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ABSTRACT

A study examined 52 stories for grades 1-6, randomly chosen from 10 American and Canadian literature-based reading series containing well-known selections by well-known authors. The study compared the reading series selection to the original story cited in the series acknowledgments, seeking patterns of difference in wording, paragraph structure, and discourse. Results indicated that text differences and stubstantial changes in illustration and formatting affected the meaning of stories. Text changes including editing to correct, clarify, simplify, modernize, or remove stereotyping did not change meaning, but story retelling could cause losses of ethnicity, cultural and historical content, and original language pattern and language structure. Other changes in vocabulary, focus, and emphasis on mood, moral, or theme, and important events and details or characters cause a loss of the original literary experience itself. Format changes in presentation of illustrations and text also made picture books harder and novels easier to read. Findings suggest that basalizing is being done in a more subtle form through illustration and formatting than through language changes, and original meaning is lost or muddied through refocusing stories. (Contains 40 references.) (CR)

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Altering Trade Books to "fit' Literature-based Basals

Standing in the Learning Resources Centre surrounded by reading series and children's books, Sally and I were looking at several new reading series just in. Suddenly we found ourselves eavesdropping on two beginning teachers as they were exclaiming over the series in front of us. "Weren't the pictures bright and clear?" "And such a handy size". "Look at all the real children's literature!" "Every story by some one I know. All my favorites". "And look, they're even in themes!" Soon they were looking at another new series with the same enthusiastic comments. Bright colors, favorite stories, famous authors, all in one handy package. I looked at Sally and she looked at me. Somewhere in the recesses of my mind a bell began ringing. That bell is a warning to look again and look closer. In this case it rang a true clear note.

The success of using real children's literature to give meaning and pleasure to the reading process and to empower both teachers and students is well documented (Tunnell & Jacob 1989). Still, many teachers, although loving children's literature, want a surrounding structure for teaching reading. Some teacher educators also believe that using a series is more appropriate, especially for beginning teachers (McCallum, 1988). A market continues then, for publishers who produce formal reading series (Shannon, 1987).

But other teachers have turned away from the drudgery of 'scientific' basal readers to the marvel of using real books for reading instruction (Routman, 1988). For them finding enough copies and enough different books can be a problem. To fill this gap and to keep their market, publishers have developed a new type of reading series. One that purports to give teachers all the real children's literature they could possible want in a nice, neat package. What a relief and delight to many teachers -- just as for our two -- to discover these new literature-based series filled with stories and poems by known and loved authors, organized thematically packaged with teacher's guides that provide background, teaching ideas and activities (Eckhoff. 1993).

Unfortunately no solution is ever as good as it first seems. Editors and publishers must make choices and compromises when putting a reading series together (Flood and Lapp, 1987). Yet Goodman et al (1988) suggest that some of these new series are not acceptable.

Perhaps more damning than Goodman's reservations are the results of a study done by Sebesta and Standal (1993). They show that children, just as they did for the older basals, passively accept rather than show interest in selections from these new series. After administrating an interest inventory Sebesta and Standal found that grade 2 and grade 5 children classified only eight percent of the selections in the new literature-based series as 'interesting'. They were indifferent to or disliked the rest.

So while teachers are delighted by the colorful new series, children are still bored. Recognizing this paradox increased the ringing of my warning bell and demanded a deeper look at the new series themselves. What compromises and choices did the publishers of these series make? Could these changes account for children losing the pleasure of reading associated with real books? That question became the purpose of our study -- what were the differences between children's literature as presented in the new literature-based reading series and the original stories.

The Study

Fifty-two grade one to grade six stories were randomly chosen from ten American and Canadian reading series. These series were selected because they claimed to be literature-based programs and they contained well-known selections by well-known authors. In two of these series the stories were in an individual book format similar to real children's books. In the other eight the stories were assembled in anthologies. Working with each of the 52 stories we compared the reading series selection to the original story cited in the series acknowledgments. Throughout the study we sought patterns of differences rather than numerical data. Like Shriberg & Shriberg (1974), we began by focusing on the written text. We compared the wording, paragraph structure and discourse looking for possible editing changes made to the original in the series version. Very quickly we saw the need to take a further step. While there were text differences, we began to see many more substantial changes in illustration and formatting. We found that many of these changes could make a dramatic difference in our original understanding of the story. These changes affected meaning. They affected it through additions to, substitutions for or loss of the essence, the intention, or the web of associations in the original.

