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Textbook Quality

A Guide to Textbook Standards

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Preface to the English edition

This book is the English-language edition of *The Guide for the Good Textbook* (Ivić, Pešikan and Antić, 2008), originally published in Serbian. This English edition contains some significant changes: new text has been added, some text has been modified and text that refers specifically to the conception and production of textbooks in Serbia has been omitted.

The Serbian edition is based on research into textbooks that took place over more than three decades and was conducted by a research group from Belgrade University. Their systematic and continuous research included the following: an empirical study of a large number of textbooks in Serbia (analysis of textbook content, textbooks' educational design, assignments set for students, textbook language, etc.); the study of a substantial corpus of textbooks from the rich library of textbooks at the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, Braunschweig; the collection of good solutions for textbook construction from a large number of textbooks from different countries; theses and dissertations on the topics treated by the textbooks; the conception and elaboration of textbook quality standards for the education authorities of Serbia; the holding of conferences devoted to issues around textbooks; the development of theoretical questions relating to textbooks based on Bakhtin's theory of speech genres and Vygotsky's theory of cultural-psychological tools and cooperation in various forms with the Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig.

In this book the authors attempt to define general quality standards for textbooks. Quality standards for the following areas have been defined: the curricular content of textbooks, the didactic design of textbooks, textbook language and characteristics of the media in which textbooks are realised. The catalogue includes forty-three quality standards for textbooks. Each standard contains: the name of the standard (and its code), a definition and explanation of its content and a professional discussion of the reasoning behind each standard. Seen together, the forty-three standards cover a broad range of content and give a very detailed and rich definition of the textbook as a specific type of book, effectively constituting an implicit theory of textbooks.

Although the quality standards defined relate primarily to the textbook as a specific type of book, the potential application of these standards is much wider. They can be used for generating and evaluating all forms of teaching/learning resources, all forms of teaching and instructive aids and all types of media (print media, electronic media, audio-visual media) or combinations of media. For example, there are currently increasing numbers of electronic textbooks. This medium offers new opportunities to create learning resources (multimedia, simulation, electronic networking and internet support for individual electronic textbooks, etc.). However, the successful communication of content for learning alone does not resolve the major educational issues faced by textbooks.

In addition to its central part on quality standards for textbooks, this book examines other, more general, issues relating to textbooks. These include an explanation of the concepts behind modern textbooks and a consid-

eration of the quality of textbooks as a significant component of the general quality of education and of textbooks as an important cultural phenomenon, as well as issues around textbook application in teaching practice.

Although this book was written in Serbia, it relates to general issues related to the process of producing quality textbooks. Its occasional references to specific problems of textbook production in Serbia simply serve to illustrate the problem in countries which have similarities with Serbia in terms of their overall level of development, the characteristics of their education system and the status quo in the field of textbooks.

We hope that this book will be an incentive for productive professional discussion with colleagues from other countries and will further our joint effort to improve the quality of the textbooks used by our children.

The Authors

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We begin with expressing our gratitude to the Ministry of Education and Sport of Serbia for its financial support for the first and second phases of the project entitled *The Quality of School Textbooks and Quality Assurance Mechanisms* (2003–2004), which served as the foundation for further research conducive to the writing of this book.

We also wish to express our gratitude to all our colleagues and collaborators who participated in various phases of the above-mentioned project; we particularly appreciate the contributions made by Dr Jelena Pešić, Profesor Ratko Jankov and Dr Aleksandar Bogojević, who participated in both phases of the project. We equally extend our thanks to Professors Dragica Trivić and Snežana Marinković for their participation in the second phase of the project and Professor Dijana Plut for her contribution to the first.

Further, we are indebted to Dr Falk Pingel from the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, Germany, for his active participation in our workshops and seminars dedicated to history textbooks as well as for his constructive suggestions and opinions regarding professional questions on textbooks.

