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**ABSTRACT**

Observational studies of elementary school classrooms have indicated that basal reading programs (BRPs) influence strongly both how children are taught to read and what they read. BRPs are developed by authors working in varying degrees of involvement with the editors of educational publishing companies. Classroom observation literature and interviews with teachers and administrators have revealed that much of the time allocated for elementary reading instruction is spent on BRP activities. In the past few years, research on the quality and effectiveness of BRPs has focused on student researchers, the teachers' guide, and workbooks. BRPs are selected by a process called textbook adoption, during which a committee examines and evaluates a variety of programs. This process takes place at the school, district, and state level. The publisher's role in the development of BRPs is complex--the programs must serve an important educational function while being profitable, competitive products. "A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs" (a set of eight booklets) reviews recent reading research, presents guidelines based on theory and practice, and provides worksheets for BRP adoption committee members. Each of the booklets addresses aspects of reading that are appropriate to a BRP, subject to evaluation, and of primary importance. (JD)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

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Reading Education Report No. 61

BASAL READING PROGRAMS:  
DEVELOPMENT, USE, EFFECTIVENESS, ADOPTION,  
AND MORE USEFUL ADOPTIONS

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Abstract

Observation studies of elementary school classrooms indicate that programs have a strong influence on how American children are taught to read and what American children read. This paper discusses:

- how basal reading programs are developed and some of the problems their publishers must contend with.
- how they are used in classrooms.
- some of the research about their content.
- the processes used for the selection and adoption of programs.

Finally, the authors describe a Center for the Study of Reading project which has the goal of making the process of textbook adoption more useful to the people who use the books, and to those responsible for their development.

Basal Reading Programs:  
Development, Use, Effectiveness, Adoption,  
and More Useful Adoptions

The atmosphere of an exhibit hall full of basal reading programs is rather like that of a West African market town: colorfully decorated booths are occupied by salespeople extolling their wares; balloons float overhead; clowns, large animals (we think people are underneath the fur), and storytellers wander about. Cheerful hourly announcements about the big giveaway prizes are heard over the loudspeakers, and shoppers (men and women carrying large plastic bags) are everywhere. In a West African market the bags get filled with food, cloth, and other necessities. In the exhibit area the shoppers are busy filling their bags with informational brochures, posters, and a variety of small giveaway items--from road atlases to fresh roses. But people emerging from the exhibit area often have the burdened appearance of shoppers carrying the bundles and packages of a morning's serious shopping in the marketplace of an exotic and faraway land.

Our tours through the exhibit halls of regional and national meetings of the International Reading Association have made apparent to us the number, variety, and physical attractiveness of basal reading programs available to the students and teachers in American schools. What also becomes apparent is the highly commercial and competitive nature of the basal reading program market.

Most educational publishers market their programs to school districts throughout the United States, and sometimes abroad. Although well over a dozen well-known basal reading programs are on the market, information from publishers (acquired in a somewhat clandestine fashion from "sources"), indicates that about 70% of American school districts buy one or more of the five best selling programs. So, even though the top five programs vary from decade to decade, it is probably safe to assert that a small number of basal reading programs have a strong influence on how American children are taught to read, and what American children read.

How does the shopping that takes place in the exhibit halls affect how teachers and administrators select books? How do teachers and school administrators choose from the many programs on the market? What factors influence their choices? Our many visits to these book marketplaces have led us to believe that it is not only what is inside the books that account for their purchase. While we are convinced that what is inside the books affects what happens in classrooms, we suspect that many outside-the-book activities affect how books are chosen.

Classroom observation studies have convinced us that the reading curriculum in most elementary schools is strongly influenced by the content of basal reading programs (Durkin, 1983; Fisher, Berliner, Filby, Marliave, Cohen, Dishaw, & Moore, 1978; Mason & Osborn, 1982). On the other hand, because some of the research of the past decade points to some major problems with what is inside the books, we have come to believe that more

attention must be devoted to these programs. We think this attention must come not only from the people who select and buy the programs, but also from researchers who study the content of programs and the process and teaching of reading, and, of course, the publishers of the programs.

