



The Textbook Against the World

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DURING the past three decades the United States has developed important investments and obligations in the world arena. This international involvement has thrust the nation into the mainstream of world affairs and has forced Americans to commit themselves to a better understanding of the world community, especially the people who inhabit the non-Western world.

Yet, the commitment to become more knowledgeable about non-Western cultures and people is not necessarily evident in the public schools of this country. In spite of a growing international dimension found on our university campuses, the public schools continue to be dominated by teachers and administrators who are not prepared to help develop citizens with a world view.

Some educators have suggested that part of the reason can be found in colleges of education which continue to perpetuate a culture-bound view of the educational process. Throughout their professional training, prospective teachers have little opportunity either to be exposed to knowledge about the vast majority of people who inhabit this planet or to methods for teaching about the nature of the non-Western world.

Other educators are quick to blame the existing curriculum found in the public schools; a curriculum which they feel is Western oriented. Many of these critics view

the present social science curriculum as one which is still living under the influence of the 1930's when there emerged an overarching concern to prepare the youth for effective membership in our society. It is their opinion that a radical change in the focus of the curriculum is necessary before teachers will admit that there exist such subjects as non-Western history and geography, non-Western music and art.

With the combination of an ethnocentric curriculum and a professional education program that does little to expose prospective teachers to non-Western affairs, it is understandable that internationally-minded educators have begun to search for other means to accomplish their goals. Toward this end many are beginning to realize the importance of instructional material. There is a growing awareness that "how" and "what" teachers teach is often determined by the printed material which is available for students to use. In most social studies classes a published textbook is usually the only printed material available for all students. Not only does it serve as the primary focus of the curriculum, but it tends to dictate classroom activities and homework assignments.

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Analysis of Textbooks

Traditionally the textbook has been one of the teacher's basic tools for social studies education. In spite of the flood of new material which has become available, the majority of teachers still look to the standard textbook for guidance. Not only does it furnish a structure for instruction, but most of the new materials are expensive and are considered a luxury. If the teacher is to create and develop an understanding of the non-Western world, it is clear that the textbook—the single most common denominator found in the classroom—must help.

In an attempt to determine whether social studies textbooks are helping, a content analysis of the books most commonly used was undertaken. The texts selected for the study were those currently being used by secondary social studies teachers in the four western counties of Massachusetts. The purpose of the investigation was to analyze the treatment of the non-Western world and to provide some objective measure of the quality of that treatment. The textbooks were also examined to determine the relative quantity of material devoted to a non-Western perspective.

In examining the quantity of material in the textbooks, it was obvious that a large majority of those examined were Western-oriented and tended to stress Western values, explicitly and implicitly. In counting pages it was quite apparent that writers of secondary social studies textbooks do not feel it is necessary to devote much space to an examination of the current non-Western world.

In analyzing the quality of the textbooks, an attempt was made to determine whether the books helped students develop the capacity to make normative judgments of non-Western cultures and people. Toward this end, a set of goals was established. The goals focused on the attempts made in the books to describe the current non-Western life situation and to give an explanation of that situation. A basic description of a given contemporary scene was not considered adequate. Also needed was an attempt to explain

the described scene so that students would be able to make rational judgments based on an accurate perceptive evaluation. In establishing criteria for a content analysis, key international concepts were identified which were rated as desirable for textbooks to discuss.

These concepts were attempts to explain:

1. The variations of cultures on a continent
2. The cultural patterns which distinguish one group from another
3. The social transitions now taking place
4. The value orientation of non-Western people
5. The impact of Western influences, both negative and positive.

One desirable goal was seen as an attempt by the book to explain the variation of cultures on a continent. This was deemed important in order to help the reader avoid making closed generalizations which might lead to stereotypic thinking. Too often textbooks treat whole continents or subcontinents as one monolithic cultural area in which all the people share common aspirations. Without an understanding of the cultural diffusion found on a continent, it would be difficult for students to develop a comparative understanding of the problems a nation or area faces because of its diversity and cross-cultural contacts.

In order to enhance the reader's perception and interpretation of the non-Western world, another desirable goal was viewed as an attempt by the textbook to discuss the various patterns of culture which help to distinguish one group of people from another. This would enable the student to see the different ways of life and products of a culture which help to make up a viable cultural area. It was also considered important that some attention be given to the cohesive forces that tend to hold groups and societies together so that students would gain an understanding of the bases for stability and order which exist in a society.