Our special thanks go to the Georg Eckert Institute for supporting our work on textbook issues. We greatly appreciate their commitment to collaborating with us and helping us organise conferences in addition to ena-

bling the authors of this book to use the Institute's library, which holds an inspirational collection of textbooks from many countries. Needless to say we are also indebted to the Institute for their support in preparing the first edition of this book.

We thank the Ministry of Science of Serbia for their support for the project *Quality in the Process of Learning/Teaching: theoretical concepts, methodological issues and application*, during which we carried out the theoretical and empirical research on which this book is based.

We likewise owe our thanks to the Novi Sad Platoneum Publishing House and its editor Dušan Vujičić for their important contribution to our joint conferences and seminars on textbook writing, their encouragement of further research and the practical application of a large number of ideas aimed at improving the quality of textbooks.

The Authors

Introductory notes

In order to put the content and purpose of this book in context, it is essential for us to provide basic information regarding our ongoing work on textbooks. Our activities preceding this book have consisted of various initiatives, research projects, practical activities and publishing.

In-depth research on anthropological, psychological and pedagogical aspects of textbooks was initiated by the Institute for Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade in the mid-1970s. The direct trigger for the beginning of textbook research was the launch by the Public publishing house (Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva) of a project on the general conception of textbooks, the objective of which was to create and put into practice general concepts for textbooks as well as concepts for individual subjects (see *General Framework for the Preparation of Primary School Textbooks*, 1976). The first of the three authors of this book, Ivan Ivić, was a member of the core team for that project, in charge of the general concepts, while the second author, Ana Pešikan, participated in working out specific concepts for individual school subjects. The formulation of those concepts is directly linked to the content of this book; it is well known that the original concepts which emerged from this project were predecessors of current standards of textbook quality.

The first author of this book accepted the challenge arising from this work on concepts for textbooks and commenced work on the theoretical foundations of textbooks (see Ivić 1976a, 1976b). This in turn initiated

research into theoretical and empirical issues surrounding textbooks – work which is still in progress.

The first project incorporating such theoretical analysis lasted three years and was entitled *Psychological and Pedagogical Analysis of Primary School Textbooks* (1982). It was funded by the public body in charge of the organisation and funding of primary education (the Self-managing Interest Community of Primary Education of Serbia). Twenty researchers were engaged in this major project; from psychologists and educators to linguists.

As part of the above-mentioned project, existing textbooks were subjected to thorough analysis, a process which helped researchers to identify the quality issues affecting Serbian textbooks. This search for the ideas needed for the improvement of textbooks yielded a new and original approach to textbooks, which thus came to be viewed as an important cultural product of paramount formative influence in the lives of children and young people. This theory of textbooks as socio-cultural tools supporting the mental development of children is derived from the general cultural and historical theory of mental development developed by the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1997 and 2012).

Our long and persistent work in the field of textbook research bore fruit and our efforts were rewarded with an enviable number of scientific publications, diploma dissertations, Masters and doctoral theses in this area. Our dedicated research on textbooks enabled many researchers in our teams to attend international and domestic conferences, write textbook analyses and reviews, advise publishers and set up workshops for teachers on how to improve their use of textbooks in the classroom

(an overview of the main publications in the field is included in the references).

Our research in how to improve textbooks was given a new impetus when it was incorporated into the international project *Democracy in Education: Education for Democracy*, funded by the Swedish Agency for Development (SIDA/SAREC). In the period between 1997 and 1999, this project was completed in five countries (Sweden, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mozambique, South Africa and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). This project presented an opportunity for us to test the theoretical concepts which originated in our previous work conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Psychology of the University of Belgrade. It also enabled us to apply some methodological solutions to research on textbooks, testing them against international comparative research.¹

The results of our long-term theoretical and research work received comprehensive practical application in the realisation of a major new project contracted by the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Serbia. The first phase of that project ended in 2003 and was entitled *A Mechanism for Securing Quality Assurance Mechanisms of School Textbooks*. The finalisation of the first phase enabled the researchers to embark on *The Quality Standards for Textbooks*, which represented the project's second phase, ending in 2004. The principal objective of this

1 Other countries also participating in the project implemented methodology originating from the Institute for Psychology research. Some of the results of this international project are available in works by Ivić and Pešikan, 1997; Pešikan, Pešić and Plut, 1998; Carrim et al., 1998; Plut et al., 2001; Pešić-Matijević and Antić 2001; Plut et al., 2002a; Plut et al., 2002b.

project was to adopt the previously formulated and tested quality standards as national standards to be applied whenever textbooks are subjected to the accreditation process in Serbia.

