

Improving the Provision of Quality Education: Perspectives from Textbook Research

Aaron Benavot

University at Albany-State University of New York, USA

Abstract

Two concurrent shifts are occurring in international education policy. One involves a policy shift away from issues of access, enrollment and completed schooling to one focusing on learning, skills acquisition and teacher quality. The second involves a narrowing of the conceptualization of quality education, with learning outcomes and skills acquisition becoming the core constructs. This article argues that both shifts are problematic as they disregard emergent insights about the contested nature of the intended and implemented curriculum—especially as viewed through textbooks and official guidelines. Context-specific knowledge about textbooks and the curriculum is crucial, if policy makers are to identify effective ways to improve the provision of quality education. The thematic articles in this issue are noteworthy since they: a) enhance our understanding of the development, revision and use of textbooks; b) examine the cultural and political dynamics of curricular processes; and c) address important research and policy concerns concerning textbooks and the curriculum.

Shifting policy interest to quality education and learning outcomes

The international policy community is agog over quality education. For more than two decades, policy attention has been shifting away from issues of access, enrollment and years of schooling completed to issues of learning, skills acquisition and teacher quality. This policy turn has gained steam in recent years for several reasons. First and foremost, most countries in the developing world are effectively attaining universal primary education (UPE), with net primary enrolment ratios greater than 95%, or are on track to do so in the coming years.¹ Having reached, or about to reach, UPE, improving the ‘quality’ of primary education and reducing inequalities in post-primary education are emerging as new issues in national policy agenda. Indeed, many Latin American countries had already universalized access to primary education by the 1990s and, not surprisingly, quality issues became a centerpiece of regional policy discussions (UNESCO-OREALC 2007). Second, some studies have shown that mean learning levels on international assessments (a proxy for cognitive skill development) significantly influence national

¹ This is not meant to minimize the importance of a significant number of developing countries, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Africa, which have a high percentage of out of school children, and which are not expected to attain UPE by 2015 (see UIS 2011).

economic growth, independent of country's enrollment rate (Hanushek and Woessmann 2008). This body of evidence has made a convincing case for donor agencies to reconfigure educational policies--namely, to move beyond an exclusive focus on access and completion by incorporating quality concerns, especially efforts to improve learning. Exemplary of this trend is the World Bank's new strategy paper, *Learning for All* (2011:4), which states: "...getting value for the education dollar requires smart investments—that is, investments that have proven to contribute to learning. Quality needs to be the focus of education investments, with learning gains as a key metric of quality...." Teacher quality, skills development and/or learning are also explicitly highlighted issues in the strategic priorities of other development agencies: in Asia (ADB), Latin America (IADB), the UK (DFID), France (AFD), Australia (AUSAID), the US (USAID) and Japan (JICA). Third, and somewhat related, are emerging debates over the proper role of education in post-2015 development policies. There appears to be a growing consensus among many governmental and non-governmental stakeholders that quality education and learning should be among the core constructs, around which new policy priorities are designed in the post-2015 era.

Beyond the shift to prioritize learning and quality issues in national and international policies, a second trend is worth noting. In the past, quality education mainly referred to the enabling conditions for learning, what many consider as the major inputs to schooling—for example, school infrastructure, textbooks, instructional time and trained teachers. At international conferences on Education for All at Jomtien (1990) and later at Dakar (2000), the promotion of quality education and the satisfaction of basic learning needs were viewed as crucial aspects of international policy targets. In addition to a broad 'quality' goal (EFA Goal 6), participants prepared an official document, which stated that "access to quality basic education is a fundamental right for all" and further stipulated the necessary conditions for quality education such as well-trained teachers and active learning techniques; adequate facilities and instructional materials; clearly defined, well-taught and accurately assessed curricular knowledge and skills; and a healthy, safe, gender-sensitive environment that makes full use of local language proficiencies (UNESCO 2000: 15-17).

