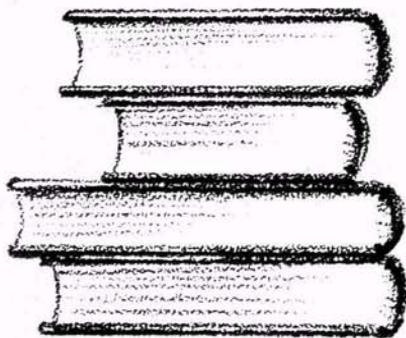

Changing methodology in teaching points up the need to modify the highly restrictive provisions of many state textbook programs. Greater flexibility is required to purchase whatever materials can facilitate children's learning.



MANY states have long had state-funded textbook programs. Most of these programs are the result of legislative enactments of at least a quarter-century ago. These regulations, some of which have undergone no substantive revision since their inception, were based upon the then current educational practices found in most American classrooms. Among these practices were the following: (a) group-paced instruction, with little or no individualization; (b) a single textbook which, for all intents and purposes, was the curriculum; (c) survey courses only with no in-depth comparative study of selected topics; and (d) only very limited use of supplementary materials from other books, periodicals, or multi-media sources.

Given the above-described conditions prior to 1950, educators and legislators showed commendable leadership in seeking to correct the abuses and inefficiencies of the prevailing textbook selection practices. The intent of the programs they conceived was usually three-fold: (a) to make certain that every child, even in the poorest rural school, had a textbook; (b) to screen out inferior or objectionable textbooks, thus ensuring that only quality materials were used in the classrooms of that state; and (c) to make more efficient use of available tax funds through central purchasing.

Through the years, these state-funded textbook programs have been quite effective in ensuring equal access for every pupil to good textbook materials. Particularly was this true when group-paced instruction under relatively static conditions typified most schools. Today, however, with the high student mobility, the modern emphasis on individualization and continuous progress, and the availability of a much greater variety

of fine new instructional materials, schools are finding the limitations imposed by state textbook programs to be unduly restrictive.

Survey Results

To learn more about current textbook adoption practices, a survey was made of the 50 state superintendents of public instruction. The five basic questions asked of each superintendent are summarized here:

1. *Do you have a state-funded textbook program?* To this question, 26 replied "Yes" and 24 said "No." The existence of state textbook programs appears to be a decidedly regional characteristic. Of the 22 Southeastern, Southwestern, and Far Western states, 19 or 86 percent have such programs, while only 7 or 25 percent of the 28 other states operate state textbook programs.

2. *Does your state adopt a standard list of textbooks from which local schools make their selections?* Here 24 responded in the affirmative.

3. *Do state regulations limit the number of titles which may be listed? If so, what*

A Survey of State Textbook Practices

PAUL I. McCLOUD*

is the number of titles? Only 10 states reported any limitation on how many books could be listed. The number of titles ranged from three to seven, the median being five.

4. *Do state regulations set the number of years of the adoption? If so, what is the number of years?* Twenty-one states indicated that the length of the adoption was fixed by state regulations. These terms ranged from three to eight years, with a median of five years.

5. *May state textbook funds also be used to purchase other instructional materials such as filmstrips and recordings which are recommended as supplements to the texts?* Only 11 states permit this flexibility in the use of funds.

Practices Among States Not Having Textbook Programs

Several unique variations were reported by the 24 states that do not have textbook programs. In Wyoming and Colorado, for example, the State Board of Education is prohibited by statute from prescribing text-

books. Connecticut and North Dakota, on the other hand, allow their State Boards to recommend but not prescribe teaching materials.

Iowa reports that it has never had laws relating to textbooks, and that the practice of letting local districts make their own textbook selections has worked quite successfully. Kansas formerly had a state textbook screening committee which provided a list from which local schools were required to select textbooks. However, in a recent session of the legislature, this law was repealed and each local district in Kansas now exercises complete autonomy in the selection of its textbooks.

In Washington, the selection and purchase of textbooks are the prerogative of the individual school district but the State Department of Education does require that each district have an acceptable policy for the selection of materials. South Dakota, instead, grants autonomy to independent districts but

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requires dependent districts to select their books from a list prepared by a county textbook committee.

Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan, while not having state adoption systems for textbooks, do regulate the activities of book suppliers to guarantee the quality and price of all books sold to public school districts in the state.

Perhaps the philosophy of these 24 states regarding textbook practices is best summarized by a curriculum consultant from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction who wrote, "In this day and age it appears to be imperative that individual schools have the right to choose from the multiple sources that are available."

Practices Among States Having Textbook Programs

Of the 26 states reporting state-funded textbook programs, all but two adopt standard lists from which districts may select books to meet their local needs. (Missouri and Maine provide textbook funds but have

no statewide adoption, each district selecting whatever texts and supplementary materials it deems appropriate.) Some states adopt only basal textbooks while others also include supplementary texts. A few states have adoptions for elementary textbooks only.

Interestingly, two of the 24 states which adopt standard lists of textbooks provide no funds for their purchase. Arizona requires each district to purchase books from local funds, while in West Virginia pupils must buy their own books.

Eleven of the 26 states which operate textbook programs do permit the purchase of some types of instructional materials other than conventional textbooks. Florida regulations, for instance, specify the following:

There may be purchased with state textbook funds text-related instructional materials such as paperback books, unbound materials, consumable materials, slides, films, recording tapes, and other audio-visual materials; provided, that such material is recommended by the Courses of Study Council or is purchased in connection with a pilot or experimental pro-

gram approved by the State Board of Education, evaluated and recommended by the State Textbook Selection Committees, and is contracted for by the State in the same manner as textbooks.

Kentucky also seeks to allow some flexibility in the use of textbook funds through the following statute:

The State Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, may authorize school districts for instructional experimentation to select and use textbooks and materials other than those selected and listed by the State Textbook Commission and adopted by adoption units. For the purpose of purchasing such experimental textbooks and materials the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall make available to all school districts an amount of money equal to that which would have been provided to the districts had they adopted a text selected and listed by the State Textbook Commission. However, in no case shall the amount of funds thus made available exceed one-tenth of the total funds for textbooks and materials made available to the district by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

In 1969, the North Carolina legislature, recognizing that "the limited supplementary book list restricts and hinders the local school system in accomplishing the goals and objectives for their programs," approved legislation providing for the purchase of supplementary instructional materials. To augment the basic textbook allocation, the bill provided additional funds to each school district for a wide variety of instructional materials, "without restrictions on purchases."

All states leave the final selection of textbooks to the local school officials, except that in those having a state textbook program, the selection must usually be from the state-adopted list. Eighteen of the superintendents mentioned laws which regulate the prices and manufacturing standards of all textbooks sold in those states, but doubtless others also have similar provisions.

In conclusion, it must be recognized that during the past 25 years, state textbook programs have significantly increased the availability of good textbook materials to all children, particularly those in small, deprived communities. Today, however, the class-

room conditions on which these programs were initially built are fast disappearing. At least three serious deterrents to modern instructional practices are posed by most state textbook programs:

1. The limitation of no more than seven adopted titles handicaps efforts toward individualization. Regardless of how good those seven series may be, they can never be appropriate for *all* pupils, since fully individualized instruction dictates that each child pursue a program of study patterned to fit his unique needs and learning style.

2. The adoption of textbooks for a fixed term of three to eight years blocks progress in today's fast-changing educational arena. Sufficient flexibility should be allowed so that new and improved materials can be placed in the hands of children when they become available, not several years later.

3. Perhaps the most serious problem is restricting textbook funds to the purchase of only printed matter. This discourages the use of many fine multi-media materials such as films, filmstrips, sound records, slides, transparencies, kinescopes, video tapes, and learning kits. These materials are becoming increasingly essential to the success of any program of individualized instruction. In fact, most teacher's editions of textbooks recommend and/or require the purchase of such supportive "software" materials to make the textbooks fully effective.

Even though 24 states have demonstrated that state textbook programs are far from essential, it may not be wise to abandon such programs entirely. Nevertheless, the rapidly changing methodology in the teaching of children points up the urgent need to modify the highly restrictive provisions of many state textbook programs. What is needed instead is much greater flexibility to purchase whatever materials can effectively facilitate the learning processes of individual children. Let us hope that the State Departments of Education and the Legislatures in the several states can be helped to see the serious limitations posed by their anachronistic regulations. □

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