We are not convinced that the marketplace alone--with its many outside-the-book activities--can assure that students and teachers will have the best possible programs. We are convinced that improving programs will require the demands of enlightened consumers, the efforts of diligent researchers, and the labors of resilient publishers. To contribute to this effort, in this paper we attempt to pull together some information about basal reading programs; we discuss:

- how basal reading programs are developed and some of the problems their publishers must contend with.
- how they are used in classrooms.
- some of the research about their content.
- the processes used for the selection and adoption of programs.

Finally, we describe a Center for the Study of Reading project which has the goal of making the process of textbook adoption more useful--to the people who use the books, and to those responsible for their development.

#### The Development of Basal Reading Programs

How are basal reading programs developed? Typically, a basal reading program is developed by authors who work closely with the editors of an educational publishing company. Authors

and editors usually begin the creation of a new edition or a new program with discussions of philosophies of and approaches to reading instructions, definitions of reading, and criteria for selecting the content of the student readers. Members of the company's marketing staff bring to the discussion the real-life expectations of the potential purchasers of the final product. Outlines are made to determine what is going to be taught and when--a program's scope and sequence chart reflects much of this planning--and lessons are mapped out.

The amount of author involvement in the actual writing of a program varies from company to company, and probably from decade to decade. Sometimes authors write prototype lessons for the teachers guides, and the "filling in" is done in the publishing house. Only occasionally do program authors write entire programs. It is more usual for editors and writers to be responsible for a great deal of the actual writing of the teacher's guides, workbooks, and other program components. Increasingly, much of this kind of work is contracted to individual writers or smaller companies working outside the publishing company.

The development of a basal reading program can take up to five years and, depending upon the size of the company and the scope of the program, can cost from 10 to 15 million dollars. Because some work is done by authors and a lot of work by "out-of-house" writers, it is a difficult to determine how many authors, editors and assistants are required to develop a program. It is also difficult for an outsider to determine who

actually is doing what. What is not difficult to determine is that publishers invest a great deal of time, effort, and money when they develop a new basal reading program. And in fact, in any one publishing house, programs are in a sense, being developed continuously. The demands of local and state school districts for new and up-to-date programs, and title pages that display current copyright dates, assure the continuous employment of a number of editors on the staffs of the major publishing companies as well as other writers working for them.

The demands for up-to-date programs have at least one serious negative effect on most basal programs, and that is the lack of time of before publication program tryout in classrooms. Although individual lessons and segments of new programs sometimes get tried out before publication, it is unusual for an entire program to be rigorously observed as it is used in classrooms, changes made on the basis of classroom observations, and then the program altered. Instead, programs typically are written, printed, sold, and then used in classrooms. We believe that much of the "bumpiness," unevenness, and the sometimes evident lack of coordination among program components can be attributed to inadequate tryout procedures.

A short discussion of some of the difficulties publishers must contend with as they select the content of student readers is perhaps of interest. The short stories, excerpts from longer stories and novels (often somewhat rewritten), poems, and factual articles in student readers are typically picked up from already written and copyrighted narrative and expository texts. But



occasionally, stories and articles are commissioned especially for a program, or are written by a program's authors.

Although some "favorite" stories appear in a number of student readers, the content of the readers varies from program to program, and especially in the beginning books. An analysis of stories in almost any beginning reading textbook indicates that the overriding purpose of most of these stories is instructional, rather than literary. The selection of words is usually determined by the approach taken to teach beginning reading. In basal programs that emphasize a phonics approach, words are chosen for their "regularity" so as to provide students with a basis for practicing (or discovering) the relationships between specific letters and sounds. In programs that emphasize a sight approach, beginning readers are written so that students have the opportunity to repeatedly practice words that appear with great frequency in both oral and written language (Meyer, Greer, & Crummey, 1986).

The content of student readers in the middle and upper grades is much less constrained by the instructional philosophy of a program. And, in fact, the student textbooks of most basal reading programs are similar in that they contain a veritable cafeteria of content: short stories--both classic and modern, excerpts from longer works of fiction, poems, plays, factual articles (most often about topics related to natural science, and historical events), biographical selections, and in the most recent editions, what can be described as "self-help" selections on specific comprehension and study skills.

