

**EVALUATION OF
THE SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS
OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**
Elementary and Secondary Education

Reach for
your **Dreams**

Québec 

**EVALUATION OF
THE SOCIOCULTURAL ASPECTS
OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS**
Elementary and Secondary Education

Ministère de l'Éducation
Direction des ressources didactiques
Bureau d'approbation du matériel didactique

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Ministère de l'Éducation, 2004 — 12-8047A

ISBN 2-550-43226-6

Legal Deposit — Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, 2004

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INTRODUCTION

This document covers the evaluation of the sociocultural aspects of instructional materials submitted to the Minister of Education for approval. The criterion used to evaluate these aspects is **A democratic and pluralistic representation of society**.

This criterion is defined in terms of five elements:

- *Accurate representation of characters belonging to minority groups*
- *Balanced and egalitarian representation of characters of opposite sexes*
- *Varied, non-stereotypical representation of the personal and social traits of characters*
- *Interactions of characters belonging to minority groups in everyday situations*
- *Nonsexist writing*

Areas of observation and characteristics of the analysis are determined for each of these elements. In addition, points for observation, elements and rules to be considered are provided to guide the evaluation process and to bring out the strengths of instructional materials as well as the areas that need improvement.

The Evaluation Criterion Used, Its Elements and How They Are Addressed

A Democratic and Pluralistic Representation of Society

First element of the evaluation criterion to be considered

Accurate representation of characters belonging to minority groups

1.1 Definition of the concept of a character belonging to a minority group

A character belonging to a minority group is:

- a gendered character
- a character belonging to one of the Native peoples
- a character possessing phenotypes (visible hereditary physical traits, such as skin pigmentation) or ethnic characteristics (characteristics involving civilization, language, culture and customs, such as a Greek, Spanish or Italian background) that are different from those of people belonging to the majority
- a character with a visible handicap
- a character whose civil status, religion, political position or sexual orientation is different from that of the majority

1.2 Areas of observation

The representation of characters from minority groups is evaluated on the basis of:

- all illustrations (photographs, drawings, etc.) that contain readily identifiable characters
- 40 percent of extended texts, i.e., exposition, narrative, comic strips, or newspaper or magazine articles

1.3 Characteristics of the analysis

This element of the evaluation criterion is considered only from a quantitative point of view; characters from minority groups are counted to determine the extent to which they are represented.

1.4 Elements to be considered in the quantitative analysis

The elements to be considered are as follows:

- ☞ In illustrations, the gendered and ungendered characters are counted separately in order to determine their relative importance in relation to the characters as a whole.
- ☞ Characters with phenotypes or obvious cultural traits should be counted.
- ☞ Dress and customs make it possible to determine if characters belong to minority groups.
- ☞ The name alone is not sufficient to associate a character with a minority group.
- ☞ Characters that have a visible disability or use an apparatus to compensate for a disability should be counted.
- ☞ Gendered anthropomorphic characters may have traits associated with minority groups.
- ☞ Fantasy characters (fairies, elves, ogres, etc.) are not considered to be associated with minority groups.
- ☞ Characters belonging to a minority group who are distinguished from characters belonging to the majority in a group of characters are counted.
- ☞ In illustrations, a group consisting entirely of characters from a minority is counted as a single character.
- ☞ The following are not counted:
 - reproductions of works of art or the artists that created them
 - human figures in the form of toys or silhouettes

1.5 Requirements concerning the quantitative aspect

In illustrations and extended texts, about 25 percent of the characters are associated with minority groups. At least 15 percent of the characters are associated with Native peoples or ethnic or cultural communities.

Second element of the evaluation criterion to be considered

Balanced and egalitarian representation of characters of opposite sexes

2.1 Definition of the concept of a gendered character

A gendered character is:

- a character whose physical and other traits, including the name and gender used to designate it, are readily associated with one of the sexes
- a character that, by virtue of its form or physical traits, may be considered human (anthropomorphic character) and that is readily associated with one of the sexes

2.2 Areas of observation

Whether the relationship between characters of opposite sexes is egalitarian is evaluated on the basis of:

- all illustrations (photographs, drawings, etc.) that contain readily identifiable characters
- 40 percent of extended texts, i.e., exposition, narrative, comic strips, or newspaper or magazine articles
- 40 percent of short texts, i.e., instructions to the students, problems, legends, etc.

2.3 Characteristics of the analysis

This element of the evaluation criterion is considered from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view. Male and female characters are counted to determine the extent to which they are represented, and qualitative aspects of their representation are also taken into account.

The characters analyzed belong to both minorities and the majority.

