

## VALUE OF STATE TEXT- BOOK ADOPTIONS IS DEBATABLE

*Constant efforts to establish uniformity in state adoptions are invariably prompted by politicians and are as consistently opposed by educators.*

STATE uniformity in textbook adoptions developed rather rapidly in the latter half of the nineteenth century. At the present time uniform textbook laws are effective in twenty-five states.

While no new states have been added to the state adoption group since 1917, there have been frequent efforts to secure such legislation in other states. On the other hand, efforts are continually being made to bring about repeal of these laws in states where uniformity of textbooks is prescribed. The present discussion is concerned with the arguments commonly submitted in support of or in opposition to the state adoption plan.

In the early history of the schools it was the common practice for pupils to bring to school whatever books the family library afforded or whatever text or edition the local storekeeper might have in stock. Much of the early agitation for state laws requiring the use of uniform series of schoolbooks had its origin in the complaints of disheartened teachers against this incongruous situation.

### *Variable Meaning of Uniformity*

No such conditions have existed in recent years. In every community the influence and authority of the state school system are sufficient to prevent any such lack of orderliness in this community enterprise. As a result, practically every school community now maintains a program of instruction based upon a rational selection of textbooks.

The term uniformity as applied to text-

books is now used primarily to designate the areas within which some specified authority has power to control the selection and use of textbooks in the public schools. In twenty-five states the state board of education or a special textbook commission is empowered to select textbooks for use in the public schools on a statewide basis. These state adoption states are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia. In five states the county board or a special textbook commission is authorized to select books for use in the schools of the county. The county adoption states are Maryland, Missouri, South Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin. County adoption may be established in any county of Iowa by a majority vote.

In the remaining states regulations regarding textbooks are made by the authorities in charge of the schools of some unit smaller than the state or county, such as the city, town, or township, or the school district. That is, the significant aspect of textbook uniformity under the laws now prevailing in the different states is the fact that in twenty-five states the uniform use of the books selected is prescribed for the state as a whole, whereas the laws of twenty-three states prescribe or permit the establishment of uniformity regulations over smaller units of school organization within the state.

There are also some differences in the scope and the meaning of the uniformity regulations as these are applied in the different state adoption units. For example, textbooks are not always prescribed by state authorities for use in all grades of the common school system. Arkansas, Nevada, and West Virginia do not clothe the adopting board with authority to prescribe textbooks beyond the elementary grades. In Alabama, Arizona, and Georgia the adopting agency

may, but is not required to, select the books which are to be used in the high schools.

In ten of the twenty-five uniformity states the books prescribed are not limited to a single text for each grade or subject. In such instances the adopting agency selects two or more texts for each subject, the complete list of books selected being known as a multiple list. Local school authorities may then select from this multiple list and prescribe the books to be used in the schools under their jurisdiction.

Uniform textbook regulations vary also in the state adoption states with respect to the extent to which they apply to different types of local units within the state. There are nine states in which either cities or school districts of a specified class are exempt by law from the uniformity rule which in general applies to the schools of that state. These exemptions are made in recognition of the fact that certain classes of communities tend to maintain higher educational standards than can be prescribed for the state school system as a whole.

It is apparent, therefore, that the term uniformity of textbooks does not denote a single set of textbook regulations administered in like manner and with like effect in the several areas described as uniform textbook territory. There is nevertheless a common motive back of all the variable plans under which textbooks used throughout a state school system are chosen and prescribed by central rather than by local school authority. This motive is the desire to ensure equally favorable opportunities for instruction in all of the schools of the state.

#### *Arguments for Statewide Adoptions*

Four major arguments for statewide adoptions have been carried through the long period of controversy beginning in 1850. These may be briefly summarized.

1. The mobility of population is the basis of two lines of argument for the uniform textbook plan. First, there is the plea

that parents frequently incur the expense of a complete new outfit of books for their children when they move from one school district to another. Much emphasis is placed upon the fact that change of residence occurs most frequently among the very classes who can least afford this additional cost for their children's schooling. Even in recent years it is noted that children are often kept out of school on this account. So vigorously was this fact stressed in many of the earlier campaigns for uniformity legislation that it is generally regarded as the origin of the uniform textbook movement. The second argument arising from the experience of families moving to another community is that the children have difficult adjustments to make and their progress in school work is frequently retarded when they are required to change to unfamiliar textbooks.