Authors and editors must respond to many demands as they choose selections. The instructional criteria that predominate in the primers are replaced by other criteria as the selections get longer and the books get bigger. Some people urge that the stories reflect classic literary traditions; others promote stories that are "timely" so that modern students will relate to them. Selections on history, geography, and science must be accurate and represent a range of topics. To these demands are added those of groups seeking to have their constituencies represented in children's reading textbooks. When the student readers of the 1960's and those of today are compared, it is apparent that women and minority groups are represented to a much greater degree in the current books. A survey of the most recent books also reveals that handicapped and elderly people are portrayed not only in the pictures, but as characters in stories as well. That there is such a marked change in the way these groups are represented in basal readers is not an accident of history. Rather, it is due to the groups of people working to affect the content of the books students will read as they learn to read.

The sometimes competing demands of these groups can be bewildering. For example, stories should be inspirational; stories should present "life as it is"; stories should portray high ideals; Greek myths are bad because they are about pagan deities; Greek myths are good because they are about classic subjects; stories about magical characters are bad because they represent an unsuitable explanation of life; stories about

magical characters are good because they foster children's imagination; American heroes from the past should be treated with respect; questionable episodes from the American past should be frankly addressed. The list goes on, but the message is clear: Lots of people want to have lots to say about what goes into basal readers, and some people succeed in being heard. One effect of all of this interest is that publishers and authors have become very careful. They don't want to offend anyone, and they are anxious to please everyone. And "everyone" is a lot of teachers, administrators, and in the final count, a lot of students.

#### The Use of Basal Reading Programs

Why are basal reading programs so important? How much do they affect what happens in classrooms? From observing a lot of classrooms, talking to many teachers and administrators, and reviewing the classroom observation literature (for example, Durkin, 1981; Barr & Dreeben 1983; Shannon, 1983), we have come to believe that basal reading programs account for a great deal of how time is spent during the periods allocated for reading instruction in elementary classrooms. For example, Barr and Dreeben (1983) report that teachers are directly geared to coverage of materials in basal programs and that these materials, in fact, "drive" the classroom. Although most educators would agree that published programs are secondary in instructional importance, substantial evidence makes it clear that most elementary school teachers rely heavily on basal reading programs. A number of researchers have attempted to ascertain

how much of what students and teachers do in school emanates from textbook programs. The popular estimates are that from 80% to 95% of what goes on during reading periods derives from the many components of basal reading programs. One researcher (English, 1980), estimates that about 80% of the knowledge to which students are exposed comes from textbook programs.

Do teachers follow the instructions in the teachers guides that are the guiding forces of most textbook programs? To answer this question, Durkin (1983) observed 16 elementary teachers from the first, third, and fifth grades as they taught reading on two successive days. She found a close match between how teachers conducted their reading lessons and what was prescribed in the teachers' guides. Teachers departed from manual recommendations most frequently in their lack of attention to the prereading activities recommended in the guides--activities that have to do with the development of vocabulary and background knowledge. On the other hand, their adherence to all post-reading recommendations (usually comprehension assessment questions and independent written work) was quite consistent, including those activities described as supplemental.

Other observers of teachers (Duffy & McIntyre, 1982; Berliner, 1976; Brophy, 1980; Evertson & Holley, 1981; and Fisher et al., 1978) have all documented variations upon the theme of the strong relationship between published programs and the goals and actions of teachers, and have not made it difficult to conclude that teachers' guides are an important influence on reading instruction.

Several classroom observation studies have documented how much time students spend with one component of basal programs--workbooks and the worksheets run from ditto masters. Fisher and his colleagues (1978) found that 70% of allocated instructional time was spent on workbook-type exercises. L. Anderson (1984) found that from 30% to 60% of the instructional time allocated for reading was spent on reading-related workbook-type activities. Mason and Osborn (1982) found that during reading periods, students spent as much time working at their desks on workbook exercises as they did reading in their student textbooks, or engaged in instructional activities with their teachers.