A third desirable goal was to make the

reader aware of the social transition now taking place in non-Western societies. As more people move away from a traditional way of life toward new patterns, the society tends to be in a constant state of social change. The effect of this change on people, who must somehow balance the old with the new, should be taken into account when viewing the developing world. It is also important to note the speed and nature of the changes which are taking place. While some societies tend to be rather stable and slow-changing, others are in a continuous state of flux.

Another worthwhile goal was viewed as an attempt to expose the reader to the value orientation of the culture under study and an explanation as to why certain of these values continue to be perpetuated. While it is impossible to understand all of the value variations found in a given culture, it is important that students be made aware that such differences exist so that they have some background knowledge for understanding the motives and actions of the people living in a specific area. An exposure to the generalized values which people have also helps to place in context the wide variety of human patterns of behavior. It helps the reader identify attitudes that diverse people have toward distinct life activities and shows how the behavior of individuals can be influenced by their culture.

A final desirable goal was seen as an attempt to explain the impact of Western influences on non-Western cultures. Increased contact between the West and the rest of the world has directly affected the life of millions of people. Not only has the contact led to a form of modernization, but it has also helped produce an arena for conflict as divergent customs, institutions, and values confront one another. An awareness of both the positive and negative influences which come from the West should help the student to recognize and take into consideration the West's influence on the rest of the world.

Concomitant with the establishment of concrete desirable goals, the study endeavored to define descriptions in textbooks which were considered detrimental to the

reader's understanding of the non-Western world. Basically, descriptions of political, economic, or social problems without an attempted explanation of these problems were considered detrimental. So also were descriptions which cited a society's attempt to imitate the West without an explanation as to why. It was considered important for the reader to understand why a particular condition existed and, if possible, to be exposed to the other person's point of view.

In a broad sense, both the desirable and detrimental criteria were constructed in an attempt to determine whether textbooks had moved beyond the point where they disseminated a plethora of descriptive and factual information which exposed students to lists of historical and geographical facts, and military and political events. Certainly exposure to source material is important, but it is the use to which this information is put that has become the focus of social studies today. A factual knowledge of the non-Western world is but one step in understanding the people of that area. It was hoped that the textbooks would move beyond the knowledge component and help students develop the skills and attitudes necessary for an individual to recognize and deal with diverse people.

By endeavoring to explain descriptive material and answer the question "why," the textbook could help broaden the student's perceptive powers and develop skills in social science inquiry. In this way the textbook could not only foster the ability to collect, organize, and evaluate knowledge in terms of its validity and reliability, but also enhance the capacity of students to make logical judgments based on the ability to analyze a given situation. A better understanding of the world can occur through the activity of developing criteria for discriminating and responding to useful knowledge about conditions and development in the world. The textbook should be a useful instrument in nurturing these skills.

The acquisition of knowledge about the non-Western world should also help the student move away from an ethnocentric frame of mind toward one of world-mindedness. Such an attitude would enable the student to

see the globe as a whole and his position in it. It would help him to empathize with the world's commonalities, and be sensitive to the needs of culturally diverse people. Such an individual might be able to examine several dissimilar values simultaneously, and objectively analyze these values in a planetary perspective.

Results of the Study

These desirable goals were selected as the basis for determining the criteria by which the textbooks were judged. The goals were viewed as important international concepts which could and should serve as instructional objectives. The extent to which the specific goals were met determined the merit of the book.

The results of the study indicated that few textbooks met all five desirable goals, while many did not meet even one. The majority of the books did attempt some explanation of the factual material, but fell far short in helping to develop among students the capacity to make normative judgments of non-Western cultures and people. In more general terms, the results of the study indicated that:

1. There is an overwhelming effort to aggrandize the Western way of life to the detriment of non-Western values. Not only were most books blatantly ethnocentric in outlook, but they consistently stressed the superiority of our culture over any other.

2. In many of the books the major contributions were made by historians and geographers who tended to be time and space bound, historians in the sense that many of their major ideas were applicable only to events of a given historical period, geographers to the extent that many of their constructs related only to a particular area. Both tended not to relate historical events and physical places to the panorama of human responses.

3. Too often there was evident a sense of paternalism in which our nation is depicted as the big brother who has helped or will help save a particular area from such evils as communism, poverty, and ignorance. The paternalism extends to comparisons of people in which

the general tone of Western superiority is pervasive.