Changes to Text

In looking at text there were two major types of change. The first was editing that corrected, clarified, simplified, modernized or removed stereotyping without changing meaning. The other, less straightforward type, did change meaning. These meaning changes included a retelling of the story or changes in structure, vocabulary, focus and emphasis.

The retelling of a story, a re-creating of the original, is a perfectly legitimate change if the publisher acknowledges and notes the adaptation. Many did not. Although acceptable, retellings can also be problematic. These re-creations retained the basic action but the nuances of the story, such as characterization or mood, were lost. This kind of change occurred to the original *Caps for Sale* (Slobodkina, 1968) when retold in one series as *Stacks of Caps* where the original rhyme was lost and replaced with a nonsensical, non-rhyming version. The intent of the change was to modernize; to indicate a cost of living increase by updating the amount of money needed. The result was a loss of ethnicity, a loss of cultural and historic content and in addition, a loss of the original language pattern (see Slobodkina, 1968, p. 1; and Journeys, 1989, Springboards I, p. 42-44).

A second change in meaning resulted in a change in language structure. This kind of change lessened the impact of the original form and made a difference in meaning. In the original *Sally Can't See* Petersen (1974), emphasized the five senses through indentation and the use of the infinitive form of the verb. In the series version continuity in paragraphing and maximum use of available space demanded a loss of indentation and a verb form change and so, a loss of emphasis:

> But for her there is one sense missing.
> Usually we have five senses--
> to see
> to hear
> to feel
> to smell
> to taste (Petersen, 1974, p. 3).

> Sally knows when the sun ils shining--she can feel its warmth. But for her there is one sense missing. Usually we have five senses--we can see, hear, feel, smell and taste (Impressions, 1988, Under the Sea, p. 204).

Another commonly occurring change was in vocabulary. Sometimes only one word was changed, and surprising as this seems, such a change made a great deal of difference in meaning. In the original version of Robert Munsch's *Paper Bag Princess*, Elizabeth says to Ronald, "You look like a real prince, but you are a bum." In the series version Elizabeth says, "You look like a real prince, but you are a creep." The one word "bum" changed to "creep" may not seem like much of a difference, but the analogy of a "prince", which Ronald is supposed to be, to a "bum", which is the opposite of prince, is lost. 'Hero' is a more logical opposite to the word 'creep'. Thus, through the change of one word, evocative, visual and analogous language structure and meaning were lost.

Another important change in text meaning was a change in focus. *Angel Square* (Doyle, 1984) was an excellent example of how the series version lost the main focus of the original story through excerpting. The excerpt, while word for word, was taken completely out of context. The original story, a mystery that dealt with racism in 1946 from a child's perspective, became a simple description of a department store at Christmas. The theme and genre were changed through omission. Another example was the series version of *Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing* by Judy Blume (1972). In using only the last chapter of the book as the series excerpt, the focus of the story was switched from the rivalry of two brothers to the eating of a turtle. Subtlety of emotional meanings and a focus on personal interaction was replaced by blatant physical action.

As well as loss of the main focus of a story, other smaller changes were made to meaning by changing the emphasis of mood, moral or theme, of important events and details, historical context or characterization. For example, in the series version of *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* (Kipling, 1908) the characterization of the male and female cobras became quite convoluted and stereotypical through a role reversal. The evil role moved from the female to the male, making the female the homebody and caregiver and the male the problem solver, while in the original the female instigated the solution, evil though it was. In this version characterization, context and

vocabulary were simplified or lost and thereby a chance to increase students' historical and cultural schema was lost as well. All of these meaning changes to text, whether large or small, meant a loss of the original literary experience itself.

Changes in Illustration

There were more and bigger changes in illustration than in text. And they had a stronger effect on meaning. Illustrations in books are more influential than seems to be commonly realized, although several researchers and authors of children's literature have emphasized their importance (Eichenberg, 1979; Nodelman, 1992, 1988; Provenson & Provenson, 1991; Small, Lovett & Scher, 1993). As Mem Fox puts it (1993, 55), "As a writer of picture books, where would I be without the pictures?".