If it is acknowledged that the many components of textbook programs account for a great deal of what happens in classrooms, then questions about the content of these programs are relevant.

#### The Effectiveness of Basal Reading Program Components

We suggest that it is not unreasonable for teachers to assume that basal reading programs developed by reputable publishing houses and written by eminent reading educators represent the best, most current and most expert knowledge about reading instruction, and that the programs will provide a basis for the successful instruction of all the students for whom they are intended. But what do educational researchers have to say about the quality and effectiveness of basal reading programs? Only during the past few years have researchers conducted systematic analyses of published textbook programs. The most analyzed components of basal reading programs are the student

researchers, the teachers' guides, and workbooks. In this section we discuss some studies that have analyzed the effectiveness of the content of these components.

Student readers. What are the characteristics of the books that students use as they learn to read? If basal readers are considered preparation for reading in "real" books of literature and content area textbooks, how well do these readers prepare students to read "real life" books?

In one study, Bruce (1984) compared characteristics of basal reader stories with those of tradebook stories and found a number of differences between the stories in tradebooks and those in basal readers. He concluded that publishers of basal programs should expand the range of story types they include in their student readers. Alternatively, teachers should be made aware that children reading from basal readers are not exposed to many of the story types they will encounter in "real life" reading, and should supplement the readers with tradebooks.

Although research about stories has been carried out for a number of years, research about the characteristics of the expository writing in student textbooks is more recent. Although almost no studies have included the expository selections in basal readers, the research of Anderson, Armbruster, and Kantor (1980) on content area texts perhaps sheds some light on the expository prose in basal readers. These researchers analyzed social studies and science texts on the basis of text structure, text coherence, text unity, and audience appropriateness and found many examples of unclear writing. Somewhat unexpectedly

they concluded that the effect of poor writing on how much content area knowledge students acquire in the early elementary grades may not be very great because many teachers of young children do not use textbooks as the primary learning source. But as would be expected, they suggested that poor quality texts probably have a negative effect on how intermediate grade students learn to learn and comprehend information from text.

Research about readability formulas is of particular interest to people concerned about the quality and comprehensibility of what students read. The standard readability formulas are measures of sentence length and the complexity, unfamiliarity, or length of vocabulary. Everybody-- teachers, adoption committee members, authors and editors-- assesses the difficulty of textbooks with readability formulas.

But how effective are readability formulas? And does the use of these formulas by publishers and writers have some side effects? Some researchers argue that the extensive use of readability formulas in the writing of texts is detrimental to the comprehensibility of texts.

During the past five years, the effects of readability formulas on text comprehensibility has been the subject of several studies. In one study "original texts" (from magazines and books) were compared with the same texts rewritten to conform to readability formulas (Davison, 1984). Davison comments that using formulas on a text "do their bit to lower the vocabulary scores and sentence length," but notes that the resulting simplifications are sometimes contradictory. For example, the

practice of paraphrasing hard vocabulary may considerably lengthen or add subordinate clauses to sentences. A writer who cannot use alligator may have to say the "long, mean animal with many teeth," thus lengthening the sentence. Another example: The deletion of connectives can require a reader to make a greater number of inferences to understand the meaning of a text. In the following example, the reader of the adaptation has to make more inferences and utilize more background information than the reader of the original text. The original and rewritten texts are taken from the Davison study, (p. 124):

(original)

I had kept my nerve pretty well till dawn, just as the faint light was coming, when we looked out and saw the water whirling against the bay window.

(adaptation)

But we all kept our courage up. As the faint light of dawn was coming, we looked out. The water was whirling by.

Davison claims that seemingly simple changes can seriously distort the logical relations between the parts of the text, disrupt the presentation of ideas, and make it difficult for the the meaning of an original piece of writing to be conveyed. Davison also presents evidence that strongly suggests that making changes in text solely on the basis of readability formulas can have harmful effects on a text's comprehensibility.

