

THE FLORIDA STRUGGLE OVER UNIFORMITY OF TEXTBOOKS:
Part II, The Battle against Uniformity, 1917 - 1961

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Because of the unique place which the textbook has held in American education, both school men and lay personnel have had intense interest in textbook selection. The Florida textbook law of 1917 extended through the high school state-wide uniformity of textbooks, already effected in the elementary school. (1) The campaigns and skirmishes eventuating in this law have been traced in an earlier essay. Although those favoring state-wide adoption were overwhelmingly successful in achieving their goals in 1917, unanimous approval by no means existed. Review of Part I indicates that vigorous support for local selection of textbooks and county-wide adoption long had existed; such support remained after the adoption of state-wide uniformity. During the next few years opposition to state-wide adoption, grounded largely in political and administrative factors, was augmented by resistance for additional reasons.

The struggle against compulsory uniformity and for variety in textual materials is traced herein. As in Part I, data were secured chiefly from primary sources--the Laws of the State of Florida, the annual and biennial reports of the state superintendents of schools, the minutes of the State Courses of Study Committee, the minutes of selected county school boards--Broward, Calhoun, Duval, Escambia, Gadsden, Hillsboro, Holmes, Lake, Monroe, Walton, and Washington, with the supplementary use of secondary sources, such as the Florida Educational Association Journal.

The Transition Period, 1917 to 1925

The laws of 1911, 1917, and 1921 provided for state-wide textbook uniformity. (2) The 1917 law stated clearly:

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That any teacher who shall willfully use, or permit to be used in his or her school, any textbook upon the branches embraced in this act, where the Commission has adopted a book upon that branch, other than the one so adopted, the County Board of Public Instruction shall discharge and cancel the certificate of said teacher. (3)

The other laws relating to adopted texts were similar.

The 1921 law provided that there be a state school book commission whose duties were to adopt a uniform series of texts for the public schools, these to be adopted for eight years. It also established a sub-commission of "seven prominent educators actually engaged in school work," who were to examine and evaluate all books offered for adoption, and to recommend to the commission their first five choices. This law maintained the provision of earlier laws that teachers who refused to use the state adoptions be discharged. (4) The sub-commission, meeting in December, 1921, recommended supplementary texts. (5)

During the intervening years, gradual introduction of the texts approved by the state had been permitted to the county school systems, some counties being allowed by law to continue to use texts of their choice. Where there was no state adoption, obviously selection continued to be made at the county level. The example below pictures such selection. A committee from the Broward County Federation of Woman's Clubs recommended to the county superintendent and school board that the Palmer system of handwriting be adopted. Superintendent Rickards explained to the group that this method was already in use in several schools in the county. He further indicated that he would seek to have it adopted in the three counties in the Royal Palm Association-- Broward, Dade, and Palm Beach. Later he reported its adoption by the Association. (6)

During this period, both before and after the enactment of compulsory school attendance (7), delegates at the annual conventions of the Florida Education Association approved resolutions that free textbooks be provided. The discussions incident to the passage of later resolutions revealed belief that youth compelled to attend school should be provided with minimum materials for study, that is, with textbooks. (8) Throughout the country there existed a strong desire to provide equal educational opportunity for all children and youth. Not only the legislators but also many representative citizens believed that uniformity of texts brought equality of instruction, hence, equality of learning.

In 1925 when the legislature provided that free textbooks be supplied to pupils in grades one through six, schools which wished to take advantage of the free textbooks were required to use the state adoptions. Apparently all counties acceded. Hence, in practice, the use of adopted texts on the elementary level was not mandatory prior to 1925; nor for secondary schools until later. (9)

State-Wide Uniformity, 1925 to 1937

No sooner had free textbooks, adopted state-wide, come into use in elementary schools than objections to the textbook law then in effect were expressed by various professional groups in the state. Some opposed use of school funds for this purpose, as revealed by resolutions of FEA district conventions in 1926. (10) Others were criticizing various aspects of the law and its application. The Gulf Coast Teachers' Association, affiliated with the Florida Education Association, in 1926 resolved:

That it is the sense of the Association that many of the textbooks adopted by the state are inadequate and undesirable for the purposes intended; and that the practice of making long term contracts for the purchase of said textbooks thereby preventing the adoption of better textbooks, should be condemned. It is the sense of this Association that five years be the maximum life of any such contract. (11)

