

ELECTRIC BOOK WORKS

7 September 2014

To: Mr A Subban
Director, LTSM

For attention: Mr S Sibiya
Department of Basic Education
ltsmdraftpolicy@dbe.gov.za

Written submission on the Draft National Policy for the Provisioning and Management of Learning and Teaching Support Material for grades R to 12 (“the Draft Policy”), regarding section 7.7.1: one book per subject per grade

For decades, our government has tried to get textbooks to every South African schoolchild. It has been expensive and complicated, largely because of our long history of unjust education. The Draft Policy is a bold attempt to solve this problem, and boldness is necessary at a time like this.

However, we believe the proposal to buy only one textbook (per subject, per grade) for every South African schoolchild will do far more harm than good.

- Single textbooks narrow the minds of our people: imagine if all our schoolchildren all read only one version of history, life orientation, and literature.
- By picking one textbook, the government would create monopolies for the people that produce them. Monopolies stifle innovation and, without ongoing competition, lead to higher prices over time.
- Our learners are diverse. Different learners need different kinds of textbooks, chosen school by school for their specific needs.

We ask the Minister to consider other ways to reduce costs and increase access, and to embrace a model that allows a diverse range of textbooks to thrive in our schools. We must all work harder to give our children textbooks, but we should never limit their education by limiting diversity.

In support of this submission, I have gathered signatures and input from hundreds of concerned citizens around South Africa. I am including with this submission a list of almost 1000 signatories. Many have written motivations in support of our position, which you may see by visiting our petition here: <http://bit.ly/one-textbook-petition>.

Motivations from citizens

This is a small selection of these motivations:

“As a parent, an activist in the liberation struggle, a educationist and a person involved in the publishing industry, I believe that such a step will be taking us backwards and

undoing any gains we have made in encouraging open minds and creative thinking since the end of apartheid. This move will also cripple smaller publishers in the industry and stifle growth of these smaller BEEE aligned organisations, as the huge monopolies take over.”—Tharlikha Krupandan CAPE TOWN

“The interrogation of 'multiple perspectives' of the past is a core historical concept in the CAPS curriculum and is a central pillar in the teaching and learning of History. Given the challenge of access to resources, the rich variety of materials presented in the different textbooks plays a key role in developing the critical thinking skills of our History learners.”—Kate Angier CAPE TOWN

“The single textbook model allows for only a single story - a single version of the truth - to be told. This stands in sharp contrast to our democracy's principled stand on embracing diversity - !ke e: !xarra !ke ("unity in diversity"). Quality education for all children is South Africa is vital for a thriving economy and strong democracy. The short-term financial benefits would have dire long-term financial impacts: not only would it cripple an already struggling publishing industry that is of vital importance to growing a knowledge-based workforce, but it would also inhibit the development of those critical and creative thinkers that our country needs now and in the future.”—Mignon Hardie CAPE TOWN

“As a teacher myself, I know this is just a short cut for the government. Our kids need a rich education where books and textbooks are there to provide a basis for critical thinking and a greater knowledge that goes beyond one textbook.”—Jeanne Harito JOHANNESBURG

“Our children are entitled to education and they should receive education on a comfortable level. Children are all different and learn at different paces. They should be exposed to many sources of information.”—Anieshya Essop CAPE TOWN

“Many years of teaching experience tells me that extreme standardisation such as this will be gravely prejudicial to the cultivation of critically discerning thought.”—David Newmarch DURBAN

“I have school-going children and believe that having a single textbook is poor for democracy and runs counter to improving the quality of education. Textbooks constitute a small fraction of the total education spend, so there are plenty of opportunities to cut waste in areas where high spend goes.”—Orenna Krut JOHANNESBURG

“The idea of one single textbook on each subject, for each grade is as preposterous as it is degrading. A robust education system must have a variety of texts to choose from, at each level and at each grade.”—Jo Warner JOHANNESBURG

“A single textbook will have a detrimental effect on learners for the reasons explained in the petition. It reverts to a similar system as the one used under apartheid, which is to be avoided at all costs. It will have a detrimental effect on the income of authors, most of them previously disadvantaged, who form an important component of the educational industry and economy.”—Marina Pearson JOHANNESBURG

“Different classes may have different learning needs, choice is an important democratic

right, and competition is a crucial condition for improvement in all complex products, including textbooks.”—Norman Blight JOHANNESBURG

“One textbook per subject per grade reinforces the concept of rote learning which will have dire consequences for higher education.”—Patricia Liebetrau DURBAN

“With no competition there is the real danger of monopolies dictating prices and narrowing children's experience to different approaches to learning and to life.”—Hettie Scholtz STELLENBOSCH

“Each school has its own identity. It's not one size fits all. If a school has to govern itself (SGB) allow the school to decide what is best for their students. Give back this responsibility to the teachers and school management. Else address problems in school management, not some controlling decision that removes once again accountability in schools to educate.”—Gail Petrie CAPE TOWN

“I teach Mathematics and need different textbooks to widen the scope of questions which widens the scope of understanding.”—Namari Myburgh CAPE TOWN

“I'm an educationalist and a book editor and publisher. I have worked on many books and am only too aware of how standards vary. What if your one book is not the best possible book? There will be no other choices. What if your one book does not suit every learner and every school?”—Alison Paulin OBSERVATORY

“Teachers should be able to choose which book suits their learners. Not all learners and not all classroom circumstances are the same; hence the need for more than one book per grade per subject. Also, the proposed plan could put small publishers out of business and is therefore contrary to the aims of the National Development Plan and the DTi, aiming to increase employment in businesses related to culture and education.”—Marian Griffin Kloot CAPE TOWN

