A content analysis of realism in elementary school basal reading textbooks
by Jon Allan Reyhner

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University
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Abstract:
The research method of content analysis was used to determine the amount of realism in stories in eight basal reading series published between 1978 and 1983.. Realism was defined as six categories of story content that psychologists over the past forty years have felt should appear more frequently in basal reading stories.

The six categories were age spectrum (non- elementary and young adult characters), conflict, aggression, life situations (birth, death, etc,.), negative emotions, and intellectual activities. One fourth of the stories (203) in the primers and first, third and fifth readers was randomly sampled.

Aggression and conflict were the least common categories of realism. At the third and fifth grade, negative feeling was the most common realism category, and at the first grade, intellectual activity was most common. Six research hypotheses were formulated and tested at the .05 level of confidence using Student's t-test. Stories in frequently state adopted reading series were found to have the same level of realism as stories in less frequently adopted series. Stories with female major-characters were found to have the same level of realism as stories without female major characters. Stories with minority group major characters (Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, or Asians) were found to have a higher level of realism than stories without minority group major characters. Everyday stories with non-middle-class urban settings were found to have the same level of realism as everyday stories with middle-class suburban settings. Stories with anthropmorphic characters were found to have a lower level of realism than, stories without anthropomorhic characters. Fairy stories were found to have the same level of realism as non-fairy stories.

. Only one story in. the sample was set in the future, only one was set in Africa (with White major characters), and only one mentioned divorce. No stories mentioned pregnancy. No stories emphasized conflict between parents, and only one emphasized sibling rivalry. Most stories set in foreign lands were myths or legends. Traditional fairy stories with wicked witches have been replaced by stuffed animal stories that lack realism.

The investigator concluded that the basal reading series sampled do not provide children living in our modern society an adequate core of children's literature.

A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF REALISM

IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BASAL

READING TEXTBOOKS

by

Jon Allan Reyhner

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Jon Allan Reyhner

This thesis has been read by each member of the
thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory
regarding content, English usage, format, citations,
bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for
submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

May 25, 1984 _Elnora A. Old Coyote_
Date Chairperson, Graduate Committee

Approved for the Major Department

May 25, 1984 _JMM Page_
Date Head, Major Department

Approved for the College of Graduate Studies

June 14, 1984 _Henry L Parsons_
Date Graduate Dean

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Signature _Jon Allan Reyhner_

Date _May 25, 1984_

VITA

Jon Allan Reyhner was born in Fountain Hill, Pennsylvania, in 1944. He attended the University of California at Davis from 1962 to 1967 and received Bachelor's and Master's degrees in history. He taught junior high school for four years in Arizona on the Navajo Reservation, then went on to become a junior high assistant principal in New Mexico, and then a middle school principal in Arizona. While working in Arizona and New Mexico, he completed a Master's degree in secondary education and an Educational Specialist's degree in secondary administration at Northern Arizona University. In 1978, he moved to Montana to become an elementary principal at Rocky Boy. In 1980, he went to Montana State University to begin full time work on a doctorate. For the past two years, he has been elementary principal at Heart Butte, Montana, and he has recently completed the editing of several books about the Blackfeet Indians for elementary students.

He married Helen Marie Bennett in 1972, and they have two children, Deborah Dawn and Tsosie Dean.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> Come, Boy, learn to be wise. . .
>
> I will shew thee all.
> I will name thee all.
>
> > --John Amos Comenius
> > The Orbis Pictus, 1657

How much of reality, what adults think they know
of the world, can be found in the stories published in
modern basal reading series? There is a long history of
limiting the content of stories meant for children. Plato
in the Republic called for the censoring of stories for
children (1952, p. 321), and Aristotle in his Politics
cautioned directors of education to "be careful what tales
or stories the children hear, for all such things are
designed to prepare the way for the business of later
life" (1952, p. 541). Even the graphic realism of folk
tales for children before they were bowdlerized by the
Victorians exhibited a form of censorship. Anthropo-
morphic characters, animals depicted as having human
characteristics, such as the wolf in "Little Red Riding
Hood" were used instead of humans to represent the darker
aspects of human character that traditional societies must

have felt children should be warned about at least
indirectly.

Today, in the attempt to present children with an
idealized world free of the uglier, more evil, and tabooed
areas of life, evil humans and animals, conflict and
aggression, and even birth and death have been largely
banned from reading textbooks. Some critics contend these
current basal reading textbooks ill prepare children for
the realities of adult life. "To the extent that young
people believe them," asserts Francis Fitzgerald, "these
bland fictions, propagated for the purpose of creating
good citizens, may actually achieve the opposite; they
give young people no warning of the real dangers ahead,
and later they may well make these young people feel that
their own experience of conflict or suffering is unique"
(1979, p. 218).