What is changing in the 21st century is the conceptualization and measurement of quality education. Quality is viewed today more in terms of learning outcomes and less in relation to the enabling conditions for learning. This policy shift—broadly between quality as inputs to quality as outcomes--partly reflects the growing availability of (comparative) evidence on learning levels and disparities from an unprecedented number of international, regional and national assessments (Kamens and Benavot 2011; Kamens and McNeeley 2010). Donors are choosing to prioritize the monitoring of learning outcomes (instead of the enabling conditions for learning) and then allowing national decision makers to decide on the most effective combination of policy levers to improve

learning outcomes. Thus, the increasing prevalence of assessments of student achievement (both high stakes and low stakes testing) has resulted in a narrowing of the notion of quality education. While previously viewed as encompassing multiple dimensions, each of which contributed to a learner's experience in school, quality education today is more narrowly associated with learning outcomes—for the most part, cognitive knowledge and skills in language, mathematics and, to a lesser extent, science (Benavot 2012).

What kinds of learning? For what purposes? Through which curricular means?

As learning outcomes and skills development take center stage in policy statements and funding priorities, several fundamental questions emerge, which deserve careful consideration. What specific kinds of learning and skills do different stakeholders propose? In which settings (formal/non-formal) and through which curricular frameworks (or structures) are the learning and skills to be obtained? To what purposes and aims are learning outcomes and skill acquisition directed, and whose interests are being served? Who defines what is or is not 'relevant' learning in a particular setting? Which instructional means and teaching methods are advanced, if any, to effectively enable learners to acquire particular knowledge, competencies and skills? And how should learning processes and outcomes be monitored and assessed?

A cursory examination of international policy documents indicates marked differences in whether and how they address these questions. Most documents ignore or minimize the importance of the issues contained in the questions. They make little reference to the subjects or topics that schools are expected to teach, that students are expected to learn, and the means by which particular skills are acquired. They tend to view learning as an outcome disconnected from the wider context in which learners experience, acquire and apply what they have learned. As the papers in this volume make abundantly clear, the selective and legitimated bodies of knowledge, which schools impart through official syllabi and authorized textbooks, are designed to reflect prevailing cultural values, social norms, and political orientations as well as specific educational aims. Student classroom experiences are, in large measure, a consequence of the intentional activities and latent social messages conveyed by, and through, the formal curriculum. Thus, policy documents concerned with learning and skills development, which make no reference to the curriculum and its constituent parts, become a kind of disembodied and decontextualized policy talk. The silence concerning curricula, syllabi and textbooks in policy statements that advance the case for improved learning, is deafening. It is also counterproductive.

Some international policy documents do mention curriculum-focused themes—albeit in problematic ways. Consider, for example, a recent mission statement by UNESCO. It defines the organization's objectives in education: "...[as] increasing equity and access,

improving quality, and ensuring that education develops knowledge and skills in areas such as sustainable development, HIV and AIDS, human rights and gender equality ...” (UNESCO 2011: 7). Although UNESCO has allocated considerable resources—human, programmatic and otherwise—to the latter themes, the challenge of measuring and monitoring their presence in school curricula, course syllabi and textbooks has been daunting (see, for example, Björneloo and Nyberg 2007; Gross 2009). This suggests that the lack of a deeper, comparative understanding of the intended contents of schooling, and how they are implemented through textbooks and guidelines, undermines the realization of UNESCO’s policy priorities.

Furthermore, when skills like literacy or numeracy are mentioned, as they often are in many policy documents, they are typically treated as universal proficiencies, detached from the cultural context in which young learners acquire them. For example, little is said about the status of the language(s) in which children are expected to learn to read and write, or about how the acquisition of literacy in an officially recognized language may adversely affect student knowledge of non-recognized languages. For many multilateral and bilateral agencies learning to read and write in a national or international language has a fundamental economic purpose: to provide children and youth with basic literacy skills so they can acquire more specialized ones needed for their future productive roles in the labor market and the economy. Donor agencies have much less to say about the social, political and cultural purposes to which acquired literacy skills may be applied. Skills and knowledge acquisition can foster more active and capable citizens, more conscious agents of cultural production and consumption, and more empowered political participants (UNESCO 2005). They may also undermine linguistic diversity and religious tolerance. Not only are policy documents silent about the social, political and cultural contexts in which literacy and numeracy are embedded, they seldom discuss evidence of the dynamic—and even contradictory--roles that these skills play in on-going social change.

