FULL OF LIFE AND WITH A DIGITAL TOUCH
TRENDS IN THE “TEXTBOOK OF THE YEAR” COMPETITION 2015

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The competition for the coveted “Textbook of the Year” award produced one or two surprises this year when it was presented in March at the Leipzig Book Fair, attended by Brunhild Kurth the president of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the German Länder. This year saw the first nomination for a digital textbook, which was seen as a favourite by many but was ultimately beaten to the prize, in the category for social sciences, by an apparent outsider. Another award winner, “mathe live”, took a completely new approach to maths whilst the shortlist for language books demonstrated that skills-based approaches have become standard.

The majority of books submitted were still printed works but with a digital twin that offered modest additional features. However, with the nomination of the digital history textbook mBook – Geschichte denken statt pauken (Institute for digital learning, Florian Sochatzy and others) the trend toward digitisation became tangible for the first time this year. This highly innovative work encouraged history lessons to embrace the digital world – using techniques such as video presentations by the author, themed picture galleries and links to YouTube films. However, with the variation in quality between chapters ultimately prevented its victory.

A further impediment to mBook’s win was the presence of an exceptionally appealing book in the same category: Plan L. (Schoeningh, edited by Silvia Leutnant). Prior to the competition nobody would have considered that a home economics textbook had a chance. However the judging panel were impressed by the way in which the book inspired joy in cooking, eating and budgeting and how it used exciting methods to simultaneously encourage critical thinking. The panel also admired how the authors had used examples from pupils’ everyday experiences to illustrate global themes.

The trend towards real living environments was especially evident in the STEM category. The winner mathe live (Klett, Dorothee Göckel and others) raised the bar. Instead of working systematically through principles of mathematics, the book encouraged pupils to seek maths in their everyday environments – such as a town plan, on packaging or in nature. This method enables mathe live to make maths accessible to many children who would otherwise be alienated by the abstract nature of the subject.

In the languages category there was a neck and neck contest between À toi! (Cornelsen), Pontes (Klett) and Vamos! Adelante! (Klett) which the French book À toi! edited by Peter Winz was eventually able to turn in its favour. The jury admired the book’s use of true-to-life scenes and its outstanding emphasis on skills, which until now had generally been the reserve of textbooks for English. The jury was pleased to see that the “minor” foreign languages are catching up in this regard and that a carefully considered emphasis on skills appears now to be standard in language textbooks. It remains to be seen whether the trends observed this year will still be evident in next year’s competition and what surprises will be in store then. We will find out on 18 March 2016.