Unrealistic Basal Readers of the 1950's

A psychologist, Otto Klineberg, found that reading
textbooks of the nineteen-fifties portrayed an unrealistic
white middle-class world of abundance and fun (1963). The
stories had none of the scarcity and insecurity that have
been central facts of life for most of human history.
Students reading these stories would tend to take for
granted the relative economic abundance and domestic peace
of our recent history. Children fed on the fun filled

middle-class existence of school readers, according to the
curriculum specialist Kieren Egan,

> . . .do not come to realize that this relative
> security [of present times] is very rare and is one of
> the great achievements of western technological
> culture; an achievement which only those who have
> known and can imagine nothing else tend to undervalue.

"The pat little stories in school readers in which virtue
always triumphs or in which everyone is really nice,"
according to the moral educator Lawrence Kohlberg, "are
unlikely to have any value in the stimulation of moral
development" (1966, p. 23).

Klineberg felt that the lack of non-white
characters in basal readers of the fifties strengthened
the ethnocentric attitudes of whites and made minorities
feel they did not belong (1963, p. 77). The reading
specialist Joseph Johnson seriously questioned basal
reader content as highlighting only "certain values
believed by their middle-class authors to be the basic and
ubiquitious cornerstones of the entire culture." He felt
most of the stories in popular basal reading series were
"not realistic in any sense" (1974, p. 558). The
anthropologist Jules Henry charged that,

> . . .our elementary school readers tend to conceal
> rather than to reveal the realities of our culture. .
> . and [are] to a great extent divorced from the
> critical problems of life, death, origins and
> relationships. (1961, p. 21)

The unrealistic basal stories of the fifties were
a result of a thirty year emphasis on vocabulary control

in the teaching of reading and the emphasis on life
experience and life adjustment in the progressive
education movement. Reading specialists took the child
centered curriculum of progressive education and wrote
what they considered to be realistic stories about
families supposedly similar to the family of the student
who would be using the text (Smith, 1965, pp. 327-28).
The progressive educators glorified "the homely
activities" of the child as exemplifying "a wonderful
world the depths of which he has not sounded, a world full
of mystery and promise that attend all the doings of
grown-ups whom he admires" (Hartman, 1922, pp. 102-103).

Recent Reactions to Unrealistic Basal Readers

Family-centered stories in the mid-twentieth
century crowded out from basal readers fairy tales and
literary selections which were now felt to be foreign and
therefore unreal to the experience of young children.
Today a reaction is taking place and some curriculum
specialists see the family centered curriculum as
pseudorealism. Kieran Egan recently wrote that "what
children know best when they come to school are love,
hate, joy, fear, good, and bad. That is, they know best
the most profound human emotions and the bases of
morality" (1979, p. 10). He felt that teachers "could
provide direct access [for the child] to anything in the

world that can be connected with basic emotions and morality" (1979, p. 11). Jeanne Chall in her major study of reading methods, <u>Learning to Read: The Great Debate</u>, largely ignored the influence of story content on learning to read, but then added in her conclusion,

> My own personal content preference for first and second graders is folktales and fairy tales, they have universal appeal. In my work with children, I never found one who could not identify with "Cinderella," "The Gingerbread Boy," or "The Three Little Pigs." These tales contain struggle and triumph, right and wrong, laughter and tears--themes that have disappeared from modern stories based on familiar experiences. Most authors who select and adapt stories for first- and second-grade readers seem to have forgotten that children, like adults enjoy a good cry once in a while. To make all stories come out happily at the end is not only unrealistic but also dulling. (1967, pp. 311-12)

When the purpose of teaching reading was to teach religion, morality, or literature as it was in earlier times, realism similar to what Egan describes found its way into reading instruction through bible stories, morality tales, and literary selections used to teach reading. However much of this realism vanished when scientific reading instruction made reading skills the object of teaching reading in this century. Basal stories specially written from frequency lists of words often lacked the larger purposes of earlier stories. Authors of basal reading texts and reading specialists in general were preoccupied with the method of teaching reading almost to the exclusion of concern for what meaningful

messages students might receive from the stories they read
(Zimet, 1972, p. 129).

Role of Reading Instruction in Education

Reading is more than just a technical skill.
Reading has the potential of opening a wider world of
information and experience to a child than he can gain
orally. As the reading specialist Arthur Gates wrote,

> Reading is not to be regarded as limited to mental
> activity. The dynamic and emotional processes are
> also involved. In whole-hearted reading activity the
> child does more than understand and contemplate; his
> emotions are stirred; his attitudes and purposes are
> modified; indeed, his innermost being is involved. . .
> The reading program, should, therefore, make provision
> for exerting an influence upon the development of the
> most wholesome dynamic and emotional adjustments.
> (1949, p. 4).