A final pattern worth noting involves instances in which policy documents address some of the aforementioned questions, but do so in a general fashion lacking specificity. A section from the World Bank’s strategy on *Learning for All* (World Bank 2011: 26) illustrates this point:

“Learning outcomes have typically been measured in terms of reading and numeracy skills, but the knowledge and competencies that help young people live healthy, productive and satisfying lives are much broader. In other words, education is not only about reading, writing and arithmetic....Social, communication, teamwork, critical thinking and problem-solving skills are invaluable for people to function well at home, in their communities, and at work. Specific technical and vocational skills related to an occupation are also important for success in the labor market[L]earning is not simply the business of education agencies; it should also

involve social welfare and/or social protection and health agencies in the design and implementation of policies across sectors that ensure young children have foundational skills to succeed in school...”

This statement reflects a fairly comprehensive view of competencies and skills, and the multiple contexts in which they are acquired. But the remainder of the policy document provides almost no details about the acquisition of the less conventional skills mentioned (e.g., social, communication, teamwork skills). More studies are needed about the kinds of classroom contents and teaching processes that effectively inculcate specific types of skills and competencies (Alexander 2008). And in the absence of concrete evidence about how such skills are fostered and how they impact people’s lives, policy statements such as the World Bank’s pay lip service to broad conceptualizations of learning and end up reinforcing narrower ones. They also raise doubts about the extent to which the contents of official policy statements are aligned with actual funding priorities and program evaluations. In short, while the rhetoric surrounding quality and learning may be comprehensive in its intent, the implementation of policy directives may result in a limited array of assessed learning outcomes.

Moreover, it is not an accident that some learning outcomes receive disproportionate attention in the school curriculum and in learning assessments. Certain subject areas have achieved greater institutional status and curricular centrality than others (Reid 1990, Goodson 1995). School subjects transmitting highly legitimate, economically valued, culturally important or developmentally essential knowledge and skills tend to acquire higher institutional status. For example, language education and mathematics are considered crucial subjects in basic education, and typically receive almost half of all intended instructional time in the first six grades (Lockheed and Verspoor 1991; Meyer et al 1992; Benavot 2008). The institutional status of other subjects--in the social sciences, the physical and natural sciences, and moral and religious education—is more historically contingent, varying by country and region, which differentially affects instructional time allocations (Benavot 2008).

The discussion thus far underscores an important policy implication. While the growing interest in learning deserves to be applauded, the success of this policy shift depends on understanding the ways in which countries structure and convey selective bodies of knowledge in schools, and how these processes impact learning opportunities in the classroom. Evidence about the nature and impact of the curriculum and its component parts (i.e., textbooks, guidelines, course syllabi, teacher guides and assessed learning) is crucial, if policy makers are to identify effective ways to enhance learning processes and the quality of education provided. In the absence of such evidence, the ‘black box’ of learning—especially what occurs when teachers and students encounter each other in classrooms--will remain darkened and unlocked.

Curricular distinctions and the contested contents of textbooks

In general terms a curriculum is a structured sequence of courses (a program of studies), and their prescribed contents, offered at a school or educational institution. At minimum, a curriculum defines what subjects should be taught, how much time to devote to each subject, and how to organize the knowledge, topics and themes to be conveyed. Many studies of the curriculum distinguish between *the official, intended curriculum* (what should be taught, as specified by administrative authorities and textbook developers) and *the implemented curriculum* (what is actually made available and taught to students in classrooms). While comparative information about the former is fairly abundant (e.g., Meyer et al 1992; Benavot 2008), systematic evidence on the latter is sparse and often contradictory. This stems, in part, from different conceptions and measurement strategies that have been developed to capture the implemented curriculum (e.g., Rosier and Keeves 1991; Resh and Benavot 2009). Another reason is that evidence concerning the curricular contours of classroom life is notoriously difficult to obtain and compare.

Curricular statements, course syllabi and textbook guidelines are core policy documents, which are prepared by relevant national or sub-national authorities, mainly for internal actors in the education system, but also for external stakeholders. They outline the curricular policies and aims of a school system, as well as the intended program of studies, by subject area and topic, typically for each grade level. These documents frequently invoke broad policies and ideological intentions--for example, statements about the system's overarching goals, teaching methods, pedagogical philosophies and expected non-cognitive learning outcomes. As such, these documents are a fair representation of the official intended curriculum.

