The Curious Case of the Black & White School Books

Prosveta Publishing House JSC
The System in Bulgaria

• Expenses for educational books up to Seventh Grade (Year 7) are covered by The Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria.

• Educational books for Eighth Grade (Year 8) and above are purchased by parents.

• Due to a reform programme in the educational system, a new curriculum is in force in 2017/2018 academic year for students in grades 1, 2, 5, 6 and 8. Therefore, to accommodate the changes, Prosveta (amongst other publishers) developed and submitted for approval to the Ministry of Education brand new educational books for these grades.
Prosveta’s Decision for Grade 8

- Our team decided to give grade 8 students and their families the opportunity to choose between two versions of the body of their school books, without changing their content:
  - ✓ Black and white
  - ✓ Full-color

- ! There are two print versions only where it is justifiable to have a black and white copy - subjects in which images are not essential to the learning experience of the student!

- ! Both versions are approved by The Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria!
Why Two Versions?

• **Full-Color Books**
  - Easy on the eye
  - Enhance the learning experience in subject areas where images are crucial
  - Weigh more
  - Cost more
  - Not eco-friendly
  - Identical content

• **Black and White Books**
  - Eco-friendly (printed on recycled paper)
  - Weigh less
  - Cost less
  - Give students and their families a choice
  - Identical content
The Misunderstanding

Managing director’s interview on a national television channel covered:

✓ Preparation for the beginning of the new school year
✓ New school books for 1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th and 8th grade
✓ New e-books with interactive and 3D educational aids and resources
✓ Black and white and full-color books for 8th grade

“For financially challenged families we have textbooks with a black and white body, which are significantly cheaper.”
The Consequence

• After the interview was broadcast, the quote was taken out of context; his words were twisted and falsely interpreted.

• Several angry parents turned to social media to accuse Prosveta and the Ministry of Education of intentional segregation based on income. Their comments were angry, deeply insulting, and most of all – misinformed and ungrounded.

• They made allegations that such distinction between children at school will facilitate bullying and aggression, and deepen the existing social class division.
The Consequence

- In a matter of hours the news broke everywhere – a few vocal individuals and their ‘rants’ on Facebook turned it into a full-blown national scandal.
Black or white cynicism or for cheaper children of Bulgaria

Black and white textbooks for the socio-WEAK KIDS AFTER 8th grade?! And Colono — hi, Bulgarian! Morning, detective. Some State Administrator with a black-and-White brain has decided that the child’s soul is obliged to bear the burden of the social division’s. 14 years old is just the right time to start getting used to the color difference, pardon the price difference, right? Right?! 14 years old is just the right time to accept that they are the cheaper children of Bulgaria.

How many children do we have left in this country, “my sweet” Black and white for from mon and from companies? How many colors are in the eyes and in the heart of a child? You know what? Do you remember? How will we discipline dreamers? How do we teach them dignity? How do we teach them love? By giving colored pencils to the black and white children to make the difference to the for their parent s’ price? Idiocy is not criminal until the moment he becomes aggressive cynicism. And to children. I can požáržham in color, but the black and white popúržzhnya will be too much. And don’t, Riva, that our children are gone. We, the big ones, are chasing them. With Black and white textbooks for colorful international passports.

My son will be in the 8th grade this year. And I will give him the freedom to choose the color of his books. But before that, I will explain to him and I will apologize to him on behalf of the elderly. Colorful, honest and with love. Things every child deserves.

Black-and-White textbooks will be for the socially weak. I’m thinking, when we get to the books, are they gonna be socially? I’d be happy to see a colorful and a alphabet prayer in pictures. For some of the wealthy, it’s even advisable, otherwise the chance to read them to zero. Which surprisingly turns out to be the IQ of the mon, according to the latest independent research.