The problem of teaching reading, according to the
psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, "is primarily one of
convincing pupils that the printed word holds the answers
to important questions about which they are curious"
(1961, p. 146). He felt that,

> One of the most difficult and yet important things
> that any human being has to learn is to understand
> himself, and how to get along with others. This means
> that he must learn how to form correct expectations in
> regard to his own behavior and that of others. The
> people with whom the child must first learn to get
> along are his mother and father. One could expect,
> therefore, that his readers would teach him to have
> realistic expectations of his parents and their
> interactions with him and each other.
> But while parents play a large role in our
> readers, the stories never describe occasions on which
> even the slightest differences arise between parents.
> This tells the child that either the stories are not
> true, and that reading is not worthwhile, or else that

something is wrong with his parents, because they
argue on occasion. (1979, p. 147)

While Gates felt basal readers should be only a
"small fraction" of the total reading program (1962, p.
445), another reading specialist found there was little
time for use of supplementary reading materials if the
teacher followed the directions in the average teacher's
manual (Spache, 1972, p. 35). In a 1963 Harvard study, it
was found that basal reading series were used as the chief
means of teaching reading in grades one through three in
ninety-five percent of the schools surveyed (Austin, p.
54).

As a major portion of the reading material of
elementary school children, basal readers must provide the
emotion stirring and impact that Gates speaks of if
children are to really learn what reading is about in
school. However the review of the literature found in
Chapter 2 shows that basal readers have been found to be
inane, pollyannish, and boring by educators, psych-
ologists, and even some reading specialists from the
eighteen-nineties to the present.

Pressures on Publishers That Lead to Textbook Blandness

Bettelheim and Zelan cited publisher timidity for
the poor content of basal readers (1981, p. 27).
Conservative groups pressure local school boards and state
textbook committees not to adopt textbooks with conflict,

politics, sex, love, hate, and violence in them and thus
encourage textbook publishers to avoid "much of the
reality of children's lives" (Bowler, 1978, 515). With
their million dollar investments, publishers cannot risk
controversy and the result "is a book of endlessly
repeated words passed off as stories." Teachers only
accept such books because they have been put together by
"reading experts." Elaborate illustrations are used to
draw attention from the dullness of the text (Bettelheim
and Zelan, 1982, p. 27). According to Zimet, publishers
have typically tended to be conservative and to model new
editions of their readers after old editions of their own
and their competitors in order to protect their
investments (1972, p. 130).

The reading specialist Robert Aukerman accounts
for the sameness of basal readers after World War II to
the fact the authors of the various series "knew each
other well" and exchanged ideas regularly especially under
the auspices of the newly formed International Reading
Association (1981, p. 8). Some reading experts,
especially the proponents of the language experience
approach to teaching reading, see basal readers as a fraud
perpetuated by publishers and their paid consultants for
the millions of dollars involved (Yarington, 1978;
Douglas, 1980).

Whatever the reasons for publisher conservatism

and the similarity between series, Kingston in reviewing

the literature on sexism found that "traditional roles

tended to be seen as stereotypes" in textbooks and were

thus avoided (1977, p. 132). Fitzgerald in a study of

history textbooks concluded that the inclusion of any kind

of nasty information regardless of its truth was seen as

bias (1979, p. 96). "Publishers," according to Nelson and

Roberts in their study The Censors and the Schools,

acknowledged "they must walk a narrow path to avoid

controversy and offending any special interest groups"

with the result that many of their textbooks "lack

vitality" and are "dull" (1963, p. 20).

Yarington in his book The Great American Reading

Machine attributed the "bland, often stilted content" of

most basals to the fact that the author "writes with the

readability formula in hand" (1978, p. 42). Abercrombie

found,

> Primers and first and second readers are concerned
> largely with decoding skills--content is often
> incidental to decoding exercises and most topics are
> treated in a fragmentary way. (1974, p. 6)

Bettelheim felt it would be more honest to teach reading

with flash cards than with the current repetitious primers

and to give up the pretense of telling stories in primers

(Conversations, 1979, p. 33).

Despite the conservatism of publishers, basals

have changed considerably in the past twenty years.

Proponents of basal readers, such as the Aukermans claim,

> The variety and excellence of the literary works
> provided at virtually every level of most of the new
> basal reader series would be difficult, if not
> impossible, to match through any other means. (1981,
> p. 409)

As evidence, they give the many award winning trade books
that are included in whole or in part in recent basals.
However, the most dramatic and visible changes in basals
have been the inclusion of ethnic minority characters and
the increased roles for female characters.

   These changes have not resulted from any criticism
by academics of basal content, but rather have been the
work of civil rights and feminist groups pressuring school
boards not to buy what they consider to be racist and
sexist textbooks (Grant and Grant, 1981, p. 63). An
example of the call for change in basal content was the
study Dick and Jane as Victims which appeared in the early
seventies and called for groups to pressure school boards
and other organizations to buy textbooks that portrayed
females more positively and in a greater variety of roles
than the then current textbooks (Women, 1975).