2.4 Elements to be considered in the quantitative analysis

For illustrations:

- ☞ The gendered and ungendered characters are counted separately in order to determine their relative importance in relation to the characters as a whole.
- ☞ A group consisting entirely of characters of one sex is counted as a single character.
- ☞ One or more characters within groups made up mainly of characters of the opposite sex should be counted.
- ☞ The following are not counted:
 - reproductions of works of art or the artists that created them
 - human figures in the form of toys or silhouettes
 - close-ups of parts of the human body other than the head

For extended texts:

- ☞ All characters that play a major or secondary role are counted.
- ☞ Characters that are quoted are not counted.

For short texts:

- ☞ To be considered as representing either sex, characters quoted in short texts must play an active role.
- ☞ When the same character appears in several short texts, it is counted each time it appears.
- ☞ Short texts in illustrations should be considered, e.g., dialogue in a comic strip.

2.5 Requirements concerning the quantitative aspect

The material includes an equal number of male and female characters in each area of observation: illustrations, extended texts and short texts.

2.6 Points for observation of the qualitative aspect

The following points for observation for dealing with the qualitative aspect are to be used to determine whether the material meets the requirements that have been set; not all of them necessarily apply to the material.

- ☞ Characters of both sexes are shown doing remunerative work.
- ☞ The remunerative work shown is varied and transcends the traditional sexual division of labour.
- ☞ No suggestion is made that the characters' ability to do remunerative work depends on their sex.
- ☞ Characters of both sexes are shown doing volunteer work or community work.
- ☞ Girls and boys shown in school play a variety of similar or equivalent roles.
- ☞ Parental roles are distributed without regard to sex.
- ☞ Characters of both sexes are shown carrying out various household tasks, and not only those tasks traditionally attributed to their sex; but the traditional sexual division of labour is not systematically reversed.
- ☞ Characters of both sexes are shown in similar recreational activities, and not only those traditionally attributed to their sex.
- ☞ In narratives, the characters are not restricted to their traditional roles.
- ☞ In narratives, women's contributions in various spheres of activity are brought out where appropriate.
- ☞ Historical documents and texts about history presented in textbooks should attempt to provide an equitable representation of characters of the two sexes. Women's contribution to history should be emphasized, or, where they are absent from historical documents, the reasons for this absence should be provided.
- ☞ In textbooks on contemporary history, it is important to emphasize women's contribution to history and to point out their efforts to obtain recognition of their rights.
- ☞ Literary works in anthologies should be selected with a view to providing a balance in the representation of male and female characters.
- ☞ Expressions and terms that are today considered obsolete or pejorative should be placed in their historical context.

2.7 Requirements concerning the qualitative aspect

In illustrations, extended texts and short texts, female and male characters are represented:

- ◆ in a variety of roles that are equivalent and that transcend the roles traditionally attributed to the sexes
- ◆ in a variety of situations: at work, at school, in the family and in recreational activities
- ◆ in a variety of occupations that are equally remunerative and respected and that transcend the traditional sexual division of labour

Third element of the evaluation criterion to be considered

Varied, non-stereotypical representation of the personal and social traits of characters

3.1 Definition of the concept of a stereotype

A stereotype is:

- a simplified and sometimes distorted representation of an individual or a group based on one or more characteristics
- the application of an overall, undifferentiated image to all the members of a social group

A stereotype is *discriminatory* when it restricts the development, expression or rights of individuals belonging to the social group to whom it is applied.

A discriminatory stereotype is a value judgment that:

- has no basis in reality
- is based on widespread prejudices
- may give rise to negative attitudes and behaviour

The danger of discrimination increases the more the stereotype is repeated.

3.2 Areas of observation

The diversified, non-stereotypical representation of the personal and social traits of characters is evaluated on the basis of:

- all illustrations (photographs, drawings, etc.) that contain readily identifiable characters
- 40 percent of extended texts, i.e., exposition, narrative, comic strips, or newspaper or magazine articles
- 40 percent of short texts, i.e., instructions to the students, problems, legends, etc.

3.3 Characteristics of the analysis

This element of the evaluation criterion is considered only from a qualitative point of view. All female and male characters associated with the majority or with minority groups are counted.

3.4 Points for observation of the qualitative aspect

The following points for observation for dealing with the qualitative aspect are to be used to determine whether the material meets the requirements that have been set; not all of them necessarily apply to the material.