Textbooks, by contrast, are developed by curriculum specialists and subject experts (many of whom work outside the education system or in academia) and used extensively by teachers for instructional purposes. They define the knowledge domains and topics to be taught in the classroom as well as the performance standards that students are expected to achieve. In most instances they constitute the basis for constructing test items for end-of-term or end-of-cycle learning assessments. To the extent that textbooks are written or revised in close accordance with official guidelines, and approved by appropriate officials, then they too accurately capture official curricular intentions. In practice, however, textbooks in many subjects only partially reflect the guidelines put forward by authorities. Possible reasons for this include:

- the relatively insular world of textbook authors and editors;
- the lack of specificity in official guidelines and statements;
- the different target audiences addressed by official statements and course guidelines and by textbooks;
- the high expense of revising/adjusting textbooks in the wake of new curricular

- reforms;
- a tendency for textbook writers/editors to rely on past practices and existing materials, even when urged to innovate by incorporating “new” pedagogical principles or contents; and
 - ineffective (or corrupt) administrative procedures and oversight measures.

The extent of alignment between textbook contents and official intentions is likely to vary by subject area, grade level, governance pattern, publishing policy, and a country’s level of development. For example, in wealthier, more centralized education systems, in which well-established administrative regulations and oversight mechanisms are the norm (say, in Japan or in German Länder), textbook alignment with official guidelines is quite high. In less developed countries, where textbooks are expensive to produce, where their availability is limited, where textbook authorship involves multiple actors (including foreign ones) and/or where oversight mechanisms are less established (or corrupt), then the degree of alignment is likely to be quite low. A recent analysis of reading and mathematics textbooks in the developing world provides substantial evidence of the lack of content alignment between textbooks and official guidelines (UIS 2012).

Furthermore, there are issues as to whether, how and how much teachers actually use textbooks in classrooms. Evidence suggests that textbooks are a central part of classroom life in much of the world, although more so in some subjects (e.g., language, mathematics, history, geography, social studies, civics, natural sciences) than in others (e.g., aesthetic education, moral education, physical education) (Naumann et al 2006). In the US, for example, teachers spend 70 to 90 percent of the total instructional time delivering the contents in the textbooks (Applebee et al 1987; Armento 1986; Wade 1993). In systems with elaborate administrative measures (e.g., inspectors, school accounting procedures, assessments), teachers can be expected to closely follow course syllabi and textbook guides. Even in less-developed settings, in which schools have limited stocks of textbooks, teachers often spend considerable class time having students copy textbook contents, almost verbatim, in their workbooks (Abadzi 2006). And in systems with high stakes examinations based on textbook contents, teachers organize class lessons in close accordance with textbooks to assist students in test preparation (i.e., they ‘teach to the test’). Overall, given these patterns, it seems more appropriate to refer to textbooks as an instructional device that *mediates* policy intentions and curricular implementation (Valverde 2002). In sum, textbooks are better understood as being situated between the intended and implemented curriculum.

The literature on the curriculum also distinguishes between the formal and overt contents of textbooks and guidelines, in contrast to their hidden or implicit contents. For example, many studies of social science textbooks examine *implicit* assumptions about gender, class, race, morality, citizenship and authoritative school ‘knowledge’ (Bowles

and Gintis 1976; Dreeben 1968; Anyon 1980; Giroux and Purpel 1983; Lynch 1989). In the current issue articles about Mandarin Chinese reading textbooks (Wu), Nigerian technology textbooks (Adeoye and Olobiyi), Bulgarian social science and humanities textbooks (Psifidou) and Bhutanese values education and Japanese moral education (Sakurai) focus more on the formal and overt contents of the texts. Articles on Finnish textbooks (Bromley and Makinen), English and Greek history and geography textbooks (Klerides), Ethiopian textbooks in civic and ethical education (Yamada) and Israeli history, geography and civics textbooks (Peled-Elhanan) tend to emphasize their hidden or implicit contents.

By their very nature, and given the ways they select and frame knowledge, textbooks cannot claim any sense of neutrality. Textbooks are indeed contested and hybrid entities (see Klerides in this issue). Textbooks and other curricular materials reflect governmental and institutional responses to the question of what and whose knowledge is most valuable (Apple 1979). The literature on textbooks and the curriculum highlights the conflicts and compromises occurring among different agents and stakeholders, some more powerful and authoritative than others, over what social, cultural, political, scientific and educational knowledge is to be included in (or excluded from) the curriculum (e.g., Goodson 1995; 1997). Historical struggles over the shape of the curriculum can be protracted and heated precisely because they reflect competing visions of the 'good life', the 'ideal citizen', and the 'desirable society' or 'polity'. Under such circumstances, national—in some cases, sub-national—educational authorities become arbiters of competing ideological visions, which are eventually set forth in official curricular policies and in published textbooks.