   By concentrating on easy to see aspects of basal
reader content such as ethnic identity and sex, single
interest groups produced at least surface changes in basal
readers that even a cursory glance of their illustrations
will show. Today, with basal texts under attack for
either omitting or stereotyping the handicapped and aged

(Kingston and Drotter, 1981; Baskin, 1981) and in the wake of criticisms of what many writers still consider to be highly visible but only token changes in the treatment of ethnic and female characters in basal reader stories, it is appropriate to make a study to determine if the newest editions of basal readers contain the broader aspects of realism for which psychologists have called. Specifically to see if the newer stories with non-white, non-male, and non-suburban main characters contain more realism than the remaining white middle-class male dominated stories, and if fairy stories and animal stories continue to have more realism than stories with contemporary settings.

Statement of Problem

The problem of the investigator in this study was to determine how much realism that psychologists have felt should be included in basal reading stories was actually included in currently used basal reading series. The investigator also sought to determine if greater story realism was associated with stories that came from more frequently adopted basal series, with stories that had minority group members or females as major characters, and with stories that had non-middle class settings.

Need for the Study

Studies of sex and ethnic stereotyping in basal readers after the first burst of change in the nineteen-sixties showed that only superficial changes in content had taken place for the most part (Waite, 1972; Britton and Lumpkin, 1977). Looking through the first multiethnic readers Joseph Janell found the following:

> . . .increased numbers of illustrations which begin to look suspiciously like characters from Negro, Chinese, and Mexican families. But although the children's eyes are slanted or their skins dark, one would never dream that the black child had a single problem that was significantly, or even mildly, different from his white classmate's. Together they walk the shaded streets of suburbia, wearing the same clothes and playing the same games. Inside bright new homes they enjoy sumptuous holiday dinners and lavish yuletide gifts--all remarkably similar. There is no anguish or pain. Segregation, isolation, racism--indeed anything that smacks on the privation or privilege found in the lives of real children--have been carefully deleted from their world, leaving it sparkling, asceptic, and trouble-free. (1970, p. 113).

A second generation of changes made in the nineteen-seventies has had great claims made for it, but the first small scale research studies have cast doubt on these claims (McCutchen et al., 1979, pp. 441-42 & Kyle, 1978, p. 307).

Reading specialists who mention the matter of content in their textbooks on reading instruction report more realistic portrayals of minorities and females; but they have limited documentation for their claims and often cite studies from the early seventies which actually

review series published in the sixties. Dale Johnson
claims,

> With respect to race and ethnicity, basal reader
> content is much more realistic and representative of
> life in America than in previous years. This is not
> true with regard to women. (1976, p. 224)

Otto, Rude, and Spiegel reported "a more realistic
representation of life is presented in today's reader,"
and they found ethnic and environmental pluralism in
recent basals (1979, p. 231). Robert Aukerman claimed to
find in the most recent basals that,

> New stories have replaced others, providing
> realistic situations portraying ethnic and cultural
> mores rather than attempts (like in the 1960s and
> 1970s) to introduce minority characters into white,
> middle-class neighborhood story situations. (1981,
> p.9)

Far and Roser reported two years earlier,

> Today's [basal reading] books have changed
> considerably. The stories take place in a wide range
> of settings; minority families are included; and
> females are depicted in a wide range of roles and
> occupations. (1979, p. 437).

They cited an in-house comparison of Houghton Mifflin's
1966 and 1977 editions for the evidence of the above
changes (1979, p. 441). They went on to declare that the
success of the effort to have basal content accurately
represent society was still an issue and found some basals
still focus on suburban middle-class settings (1979, pp.
441 & 445).

Two recent small scale studies of basals raised
added doubt about the broader claims of a new era of

realism in basal readers. McCutchen, Kyle, and Skovira
examined a single Isaac Asimov story reprinted in four
basal reading series and found characters had been changed
in regard to their race and sex without any change in
characterization. They felt,

> A new potentially damaging stereotype may have
> been substituted for the old latent message of basal
> readers. The old latent message told us to live in a
> house in the suburbs with a daddy who worked. We are
> to be White and middle-class. Perhaps the new message
> says that in reality everyone is culturally the same.
> Children reading the stories may learn that people
> with uncommon surnames are no different from
> themselves or from each other. . . Should children
> believe that Italians, Jews, Hispanics, boys and
> girls, all act the same? (1979, pp. 441-42)

They felt "more detailed studies" were needed analyzing
how textbooks portrayed ethnic characters and girls and
boys (1979, p. 442).

> Diane Kyle examined preprimers and found that,

> Although children of various races are well
> represented numerically in most series, diverse
> lifestyles among these children are not apparent.
> Everyone seems to dress alike and to live in the same
> neighborhood. (1978, p. 307).

She felt, "Before final conclusions can be formulated
[basal] readers at all grade levels should be evaluated"
(1978, p. 307).