While changes in text were fairly straightforward and easy to compare, changes in illustration were more subtle, requiring a more discerning eye. As with text, there were many different types of change, the most obvious being a change in illustrator. Many of the other changes hinged on the work of these new illustrators. There were changes in mood through color and medium and in a refocusing of action, setting or character.

The series often changed illustrators. Usually, we felt, with negative effect. According to Nodelman (1988) the words and illustrations in a book are in a relationship and they affect the meaning of each other. Changing one changes the other. A change in illustration changes the interpretation of the story's meaning. And indeed they seemed to. For example, frequently the new illustrations did not "...forward the storyline..." (Provenson & Provenson, 1991, 175). For example, *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* written by Judi Barrett and illustrated by Ron Barrett (1979) appeared in three different series. While one series kept the original artwork, the two other versions were re-illustrated by new artists. Each new illustrator demonstrated a very different feel for the action, the characters and the mood of the original story. In one series the original graphic storm of eatables became quiet floating food and in the other, a storm-tossed boat became a placid cruise ship (Barret, 1978, p. 8-9; Journeys, 1989, Tickle the Sun, p. 228-229). Comparing the dog as depicted in the third series with the original reveals tellingly what can happen to characterization through a change in illustrator. A sentinel perched at the front of the boat became a bemused puppy

being towed along (Barret, 1978, p. 25; Impressions, 1988, Cross the Golden River, p. 176-177).

Frequently the art medium used in the original was down-graded becoming less real and more cartoon-like. This type of change was made very explicit in *Sally Can't See* (Petersen, 1974) with a change from photography to a watercolor wash. Sally changed from a very real blind girl with a cane to a cartoon-like girl who did not look the least blind nor in need of a cane. Simplifying the art medium made her blindness less credible, less real.

Illustrations also changed in color -- in hue, shade and saturation. Excerpts from novels show this most clearly. Most novels had black and white line drawings if they had any illustration at all. The series versions almost always included two to four new, large and highly colorful illustrations. Series consistently used bright, clear colors throughout making them upbeat and active. This brightening distorted any quiet, somber or other than upbeat mood conveyed in the original.

Finally, changes in illustration altered the focus of stories in several ways. One was a change in focus from action to setting, as in *Over in the Meadow* by John Langstraff (1971). In the series version the interaction and eye contact between the mother and her young were left out, making the animals static and the background dominant, rather like an animal diorama in a museum. A second alteration was from emotion to action, as in *The Snowy Day* by Erza Jack Keats (1962). Although the original illustrations were used in the series version, the illustrations depicting the feeling of new snow and being alone in winter's vastness were deleted. Only the illustrations portraying Peter's actions were kept.

A third was in a loss or change of character. In *The Snowy Day* all illustrations that included secondary characters were deleted and only Peter is left. Characterization was changed in the *Paper Bag Princess* (Munch, 1982) where Elizabeth and Ronald's personalities were reversed by an exchange of facial expressions and gestures (Munsch, 1980, p. 22; Journeys, 1989, Springboards 2, p. 40-41). And in *One Snail and Me* by Emilie McLeod (1961) where the race of the main character was changed and so a scruffy dirty white child with a big grin becomes a neatly be-ribboned black child with a prim smile (Mcleod, 1961, p. 2; Impressions, 1988, Over the Mountain, p. 28-29). In an attempt to maintain racial equality the series managed

a kind of reverse stereotyping. Are black kids not allowed to be scruffy, dirty, having big grins and needing baths?

Changes in Format

Just as with changes to illustration, there were consistent and numerous formatting changes that were more subtle and difficult to pick out than changes to text. The formatting changes we found included differences in visual chunking, containment of text and illustration, line length, page and font size and number and size of illustrations. As innocuous as formatting may seem, the physical qualities of a book generate specific expectations for its readers (Nodelman, 1992). Encountering a large, thirty-two page book with picture on one page and text on the other we expect a picture book and all that particular format implies.