The authors in this special journal issue describe in rich detail the contested terrain of textbooks and official guidelines. They address the politics, politicization and political uses of the curriculum using different analytical strategies. Although they shine a spotlight on certain subject areas of the curriculum (social sciences, moral and ethical education, language) more than others (mathematics, natural and physical sciences, the arts), the evidence they report has relevance for other subjects and in other education systems.

To reiterate and conclude: it is only by carefully understanding the nature, design, development and utilization of textbooks and other aspects of the curriculum, that policy makers can realistically expect to make progress in improving the quality of their education systems, by increasing learning levels and reducing learning disparities.

Comparative perspectives on textbooks: article summaries

The following section briefly summarize each article in this special issue on textbooks and quality education, as well as two additional articles: one on decentralization in Pakistan and the other on distance teacher education in sub-Saharan Africa.

In an overview of major trends in history and social studies textbook research, **Eckhardt Fuchs** focuses on studies of textbook revision, identity construction, methodology, textbooks and society, textbooks and other educational media, and the theory and history of educational media. He prefers to characterize these studies as ‘textbook-related research’, rather than ‘textbook research’ to better capture the variety of conceptual, disciplinary and methodological approaches constituting the field. He notes that although textbook-related scholarship is blossoming, it garners little institutional status in universities and research institutes. Fuchs concludes by identifying what is missing from the existing literature on history and social studies textbooks. In particular, he notes that there are too few empirical studies of the usage, reception, and effects of such textbooks in the classroom and a widespread atheoretical approach to textbook analysis.

Patricia Bromley and Elina Mäkinen highlight an emergent worldwide shift in the overarching aims of education: the fact that schools—and the curricular contents they convey—are increasingly expected to promote and support diversity. In the past national education systems emphasized the building up of a loyal, unified national citizenry. Since WWII, however, countries are promoting (and are expected to promote) the rights of diverse groups in society, defined on the basis of gender, ethnicity, immigrant and indigenous status, religion, language and sexual orientation. Bromley and Mäkinen note that current research provides few convincing and empirically validated explanations of this significant and broad-based shift in educational purposes and textbook contents. To this end, they carry out two analyses: first, a longitudinal study of civic education textbooks in Finland, which exemplifies an unusually homogeneous population; and second, a cross-national comparison of civic education textbooks in 33 countries. Their analyses indicate that the level of emphasis on diversity in Finland outpaces many countries with much more heterogeneous populations. They argue that the officially sanctioned attention to the rights of diverse groups in textbooks reflects an underlying social and cultural shift at the global level in the conception of ideal civic behavior. Rather than constructing unquestioningly loyal national citizens, schools today are being asked to create active, empowered, and globally aware individuals.

Eleftherios Klerides explores the nature of the constructed narratives found in social science textbooks. He argues that textbooks are best understood as publicly vetted compilations, containing distinctive, often contradictory contents rooted in three interrelated social spaces: the national, the international, and the global. History and geography textbooks are especially notable in this regard. They develop themes and perspectives from each of these three spaces, though not necessarily in a coherent fashion. Thus, the built-in hybridity of textbook contents produces a plethora of unclear and ambivalent messages for student readers. In most history and geography textbooks competing narratives of community and identity are included, which draw upon discourses

at the national, the international, and the global levels. Klerides validates these analytical insights through an examination of history and geography textbooks from England and Greece--some historical, others contemporary. He concludes by discussing several implications of textbook hybridization.

In many corners of the worlds, especially in Asia, there is an appreciation of, and an increased interest in, the pursuit of psychological well-being or happiness, as opposed to economic well-being and productivity. Bhutan is at the center of this international drive as it seeks to create and institutionalize measures of gross national happiness. Surprisingly, few studies have explored the role of the school and the curriculum in this emergent ideological and policy shift. **Riho Sakurai** addresses this issue by comparing two closely related subjects--values education in Bhutan and moral education in Japan. She explores how the school curriculum is being re-designed by government officials to contribute to both individual well-being and societal happiness. Her analyses indicate that, while the contents and principles of values and moral education have evolved in distinctive ways in each case, both countries have recently carried out major political and legislative reforms, which underscore the relevance of these curricular dimensions. Sakurai's study shows how the Bhutanese seek to strengthen national identity through values education whereas the Japanese seek to advance the same objective through moral education. In each case, however, different concepts and themes—for example, “love for family,” “love for hometown,” “love for country,” “patriotism” and “international understanding and amity” --are utilized to fortify national identity and are taught differently in each educational context.