But the books are in the bag, you can’t see who’s poor, who’s rich. They gave them a tattoo of these children on their forehead, to know that they are inferior caste, not to be confused. Bigger and more in perspective. Black and white clothes, Black-and-White toys, clear things out. Even if you put them in black and white rooms, what are they gonna do all over the school, just to despoothing the colors?
Ivan Bakalov
August 31 at 11:04am

In my opinion, that idiot from education, who offered black and white books for poorer, should be publicly quartered. I'm amazed there's no backlash yet. This is the detonation of basic norms in society, the constitution, democracy at all. How are you gonna share the kids in two categories? The State has no money to subsidise textbooks? Imagine the kids in one class, part of them with "Cheap" textbooks on how they're gonna look at the others? Where are the liberal Taliban to protect equality? Someone offers segregation, racism even, and it's all about jokes. Why don't the top editors in the morning block find this jerk and invite him to get his story? Loan Him out. Who are they? For such a thing in France, the government will fall.

Ivan Popov
September 4 at 6:00pm

Black White books for "the poor" for the rich "colored" How the kids grow up in a normal environment????????!!11111!11111111? I'm shocked, insolence, people don't have money for bread, and we can't give kids free books... crap!

Vesselina Sedlarska
August 31 at 8:19am

Since the various textbooks will increase the aggression, it has been decided to restrict it. Students with black and white textbooks have the right to beat / kill only classmates with black and white textbooks, while students with colorful ones have the right to beat / kill any.
Opinions of the Misinformed

• Once the media caught on, the black and white books were deemed “books for the poor”. The term “black and white” was immediately turned into a synonym for financially unstable families and their children.

• We received calls from every news channel, agency, station and newspaper asking for an official statement.

• Our managers were invited by news anchors and talk show hosts to debate, explain and defend our standpoint opposite those same vocal Facebook users, who claimed to represent all parents.
Opinions of the Misinformed

• The Ombudsman of Bulgaria, Maya Manolova, also weighed in on the manufactured scandal:

“This decision is scandalous and discriminatory because it indirectly divides the children of Bulgaria by inciting discrimination and encouraging the social division between them.”

• She issued a letter to the Minister of Education insisting that he prohibits black and white books (approved by the Ministry) from entering the market.
Opinions of the Misinformed

• The Chairman of the Bulgarian Socialist Party, Korneliya Ninova:

“Absolutely unacceptable absurdity, this is yet another division of society into categories of poor and rich. It widens the gap between different social classes.”
The Ministry’s Reaction

Press-conference:

• Under the pressure of public opinion, the Minister of Education, Krasimir Valchev, gave an emergency press-conference where he said that the Ministry was not responsible for the production of black and white copies of school books (even though they successfully completed the Ministry’s official approval process).

• Valchev made it clear that the decision to introduce such textbooks on the market was Prosveta’s.
The Ministry’s Reaction

Press-conference:

• He explained that the new textbook approval regulation the Ministry introduced in 2016 does not specifically prohibit such products, but he promised to change its text, so that only full-color books would be eligible for approval from this point forward.

• Valchev officially asked Prosveta to pull the black and white books off the market.
Prosveta’s Measurements

• Official Statement sent to all media – elaborately clarifying the intention behind the B&W product and its benefits for all students, their families and the environment.

• Members of our managing team cleared up the misconceptions in debates on talk-shows and news channels.

• Offered to include a free e-book with every purchased black and white copy.
The Outcome

• Once the whole picture was revealed to the public, the tide began to turn.

• Letters, emails, Facebook comments and messages from teachers, students and parents poured in in support of Prosveta and the black and white copies.
The Outcome

- People visit our bookstores and call our representatives to ask whether they can purchase the black and white books.

Their reasons are not necessarily financial. They recognize the advantages that the black and white copies hold against their full-color counterparts:

- Students want lighter backpacks.
- Eco-conscious parents.
- They want to be given the freedom to choose the product they like.

Facebook post: “Buy your kids colorful textbooks, give them gold pens, do whatever you like - but do not restrict people's right to choose and do not impose your opinion.”
The Outcome

For better or for worse, Prosveta made the headlines of every news outlet for three consecutive days.

There is no such thing as bad publicity, right? 😊
How would you have addressed the situation?