The first phase of the *Mechanism for Securing Quality Assurance Mechanisms of School Textbooks* project was realised by the Institute for Psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy in tandem with the Belgrade Educational Forum. The head of the project was Ivan Ivić, whose team members included Ana Pešikan, Jelena Pešić, Dijana Plut, Ratko Jankov and Aleksandar Bogojević (Ivić et al., 2003). The second phase of the project was also completed at the Institute for Psychology and the Educational Forum. The head of the project was again Ivan Ivić and his team comprised Ana Pešikan, Jelena Pešić, Dijana Plut, Ratko Jankov, Dragica Trivić (Šišović), Snežana Marinković, Aleksandar Bogojević and Slobodanka Antić (Ivić et al., 2004).

Our work on the *Textbook Quality Standards* ran parallel with another project conducted by the Institute for Psychology in cooperation with UNICEF, entitled *Active Learning* (Ivić, Pešikan and Antić, 2003) and launched in 1994. The principal idea theoretically and practically underpinning the *Active Learning Project* was a shift in focus from “lecturing” to “learning”, from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach fostering students’ active participation in the teaching/learning process. This view of the teaching/learning process as a search for ways of supporting the learning process of the student is embedded in our approach to textbook quality standards, which focuses principally on the educational design of a textbook’s curricular content and is most relevant and applicable to standards relating to the design of questions and

assignments included in the textbook (see Catalogue of quality standards for textbooks, E-Dimension: Quality standards for the educational design of textbooks, particularly standards E7–E11). A detailed description of the link between the *Active Learning Project* and the *Textbook Quality Standards Project* has been presented in a number of scientific papers over a period of some years (Pešikan, 2003; Pešikan and Janković, 1998; Pešikan and Antić, 2003; Pešikan and Antić, 2007; Marinković, 2004).

We have benefited from a highly successful collaboration with Platoneum Publishing House and the Education Forum, to whom credit is due for the application and elaboration of the results obtained through our research. The collaboration consisted in organising meetings of experts and academics, some of which were arranged in cooperation with the Georg Eckert Institute, Braunschweig, Germany, as well as publishing project-related scientific papers in the journal *Teaching and History* (Platoneum) and further encompassed the design and realisation of programmes intended for in-service teacher training advising on how to use textbooks, how to choose a textbook from a number of alternatives and how to evaluate textbooks. The programme *The Quality of Textbooks and Improving History Teachers' Competence in Choosing, Using, Evaluating and Creating Textbooks* was carried out jointly by three parties: the Education Forum, Platoneum and the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina. This programme, intended for in-service teacher training, was accredited by the Institute for the Improvement of Education and is being implemented throughout Serbia.

We hope that it has become evident from these introductory notes that *Textbook Quality* is the result of con-

tinuing and dedicated work by its authors in both theoretical and empirical research on textbooks.

1. The textbook and its significance

1.1 Introduction

In this book, we will attempt to provide a theoretical and practical definition of “the textbook”. The question as to what a textbook actually is is significant from a theoretical point of view because its answer encompasses responses to other questions: What is learning? What, specifically, is learning at school? What is the role of the teacher during the teaching process? And what should a successful thematic unit within a textbook look like?

First, the way in which we define and determine the concept of the textbook will affect its practical realisation as a whole: the appearance of the basic text (the type and quantity of content presented), the kinds of supplementary materials used, the textbook’s educational/scholarly apparatus and its aesthetic and typographical format.

Second, the way in which we define the textbook will influence the teaching process itself and will determine whether students will be able to use the textbook independently or whether supervision in the form of a teacher, parent or guardian is necessary.

