

Textbook

History and Development

The textbook remains today, as it has over the years, the single most important tool utilized by teachers for the purpose of instructional development. The basic textbook provides a common body of subject matter material organized in a manner designed to facilitate instruction. If the history of textbook development is examined, we find tremendous change based on new methodology, content, ideas, philosophy, and the demands of an ever-changing world.

Hornbooks constructed in the shape of a paddle and samplers used in dame's school were among the forerunners of our modern textbooks. These usually contained the alphabet, numerals, and sometimes religious verses. From this humble beginning, the next step was materials produced by the local printer. This material was produced to supplement income, and quality materials were the exception. The books used in the early schools remained English in origin to a major degree.

The most popular American textbook resulted from the dissatisfaction of Noah Webster, a teacher in the Goshen Classical School. The materials produced by Noah Webster were divided into three parts including a speller, grammar and a reader. The speller was published in 1783 and emerged as the famous Webster's Blue Book. This Webster speller was destined to become the largest selling textbook of all time. Textbook selection at this stage in history was a relatively easy task. Choice was mainly a question of availability.

Several factors emerged in education that gave further impetus to the development of textbook materials. With the expansion of free education, the problem of increased enrollments emerged. Pupils began to leave the multilevel single classroom for separate grades and rooms. School districts became more complex and the trend toward more