

# Ridding school textbooks of stereotypes

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© UNESCO/Michel Ravassard Student-teacher dialogue to prevent violence in school, France

**“In today’s world, where stereotyping leads to inequalities, violation of rights and, in some cases, violence, it is essential that education promotes positive, not negative values and images. We need to ensure that education does not perpetuate stereotypes, but rather teaches students to respect and value cultural diversity and intercultural understanding.” (Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General of UNESCO for Education)**

The need to ensure that education does not transmit stereotypes was stressed at a recent meeting organised by UNESCO, which included the participation of 21 experts from Asia, Africa, Europe and the Arab States. In his opening address, Mr Tang underlined that education systems worldwide are faced with the challenge of how to promote learning to live together through dialogue and intercultural understanding. He talked about the value of inclusive learning materials and textbooks which do not contain stereotypes, and how they can promote values such as intercultural dialogue, peace, diversity and respect.

This two-day meeting financed by Saudi Arabia, which took place on 24-25 September 2012, aimed at revising UNESCO’s strategy for the publication of textbooks and learning materials, as well as drafting the outline of a practical training manual for the writing of textbooks. This is to ensure that content aimed at students systematically reflects cultural and religious diversity, and avoids gender stereotypes.

Among the proposals made at the meeting was the call for comparative research and case studies in the training manual to exemplify good practice from teachers. There was also discussion about the adaptability of material and the necessity of cultural sensitivity in some disciplines (history, civic education), and finally a discussion about the use of the terminology of diversity.