Third, this book’s practical significance is that it indicates which stakeholders and authorities should take part in the creation of the textbook. If we take a history textbook as our example (Stearns, Seixas and Wineburg, 2000; Pešikan and Antić, 2007), the following disciplines, social groups and institutions will have an interest in the book’s content and style:

- The discipline of history, embodied in institutions such as universities, academic institutions and academies, professional bodies and societies, etc.
- The disciplines of education and psychology, which seek to ensure that the textbook demonstrates awareness of the psychology of learning and of children's intellectual developmental potential within given age groups.
- Political stakeholders that shape domestic and foreign affairs policies, for instance ministries of education and of internal and foreign affairs. If, for example, a country is planning a long-term alliance with a country with which it used to be at war, such stakeholders would be concerned with the question of the extent of the coverage this war would receive in the textbook and how it would be presented.
- Mainstream society, which has its own interpretation of many events, figures and phenomena in history and is thus interested in representations that agree with the dominant ideology.
- The church, which – whether it is part of the national system of education or not – has been involved in socio-political events until recent times and is therefore very sensitive to the interpretation of its own role and position in historical events.
- Parents and children: Parents are highly engaged with their children's well-being and often have their own personal perspective on particular issues in history, especially when it comes to recent events in a country's national past. Students, in turn, may have their own point of view regarding particular chapters in history. Sometimes this stance manifests itself in the form of stereotypes attached to different ethnic and

social groups (Patton, 1980; Gardener, 1991; Hallden, 1998; Voss, 1998; Pešikan and Marinković, 1999; Pešikan, 2001; Pešikan and Marinković, 2006; Antić, 2007a). When we consider the way in which history is taught in our schools, it is obvious that this type of content does not reach the children. History is one of the least popular school subjects (Pešikan, 1996).

During the process of writing a textbook, it is important to keep in mind the points of view and the needs of these and other relevant social groups. Very often, the influence of these stakeholders is reflected in the structure of the textbook, so that it is sometimes highly obvious that some parts of the textbook have been specially created to satisfy the interests of some of these interest groups.

Furthermore, one of the most serious problems in education – not only in Serbia – lies in the quality of school textbooks (Ivić, 1992; Johnsen, 2001; Ivić et al., 2003; Pešikan and Ivić, 2005b). The evidence for this can be found in professional research papers and it is also a view held widely in public opinion, particularly by parents and teachers.

In order to improve the quality of textbooks within the shortest period of time and without great expenditure, it is necessary to ensure that the prerequisite conditions (i.e. institutional and human expert resources) for both the writing of the textbooks and their academic study are in place. By improving the quality of textbooks, we can make a significant contribution to the improvement of education as a whole, because the quality of textbooks is a very important component of the general quality of education. Once good textbooks are written, they reach schools, teachers and students. Therefore, particularly in developing countries, there is no single

factor in improvement in the quality of education which is comparable with textbooks in its impact.

This publication, as a guide for good textbooks, is mainly concerned with improving education by raising the standard of textbook quality.

1.2 Do we need textbooks at all?

Not all countries have textbooks and many more do not have textbooks which are used on a compulsory basis² (Mikk, 2000; Johnsen, 2001). Instead of the type of textbooks we are familiar with, these countries use sets of instructional materials which vary from school to school.

Therefore, the first inevitable question is whether in today's educational system there is a need for textbooks at all. This should not be an abstract question to be resolved in an abstract way, i.e. treated separately from specific conditions affecting the development of the teaching process in a given country. If the real conditions in each country are taken into account, then we can categorically state that in all developing countries there is a need for textbooks of guaranteed scope and quality, because this is one of the most reliable and easiest ways to secure the quality of education as a whole.

If a democratic country wants to provide quality education for all its children and young people, but is not yet economically strong enough to rely on the population's

2 In some schools in Serbia there is no such thing as a "Bukvar" (a universal Serbian spelling book), which in Serbia is also called "the very first school book".