Recommendations on Enhancement of Textbooks

Second Report

December 18, 2008

Meeting on Education Rebuilding
1 Directions of Enhancement of Textbooks

Based on the amendment of the Basic Act on Education and the revision of the Courses of Study and a new view on textbooks, both the quality and the volume of textbooks should be drastically enhanced.

(1) Detailed descriptions to help students’ self-education and self-learning; increase the amount of drill exercises and reading materials
(2) Improvement of descriptions related to advanced and supplementary learning lessons; change of view on textbooks
(3) Improvement of descriptions so as to enhance interest in and willingness to learn about such matters that relate to real life and real society
(4) Enhancement of materials that can contribute to fostering a rich sensibility and sense of morality

2 Adjusting Conditions for Enhancement of Textbooks

Textbooks need to have sufficient volume for the enhancement of the contents. Therefore, the adjustment of conditions is required, for example, to double the total number of pages of textbooks for Japanese language, science and English.

(1) Review on the criteria for authorizing textbooks, such as the elimination of the restriction on the volume of advanced and supplementary learning lessons
(2) Expansion of budget for textbooks appropriate for their enhancement
(3) Textbook adoption procedures
(4) Changing of textbook publishers’ and writers’ way of thinking
(5) Strengthening of a research system for textbooks, etc.
The Meeting on Education Rebuilding has compiled the following recommendations for improving the quality and the volume of textbooks, hoping that they will be reflected in the editorial processes of new textbooks corresponding to the revised Courses of Study.

1 Directions of Enhancement of Textbooks

Based on the amendment of the Basic Act on Education and the revision of the Courses of Study and a new view on textbooks, both the quality and the volume of textbooks should be drastically improved.

(1) Detailed descriptions to help students’ self-education and self-learning; increase the amount of drill exercises and reading materials

At present, Japanese textbooks are made mainly for classroom use. However, new textbooks should be designed so be more suitable for students’ self-education and self-learning, providing them with plenty of materials that can form the foundation that equips them with the ability to think, the power to seek truth, and the capacity to utilize their knowledge.

Increasing the amount of drill exercises in textbooks will reduce guardians’ financial burden of purchasing commercial study materials and will also lessen teachers’ burden of preparing supplementary teaching materials, thus enabling them to spend more time with children.

(Examples)

• Descriptions should be more detailed so that students can understand the materials by themselves.
• Drill exercises (e.g., for arithmetics and mathematics), the quantity of reading materials (e.g., classics and writings of sages and literary magnates for Japanese language, and the volume of readings for English), and citations from original texts (e.g., original texts by philosophers for ethics, and newspaper materials and the originals of speeches for English) should be increased.

(2) Improvement of descriptions related to advanced and supplementary learning lessons; change of view on textbooks

Advanced and supplementary contents should be increased so as to enhance diversified styles of teaching, such as tutoring, group teaching, advanced learning lessons, and supplementary learning lessons, in accordance with individuality. Improvements should be made for advanced instruction for children who want to learn advanced materials and for teaching children who struggle with learning. Textbooks for children with disabilities should also be improved so as to provide them with sufficient support responding to the characteristics of their respective disabilities.

Textbooks for mathematics and science should aim to firmly maintain international standards, considering the features of the subjects.

In order for the contents of advanced learning lessons to be enhanced, guardians and teachers’ views on textbooks need to be changed, so that they come to share the idea that teachers do not have to teach everything in textbooks. If advanced materials are included in entrance examinations, teachers may be
forced to teach everything. Therefore, it should be ensured that entrance examinations only test students' abilities within the range of the contents specified in the Courses of Study.

(Example)

• Textbooks for upper secondary schools should contain university-level materials and materials that review lower secondary school lessons.
• Experts in various fields should be allowed to freely describe the latest information they want to tell elementary school children and students of lower and upper secondary schools and show the appeal of the respective fields, through methods such as telling them how learning such information leads to the most advanced science.

(3) Improvement of description so as to enhance interest in and willingness to learn about such matters that relate to real life and real society

Current Japanese textbooks focus on fundamental knowledge that children are to acquire, but efforts should be made to make textbooks more attractive to children.

