

A TEXTBOOK IN THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

The paper is focused on textbooks and their position in the process of education. The function and structure of textbooks is emphasized. The final part presents several methods for working with a text.

Key Words

textbook, functions of the textbook, structure of the textbook, working with a text

Abstrakt

Príspevok sa zameriava na postavení učebnice v edukačnom procese. Zabýva sa učebnicí ako edukačným médiom a zdôrazňuje predovšetkým jej funkcie a složky. Záverečná časť je venovaná dnešnej práci s učebnicou.

Klíčová slova

učebnice, funkcie učebnice, štruktúra učebnice, práca s textom

1. INTRODUCTION

Textbooks occupy a very important position in an educational system. In many cases it has a very strong influence on the popularity of a relevant subject among pupils. On the other hand many coloured textbooks are inadequate for curriculum. Therefore I have decided to write an article on some basic indicators, qualities and functions of a good textbook.

The main purpose of a textbook in general is to serve as a permanently available store of knowledge. A textbook, of course, is a special kind of book that makes the existent knowledge available to students in a selected, ordered way (Encyclopaedia of Educational Research, 1969, pg. 1472). A textbook's real advantage is that it is always available off the shelf, unlike CD-ROMs, television programs or videos, which require other devices.

2. FUNCTIONS OF A TEXTBOOK

First of all, we have to define what a textbook is. It is not a simple task because textbooks are influenced by at least three educational factors. Figure 1 in Průcha (1998, p. 13) can help us to imagine this task. Textbooks correspond to the national curriculum of each country and their contents are influenced by different policies. Instructional tools¹ involve also teaching methods and teaching aids (e.g. textbooks for pupils and teachers, teaching syllabi, electronic books, educational programs on computers, educational games) in addition to textbooks. It is important to realise some advantages of printed textbooks:

- *Simple availability, transferability, no technical needs*
- *Good price - cheaper than a computer and programs*
- *Not everybody likes computers and electronic books*
- *Not everybody is able to use information technology*

We can see that besides a textbook – an instructional text – we also need other school instructional materials such as reading books, workbooks, picture primers, dictionaries, etc. For each subject it is strongly recommended. As a consequence of that, it seems that textbooks have to be seen from two specific standpoints – structure and content.

We distinguish two kinds of textbooks: textbooks for pupils (they are the main source of knowledge) and textbooks for teachers (they are inspiring and can help with class preparation). From the pupil's view we recognize eight functions of a textbook (Zujev, 1986, p. 67):

- **Informative function** – the textbook determinates the content of education in some specific subjects. It defines the dimension of information that should be learned by pupils.
- **Transfer function** – the textbook provides information obtained from scientific data, written to be understandable to school pupils.
- **Systematization** – the subject matter is divided according to a specific system into the particular school years.
- **Improve knowledge and self-control** – the textbook helps pupils to receive, improve and control specific information.
- **Self-education** – the textbook motivates pupils to study and to complete their knowledge, if they recognize some gap in their understanding.
- **Integration function** – the textbook is a tool of comprehension and integration of all information, which pupils receive from their surroundings.

¹ It is everything that guides to achieve the educational goals (comp. Průcha, 2002, p. 276).

- **Coordinating function** - the textbook coordinates other instructional activities.
- **Function of development and education** - the textbook supports personality development.

These functions present an ideal complex which is covered in different qualities and quantities in every textbook. Each textbook influences not only specific knowledge but also psychological development and personality skills. Hence the content and the structure of a textbook are very important features.

Before we speak about the structure of a textbook, we have to mention an alternative, a more general classification of the functions of a schoolbook. Overall we distinguish three main functions from the users' view (comp. Průcha, 1987, p. 49):

1. Curriculum presentation

A textbook presents information in various ways (verbal, visual and their combinations).

2. Study leading

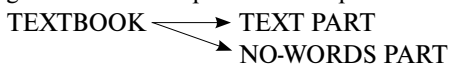
A textbook regulates the study of pupils and at the same time it helps teachers to divide teaching materials into suitable portions. Its presentation of subject matter should be reliable, accurate, and scholarly.

3. Organization

A textbook informs its users about the methods which can be used with them (e.g. content, index, instructions).

These basic functions can be the criteria for evaluation. Many educational studies are focused on the evaluation of textbooks.

There are many approaches to a textbook structure and to its evaluation. In general we can express the components in this way:

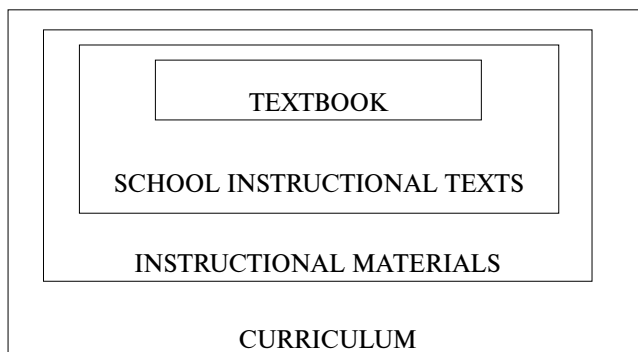


Text part consists of setting activities, expository texts, examples, exercises, questions, and feedback (results). It should be the main part of a textbook corresponding to instructional standards.

No-words part has a similar function as a text part but it is expressed by pictures, diagrams, tables, graphs etc. It should support the theory and examples involved in the text. At this time there are many new textbooks where images play a greater role than the text and therefore they distract students' attention. All the mentioned aspects should possess the qualities expressed in the functions above.

Pict. 1

Textbook in educational system



3. WORKING WITH TEXTBOOKS

The ways in which textbooks are used reflect different points of view on the functions they serve. The traditional way, and today still an usual way, is to use a textbook as the basis for a given course or subject. Many forms of education are based upon working with textbooks. The collective education offers traditional work with a textbook where pupils use a relevant book or other material in a recommended way.

Today's education tries to make teaching more open and creative. Alternative schools are of a good inspiration. In this manner pupils should learn how to work with a great body of information and for this purpose one or two required books are not enough. Students should know how to work with encyclopaedias, dictionaries and other specific books, and moreover, they should apply their real-life knowledge. Project teaching, in which pupils solve a real problem, uses such tactics. They have to do a critical reading, which means that they have to decide which piece of information is relevant or useless for their problem.

There are many other forms of education that involve different kinds of work with textbooks. We can name for instance team teaching, the Platoons system, the Batavian system, group instruction, and the Waldorf's schools.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is necessary to claim that a textbook is a system of knowledge and activities. It presents one way of reaching a goal for the course content. A textbook, if it is well written and carefully edited, can invite creative response. It can be a guide to discovery. Therefore, teachers should continue to use textbooks in different ways.

We can say that textbooks will be still an essential source of knowledge for students – knowledge they could never build from direct experience – and good schools will continue to supplement a textbook with other materials and experiences.

This article intended to show at least two views on the functions of textbooks and their structure. Finally it presents a few examples of how to work with textbooks in a school environment. A detailed description of the particular textbook components can be found in the references.

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