In conclusion, she finds that although steeped in tradition and simple to use, readability formulas generally have a harmful and negative effect on writing and revising written material for classroom use. She advises that informed subjective judgment is



the best replacement for readability formulas in both writing and analyzing student texts.

Teacher's guides. Although the books students read have been analyzed rather extensively, there has been less research about manuals the teachers use. Durkin (1984) examined the teacher's manuals associated with basal reading programs. In her analysis of comprehension instruction in the teachers' manuals of five basal reading programs, she categorized the suggestions to teachers as instruction, review, application, and practice. She recorded the number of suggestions in each category and gave examples of their quality. She found, for example, that when manuals specify instruction, the directives are often vague and unclear. In addition, she found that the manuals "offer precise help (for example, obvious answers to assessment questions) when it is least needed, but that they are obscure or silent when specific help is likely to be required."

Durkin's observations about review were no less disheartening. She remarked that "the frequency with which information or a skill is reviewed appears to have no connection with difficulty or importance for reading. Instead, the amount of review in all the series seemed more like the product of random behavior than of a pre-established plan." In Durkin's analyses, application and practice fared no better.

Workbooks. A number of classroom observation studies (L. Anderson, 1984; Fisher, Berliner, Filby, Marliave, Cohen, Dishaw, & Moore, 1978; Mason & Osborn, 1982) indicate that students spend a lot of time working in workbooks and other practice materials.

What are the characteristics of these materials? In an analysis of workbooks associated with basal reading programs, Osborn (1984) commented on many aspects of workbook tasks, including: the relationship of workbook tasks to the rest of the program, vocabulary and concept level, instructional design, amount of practice, student response modes, number of task types, art, layout, quality of content and clarity of instructions.

Osborn found that workbook tasks in some programs had very little or nothing to do with the rest of the program; that instructions were often unclear, obscure, or unnecessarily lengthy; that the vocabulary of the workbooks was sometimes more complex than that of the rest of the program; and that the art and page layouts were often confusing. In addition, she found that although many tasks were trivial, having little to do with reading or writing, some of the most important tasks occurred only once or twice in an entire workbook. Although she found examples of well constructed tasks, she concluded that "workbooks are the forgotten children of basal programs," and urged publishers and teachers to attend to the problems inherent in these practice materials.

We have thus far discussed how basal reading programs are developed, how they are used, and reviewed some research about the effectiveness of these programs. By putting together the elements of this discussion we arrive at a strange triangle: (1) Publishers regularly develop programs to sell to school districts; (2) Teachers use basal reading programs and follow them with varying degrees of fidelity; (3) Researchers who have

pursued analyses of these programs have delineated problems that are seemingly of significance to the teachers and students using the programs. The question that emerges from this triangle is, "Why do publishers publish and teachers use basal reading programs that, according to the researchers, have some serious problems?" We will attempt to answer that question by discussing the environment and process of textbook adoption. Finally we will describe a procedure that perhaps will be capable of resolving some of the problems inherent in the publisher-user-research triangle.

#### Textbook Adoption

One dictionary definition of adoption includes the phrase "to take up, use and make one's own"; it is in this spirit that adoption committees usually select textbook programs. Programs that get through adoption committees and into classrooms are those that teachers are expected to make into their own as they work with their students.

How do teachers decide which programs to use? Most often by a process called textbook adoption, during which a variety of published programs are examined and evaluated by a committee of teachers and other people associated with schools. The adoption of textbook programs takes place at many levels--at the school level, the district level, and the state level. In some states, called adoption states, a given number of textbook programs are selected by a committee (usually appointed by the governor, or the state superintendent of schools, and organized to represent the entire state) to be listed on a state list. To be eligible

to buy textbook programs with state funds, local school districts must select programs from among those listed by the state adoption committee. In the other states, labeled by publishers as "open territory," the selection of textbook programs is carried out by committees representing a city, an entire school district, or sometimes just one school.

One commentator summarizes some of the confusing realities of textbook adoption (Bowler, 1978):

There are no uniform dates or forms, no common policies on bidding [by publishers], the length of the adoption cycle, sampling, extension of textbook contracts, price escalation clauses, number of school grades covered by adoption, adoption of audio-visual materials or requirements that school materials be "learned-verified" before purchase (p. 518).