Some interesting comments have been made relative to the urge for legislation in relief of the financial burden upon parents and the educational disadvantages to children under these conditions. At the 1908 meeting of the N. E. A., Superintendent Carleton B. Gibson, of Columbus, Ga., asserted that the demand for state uniformity of textbooks "came from sympathy for the less fortunate in educational matters" rather than from a desire for unification of school work throughout a state. Much of the discussion has been in this vein. Families that must move from year to year under the vicissitudes of tenant farming or unskilled labor are, in the light of this argument, to be especially favored and protected in their relations to the public schools. It is as though the whole concept of free schooling for the masses rests upon legislation safeguarding the families who move from one locality to another within the state against the financial hardship and the educational hazard of a change of textbooks.

#### *Legislating for the Minority*

It goes without saying that this argument

has not been universally subscribed to. It has much less weight in recent years because of the progress of the free textbook movement. Moreover, it has always been more or less effectively refuted in terms of the limited number of persons affected. Superintendent Greenwood, of Kansas City, writing in February, 1891, declared that such legislation "is legislating for the minority at the expense of the majority. The number who move in any given year constitute much less than one per cent of the population. A law based upon such ground is manifestly indefensible."

2. The prices at which textbooks have been made available through local agencies have generally been cited as an argument for state adoptions. There are many reports of varying and unreasonable price schedules in different localities in the days before statewide regulation of prices became generally established. This argument looms large in the reports of legislative proceedings and apparently has figured in numerous political campaigns. In general, these discussions are replete with exaggerated estimates and a variety of misleading pronouncements.

It is recognized, however, that textbook prices were actually lowered as the state adoption movement progressed. It is noted, moreover, that prices were lowered not only in state adoption territory but in other states as well. Monahan<sup>1</sup> attributes this general price reduction to the terms of the contracts under which state adoptions are commonly made. But if the higher prices of textbooks of earlier years were directly affected by state adoption legislation, it is contended that the same effect is now attained by legislative measures which do not involve the adoption principle. This fact is noted in recently published statements of representatives of two leading textbook companies. These statements are as follows:

<sup>1</sup>Monahan, A. C., *Free Textbooks and State Uniformity*, Bulletin No. 36, U. S. Bureau of Education, 1915, p. 24.

"In the early years of state uniformity prices were lowered. Later, many states, of which Michigan and Illinois are examples, passed laws requiring the publisher offering his books to give bond that the prices were the lowest quoted anywhere. As a result, books are furnished in such states as Michigan and Illinois at the same prices at which the same books are furnished in Indiana. It is apparent, therefore, that the argument in favor of state uniformity because it means cheaper books no longer holds."<sup>2</sup>

"So far as the cost is concerned, the seeming argument vanishes when we realize that the circumstances are such that no publisher can legally quote a price for a specific textbook in one state that is lower than the price publicly announced in any other state. Consequently, a state that has no official machinery of state adoption can, and does, secure that book at the lowest price quoted for it elsewhere."<sup>3</sup>

*Is a Better Choice of Textbooks Assured?*

3. It is argued further that the state adoption plan ensures a better choice of textbooks for the schools of the state as a whole. The lack of ability of the average local school board member to pass judgment on the offerings of competing textbook firms is so obvious that any selection of books for which such persons are responsible is at once discredited by virtue of being thus chosen. Or, if the incompetent lay officials are intelligent enough to leave the selection of books to the teacher or to the teaching staff, the chance of error is still not entirely removed. In fact, the unintelligent way in which teachers have commonly exercised the privilege of textbook selection or have attempted to influence adopting boards has been cited as a factor in furthering the progress of adoption legislation.

It is also asserted that local school authorities are subjected to pressure and

<sup>2</sup>National Society for the Study of Education, *Thirtieth Yearbook*, Part 2, pp. 180-81.

<sup>3</sup>Whipple, Guy M., "The Selection of Textbooks," *Am. School Board Jour.*, May, 1930.

temptation by maneuvering textbook agents whose only interest is the promotion of textbook sales. In the early writings there are frequent references to the textbook "trust," with swarms of agents actively participating in local school elections and wielding a powerful influence in the appointment of teachers and school superintendents who were favorable to their publications. Instances are noted of a single publishing company being able to secure a contract covering all of the books to be used in the local school system.