Mandarin Chinese is one of the most widely used languages in the world, with an estimated 1.3 billion native speakers. In addition to the dominance of China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan are three other areas where Mandarin Chinese is considered a major or an official language. Together these four Mandarin speaking areas play an important role in the world economy, particularly in East Asia. Yet while all four areas share Mandarin as their common official language, their political traditions, economic histories, social orientations and education systems are quite different. In an exploratory study **Yi-Jung Wu** asks whether the design and contents of the officially authorized Mandarin reading curriculum are influenced by apparent political, economic or cultural features of the four locales. In other words, to what extent is the same language, Mandarin, taught differently in each educational system, and why? Among the study's main findings: A political dimension is most apparent in the reading curriculum found in China and least apparent in that used in Taiwan (Hong Kong and Singapore are closer to China on this continuum). In each system between one-fifth to one-third of all reading lessons at the primary level focus on the development of individual virtues and character-building (often referred to as moral education), which is a core element of Chinese Confucius culture. Reading textbook contents emphasizing nationalism and patriotism are much

more prominent in China and Singapore than in Hong Kong and Taiwan. In all contexts except Singapore about 2 of every 10 lessons seek to develop a taste for nature, art and an appreciation of literature. Overall, while Wu's study underscores the influence of a deeply rooted Chinese culture, it also highlights significant differences in the design and purposes of the Mandarin reading curriculum, which seem to reflect the broader political and social context in which the language is taught.

In many countries curricular policies and textbook contents, especially in the social sciences, have been an on-going source of contestation and controversy. This is certainly this case in Latin America. Not surprisingly, many scholars have examined the evolving politics of the school curriculum, highlighting the interests and orientations of different groups who have sought to influence the contents of the intended curriculum. In this article **Silvina Gvirtz and Ivana Zacarias** explore a relatively new phenomenon related to the politicized nature of the school curriculum—namely, the use of the curriculum by politicians or political interest groups for political gain. They analyze an incident that took place in Argentina prior to national elections in 2011, in which a series of proposed changes to a subject known as 'Politics and Citizenship,' taught in upper secondary schools in the province of Buenos Aires, became fodder for electoral gain by opposition forces. Gvirtz and Zacarias detail how, following the release of a draft document containing suggested curricular modifications, political actors who were opposed to the government initiated a spurious public debate aimed at distorting the contents and spirit of the document, and questioning the inclusion of specific concepts and topics. The authors discuss the main contours of the politically charged debate, as well as its policy consequences, in light of Argentina's recent curricular history.

In Ethiopia, a deeply fractured and multi-ethnic society, the maintenance of national unity is a key policy objective. Past government officials have viewed the curricular subject known as 'Civic and Ethical Education' an important means to ensure the continued rule of a fragile, but democratically elected government, which first emerged in 1994 after a long period of monarchy and dictatorship. In her article **Shoko Yamada** disentangles the logics and ideological bases of democracy in Ethiopia by analyzing the contents of the Civic and Ethical Education textbooks used in secondary schools. These textbooks present democracy as closely related to the need to control power and encourage tolerance. Textbooks emphasize the development of patriotic citizenship, but strictly discourage loyalty to a particular ethnic group. Teaching the concept of democracy becomes an opportunity to condemn the past autocracy, which suppressed the rights of ordinary citizens. This case illustrates how the school curriculum and textbooks are often revised, following major political upheavals, to promote loyalty to the state and the legitimacy of the new regime.

Nurit Peled-Elhanan goes beyond the overt and explicit meanings of school

textbooks and examines the presentation of images, maps, layouts and the use of language in textbooks in order to uncover implicit messages and meanings. Specifically she uses social semiotic methods of inquiry and multimodal tools of analysis to explore Israeli elementary and high school textbooks used in teaching History, Geography and Civics. She finds that non-Jewish 'minorities' and Jewish 'ethnicities' are represented in textbooks, both verbally and visually, in a racist manner, as stereotypes and not as individuals. Palestinian citizens and those Palestinians living in the occupied territories are presented – if at all - as vile, primitive and dangerous groups. Jewish 'ethnicities', which mainly include Jews whose families migrated from Arab countries and Ethiopia, are depicted as marginal groups relative to mainstream Israeli society. Textbooks in these school subjects are shown to portray both groups as situated in the country's cultural and social periphery. A multimodal analysis of textbooks, according to Peled-Elhanan, provides a more unified perception of textbook representations and, in doing so, reveals important ideological under-currents and interests, which are less apparent in traditional content analyses.