We could add to this list problems associated with how committee members are selected, what groups are represented, the number of issues adoption committees have to deal with, and how committees are organized to perform their important tasks.

And we will mention, but not fully consider in this paper, the problems that publishers, other states, and school districts must contend with that arise from the influences on publishers of the big adoption states. Publishers do pay a great deal of attention to the demands of adoption committees in these states. One commentator on textbook adoption (English, 1980) concluded, "We like to think that there is no national curriculum in the United States. In practice, Texas, California, and Florida set

out curriculum and most other school districts go along"  
(p. 277).

The big adoption states are big markets. That most of us, no matter where we grew up, have some knowledge of the battle at the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas is probably likely not due to its outstanding importance as an event in all of American history, but rather to the importance of the Texas market to the publishers of American history textbooks.

The primary function of most adoption committees, whether at the local, district, or state levels, is the evaluation and selection of textbook programs. Typically, a committee is responsible for organizing the evaluation procedures, and composing the checklists, rating forms, and guidelines that reflect the group's objectives, as well as for the actual evaluation and selection process. The constraints put upon adoption committee members are numerous. For example, people serving on committees rarely receive remuneration or even released time from their daily responsibilities. Perhaps the biggest constraint is time. In a case study of the adoption process in the state of Indiana, Courtland and Farr and their colleagues (1983) reported that the textbook reviewers felt that not nearly enough time had been allowed for a thorough examination of materials.

An examination of a number of rating forms and checklists formulated and used by adoption committees reveals two outstanding problems: the lack of objectivity, and the lack of representation of research-based criteria. Courtland and Farr

report that the evaluation criteria employed by most of the reviewers in their adoption study were based on "personal interpretations" of the general criteria that were supplied to them. They write:

When asked specifically to identify the factors that caused them to select as "best" one set of textbooks, the reviewers responded with a wide variety of general information and little specificity. The researchers' general impression was that the reviewers were often looking for reasons to exclude a set of texts rather than significant reasons to adopt one textbook series (p. 76).

An item analysis of basal reading evaluation forms and checklists gathered from 26 school systems in 14 states (Comas, 1983) revealed that rarely did there appear an item that required committee members to document or substantiate in a quantifiable form any of their conclusions about a program.

Our own analysis of rating forms and checklists suggests that the subjectivity inherent in many adoption committee evaluations rests with an excessive reliance on these instruments. The very nature of many of these instruments precludes objectivity: for example, answering questions about sufficient review, by "yes" or "no" and rating how well teachers' guides are organized on a scale from 1-5, that can only yield biased responses.

The small representation of research based criteria on the items on rating forms and checklist was also evident. In fact, it was usual to find more items about the physical features of

textbooks than, for example, about the specific content of student textbooks, the prose style in readers, and the instructional design of the content of the teacher's guides. Only a few of the checklists we examined included questions about field try-out and program effectiveness information. Such research involves the testing of the effectiveness of an entire textbook program in a number of classrooms with a significant number of teachers and students. (This type of research is often alluded to as "learner-verification" information.) Items that could tap these topics were not a common feature of the checklists we examined. And, in fact, the Comas item analysis of evaluation forms found that only 34.6% of the districts sampled included research questions of any kind on their evaluation forms, as compared to 73.1% that included items about illustrations.

That rating forms and checklists are typically so lacking in questions about the quality of instruction and the research basis for the content of the programs is worrisome to those concerned with improving reading instruction. Is there a better way committees can go about the process of program evaluation and adoption? The Center for the Study of Reading's Adoption Guidelines Project is an attempt to provide adoption committees with research based information and procedures for more meaningfully and quantitatively examining the content of basal reading programs.

More Useful Adoptions

Before we describe the Center for the Study of Reading's Adoption Guidelines Project, we should like to return to the topic of educational publishers. The roles of the publishers who develop educational programs are complex: Publishers must produce programs that have an important educational function; on the other hand, they must produce products their customers will buy so their companies will show a profit. Stiff competition among publishers probably contributes to their concern about being "different," and their caution about making changes.