Questions to be Investigated

There is considerable question as to whether
textbooks are becoming more bland or more realistic owing
to contemporary pressure groups demanding changes in the

way various groups of people are portrayed in basal reader
stories. Using, as a measure of realism, a group of
things that various psychologists have felt should be in
basal readers but were either inadequately represented or
completely omitted, the investigator of this study
attempted to answer the following questions about the
content of basal readers:

1. How much realism is included in a selection of
stories from the most recent editions of basal reading
series?

2. Do the stories in more widely adopted basal
reading series have a different level of realism than
stories in less widely adopted reading series?

3. Do stories with major characters who are
female or minority group members have a different level of
realism than stories without major characters who are
female or minority group members?

4. Do stories with non-middle-class, suburban
settings have a different level of realism than stories
with middle-class suburban settings?

5. Do stories with anthropomorphic characters
have a different level of realism than stories without
anthropomorphic characters?

6. Do fairy stories have a different level of
realism than non-fairy stories?

Research Procedures

The first stage of the research to answer the questions of this study was to select basal reading series stories to be analyzed. The second stage was to review the literature to establish the categories of realism that would be looked for in the selected stories. The third stage was to develop a coding guide and scoring sheet describing how to code and score the realism found in the stories. And the fourth stage was to check the validity and reliability of the realism score. With adequate validity and reliability established, the actual coding of the selected stories was done by the principal investigator, and the results are presented in tables and were statistically analyzed when appropriate in order to answer the questions of the study.

Because sales figures on basal reading series were unavailable, frequency of state adoption was used to determine the popularity of basal reading series. The seven largest states, population over five million, of the twenty-three states which had statewide textbook adoption were contacted to obtain a list of their currently adopted basal reading textbooks. The series were ranked in order of frequency of adoption and four of the most frequently adopted series and four of the less frequently adopted series were selected for study.

In order to determine the amount of realism in the
reading textbooks selected, the descriptive research
method of content analysis was used. "Content analysis,"
according to the communication specialist Bernard
Berelson, "is a research technique for the objective,
systematic, and quantitative description of communication"
(1971, p. 18). In order to apply the method of content
analysis, a unit of analysis must be chosen which "may be
a book, a magazine article or story" (1971, p. 141), and
each unit is analyzed as to whether it contains any
content which fits the categories of data for which the
researcher is looking. In this study stories were used as
the units of analysis. Berelson felt that "Content
analysis stands or falls by its categories" (1971, p.
146).

In order to determine categories of realism that
psychologists felt were appropriate for basal reader
stories, a review of the related literature was made.
Nine categories of realism were found that psychologists
have felt should be included in basal reader stories but
were either inadequately represented or totally omitted.
These nine categories are listed below:

1. Minority Characters: Characters drawn from
the racial and ethnic minority groups living in the United
States (Klineberg, 1963, p. 77; Zimet and Blom, 1972, pp.
136-37).

2. Female Characters: Females in proportion to their real population (Child, Potter, and Levine, 1946, pp. 46-49).

3. Rural/Urban Settings: Non-middle-class suburban socio-economic settings (Klineberg, 1963, p. 77; Zimet and Blom, 1972, pp. 136-37)

4. Age Spectrum: Characters drawn from groups other than those of elementary school age and middle aged adults (Zimet and Blom, 1972, p. 137; Bettelheim and Zelan, 1982, pp. 15 & 254).

5. Conflict: Conflict of various types, especially conflict between parents, parent-child conflict, and sibling rivalry (Bettelheim, 1961, pp. 386-87; Zimet and Blom, 1972, p. 136).

6. Aggression: Dominating rather than dependent behavior (Child et al., 1946; Zimet, 1970, p. 235).

7. Life Situations: Basic life situations such as birth and death (Zimet and Blom, 1972, p. 136).

8. Negative Emotions: Negative emotions and feelings such as fear, failure, sadness, jealousy, and anger (Child et al., 1946, p. 45; Zimet and Blom, 1972, p. 136; Bettelheim and Zelan, 1982, p. 109).

9. Intellectual Activities: Intellectual activities such as reading, studying, and visiting museums (Child et al., 1946, pp. 8 & 44; Bettelheim, 1974, pp. 15-20; Bettelheim and Zelan, 1981, p. 28 and 1982, pp. 237

& 244).

The first three categories of basal reader realism, minority and female characters and rural/urban settings, have been the subject of extensive study as described on pages eleven through fourteen and in Chapter 2 of this study. Stories can be checked against population figures to determine if story characters and settings appear in proportion to their real distribution in the United States. These first three categories were used to determine if the work of pressure groups calling for more realism on specific aspects of basal reader content was associated in modern basal series with a wider range of realism indicated by categories four through nine.