4. There is a common tendency to crowd into a textbook a proliferation of descriptive and factual information without an explanation of the description or the necessary supporting data to make the facts meaningful. For the most part, factual material was correct; however, through omissions, seldom did the facts explicate both sides of an issue or event.

5. Students are sometimes led to believe that Asia or Africa is an entity rather than a group of diverse cultural areas. While the case study approach is a commendable one in the teaching of social studies, oftentimes inferences are made which encourage students to believe that the individual being studied is representative of most of the people found on that continent.

6. Little effort is made to promote world-mindedness. Most textbooks do not emphasize the various roles individuals play which transcend national boundaries. The theme of "riders on the earth together," with men sharing and attempting to solve common problems, is not a prevalent one.

Moving beyond the parameters of the criteria selected for the evaluation, the most encompassing criticism of the textbooks is their overarching Western orientation. While the orientation takes many forms, it is often seen in the following ways:

1. The lack of political structure which emulates the Western model is taken as evidence that non-Western people have difficulty in governing themselves.

2. The lack of an apparent economic structure based on industry and technology is taken as evidence that non-Western people have no economic institutions except those introduced by the West.

3. Imitation of the West is viewed as the only process which constitutes progress and social development.

4. Comparisons with the West are made on the assumption that Western values are good and others are either bad or nonexistent.

5. Regions of the non-Western world are viewed as world problems or "trouble spots." The problems of non-Western people are seen as problems which must be solved by the West.

6. The non-Western people are categorized as helpless human beings who must be brought over to the Western side or else they will be brainwashed into following communist doctrine.

It was not the purpose of the study to ridicule or censure specific books, but rather to determine the extent to which selected textbooks were assisting the classroom teacher to teach effectively about the non-Western world. It is realized that textbooks are written for a varied audience ranging from intelligent and interested students to apathetic and unintelligent ones. It is also realized that textbook authors have developed instructional objectives of their own which apparently have not included an internationalizing dimension. Most writers treat the non-Western world as if they were afraid to approach it at all; as if it were a taboo subject to be minimized and, if not minimized, at least used to stress the superiority of our way over theirs. There seems to be conviction on the part of authors that if you stress an appreciation of "other people" you will corrupt the reader and be labeled as anti-American.

Perhaps textbook authors are more cognizant of the countervailing forces which oppose a global approach to the teaching of social studies than are internationally-minded educators. Textbooks are written and published to sell. If a teacher and administrator view the book as one which denigrates the American way of life and encourages anti-patriotism, they are reluctant to purchase it. Many teachers see their role as defender of the values found within their social milieu. They are not socialized to an international view and lack a world perspective.

On the other hand, there is a growing number of teachers who realize they can no longer ignore the vast majority of people who inhabit this planet. These teachers are searching for new instructional material to assist them. If textbooks are to maintain their prestigious position in the classroom they must respond to this new challenge. Materials must be prepared which will directly assist the teacher in developing ideas, attitudes, and understandings of the non-West-

ern world. In accepting this challenge, it would be helpful if certain principles were kept in mind.

One principle is that more scholars from a variety of disciplines should provide input for textbook authors. Topics habitually included in history and geography books should be reexamined with the help of other social scientists in order that students receive a multi-disciplinary view of the world. Contact with specialists in non-Western literature as well as music and art would help to add another dimension.

Another principle for authors to consider is the role of value orientation in the presentation of social studies material. It is important for students to begin to understand the sources of differences in human attitudes and actions. Familiarity with value positions which have affected or are affecting the course of mankind is essential to a proper understanding of the non-Western world. This includes value positions that are contradictory to the democratic ethos as well as those compatible with it.

A third principle is that textbook authors must recognize the contributions that others can make in the teaching-learning process. Only a few teachers are secure enough to teach about the complexities of a global society without assistance. That assistance can come from writers who are willing to accept help from specialists in curriculum and instruction as well as from experienced teachers and their students. In the realm of social studies today, a variety of instructional alternatives can be placed within the covers of a textbook. New strategies for textbook writing must include a closer look at alternative ways of utilizing written material if students are to gain a better international perspective.

Finally, it is important for the textbook writers to realize that in a world undergoing rapid and radical change, the schools cannot afford to continue to educate students to be culture-bound. If the situation is to improve, teachers realize that a concerted effort must be made to convince authors and publishers that educators will no longer accept textbooks which limit the ability of their students to cope with the reality of a global society. □

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