“A single-textbook system is a provably bad idea. That's like saying there should only be one culture in a country as diverse as South Africa. Hegemony is always bad.”—Diane Awerbuck CAPE TOWN

“Every school has a unique character and the textbook should complement the character of the school and the community in which it functions. One book cannot be everything to everybody.”—Miemie Talljaard CAPE TOWN

“There is huge diversity in the needs and contexts of South African children. Prescribing a single textbook will disadvantage some section/s of the school-going population, regardless of how well it is designed.”—Avril Butler CAPE TOWN

“We cannot produce thinking, creative, entrepreneurial school leavers on a single textbook: a single voice from which to learn is tyranny.”—Richard Higgs CAPE TOWN

“To be truly educated is to be able to assess the value and reliability of information. This simply cannot be taught by any one text book. In any case, restricting the number of textbooks is not going to solve funding and logistical issues. Rather, INSIST on a bigger

budget and better delivery.”—Merry Dewar CAPE TOWN

“Textbooks have been a political issue for a very long time in South Africa. Ideologies of what is appropriate and cost-effective have taken turns in reducing the supply of materials to learners. In the electronic age and with open access technologies, surely there is a much better way.”—Robert Morrell CAPE TOWN

“As former teachers and curriculum developers, we understand the importance of diversity.”—Terry Bell CAPE TOWN

“In the interests of supporting diversity and creativity in thinking; supporting an industry that provides a valuable service, I am happy to sign this. The problem lies in distribution of textbooks not in the publishing industry itself. Having a range of educational products to choose from in order to meet the particular needs of particular learners is a good and healthy thing.”—Kim Barker GRAHAMSTOWN

“I am a writer and this policy will have a serious effect on my publishers, I suspect it will force quite a few of them out of business. The end result will be a near monopoly with far less diversity in textbooks for the students.”—Lauri Kubuitsile MAHALAPYE, BOTSWANA

“Learners and teachers need choices - as a country we need a vibrant publishing industry - text books are an important part of publishing - this will stifle all but the largest publishers”—Bridget Farham CAPE TOWN

“It's important because it doesn't allow diversity. It risks limiting the information that learners get to a single approach and a single point of view. If a mistake is made and a book of poor quality is prescribed (and we all know mistakes can happen), the impact on learners will be very serious.”—Mary Reynolds CAPE TOWN

“It is vital that our children have access to a range of learning materials, and materials that are best suited to their context. The CAPS are already so prescriptive in terms of what must be taught, in what way, in what amount of time, and at what time of year. Unless teachers are able to select books that are most relevant to their classes, education is likely to fail in most instances. The issue is not with the textbooks. The issue is with the teachers. Upskill the teachers, create confident teachers with excellent subject knowledge and our children will fly... This will only further shut down learner options and learner (and teacher) minds.”—Yvette Hardie CAPE TOWN

“We need MORE books in this country, not fewer.”—Kate McCallum CAPE TOWN

“Education should open the minds of our learners; this cannot be achieved when learners are limited to information from just one source. Schools should be free to choose the books they order based on the needs of their respective learners. It also gives rise to an unhealthy monopoly with regard to schoolbook supply.”—Vanessa Wilson CAPE TOWN

“Knowledge production and a viable knowledge economy require a vibrant and creative research, writing and publishing industry with multiple choices for users and an extensive range of content platforms in order to ensure generation of future content and innovation.”—Jeremy Wightman CAPE TOWN

“This policy would stifle innovation and crush the publishing industry, which is an important cultural industry. The policy is in direct opposition to Trade and Industry policies to encourage competition and promote small businesses.”—Beth Le Roux
PRETORIA

“I am a textbook writer for schools in African countries, including South Africa. When I write textbooks I take a risk that they will not be selected, and this is a risk I am prepared to take. However, with so little chance of being selected in South Africa, I would not risk investing my time in writing textbooks for South Africa. Most authors would feel the same way and South Africa will struggle to attract high-quality books for submission. I don't know any author who would take this gamble with such a high chance of losing.”—Elizabeth Mattson LONDON

“It destroys an industry filled with artists, illustrators, photographers, writers, authors, translators, designers, typesetters, who all also make books that are not profitable, who make books in official languages that are not profitable. The industry can be destroyed in one pen stroke, but not rebuilt with another.”—Elaine Williams CAPE TOWN

“Rather save by streamlining admin and not throwing away books in the veld. Please support authors and publishers or the next problem would be illiteracy”—Petro Nhlapo
GRAHAMSTOWN

“Education needs to widen children's horizons, to prepare them for life as active citizens, for work, for challenges. They need to learn not just facts, but how to think and create -- our future as a nation depends on this. A one-size-fits-all textbook approach will stifle the learning process and narrow children's opportunities. We have let our learners down so often in the past -- let's not do it again.”—Helen Moffett CAPE TOWN

“Constructive thought requires the ability to compare and evaluate options and the freedom to do so. A wide variety of inputs, sources and influences throughout one's life is essential if there are to be people available to run and develop the country, its laws, its commerce, its science and engineering and the basis of it all, its education.”—Anita van der Spuy CAPE TOWN

Conclusion

I have worked for many years on new, innovative ways to create and distribute books. I believe that I and my fellow citizens can work with the Department on alternative solutions to our textbook crisis that put a rich diversity of materials within reach of every learner.

Sincerely

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