While the conditions noted are frequently described as generally prevalent in the sense that they could be observed in many areas, there is considerable evidence that the tendency in recent years has been definitely in the direction of improvement in both the methods of textbook selection by local school authorities and the ethics of textbook salesmanship.<sup>4</sup> Not only do local school boards commonly adopt books only as recommended by the teaching staff, but also teachers are preparing themselves for this responsibility by careful study of methods and devices designed to secure a dependable appraisal of the books available for adoption. Moreover, frequent reference is made to the favorable conditions existing in such states as Massachusetts, where textbook control has always been left in the hands of local authorities.

With reference to the policies of publishers and their representatives in promoting the sale of their publications, the findings of an extensive inquiry pertaining to the ethics of marketing and selecting textbooks are summarized by Dean Edmondson in the conclusion "that the standards of practice in selection of textbooks not only are higher today than formerly but also are relatively higher than those which prevail in many other lines of business."<sup>5</sup>

4. The fourth argument that has been

<sup>4</sup>National Society for the Study of Education, *op. cit.*, chap. 7 to 10.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 308.

generally urged in furtherance of state textbook adoptions is the ease and convenience with which uniform courses of study can be formulated and administered on behalf of the schools of the state as a whole. This argument appears frequently in the writings and official reports of state school superintendents, especially in the period between 1890 and 1910.

#### *Course of Study Problem Less Perplexing Now*

It is urged that with large numbers of inadequately trained teachers in the schools, particularly in the villages and rural districts, a satisfactory quality of instruction cannot be assured except on the basis of a standard course of study, prescribed and recognized as the minimum program for the schools of the state. Not only does it simplify the task of formulating the course of study to have it based upon uniform series of books, but also there is much less difficulty involved in securing a general adherence thereto. Moreover, teachers of meager professional training are at a disadvantage in attempting to follow the state course of study under a system of local adoptions since they must reinterpret this course of study in terms of the content and methodology of a new set of textbooks as often as a change of teaching position may require.

Recent writings place much less stress upon the relation of uniform textbooks to the problem of maintaining a satisfactory state course of study. The growing recognition of the need for reasonable flexibility in the systems of instruction designed to cover statewide areas, the increasing proportion of well trained teachers and the extension and improvement of supervision have caused the course of study problem to lose many of its perplexing aspects. There are now so many books of excellent quality that the choice of any set as the basis of the course of study for a state school system could not possibly favor any significant percentage of the teachers involved, but must

inevitably cause more or less disappointment to large numbers of the teaching force who have decided preferences for other books.

#### *Arguments Against Statewide Adoptions*

While the extension of state adoption territory under the impulse of these several motives continued at varying rates of progress for fifty years or more, and while the system seems to be thoroughly grounded in many of the states where it is now effective, there has been impressive opposition to this progression even from the beginning and there is much current dissatisfaction with both the processes and the results of its operation in all state adoption areas.

Various arguments characterize the statements of opponents of the numerous proposals to establish textbook uniformity, both in the states where the movement was successful and in states where it was thwarted, and in the contentions of critics of certain administrative tendencies and the educational outcomes frequently observed in consequence of the uniformity program. Brief mention of ten of the more significant of these observations will serve the major purposes of the present discussion.

1. Wherever adoptions are made on a statewide basis, the adopting agency, whether the state board of education or a specially appointed textbook commission, is a political or semipolitical body. In nine of the twenty-five uniformity states, the governor is a member of the adopting board. In twenty-two states the members of the board, or some of them at least, are appointed by him.

While the tendency in recent years has been in the direction of professional rather than political appointments, there is much complaint even now of abuses of this appointive power in giving expression to political preferment, not entirely exclusive of appointments going to members of the teaching profession. To the extent that political motives may influence these appoint-

ments, there is an almost certain loss of any possible advantage of a state agency over the local adoption system so far as sincerity of action is concerned. In such a situation there is an inevitable play of political pressure, either directly through the instrumentality of "political lawyers" employed by publishers, or indirectly through friendly contacts more or less innocently established or the recognition of obligations previously incurred.

2. The size and nature of the contract covering the textbook requirements of schools over a statewide area not only make the selection of textbooks a matter of interest to the politicians, but they constitute also a constant threat of corruption and enshroud the whole adoption procedure in suspicion, regardless of the prominence and reputation of the several members of the adopting board. There are so many notorious traditions of bribery and other shady practices in the folklore of state adoptions that even a friendly confidence is often strained in the effort to understand and account for the decisions arrived at in the sessions at which adoptions are made.