In 1927 the Convention of County Superintendents and School Board Members questioned the underlying theory of the free textbook law. They also recommended with no dissenting vote that the law as then in operation be repealed, but at a later meeting agreed to delay making this request. (12) In that same year the high school principals, also concerned with this problem, approved two resolutions: one, proposed by the Resolutions Committee, that textbooks be adopted for no longer than four years; and another, prepared by the Committee On Uniform Textbooks, that the state prepared a list from which each county be permitted to adopt its own books for a minimum period of four years. (13)

That such protests were widespread is seen in the adoption by the Florida Education Association at its 1928 annual convention of the following resolution:

That if there is made another state textbook adoption, the provision of a multiple list of textbooks be adopted, and a close adherence by the State Textbook Commission to the recommendations of the subcommittee of professional educators in the selection of books. (14)

During this period lay citizens were also troubled over many educational problems. As a result of this widespread concern, the 1927 legislature authorized a citizens' committee to study educational problems of the state. (15) The five-member committee employed a staff headed by George Strayer.* In 1929 this Educational Survey Commission dealt with the textbook situation in one section of its official report which was made to the legislature. The survey staff had interviewed forty-one principals, among whom only two favored the law as then in effect. Objections of these principals, in order of frequency, were: too much uniformity, list too limited, period of adoption too long, adoption made by politicians, no provision for junior high school, and poor textbook selection. (16)

The survey staff itself criticized the 1921 Florida textbook law on two counts: (1) the selection of a single textbook to be used by all high schools in the state with no opportunity for schools to select books suitable to local conditions; and (2) the long period of adoption, which was eight years. As evidence for their second criticism they cited the condition in one high school where of thirty-nine texts then in use twenty-one bore a copyright of 1921 or earlier.

The survey report included the following recommendations:

1. That the preliminary examination and final approval of textbooks be delegated to a single body of well trained successful educators who shall be known as the State Textbook Commission, to be appointed by the State Board of Education upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.
2. That provision for free textbooks in elementary grades be extended to include free textbooks for the secondary schools.

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6. That the present textbook law be changed so as to permit the prompt use of desirable modern books.
7. That more than one book be provided for a given subject.
(17)

With all the criticisms, evidently the citizens of Florida approved the furnishing of "free" textbooks by the state, for in 1932 they elected a governor who had for one of the planks in his platform the supplying also of high school students with state adopted texts. Shortly the legislature enacted such a law. (18)

Multiple listings were provided within the next few years. In 1930 the State Textbook Commission approved the five choices in literature texts which had been listed by the Sub-Commission. (19) The list of textbooks adopted in 1932 for elementary schools included multiple listings for English, reading and literature, and fifth-grade history, with supplementary readers in geography, health, and conduct, for grades three through six. (20) In 1935 the Standards for Florida Elementary Schools specified that elementary pupils in grade one were to read two additional supplementary readers; in grades two through five, at least three; and in grades six through eight, either three readers or additional substituted material equivalent in amount. (21)

In the mid 1930's American educators were examining the extent to which their curricula took cognizance of recent findings in the behavioral sciences and of the changes in society, and provided for the changing character of the school population, especially in high school. Earlier Cubberley, a recognized authority in school administration, had argued forcefully against limitation to one text. (22) Goulding, a leader among the secondary principals, perhaps was influenced by these considerations when he stated that among the factors limiting desirable curriculum revision were the textbooks which had been adopted for basal use. (23)

In 1937 the Florida School Code Committee, appointed by the Governor in 1936, recommended that the method of selecting and adopting textbooks be changed. (24) Consequently, the 1937 legislature enacted legislation embodying several modifications (25):

- (1) Wholesale changes in any one year were prevented.
- (2) Texts were to be adopted for an initial period of three years.

