks*.

UNESCO Looks Ahead

UNESCO's plans for 1951 include considerable attention to implementing the suggestions of the Brussels seminar. For instance, experiments will be made in providing teachers' colleges with circulating exhibits of selected foreign history and geography textbooks for comparative study. All possible encouragement will be given to the projected mu-

tual textbook studies. Publications are now in preparation which are intended to assist authors and editors in improving history and geography textbooks.

Textbook improvement is inevitably a slow, laborious and unspectacular process. UNESCO has made a beginning, building upon past efforts of such organizations as the Institute for Intellectual Cooperation. Given a decade of relatively favorable international conditions, UNESCO may be able to achieve, through its member states, an enduring improvement in textbooks.

The Listening Post

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Issues in Financial Support

AS state legislatures assemble and as Congress begins another session, one of the issues before each will likely be that of financial support at the federal, state, county and local levels.

At the present time, federal support ranges from no support in Massachusetts to 7.7 per cent of the total cost of education in North Carolina. State support to local schools ranges from the high of 89.5 per cent in Delaware to 0.7 per cent in Nebraska (2.9 per cent is added from the permanent fund, but this is still the *lowest* among the states). Conversely the percentage of local support is highest in Nebraska (95.9) and lowest in Delaware (8.3). The median percentages are: federal—1.6, state—37.9, and local—60.5. The average percentages are: federal—1.9, state—42.7, county—5.6, and local—49.8. The NEA Research Division estimates that the percentage of current revenues from

state sources will be 44.8 for the school year 1950-51.

Local Revenue Receipts Declining

The trend in the percentage of revenue receipts over the past two decades is reflected in the reports of the U. S. Office of Education:

	1929-30	1939-40	1949-50
Federal	.4	1.7	1.9
State	16.9	30.3	42.7
County	10.4	6.7	5.6
Local	72.3	61.3	49.8

These percentages indicate that over the period of twenty years there has been a sharp decline in the amount of financial support by the county and local communities. The sharp increase has been at the state level. It is at this point that questions regarding future trends will be raised. What percentage of support shall be shared by the respective governing bodies?

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