We should like to comment on this caution by discussing three meetings organized by the Center for the Study of Reading for the Educational Division of the Association of American Publishers. These meetings, which have been held over a seven year period, have been attended by executives and editors of essentially all of the major publishers of educational programs in the United States and Canada. Researchers from the Center, as well as other research institutions, presented research that had both direct and indirect implications for reading programs, as well as content area textbooks. During each of these meetings, members of the publishing houses considered and discussed the research reports and the kinds of changes implied by their ideas. One of the authors of this paper attended each of the meetings, and she will take the liberty of characterizing the publishers' responses as very cautious and of pointing out that this caution diminishes the likelihood that the instructional implications of new research will be quickly translated into the procedures of



teachers' manuals and the content of student readers and workbooks.

While the publishers frequently acknowledged the relevance of the research to reading instruction, they just as frequently pointed out the danger of making major changes in programs before their markets demanded them. It became quite evident that the real impetus for changes in reading programs would not come very readily from the ideas and evidence of the researchers, but would come from those teachers and administrators responsible for the selection and use of programs. Although researchers have always been aware of how long it takes to get research into practice, such a strong message from the publishers was somewhat of a surprise to most of the researchers attending these meetings.

Adoption committees were a frequent topic of discussion, and the researchers became aware of something that publishers have known for years--adoption committees have a great deal of influence on the content of published educational programs. One suggestion was that adoption committees have a great deal of potential for facilitating some of the changes implied by current research. The questions became, "How can the members of the state and local adoption committees become more informed about the implications of research for reading instruction?" and "Will they start demanding some of the changes implied by current reading research appear in the programs they buy?" The Center for the Study of Reading Adoption Guidelines is an attempt to provide an answer to those questions.

A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs is a set of booklets on topics important to reading instruction. These booklets review recent research, present guidelines based on research and good practice, and provide worksheets for adoption committee members to use as they examine reading programs. The premise of this project is that a constructive adoption process will not only provide committee members with more precise information about the content of basal reading programs, but also will provide them with specific recommendations for program improvement that can be passed onto publishers.

A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs contains eight booklets. Each of the booklets is organized similarly, but different booklets focus on separate topics. The topics selected represent aspects of reading that (a) are of primary importance, (b) appropriate to a basal reading program, and (c) subject to some sort of evaluation. The topics are:

- Beginning Reading and Decoding Instruction
- Comprehension I: The Guided Reading Lesson
- Comprehension II: Skills and Strategies
- Vocabulary Instruction
- Workbooks
- Selections in the Reader
- Testing and Management Plans

In addition, a Leader's Manual provides information about how to organize committees to use the booklets.

The booklets are written by different groups of authors. Booklet authors were asked to consider the task of putting together a booklet as an exercise in answering two questions:

1. What implications does your topic have for a basal reading program?

2. How would you help adoption committee members examine a basal reading program so that they can find out some precise information about how your topic is treated in that program?

Some of the booklets (for example, Beginning Reading) cover alternative views of reading instruction. The consideration of each alternative, however, includes procedures for evaluating such characteristics as internal consistency, consistency across components of the program, and sufficiency of practice.

The advantages of the booklets format include that adoption committees are able to pick and choose from among the booklets for topics most important to them; different committee members can be assigned to different booklets; committees may not like one booklet, but use others. The 12 field-test committees trying out the booklets reported finding them useful, and in some cases extraordinarily useful (see Dole, Rogers, and Osborn, 1987). The booklets will be available for general use in 1987.

From the enthusiasm and interest these booklets have generated among those groups trying them out, we have come to believe that sound evaluation procedures can be useful tools for improving the quality of basal reading programs. Given the importance of these programs to teachers and students, it seems apparent that the tools that adoption committees use to evaluate their content must be made more effective. We believe that evaluation procedures that yield specific information about the content of programs also have the capability of yielding recommendations for the improvement of programs. We hope that the Center for the Study of Reading Adoption Guidelines project

will help state and local adoption committee members achieve  
this goal.

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