- ☞ Characters are shown in a variety of social conditions. No suggestion is made that their competence, behaviour or attitudes depend on their social condition.
- ☞ Immigrants are shown as coming from a variety of backgrounds.
- ☞ A variety of family structures are shown; no suggestion is made that any particular family structure is superior to another.
- ☞ The representation of elderly people transcends stereotypes associated with this group; they are shown in a variety of active, respected roles.
- ☞ The depiction of the physical appearance of characters does not rely on stereotypes.
- ☞ The depiction of the dress of characters is not stereotypical. Characters belonging to the Native peoples or to ethnocultural communities may be shown in their traditional dress without this depiction being considered stereotypical; however such characters should not be shown only in their traditional dress.
- ☞ Characters belonging to the Native peoples or to cultural communities may be shown in their traditional activities without this depiction being considered stereotypical; however such characters should not be shown only in their traditional activities.
- ☞ The aspirations, interests and abilities attributed to characters do not convey stereotypes, i.e., they are equivalent for the two sexes as well as for characters belonging to the majority and to minority groups.
- ☞ Personality traits, expressions of emotion and aptitudes are varied and do not depend on the sex of the characters.
- ☞ Animals representing humans, or other anthropomorphic characters, do not convey feminine or masculine stereotypes.
- ☞ The roles attributed to boys and girls are varied and non-stereotyped; they are not simply reversed.

- ☞ The psychology of the characters is rich and well developed.
- ☞ Characters associated with minority groups are not shown in marginal roles; nor, on the other hand, are they idealized. They are depicted as having rich and varied characteristics.
- ☞ When there are historical documents or literary texts in a textbook that may convey discriminatory stereotypes, the book must contain an explicit cautionary note or provide an activity that offsets the danger of conveying discriminatory stereotypes.
- ☞ Texts used to illustrate topics related to racism or sexism must be accompanied by clear guidelines for the teacher concerning the use of the material. Subjects for discussion should be provided for the students in order to prevent any interpretation of the content that may promote discriminatory stereotypes.

3.5 Requirements concerning the qualitative aspect

The personal and social traits of female and male characters belonging both to the majority and to minority groups are:

- ◆ varied
- ◆ non-stereotypical

Fourth element of the evaluation criterion to be considered

Interactions of characters belonging to minority groups in everyday situations

4.1 Definition of the concept of interaction

An interaction is an exchange between two or more characters belonging to the same minority group (cultural or other) or to different groups in an everyday situation.

4.2 Areas of observation

The interactions of characters belonging to minority groups are evaluated on the basis of:

- all illustrations (photographs, drawings, etc.) that contain readily identifiable characters
- 40 percent of extended texts, i.e., exposition, narrative, comic strips, or newspaper or magazine articles

4.3 Characteristics of the analysis

This element of the evaluation criterion is considered only from a qualitative point of view.

4.4 Points for observation of the qualitative aspect

The following points for observation for dealing with the qualitative aspect are to be used to determine whether the material meets the requirements that have been set; not all of them necessarily apply to the material.

☞ Cultural and ethnic diversity is presented as enriching for society but is not idealized.

- ☞ Characters from minority groups are shown in interaction with each other and also with characters from the majority in the context of remunerative work, school, recreational activities and the family.
- ☞ Characters from ethnic or cultural minority groups are not shown only in situations traditionally associated with their respective groups.
- ☞ The texts and activities provided reflect the pluralism of Québec society. The texts and activities provided encourage an attitude of openness.
- ☞ Texts used to illustrate topics related to racism should be accompanied by guidelines for the use of the material.

4.5 Requirements concerning the qualitative aspect

Characters belonging to minorities are shown in interaction with characters from the majority and from minorities in everyday situations.

Fifth element of the evaluation criterion to be considered

Nonsexist writing

5.1 Definition of the concept of nonsexist writing

Nonsexist writing is writing that presents a balance between the sexes while maintaining the clarity and coherence of the message.

5.2 Areas of observation

The nonsexist nature of the writing is evaluated on the basis of:

- 40 percent of extended texts, i.e., exposition, narrative, comic strips, or newspaper or magazine articles
- 40 percent of short texts, i.e., instructions to the students, problems, legends, etc.
- all verb conjugation charts

5.3 Characteristics of the analysis

This element of the evaluation criterion is considered only from a qualitative point of view.

5.4 Rules to be considered concerning the qualitative aspect

- The texts present a balance between the sexes.
- Gender-neutral titles and occupations are used.
- Masculine pronouns are not used to include persons of both sexes.
- Verb conjugation charts use the pronouns for both sexes in the third person singular.
- The writing style avoids awkwardness and redundancy.

5.5 Requirements concerning the qualitative aspect

Texts are free of sexism and present a balance between the sexes.

