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AN EXAMINATION OF ETHNIC CONTENT IN NINE CURRENT BASAL SERIES

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During the past several years, publishers of basal reading series have focused considerable attentions on recognizing the influence of ethnicity in basal reading series (Rupley, Garcia, and Longnion, 1981). Portrayal of ethnic story characters and story content are evidenced in current basal series in order that a more balanced depiction of minority groups be represented. The concern for and value of balanced ethnic portrayals in basal reading series has been addressed in various investigations (Kyle, 1978; Butterfield, 1979; Campbell and Wirtenberg, 1980).

In a study of story content in seven basal reading series published in the mid-1970s, Kyle (1978) reported that ethnic minority characters portrayed in sixth grade basals are usually well-known historical or contemporary figures rather than fictional characters involved in realistic, modern situations. It was also reported that the sixth grade basals characterized minority adults only in professional or all-adult settings. The results of the study also indicated sixth grade basals offered few examples of integrated groups of children and that only fifteen stories at the sixth grade level related the activities of a racially mixed group. Kyle (1978) concluded: "The activities of minority and nonminority characters should convey the fact that aspirations, talents, feelings and interests are not related to race...(Basal) readers must be developed and evaluated with an understanding of all the learnings—overt and incidental—that they can produce ...Newly published materials (basal readers) indicate that this understanding has not yet been fully reached (page 305)."

Although it is generally accepted that major publishers of basal reading series have made attempts to enhance the quantity and quality of their materials by depicting a more balanced portrayal of ethnic story characters and content, current research investigations addressing the extent of such attempts are very limited. Past studies have focused on either a particular grade level or only a few levels in basal reading series, in contrast to surveying all levels of a particular reading series or group of basal reading series. A major purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which stories depicting the three largest ethnic groups are contained in nine of the major and current basal reading series (grades one through six). Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans were used in the study since they represent the

largest minorities nationwide. A fourth group labeled "Multiethnic" enabled the authors to code information about stories that featured major characters from more than one ethnic group.

The authors sought answers to the following questions regarding ethnic content by examining nine current basal reading series:

1. What amount of ethnic content is contained in nine of the major basal reading series; are there differences in the amount of ethnic content contained in these series?
2. Is there a particular basal reading series that emphasizes a greater number of stories about Blacks, Hispanics, or Native Americans than others; to what extent are these differences evident among the basal reading series?
3. In what ways can such information benefit individuals who are interested in purchasing a new basal series?

Developing Guidelines for Examination
of the Nine Basal Reading Series

Guidelines are often provided by publishers of basal reading series to specify the extent to which they intend to include and depict ethnic groups within the structure of their specific format. It is the authors' contention that minorities should be depicted accurately, in a variety of roles, exhibiting a wide range of behaviors and emotions. In addition, story characters should be depicted in varied family settings and in problem as well as recreational situations.

To facilitate the development of specific categories and sub-categories in evaluation charts used in the study, commercial guidelines available from two major publishers were selected as sources for depiction of Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans in basal reading series (MacMillan, 1975; Houghton-Mifflin, 1981). A sampling of the major guidelines from both publishers are presented below to indicate the publishers' attempts to offer accurate, objective, and balanced portrayals and to eliminate stereotypic and distorted characterizations.

Macmillan (1975)

1. Represent blacks in all communities, urban, suburban, rural, well-to-do as well as middle class and poor. When discussing urban problems, include the role of white people.
2. Issues of concern to modern Indians should be treated honestly. The strengths and pride of American Indians should be shown. Indian characters should be three-dimensional.
3. Show Hispanic people in a variety of roles, women as well as men working outside the home and in the home. Aim for balance.

Houghton-Mifflin (1981)

1. Present members of minority groups in the full spectrum of jobs. Include blue-collar, white collar, executive, and professional members of each minority group.
2. Include meaningful relationships between members of different minority groups and between members of minority groups and majority groups.

3. Recognize the social and economic barriers that restrict racial and ethnic minorities.
4. Show relationships and cooperation between older persons and people of all ages.
5. Depict with sensitivity and accuracy the unique experiences of minority groups in the United States.

Categories for coding ethnic story content from the nine basal reading series used in this study were based on the above guidelines. In addition, the authors' experience in the area of ethnic content in texts were employed. Due to space limitations, categories and sub-categories regarding each of the four groups examined are not provided, but may be obtained from the authors.

Percentage Table of Ethnic Content in Nine Current Basal Series

Publisher/Stories Date	Hispanic	Blacks	Native Americans	Multicultural	Total
MacMillan (1980) N=427	3.0	6.0	5.0	4.0	18
Open Court (1979) N=528	1.0	4.0	4.0	5.0	14
Rand McNally (1979) N=347	2.0	6.0	4.0	5.0	17
Houghton-Mifflin N=391 (1981)	3.0	6.0	4.0	5.0	18
Ginn and Company N=404 (1980)	1.0	4.0	4.0	9.0	18
Laidlaw (1980) N=269	2.0	6.0	4.0	9.0	21
Addison-Wesley N=608 (1982)	0.5	4.0	2.0	12.0	19
Scott Foresman N=456 (1981)	2.0	6.0	2.0	10.0	20
Holt, Rinehart and Winston (1980) N=409	2.0	5.0	2.0	9.0	18
Total Stories = 3839	$\bar{x}=1.8$	$\bar{x}=5.2$	$\bar{x}=3.4$	$\bar{x}=7.6$	$\bar{x} = 18$

(Logan and Garcia, 1982)

Results and Discussion

There is a distinct within-group consistency throughout the nine basal reading series examined in regard to the amount of ethnic stories. This implies that generally speaking, the amount of content regarding ethnic groups among the major basal reading series is basically parallel and that no single basal series offers more ethnic content for a particular group than another. Of the four ethnic areas examined, practically all nine current basal series included a greater occurrence of stories about Blacks and Multiethnic groups than stories focusing on Hispanics or Native Americans. This information apparently contradicts earlier findings of few examples of integrated groups in the basals and supports the notion that there is an increase in multiethnic story content.

Total percentages among the nine basal series indicates that the total number of ethnic stories included in the major basals do not vary significantly. This information can prove beneficial to individuals interested in securing a new basal series but speaks only to the quantity of ethnic content and not to its quality.

Publishers of basal series need to consider including additional stories about Hispanic groups since recent governmental reports project that the Hispanic population will increase rapidly and by the turn of the century will surpass the Black population as being the largest minority group. Classroom reading teachers who have a large population of Hispanic children in their classrooms should consider supplementing the basal program with appropriate Hispanic literature and tradebooks to better enhance the developmental reading program.

Summary

Publishers of current basal series are recognizing the value of ethnicity in story content. There are very few discernable differences in the amounts of story content found in the current basals examined. Indeed, the major basal series parallel closely regarding the amount of ethnic content presented. There is a considerably higher degree of stories about integrated groups than have been included in earlier basal reading series. Classroom reading teachers and administrators interested in purchasing a current basal series should be conscious of these similarities within existing series. Supplementary materials related to specific ethnic groups are recommended to enhance current offerings in basal readers.

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