

any binding. We're talking here about paperback books, but don't forget the growing role of tapes, visuals, etc., as supplementary materials."

The future of the textbook

While most administrators agreed that the overall quality of today's textbooks is better than ever, they did register several complaints about texts in general, and certain texts in particular. Generally, these complaints concerned three broad areas:

While the content was generally conceded to be good, many administrators registered complaints over revision practices. "My pet gripe," says a New Jersey administrator, "is the never ending revision of reading series. Many revisions are published which in fact contain no new material. In many cases, it seems, they are published just to accommodate state adoption cycles."

"I'm certain," says Austin McCaffrey, "that there are some publishers who do come out with revisions just to meet buying cycles. But the reputable ones do not. Most reputable publishers make revisions only when they're called for. And administrators have told us that the revised editions are usually better than the original. The major publishers today have people working on revisions full time. Of course the time lag is always there, and the rapidly developing body of knowledge accents that time lag, but, by and large, a revision always improves the textbook. As a matter of fact we get more complaints about lack of revisions, than about too many."

What about publishers rushing revisions through to meet cycling schedules? "I haven't heard of it being done," says McCaffrey. "What publishers will do is schedule a new series to coincide with a cycling schedule—especially in California, which accounts for a large portion of the nation's textbook purchases. They will most likely accelerate a publication date to meet a cycling date. But publishers still must compete for sales, even in a cycled state, so they will not stint on quality just to meet a date."

Textbook construction

The construction, or more specifically the poor construction of textbooks, comes under a good deal of administrative criticism. Sample comments:

"They don't last as long as they used to."

"They're not made as well as older books."

"They fall apart very easily."

"The bindings crack and come apart."

"The paper is cheaper."

"They don't hold up as well as they used to."

"One of the reasons textbooks are more expensive today," says ATP's McCaffrey, "is that they are made better. Bindings are stronger, paper is better. As I've said, a textbook will last three years. That figure takes into consideration the

abuse they meet at the hands of students. I'm certain that the administrators who complain are the ones that try to get four, five or even six years' use out of them. Even if a textbook were constructed to last six years, it usually becomes obsolete in three or four. By trying to stay with a text for longer than three years, the administrator is only cheating his students."

The third big complaint is the size. "Textbooks are simply getting too large for student lockers," says a Pennsylvania superintendent, summing up the general feeling about today's bulky textbooks.

"Some of today's textbooks are getting too large," agrees McCaffrey. "In fact, they are about as big as they will ever get. Beyond a certain size the binding may not be able to contain the book. In some instances, that size has probably been reached. A future trend may find history books broken down into two or more periods, with a text for each. In other subjects the same thing will occur. And of course, the multi-text approach will speed up this process. It's certainly the trend among publishers."

The figures, interpretations and administrator comments point up many inescapable conclusions about textbooks. Though administrators feel, by and large, that today's textbooks are the finest ever published, they no longer treat them with blind respect. The result is that the textbook is not the omnipotent classroom figure it once was. The increase in educational materials—and the increasing cost of textbooks—have combined to downgrade the text's importance, perhaps to a more realistic and workable level. At the same time the paperback, while not the educational cure-all many administrators feel it is, has removed some of the burden from the long overworked textbook. As one administrator puts it: "Though today's texts are better than ever, they are still basically the same—in content, format and presentation—as they were 10 years ago. Education is changing rapidly. The emphasis is on a variety of materials, and a variety of books. As such, the tenure of the textbook as the basic learning tool is nearing an end. We will always use the text—but never again to the exclusion of all other materials."

The second part of the textbook survey begins on the next page. It analyzes the textbook buying habits of U.S. school districts region by region. It will provide you with a practical yardstick for measuring your own textbook spending. For, while the national figures are revealing, only by looking at other districts in your area can you really determine how good a job you are doing. You have only one question to answer: are your textbook buying practices competitive with—or better than—other districts in your region? If the answer is no, this report will show what you must do to correct that situation.