For each of the nine categories of realism, a series of indicators was developed for inclusion in a coding guide to be used by the investigator to determine what kind of story content fits each category. A coding sheet and scoring guide for use with each story coded was developed, and each story was given a 'realism score' indicating the amount of realism in the story. A pilot study using two popular basal reading series, published by Houghton Mifflin and Ginn, was done to check the appropriateness of the coding guide and sheet, and modifications were made as necessary. As a test for validity, two reading specialists checked the coding

categories and coding guide to determine if the indicators

actually represented the categories chosen. A test of the

reliability of the final set of indicators was made by

training two independent investigators using the coding

guide and coding sheet and having the trainees code and

score a set of fifteen stories that the principal

investgator had coded and identified as containing all

nine of the categories under study. If the correlation

between the realism scores of any two of the three coders

had been less than .85 the coding guide would have been

modified to achieve higher intercoder reliability.

After the validity of the indicators was checked

and adequate intercoder reliability was achieved, the

principal investigator coded all stories selected for the

study and tabulated the results and did the statistical

analysis in order to answer the research questions and

hypotheses presented in chapters one and three.

Limitations and Delimitations

The following were limitations of the

investigation:

1. In the study, only the manifest content of

basal reading stories was examined. The most obvious

meanings were counted, and there was no attempt to "read

between the lines" in order to find more subtle meanings.

2. Only data that fitted the indicators chosen

for each category were coded in order to determine the realism score.

The following were the delimitations of the investigation:

1. The study was restricted to the analysis of story content of basal reading series selected. Poems, plays, and other non-story content of readers were not analyzed.

2. No attempt was made in the study to evaluate the literary quality of the stories.

3. No attempt was made to examine the actual effect of the content of the stories analyzed on children.

4. Only basal reading textbooks used in grades one, three, and five were selected for inclusion in this study.

Definition of Terms

The terms listed below were used throughout the investigation and are defined as follows:

Basal Reader. A single textbook in a basal reading series.

Basal Reading Series. A basal reading series was identified as an integrated series of textbooks designed to teach reading to elementary children. The textbooks are characterized by a series of stories with carefully sequenced vocabulary and skill development.

Content Analysis. Bernard Berelson's definition of
content analysis was used: "Content analysis is a
research technique for the objective, systematic, and
quantitative description of the manifest content of
communication" (1971, p. 18).

Fairy Stories. For fairy stories, the definition
of Child et al. was used:

> All stories in which supernatural creatures appear,
> whether or not they are the principal characters, or
> in which consequences are brought about by
> supernatural means. This classification includes
> familiar fairy tales, legends, and myths. (1946, p.
> 3)

Minority Characters. For the purposes of this
study minority characters were from the following racial
and ethnic groups as described in the 1980 United States
Census of Population: Black; Asian and Pacific Islander;
American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleut; and Spanish origin.

Realism. The term realism in literary criticism
has been applied to those stories that try to show the
darker as well as the brighter side of life. In the
nineteenth century, literary realism was a reaction to
romanticism and was described as an attempt to look at the
world without rose colored glasses so that the uglier as
well as the prettier aspects of life were portrayed
(Desnoyers, 1855, p. 81). No one has argued that children
should be exposed to all the ugliness of life, however
very few have argued for the complete protection of the

young from the harsher realities that they will have to face as adults. The investigator thought realism was a very appropriate term to use for the types of largely negative things such as poverty and conflict that were mostly banned from basal reader stories in the nineteen fifties. For the purposes of this study realism is used to refer to the nine categories of story content listed on pages seventeen and eighteen.

Realism Score. The realism score of a story has been used to represent the amount of presence of the following categories of realism; age spectrum, conflict, aggression, life situations, negative emotions, and intellectual activity as determined by using the coding guide in Appendix B and the scoring guide in Appendix C.

Summary

In this chapter the lack of realism in basal reading series was discussed with particular attention to series published in the nineteen fifties and early sixties. A brief review of some of the criticism by psychologists and other professionals of basal reader content was given. The importance of basals in terms of meeting student needs and in terms of school reading programs in the United States was documented.

The need for determining how much realism was present in basal reading stories was discussed, and six

questions were presented to study the amount of realism in
the basal reading series selected for investigation.   A
research procedure was outlined to select the basal
reading series to be studied and to answer the questions
of the study through content analysis.

Finally, the limitations and delimitations of the
study were given, and important terms used in the study
were defined.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

> In Adam's Fall
> We Sinned All
>
> Thy Life to Mend
> This Book Attend
>
> --New-England Primer, 1727

An examination of the literature showed that the
lack of realism in modern basal readers is not a new
concern. This chapter begins with a brief history of
textbooks used in American reading instruction with
special regard to realistic content. Past criticism of
the content of basal readers was reviewed, followed by a
summary of literature relating to the importance of
textbooks in American education. Lastly, a summary of the
review of literature was made.