Blessing Adeoye and Oladiran Olabiyi carefully examine the textbooks used in basic technology courses in Nigerian secondary schools. These technology textbooks are meant to serve multiple purposes. For example, they define the boundaries of authorized content, the order in which specific topics are taught and their presentation. They are also a source for problem-solving, explanation-giving, and a means of connecting students with emerging technologies. Adeoye and Olabiyi's study seeks to determine the extent to which the five basic technology textbooks used accurately reflect Nigerian educational policy objectives and enable student learning. The analysis suggests that, while there are similarities in topics covered and overall content, the textbooks differ substantially in how they approach the subject matter. Some textbooks are long, well indexed and comprehensive. Others are shorter and more concise, emphasizing select topics while mentioning others only briefly. Overall, the authors assess that the five textbooks responded well to the objectives found in the Nigerian guidelines on education. The researchers recommend that technology textbooks should contain supplementary materials—for example, activity manuals, websites, and CD-ROMs—to enhance the effectiveness of student learning. They also suggest that panels consisting of teachers, educators, and curriculum content specialists should be periodically constituted to carefully review textbooks in this area.

Irene Psifidou examines post-1989 changes in Bulgarian social studies and humanities textbooks following Bulgaria's socioeconomic transition, democratization and integration in the European Union. As occurred in other parts of Eastern and Central Europe during this period, school textbooks and curricular contents were reviewed, often more than once by various stakeholders, to reduce traces of political bias, value judgments and ideological content. Psifidou critically analyzes the extent to which post-socialist Bulgarian textbooks have been revised to incorporate an appropriate balance between

knowledge updates and the inclusion of multicultural principles and democratic values. Her study is based on an analysis of the official curricula of history, geography, Bulgarian language and literature in upper secondary education as well as interviews with key policy makers and members of the Bulgarian educational community. Textbook reviews resulted in the deletion of ideologically-laden and nationalistic themes, and the incorporation of contents that are meant to promote social inclusion and democratic principles. The analysis points to the strengths and weaknesses of the newly revised textbooks, as they seek to prepare students to be future citizens in a democratic country and region. It highlights the remaining inconsistencies between national educational standards, curricula and textbooks and discusses future policy actions to address them.

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In two additional articles, which are unrelated to the textbook-related themes of this special issue, the authors address key education policy issues. **Taro Komatsu** examines the devolution of administrative authority from national to local entities in Pakistan and its impact on the views of local district officers responsible for the delivery of public education. This qualitative study, carried out in one of the poorest provinces of the country, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly NWFP), seeks to clarify and understand the perspectives of Executive District Officers and District Education Officers, who were charged with local educational provision following a comprehensive decentralization reform implemented in 2001. Komatsu's study, based on semi-structured interviews, shows that district officers tend to view the function of public schools as both an agent of modernization as well as a transmitter of traditional societal values. This dualistic perspective suggests that local officers view themselves as accountable not only to their administrative employers and their own backgrounds, but also to local community leaders and parents. The need to serve and be accountable to multiple--and sometimes contradictory--constituencies poses considerable challenges to locally empowered educational administrators.

Finally, **Daniel Sifuna** argues that the movement to provide quality education for all children in sub-Saharan Africa has been stymied by the prevalence of conventional approaches to teacher education. Teacher shortages remain acute in many parts of the continent due to the surge in student enrolments in primary and lower secondary education, the slow increase in the pool of qualified teachers, the heavy toll of HIV and AIDs on the teaching force, and ongoing patterns of teacher attrition (due to retirement, promotion, job shifts etc.). Sifuna argues that the development of a national distance education policy is a crucial means for meeting the challenge of recruiting and training good quality teachers in Africa. He discusses a number of examples of successful and/or cost-effective distance teacher education institutions in South Africa, Nigeria, Malawi, Mauritius and Tanzania. With the support of donor agencies, distance teacher education

projects can be scaled up to meet the challenge of creating a sustainable supply of qualified teachers.

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