Similar declarations may be gleaned from the pages of journals and documents year by year from then to now. While it is obvious that conditions have vastly improved in later years, the evidences of hazard are still to be noted in litigation, in political turmoil, in legislative investigations, in accusations and caustic criticisms that are the subject matter of 1933 news reports. The conclusion expressed by numerous interested observers is that the evil will persist, at least in some form and to some degree, so long as the adoption system prevails over any statewide area.

#### *Requirements of Local Communities Vary*

3. The scope and nature of a state uniformity program are such that it is impossible for state boards or commissions exercising the right of choice of books for various communities throughout the state to

render competent service to the schools. In general, the lay members of such boards have no qualifications for passing judgment upon textbooks in any situation. In some instances the board is made up of or includes members of the teaching profession who might be expected to know how to proceed and what to consider in exercising a choice over a number of books. Even so, these professional members are frequently college presidents or professors who have no direct contact with classroom activities in the common schools and who rarely have occasion to compare one book with another with respect to their relative value for such instructional purposes.

But this does not cover the implications of the criticism of state adopting agencies on the ground of incompetency. There is widespread belief that no group of individuals could render competent service in this capacity, first, because of the varying requirements of different types of communities within the state and, second, because the members of state boards are regularly engrossed with their official or private responsibilities and have no adequate opportunity to inform themselves either concerning the needs of the schools or the fitness of the books submitted for adoption.

*Teachers Often Disapprove of the Choice Made*

4. Attention is sometimes directed to the fact that a state adoption partakes of the nature of a wholesale transaction. If ill-advised action is taken by a local school board, the ill effects are not thereby widely distributed. But a mistake that has been made in a state adoption entails much more expensive damage. Again, the state adoption plan is decried because it involves far-reaching changes in the use of books whenever a new adoption occurs. It is also frequently noted that such extensive changes in schoolbooks involve heavy losses to the people in the sums paid for the books that are discarded.

5. State adoptions are also charged with responsibility for disappointment and irritation among teachers and superintendents who find it obnoxious to use unacceptable books under compulsion. The most obvious recent tendency in relation to the selection of textbooks is a growing recognition of the right of the classroom teacher to have a voice in the selection of books required by her own teaching program. The assertion is commonly made that even superior book selections cannot counterbalance the loss of enthusiasm and interest resulting from the dissatisfaction of teachers with the choices that have been forced upon them.

6. It is further argued that the state adoption scheme does not ordinarily result in the best choice being made because too much consideration always attaches to price comparisons, and the quality of the offerings, in so far as this can be adjudged, receives only secondary consideration. Mention is frequently made of the fact that publishers are induced to provide printings in cheaper paper and less substantial bindings in order that their books may have a chance for adoption. The lower prices are taken as evidence of the financial advantage of the state contract, with no serious thought of the ultimate waste due to poor construction or the possible disadvantage to the child of protracted attention to a type page that does not conform to recognized standards. Again, it is noted that publishers not infrequently refuse to submit their best offerings because price considerations in the case at hand may jeopardize a profitable market for the same books in other states.

7. State adoptions involve a period of time during which an adopted book cannot be supplanted by another. This contract period, we are told, is open to the objection that it prolongs the life of poor books that might otherwise be discarded as soon as their lack of fitness is established. It is also noted that important revisions of adopted books are sometimes brought out during the life of the adoption contract, but the con-

tracting state does not receive the benefit of the improvement because the contract requires the continuance in use of the book originally adopted.

8. Another argument is that state uniformity stifles initiative and progress. There is no chance for gain except in the more backward areas. If the state list is better than the books in use in such areas, it is also apt to be poorer than the lists in the more progressive communities. Uniformity in general tends to produce uniform mediocrity.

9. The selection of textbooks under central authority has been characterized by certain writers as objectionable because it removes from the community a vitalizing center of interest in the school as a community enterprise. It is not essential to the concept of education as a state function that the authority of the state should be exercised in relation to details of management that can safely be left to community responsibility.

#### *Conditions in Schools Have Changed*

10. Finally, the point is made with increasing vigor and frequency that whatever force there may have been in the arguments for state adoptions in times past, there is no longer any need for or advantage in textbook uniformity on a statewide basis since practically all of the legitimate advantages sought for may now be substantially realized by other measures. It has already been noted that the price of books is no longer subject to preferential schedules under state adoption contracts, while the pleas for relief from the burdensome expense of new outfits of school books on account of change of residence, based upon exaggerated statements as they always were, are significantly less appealing in proportion to the spread of the free textbook movement.

