

The Truth about Declining Textbook Sales

Given its monetary impact on the way copyright collectives operate in Canada, the debate about the copyright-reform legislation, Bill C-32, is very contentious and, at times, results in claims that misrepresent the facts concerning our country's changing use of digital and print materials. One such extraordinary claim comes from Canadian publishers' tales of hardship concerning the decreased funds generated from their traditionally lucrative education customers. The misinformation that publishers would have us believe is that the education sector will do everything it can to avoid paying copyright-licencing fees and that entire textbooks are being photocopied instead of being purchased. This notion is false, and there is empirical evidence to prove it.

The education sector (to be specific, learning Canadians and taxpayers) spend billions of dollars every year on educational content. Figures from Statistics Canada show that postsecondary students alone spend more than \$1.3 billion on such materials.

Canadian collectives spent a great deal of effort quantifying their relationship with the education sector. A multi-million dollar study of photocopying in elementary-secondary schools was conducted during the 2005-06 school year to measure how much copying was actually taking place. This study, which was used by educational publishers as evidence in a legal proceeding at the Copyright Board of Canada, is empirical evidence of two things. First, teachers copy, on average, a total of 60 pages per student per year (or six pages per month of the school year) — not nearly enough to replace textbooks, as educational publishers claim. Second, teachers usually copy "short excerpts" from textbooks to supplement a student's main textbook. This study was used by the Copyright Board to determine the amount of copying that was actually taking place and to set a copyright royalty of \$5.16 for each full-time student to be paid annually by ministries/departments of education in every province and territory (except Quebec) to educational publishers. On a pan-Canadian level, this payment is \$20 million per year.

In their presentations on Parliament Hill, educational publishers are telling members of Parliament that textbook sales have declined by as much as 30 per cent over the preceding 20 years as a direct result of teachers photocopying textbooks instead of buying them. This is not true. These claims are being made to try to prevent Bill C-32, the Copyright Modernization Act, from being approved by Parliament. The claims are politically motivated, and educators need to inform the political debate in Ottawa with the truth.

The truth is that educational publishers are paid the handsome sum of \$20 million dollars per year to photocopy six pages per month for each full-time student. The truth is that textbook sales are not declining because teachers are photocopying textbooks rather than purchasing them, but for entirely different reasons.

Here are a few facts to consider:

- A big reason why textbook sales are down is because student populations all across Canada are in decline. For example, in 1972, there were 162,000 students in K-12

schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. In 2006, there were only 73,000 - less than half as many. Since the 2001-02 school year, enrolment has declined by 3.9 per cent in Prince Edward Island and 2.4 per cent in Nova Scotia. Fewer students means fewer textbooks are needed, so fewer are being sold. This is affecting the size of the textbook market in Canada.

- Another reason is that textbooks last longer these days – bindings and paper are of better quality. Publishers must adhere to provincial specifications guaranteeing durability and the quality of manufacture of textbooks.
- Fewer textbooks are being sold because schools have adopted a cost-saving measure called “class sets”. Instead of each student receiving his/her own textbook, sets of books are shared among one or more classes of students. The class set remains in one classroom, and successive classes of students come to the books. For example, if there are five Grade 10 social studies classes, one set of books serves all five classes. Again, fewer books are needed.
- Sales are also declining because, over the last ten years, secondary schools have been “semestered.” Semestering involves offering courses twice (or more) in the same school year. All secondary schools in Ontario were semestered about ten years ago in an effort to save money. For example, a Grade 10 student can take math in either the first or second semester. This means that one set of Grade 10 math books serves two classes where as two sets would have been required without semestering.
- Yet another reason for the declining sales of textbooks is the new and growing trend in K–12 classrooms of using digital resources. Subscriptions to electronic resources are replacing some of the need for textbooks.
- Finally, an examination of jurisdictions’ budgets for the purchase of textbooks will reveal that, in recent years, although the number of textbooks purchased appear to be declining, the amount of money that governments spend on textbook purchases has actually increased.

*** *The CMEC Copyright Consortium is producing a series of information notes on Bill C-32, the Copyright Modernization Act. Future instalments will discuss other proposals in Bill C-32 that affect students and teachers.*