Overview of American Reading Instruction

Religion, Nationalism, and McGuffey Readers

The first call for mass literacy came with the
Protestant Reformation in Europe. Both the object and the
means of literacy were the Bible (Resnick & Resnick,
1977). Early texts used to teach reading, such as the

New-England Primer (1727), borrowed heavily from the

Bible. Later as special books were published in America

to teach children to read, the stories they contained held

considerable Protestant Christian content (Carpenter,

1967, p. 23; Smith, 1965, pp. 10-35).

After the American Revolution another theme,

national unity, joined biblical moralism in American

readers (Smith, 1965, pp. 36-38). Noah Webster wrote in

the preface to his famous speller:

> To diffuse a uniformity and purity of language in
> America--to destroy the provincial prejudices that
> originate in the trifling differences of dialect, and
> produce reciprocal ridicule--to promote the interest
> of literature and harmony in the United States--is the
> most ardent wish of the Author. The American Spelling
> Book, p. x as quoted in Smith, 1965, p. 38)

Perhaps the quintessential example of the post-

revolutionary readers was the 1836-37 edition of the

famous McGuffey readers which along with patriotism

stressed the biblical values of piety, salvation, and

righteousness (Westerhoff, 1978, p. 19).

The 1879 edition of the McGuffey readers, of which

the most copies were sold and which was put out by the

publisher without McGuffey's aid, was "severely

secularized. Calvinistic theology and ethics. . . [were]

replaced by American middle-class civil religion,

morality, and values" (Westerhoff, 1978, p. 19). God was

less present in the 1879 edition and the "morality of

industry, self-denial, sobriety, thrift, propriety,

persistence, modesty, punctuality, conformity, and
submission to authority" replaced salvation and piety
(Westerhoff, 1978, p. 104). Civic virtues related to work
and social station replaced religious virtues that dealt
with piety and the all importance of the hereafter.

Politically, the McGuffey readers attacked the
radical left of the American and French Revolutions,
especially the ideas of Jefferson and Paine. The readers
pleaded "for a return to the past, for the security of
long established institutions, and for a religious basis
to society" (Mosier, 1947, p. 31). Slavery and sex were
closed areas not dealt with in the readers though the
readers portrayed death, insanity, and intemperance
(Anderson, 1956, p. 53). Mosier felt the McGuffey readers
"must stand among the great textbooks of America" because
of their "denunciation of war, injustice, crime, and
inhumanity, and for their magnificent sponsorship of the
brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God" (1947, p.
47). In the McGuffey readers it was taught that good
deeds would be immediately rewarded, usually with money,
as well as ultimately rewarded in heaven, while bad deeds
brought instant as well as ultimate punishment
(Westerhoff, 1978, p. 83). Whether this correlated with
the truthfulness these same texts preached is another
question.

While more famous than other nineteenth century

textbooks, the McGuffey readers shared many of the characteristics of other texts of the period. Elson described the world portrayed in nineteenth century textbooks as one "of fantasy--a fantasy made up by adults as a guide for their children, but inhabited by no one outside the pages of schoolbooks (1976, p. 337). She found the texts "ideologically simple" but not entirely bland" (1964, p. 339).

Era of Literature in Basals

According to Smith in the "tranquility and security" of the early 1880s, the emphasis in readers on patriotism, national unity, and intelligent citizenship was replaced by an emphasis on cultural pursuits in music, art, and literature (1965, p. 115). In the 1890s the ideas of the German educator Herbart gained influence in the United States and predominated until the beginning of World War I (Wesley, 1957, p. 182). One of Herbart's goals was character development through literature. He recommended indirectly teaching moral lessons with stories that showed both the good and the bad to children. Children wanted,

> . . .an interesting story, rich in incidents,
> relationships, characters, strictly in accordance with
> the psychological truth, and not beyond the feelings
> and ideas of children; make no effort to depict the
> worst or the best. . . [Stories needed] the strongest
> and cleanest stamp of human greatness. (1895, pp.
> 88-89)

In America, the President of Harvard University for forty years and a future President of the National Education Association, Charles W. Eliot, felt,

> . . .it would be for the advantage of the whole
> public school system if every reader were hereafter to
> be absolutely excluded from the schools. I object to
> them because they are not real literature; they are
> but mere scraps of literature, even when the single
> lessons or materials of which they are composed are
> taken from literature. But there are a great many
> readers that seem to have been composed expressly for
> the use of children. They are not made up of
> selections from recognized literature, and, as a rule,
> this class of readers is simply ineffable trash. They
> are entirely unfit material to use in the training of
> our children. The object of reading with children is
> to convey to them the ideals of the human race; our
> readers do not do that, and are thoroughly unfitted to
> do it. I believe that we should substitute in all our
> schools real literature for readers. (as quoted by
> Hardy, 1891, pp. 145-46).

In 1895 the National Education Association's Committee of Fifteen concluded,

> . . .that learning to read and write should be the
> leading study of the pupil in his first four years of
> school. Reading and writing are not so much ends in
> themselves as means for the acquirement of all other
> human learning. (p. 234).