With respect to the claim of a higher average quality of textbooks under state adoptions and the value of uniform textbooks in the maintenance of the state course

of study, it is to be noted that these contentions have never been clearly and definitely established, nor indeed are they universally approved in principle.

It is not to be wondered at that pioneer conditions impelled teachers to encourage state adoptions to avoid the disheartening confusion due to an utter lack of uniformity in the texts their pupils brought to school. It is easy to understand, too, how the bitter complaints of parents subjected to unreasonable expense from frequent changes in textbooks and exorbitant prices must inevitably have stimulated the type of remedial legislation under which the uniformity doctrine has prospered.

But the significance of a state adoption conclave in 1933 is not to be defined in terms of the conditions in which the uniform textbook idea was conceived. Such conditions do not exist in the schools today; indeed, they have not prevailed in any general way for some years past. Yet state uniformity abides as a thriving social institution, dominating a vital factor in the efficiency of twenty-five state school systems, spreading over more than half of the nation's territory and serving two-fifths of the total population.

#### *Publishers Do Uot Favor State Uniformity*

A significant aspect of the situation with respect to state adoptions in recent years is the fact that the constantly recurring efforts to establish uniformity are invariably prompted by politicians and as consistently opposed by educators and educational organizations. It is a notable fact, moreover, that current writings afford no examples of pronouncements by recognized leaders of educational thought which lend support to a uniformity program. Formerly the impression prevailed that the state adoption tradition was fostered by the textbook industry. Two recently published statements by representatives of leading textbook companies are evidence that there is no longer any

ground for this assumption. They are as follows:

"I look forward to the time when free textbooks will be furnished throughout the country, when there will be no state uniformity and no period of adoption, when the selection of books will be entirely in the hands of those who teach."<sup>6</sup>

"Contrary to the belief current in some quarters that the state adoption system and the state uniformity doctrine are favored and abetted by textbook publishers, the truth is just the opposite; the reputable and substantial textbook houses would welcome the immediate and complete abolition of state uniformity, state prescription, state selection and adoption."<sup>7</sup>

The evidence is that state adoptions persist in response to interests and forces which are not primarily educational. It is equally clear that the more recent efforts to extend the system have not been stimulated by the prospect of promoting any clearly recognized line of progress either in instruction or in school management. A timely contribution to the future progress of American public education could readily be provided through a nationwide scientific appraisal of state textbook adoptions.

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<sup>6</sup>National Society for the Study of Education, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>7</sup>Whipple, *Guy M.*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

#### POLITICAL SCIENCE TURNS TO EDUCATION

The major obligation of the State is not the organization of government, nor the making of law, nor even the administration of justice: it is the enlightenment of peoples in a cultural philosophy of the good life.—  
BENJAMIN F. SHAMBAUGH, *former president of the American Political Science Association.*

The use of leisure is a severe test of character.—*Henry Ford.*

#### WHAT YOU GET FROM VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP

*Volunteer work helps other people; but it also helps the volunteer. Participation in some social movement thus provides valuable experience, says the president of Girl Scouts.*

IF I WERE a young woman starting out to make my way in a changing world, I would for the sheer adventure of it budget my time in such a way as to include a few hours each week of volunteer work in some social movement. Not just any social movement, but one which enlisted my sympathy and enthusiasm.

Does this sound as old-fashioned as a poke bonnet? Perhaps. But many old-fashioned things, from furniture to puffed sleeves, have been swinging into style again in recent years. I am sure, for example, that a certain hard and frivolous indifference to the public welfare is going out and that our early American, small community habit of being good neighbors and responsible citizens is returning. In a period like the present when tragic human need and the possibilities of a better world present themselves together, who cannot but feel a heightened interest in public affairs and a wish to pitch in and be a part of them? Perhaps we shall soon hear a new slogan: "It's smart to be serious."

This doesn't mean that joy, humor, amusing clothes, and the spirit of play are to be replaced by stodginess and owlish solemnity. Surely the younger women of today who sit on committees, make speeches, sign appeals, and often take sides in controversial matters are intelligent and charming people. They have simply found in public life a field of stimulation and dramatic interest that affords a more varied satisfaction than the safe, routine paths of the conventional "good time." And they have discovered that the entrance to more useful and intelligent