Part of that format is the way meaning is chunked. As Bill Martin, Jr. says "Language works in chunks of meaning" (1990, p.10). In many of the originals the text of the story was visually chunked by concept, pictures and text supplementing each other. This usually appeared in a picture book as one concept per double page spread with text on one page and the related illustration on the opposite page. The series version often changed this format. The concepts in the original *Little Bear* (Minarik, 1959) were chunked in this one-to-one manner. In the series version the concept chunks were three or four to a page, and obversely, some chunks were split across two pages. As well, the illustrations were either not located near their corresponding text concepts or were deleted. Good illustrations embody the story (Eichenberg, 1979). They show the story's pattern and extend it by illuminating characters, plot and story details. When two thirds of the illustrations in a picture book were left out, the story meaning was skeletonized (Minarik, 1982, p. 44-45; Impressions, 1988, West of the Moon, p.52-53).

Another type of change in formatting was confining the illustration and text within a border. Many original children's books did not have borders. Instead the illustration continued off the page or there was a large amount of white space on each page, both of which invites the mind to go beyond. Nodelman (1992) verifies that we respond differently to books with borders than to those with none. He says that borders are restraining and imply detachment, that they suggest intense activity. Sometimes the series borders were broad and colored. More often, a narrow line was added as in one version

of *Good Night Owl* by Pat Hutchins (1982). Either way, the result was the same. The page became structured, controlled and contained (Hutckins, 1982, p. 3-4; Collections, 1989, Secret Places, p. 62-63).

The need to squeeze the original story into the predetermined dimensions of a student anthology dictated a third type of formatting change. Included within this type of change were many small changes in font size, spacing, line length and number of words per page. Most stories in an anthology are four pages long and each page is about six by nine inches. Most originals had many more pages and either larger or smaller pages than the anthology so two very consistent changes occurred.

If the series included a picture book, which was usually larger, all of the text was used but the number of illustrations and number of pages were reduced by two-thirds or more. A 32 page book with 16 pages of text and 16 full page illustrations became 16 or less paragraphs and three or four small illustrations crowded onto four pages. The print size and spacing were decreased, line length was increased and several concept chunks were crowded onto each page. The white space and illustrations were reduced or eliminated. Four pages of text with a quarter page picture above, below or down the middle does not lead to predicting that pictures and text will supplement each other as is expected in a picture book. If the series included a novel, which was usually smaller, an excerpt long enough to cover two to five pages of the anthology was used. Several large color illustrations were added and the print and spacing size were increased.

Through these two changes, we believe, picture books became harder and novels easier to read. This change in readability was brought home to us when we saw *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* in three different anthologies. A picture book version with all the illustrations intact was placed at a grade two level in one series and in two other series text only versions were placed at grade four.

Summary

After comparing these 52 stories, we would say that basalizing is still with us but in a subtler form, more through illustration and formatting than through language changes. The original meaning is lost or muddied through refocusing stories, downgrading to cartoon-like characters and rechunking the text. The original appeal of the

material is dulled by forcing the mind to focus within the limits of borders, by lightening and brightening illustrations and censoring and simplifying language usage. Adopting a one-size-fits-all format, leaving out illustrations, reorganizing concept chunks to fit page rather than meaning, increasing or decreasing font, spacing and line length change the original readability level.

In these new literature-based series publishers strove to create in a restricted format an upbeat product without stereotypes. But in the end they changed the stories' meaning, their appeal and their readability. In spite of the series' claims that they include only real children's books and real children's authors, the changes they have made turn children away from the joy of reading just as the older basals did.

As for our two beginning teachers, what would we say to them after having done the study? We would say that the best solution is to use the real books and let children savor the full impact of the original and complete story. Encourage them to become emersed in a book's totality, in the interactive play of its text, illustration and format and you will develop avid readers.

We would say that if you cannot provide enough real books and must choose a series seek one with an individual book format rather than one with an anthology format. Even if you are tied to a series that still does not mean that you cannot use the original book too. Share the original with the children before and after they read the series version. Take time to let them discover what the original contains that the series lacks and you will develop critical readers.

We would say use any opportunities to have children find the original in their school or local library or to find different books by the same author or illustrator or books about the same subject to expand on what the series provides. In doing so you will develop wide readers.

Make a space for injecting real books in read-aloud activities, sustained silent reading, when seeking patterns for writing, in choral reading and readers' theater or in any of the myriad ways presented in many good teacher resource books -- Cullinan (1992) for example. You will develop versatile and interested readers.

Finally we would say to our two teachers, we wish you well on your journey and may you learn to look deeply and critically at what you ask your children to read.

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