- (3) Changes were to be provided whenever necessary after the original three-year period.
- (4) Appointment of a committee on courses of study, which should have responsibility for suggestions relative to courses of study and curriculum, was provided. (26)

Educators, as represented by tenor of the article referred to above, approved the law. The establishment of a Courses of Study Committee through which recommendations for changes could be funneled via the State Superintendent to the State Board of Education was especially valued. The recommendations of this committee were to be focused on the curriculum and on instructional materials. (27)

The legislature further provided that the State Board of Education appoint the new Courses of Study Committee and that before December, 1937, and by that date each year, it report to the State Superintendent its recommendations for revisions of the list of subjects for which texts are to be furnished and those in which there were to be changes of texts. (28)

During the period, 1925-1937, state-wide uniformity came to Florida and for a time restricted the schools to the use of a single text in each subject at each grade level, the text to be used a minimum of eight years. Shortly, however, the eight-year barrier was breached and the limitations of a single text were overcome. By the close of the period multiple adoptions were provided in a few areas; however, in most subjects only a single textbook was on the state approved list. The eight-year period of mandatory adoption was decreased to three, with the provision for extending the term of adoption on any single text where desirable.

From Uniformity to Diversity, 1937-1961

Despite the burst of the boom in the 1920's, the population of Florida had increased more than fifty percent between 1920 and 1930, much of the increase being traceable to immigration. This influx of citizens, many of whom came from states in the Northeast and Midwest, which had no state-wide textbook adoptions or which had multiple adoptions, apparently brought reinforcements to those dissatisfied with the Florida situation. Very likely this addition to the dissidents was partially responsible for the strengthened demands in the late 30's

for greater variety in textual materials to be provided for the public schools. As a result the 1937 legislature made the several changes in the law governing textbook adoptions cited earlier.

Prior to 1937, as seen in preceding sections, both lay and professional personnel had avenues through which they might recommend changes in the curriculum: petitions to the legislature; and requests to the state board of education or to its executive secretary, the state superintendent of public schools. Educators had another: resolutions of the Florida Education Association or any of its divisions.

As early as 1937 the Florida Chapter of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish adopted a resolution suggesting multiple choice of texts:

... since the adoption of a single text fails to take into account several factors such as:

- (1) Geographical location and consequent need for varied emphasis
- (2) Preparation of teachers; i. e. with varying degrees of experience in travel and conversational ability
- (3) The smooth absorption of tourist pupils

They had asked that there be a minimum of three texts from which choice could be made. (29)

Perhaps one of the most important achievements of this new law was the establishment of the State Courses of Study Committee whose responsibilities were to serve as a coordinating and liason body through which all could channel recommendations concerning (1) the subjects for which textbooks are to be furnished by the state; (2) the need for any changes to be made in textbooks already furnished; and (3) the development of curriculum guides, which gradually had begun to replace courses of study. (30)

That these sections of the law were soon implemented is seen in the state superintendent's biennial report of 1938-1940, where Colin English stated that curriculum committees were preparing materials for teachers (curriculum guides) in elementary arithmetic and in source materials for social studies. An enlarged library book-list

for elementary and secondary schools had been prepared from which counties could purchase library materials through state channels from surplus textbook funds. Recommendations had also been made relative to the purchase and use of multisensory aids. (31)

In 1946 a speaker at the Florida Education Association Convention lamented the fact that children's reading often was limited to a single text in each subject. (32) In 1948 this situation was improved when two texts were adopted in a number of subjects; and several, covering different aspects of the subjects, in industrial arts and home economics. (33) These actions were apparently in recognition of the need both for texts and to present information throughout the full scope included in a subject and for additional texts for practice in reading. However, weaknesses pointed out two decades earlier, those of meeting differing needs of communities and different reading levels, seemed still to have been unmet.

In 1950 the Florida Education Association at its annual convention adopted the following resolution:

Since many questions have been raised concerning the present procedure for adopting state textbooks, we recommend to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction that he in collaboration with the President of the FEA name a representative committee of 11 members including not fewer than 6 classroom teachers for the purpose of making a thorough study of the whole plan of textbook selection and adoption. (34)

In response to the above resolution, the Committee for the Evaluation of the Florida Textbook Adoption was appointed and held its first meeting in September, 1950. (35)

During this same fall the Courses of Study Committee considered proposals by George Walker, administrator of the state textbook program, to change textbook law and policies, among which were:

1. Give the textbook committee responsibility for selecting and recommending to the State Board a multiple list of textbooks (criteria for selection to be developed by the State Courses of Study Committee).
2. Make it a duty of the textbook committee to provide annotations for the list of adopted textbooks (without invidious

comparisons) which will be useful as guides in selecting texts to be used in local administrative units.