The competence of teachers as well as the enhancement of textbooks is important in teaching children about the relationships with real life and real society. Therefore, teacher training should also be promoted.

(Example)

• Textbooks should be interesting enough to show why respective matters need to be learnt and how they are useful in real life and real society, thereby arousing students’ interest and willingness to learn.
• Textbooks should be flexible enough to contain matters related to other subjects as well (e.g., a science textbook can also contain information related to health education, technical science, domestic science, social studies and the like).

(4) Enhancement of materials that can contribute to fostering a rich sensibility and sense of morality

The amended Basic Act on Education provides that the purpose of education is to foster an attitude to acquire wide-ranging knowledge, a rich sensibility and sense of morality, an attitude to respect life and care for nature, and an attitude to respect our traditions and culture. The new Courses of Study emphasize the significance of nurturing pride and love for local communities, understanding and love for national land and history, the characteristics and abilities that enable children to participate in the formation of a better society, feelings of cherishing family life, and close links between children and their family and between their family and society. These ideas should be reflected in textbooks.

(Example)

• Textbooks for such subjects as Japanese language, music and fine arts should contain plenty of materials concerning traditions and culture, nature and the four seasons of Japan, as well as materials (writings, songs, paintings, etc.) that will encourage children to live with dreams and hopes and enrich their sense of morality.
• Textbooks for subjects such as social studies and domestic science should contain plenty of materials that will deepen children’s understanding and love for local communities and the country, as well as materials concerning the participation in the formation of a better society and the importance of home and family
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(1) Review on the criteria for authorizing textbooks, such as the elimination of the restriction on the volume of advanced and supplementary learning lessons

Authorization of textbooks should be reviewed so as to allow publishers and writers of textbooks to use their originality to enhance the quality and the volume of textbooks.

For this purpose, the restriction on the volume of advanced and supplementary learning lessons (10% for elementary schools and lower secondary schools and 20% for upper secondary schools) should be eliminated and a review should be made on other authorization criteria that are excessively restrictive regarding the volume of textbooks or the description of materials related to other subjects.

(2) Expansion of budget for textbooks appropriate for their enhancement

Unnecessary bookbinding with high-quality paper and photographs and unnecessary pictures and illustrations should be reduced. The budget for textbooks should be expanded in an appropriate manner as to enhance the contents of textbooks.

Local governments should secure the budget for preparing teaching guides for teachers so as to prevent any disparities from emerging due to respective municipalities’ financial circumstances.

(3) Textbook adoption procedures

For textbooks that are excellent both in terms of quality and volume to be actually adopted and used broadly, adoption procedures should not be based on attractive bookbinding, but on content, as mentioned in 1 above. For this purpose, a change in guardians’ and teachers’ way of thinking needs to take place and proactive discussions among members of Boards of Education should be held.

Sufficient time should be provided for members of Boards of Education to examine textbooks, either by starting the examination by Boards of Education earlier or delaying the time to determine adoption (at present, at the end of August of the preceding year).

(4) Changing of textbook publishers’ and writers’ way of thinking

Textbook publishers and writers should abandon their conventional editorial practices and change their way of thinking, and introduce new viewpoints and improve the quality and the volume of textbooks in line with the directions mentioned in 1 above.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, as well as universities, and academic societies should actively provide information to help these people.
(5) **Strengthening of a research system for textbooks, etc.**

A research system aiming to improve textbooks should be strengthened, through such means as comparative analysis between Japanese textbooks and foreign textbooks and research on expressions and descriptions used in textbooks (such as comparison with textbooks translated into English). In particular, such a system should be reinforced through coordination between textbook-related bodies, universities and academic societies, under the initiative of the National Institute for Educational Research of Japan.

The central government should provide aid for efforts by universities, academic societies and research bodies in respective subjects so that reference materials and other teaching materials that will supplement textbooks will be developed actively and disseminated widely by them.

Furthermore, the central government, Boards of Education and universities should provide practical lectures to enhance teachers’ capability to fully utilize new textbooks on such occasions as teacher training, in-service training, and certificate renewal course.