3. Permit each county system to select and use books from the entire list without limitation as to the number of titles or book series which they plan to use. (36)

The Florida Education Association Evaluation Committee, referred to earlier, reported at the 1951 Convention. Below is part of their report:

... Multiple adoption and local selection will permit more flexible curriculum conditions at the local level; provide opportunity for local professional personnel to select textbooks related to local needs; stimulate teacher growth; protect local systems against poor selections at the state level; and encourage publishers to offer only their best books for adoption. Therefore it is recommended: That the present law be amended to provide multiple adoption up to seven books or book series in each subject. The committee feels that all levels of the profession should participate in the selection of textbooks at the local level. (37)

The Journal commended this report and endorsed its recommendations.

Later the editor of the Journal commented that legislative recommendations would include adequate appropriations for texts and opportunity for making multiple choice adoptions for better variety in teaching materials. (38) In January, 1952, the Association was proposing legislative action to implement both proposals. In particular, reference was made to provide "methods of adoption of textbooks in accordance with the principles of the bill requiring the listing of up to five books, which was passed by the House at the 1951 session of the legislature." (39)

In the same issue the progress of the Florida Education Association Program Action Committee was reported. The summary included the statements below:

The most significant recommendations for change were:

1. Provision for multiple adoption by the State of up to five books in each subject.

2. Designation of the State Board of Education as the responsible agency for adopting rules and regulations under which the local communities will make the final choice of books for their own use.

Professional educators who have studied this problem intensely feel that the above provisions will help to improve the selection of textbooks for the following reasons:

1. Local school systems may choose texts in the light of local community needs.
2. Local adoption of texts more nearly harmonizes with the democratic principle of local rule.
3. Local selection of texts stimulates greater teacher interest and understanding of texts which results in better use of books.
4. The wise variety of materials in the classroom which is required for best teaching is more feasible with multiple adoption.
5. Local school boards are charged with the responsibility to formulate and prescribe the school curriculum. Unless they have the authority locally to select books their power to prescribe the curriculum is somewhat impaired. (40)

Similar resolutions were adopted by the delegate assemblies meeting in 1952 and in 1953.

However, school forces in the state were not agreed upon this action by the time the 1953 legislature met, as evidenced by the fact that prior to the opening date some legislators had been asked by educators to oppose the legislation supported by the Florida Education Association. Telegrams opposing and others favoring such legislation were received by members of the legislature. The bill to provide multiple adoptions reached the calendar of both houses but was defeated on the floor of the Senate. (41) However, more money was provided for textbooks and the Textbook Rating Committee was expanded to twelve members and made non-secret. During the next few years, the multiple listing of textbooks was retained as an objective of the Florida Education Association.

Turner, who had studied the selection and adoption of free textbooks, included in the implications of his study the need for a type of textbook adoption design that would make it possible "to provide textbooks for the different interests and abilities of the pupils enrolled in the schools of the several regions of the state." (42)

The Interim Legislative Committee, reporting in 1959, had found that the current system of state adoption of one book was too restrictive to meet "varying needs and different talents" of children and recommended that the adoption procedures be changed so that the state would adopt three texts, with counties selecting one or more of the three. (43) By this time also members of the profession and lay citizens had sufficiently crystalized their opinions so that a law was enacted which included many of the suggestions made in prior years for improving textbook selection. Among the provisions of the new law were:

1. That the Courses of Study Committee include three lay members.
2. That the State Purchasing Committee select and adopt not more than three texts for each grade and subject field, except that five be adopted for each grade level in elementary reading.
3. That the period of original adoption be extended from a term of three to a term of five years.
4. That the name of the Textbook Rating Committee be changed to the State Textbook Committee and that two lay citizens be added to its membership. (44)

The 1959 law also provided that "each county superintendent may requisition the quantity of each adopted textbook needed by his county, provided that the interest and abilities of the pupils in the schools in his county require the fullest utilization of each textbook requisitioned that year." (45)

In 1961 the textbook law was amended to provide that there be a separate textbook committee for elementary grades and separate committees for social studies, English, foreign languages, mathematics, science, and such other fields as may be necessary up to a maximum of twelve committees. It continued in force the requirement that all "textbooks continue to be used until they are in such physical condition

as to make them unsuitable for further use," but added "or until the content is obsolete." (46) This latter modification made possible the discarding of outmoded materials, even when textbooks were still physically usable.

Other Factors Influencing Textbook Selection

Other factors than the ideological conflict need consideration when movement from a single state-adopted text to multiple adoption is reviewed. Among these is adequate financing. That this fact was recognized by the Florida Education Association is seen in the resolutions of their delegate assemblies and in the reports of the Program Action Committees over the years. (47) Typical of the resolutions is the following:

The Association recommends that the state make available sufficient funds for purchase of textbooks so that local schools can furnish to students the books they need. (48)

The Committee appointed jointly by the State Superintendent and the Florida Education Association to evaluate Florida's textbook adoption reported in 1951 in regard to this issue:

... The Committee finds that the amount of money expended for textbooks in Florida for the past few years has been totally inadequate. It is estimated that not less than twice the present appropriation would be required to provide a reasonable supply of textbooks. (49)

Despite the continuous interest of the profession, as evidenced by their study of the textbook situation and by resolutions at their annual conventions, appropriations have remained insufficient to supply the necessary quantity of textbooks. Two conditions have played a large role in this situation: the rapid increase of the school population in Florida, with textbook allocations largely based upon the average daily attendance of the previous year, and the increase in cost of books.

Though Florida has never had a "Textbook Scandal," in some cases there have been intimations of undue influence in adoptions and

of unwise selections. As early as 1929 a survey of principals indicated that among their objections to the textbook law then in effect was "adoption made by politicians." (50) However, no evidence of political influence was presented, unless the fact that the textbook purchasing committee was comprised of five members of the governor's cabinet was meant. As recently as 1951 the committee evaluating Florida's textbook adoption thought that multiple adoption would protect local systems against poor selections at the state level. At another time it recommended that the state adopt the three titles placed highest on the list by the professional textbook committee. (51)

Summary

The previous discussion has dealt largely with the ideological conflict related to variety of texts. A practical consideration has been the ability or inability to finance multiple adoptions. Even though the delegate assemblies of the Florida Education Association frequently have passed resolutions that there be adequate financing of the textbook program, state funds continued to be insufficient to supply the necessary quantity of texts. Hence, legislation permitting multiple adoption of textbooks frequently has not been fully implemented, a condition which still exists. What profit to permit a desirable condition when it remains in the realm of possibility rather than that of probability?

Regardless of the handicap of inadequate financing and of the disparity between optimum and actual provision of the "free," state-adopted textbooks, Florida moved forward a great distance between 1917 and 1961. These forward steps included not only improvement in the quality and quantity of materials, but also in the method of selection. Though exceptions were permitted, most pupils of forty-four years ago were limited to a single text in each subject and on each grade level; today they may use any of the three books on the state list, or a combination of them. Earlier selection had been dominated by a small committee of educators and by political influences; presently committees, up to twelve in number, comprised of persons knowledgeable in the several areas, recommend the textbooks to the State Purchasing Board for adoption. Educators in counties where school officials approve may participate in the study of texts offered for adoption and make recommendations to the state committee. Presence of lay personnel on present-day textbook selection committees serves two functions: acquainting educators with questions and doubts which parents have regarding texts and providing a means of educating the public to the values of the textbooks selected and reasons for their being chosen.

During this period (1917-1961), "free" textbooks, furnished by the state, have become available for all pupils, rich or poor, elementary or secondary, who attend public schools. Thus more equality of educational opportunity is provided on all levels. The period of original adoption has been decreased from eight to five years and the discarding of out-of-date textbooks, even when physically usable, has been recently permitted, both conditions enabling the use of more up-to-date materials. These combine to effect textbook selection which encourages provision for individual differences among youth and among communities and which provides a wide range of up-to-date materials making possible curriculum enrichment on a scale undreamed of by earlier educators.

Though many improvements have been made, questions remain to be solved. In the past changes have been made by laws based largely upon practical decisions; in the future it is hoped greater use will be made of research. Such questions are: What steps shall a state take when it fails to appropriate sufficient funds to furnish an adequate supply of "free" texts? What is an adequate supply? How are textbooks best selected? What is the role of the State in textbook selection? of the local governmental unit? of educators? of lay personnel? Is there an optimum number of adopted texts for any single subject on any grade level? or an optimum term of adoption? These, and other questions which anyone who works with textbook selection or use can pose, remain to be answered as Florida moves toward selection of ever better instructional materials for her schools.

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