The Committee felt that "reading and study of fine selections in prose and verse furnish the chief aesthetic training of the elementary school" (p. 238).

Edmund Burke Huey in <u>The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading</u> first published in 1908 looked at the leading primers and first readers of the day and was "impressed with the fact that the artistic side has had far more attention and a far greater development than has the side

of method and reading content" (1918, p. 276). He surmised that excellent illustrations were what sold readers and further commented on the "inanity and disjointedness" of the stories in at least three-fourths of them (1918, pp. 278-79). Huey recommended the study of literature from the child's first day in school through his being read to and at later stages recommended deemphasizing the historic stress on oral reading in favor of silent reading (pp. 345 & 349).

Colin Scott, another psychologist, in his <u>Social Education</u>, also published in 1908, called for an emphasis on meaning in the content of beginning reading materials. He felt, "If the schools do no more for reading than to teach people to read, it may be said paradoxically that they are not even teaching them to read (pp. 212-13). Scott wrote that literature "speaks to people's hearts" and that "even tragedy is a record of a fear that is overcome" (pp. 223-24). He found literature study to be therapeutic for children in that it helped them overcome imaginary fears and cited "Little Red Riding Hood" as a "classic example" (p. 226). Scott thought currently used primers were not providing "immediate satisfaction" to children and thus were unrewarding to read (pp. 207-08). By raising students' expectations and then not fulfilling them reading texts were discouraging children. Students did not want to read about what they already knew (p.

209).

Era of Scientific Reading Instruction

After 1910 Nila Banton Smith found an emphasis on
reading research and scientific investigation entering
basal readers. The intellectual historian Richard
Hofsteader saw 1910 as the beginning of the decline of the
old academic view of education as a matter of subject
mastery and the beginning of the era of meeting the needs
of children (1963, p. 329). Blaming John Dewey and the
progressive education movement especially, Hofsteader
felt,

> Far from conceiving the mediocre, reluctant, or
> incapable student as an obstacle or a special problem
> in a school system devoted to educating the
> interested, the capable, and the gifted, American
> educators entered upon a crusade to exalt the
> academically uninterested or ungifted child into a
> kind or culture-hero. They were not content to say
> that the realities of American life had made it
> necessary to compromise the ideal of education as the
> development of formal learning and intellectual
> capacity. Instead, they militantly proclaimed that
> such education was archaic and futile and that the
> noblest end of a truly democratic system of education
> was to meet the child's immediate interests by
> offering him a series of immediate utilities. (1963,
> p. 328).

Literature was considered elitist and declined in
most basal readers to be replaced by family centered
stories in contemporary settings. Dewey in his pedagogic
creed of 1898 wrote that "the true center of correlation
on the school subjects is not science nor literature, nor
geography, but the child's own social activities" (1940,

p. 9), and a year later in his article "The Primary-
Education Fetish" he saw books as being replaced by the
telephone, rapid transportation, and art galleries (1940,
p. 21). He criticised contemporary reading instruction
because,

> Reading is made an isolated accomplishment. There
> are no aims in the child's mind which he feels he can
> serve by reading; there is no mental hunger to be
> satisfied; there are no conscious problems with
> reference to which he uses books. The book is a
> reading-lesson. He learns to read not for the mere
> sake of what he reads, but for the mere sake of
> reading. When the bare process of reading is thus
> made an end in itself, it is a psychological
> impossibility for reading to be other than lifeless.
> (1940, pp. 26-27)

"The utter triviality of the contents of our school
'Primers' and 'First Readers'," according to Dewey, "shows
the inevitable outcome of forcing the mastery of external
language-forms upon the child at a premature period"
(1940, p. 27). Because literature was so important, Dewey
recommended delaying its introduction until the child was
"capable of appreciation and dealing with its genuine
meaning" (1940, p. 29).

The new educational philosophy not only found
classical literature wanting but also folk literature.
Hartman found the "general aim of education is to explain
reality" (1922, p. 102). She felt a child's "homely
activities. . .exemplify a wonderful world the depth of
which he has not sounded, a world full of mystery and
promise that attend all the doings of the grown-ups whom

he admires" while it was psychologically bad for children
to be exposed to the violence of old myths (1922, pp.
103-04). According to Hofsteader,

> Dewey not only held that education is life; he
> went on to say that the school should provide a
> selective environment for the child, an environment
> that represents so far as possible what is deemed good
> in society and eliminates what is bad. Yet, the more
> successful the school was in this task, the less it
> could live up to the ideal of representing or
> embodying life. . .
> If the new educators really wanted to reproduce
> life itself in the classroom, they must have had an
> extraordinarily benign conception of what life is.
> (1963, p. 385)

The attempt to make an ideal society explains removal
after 1920 of many of the realistic elements previously
found in readers such as the McGuffey series. The
introduction to a Ginn supplementary reader published in
1927 is illustrative of the new attitude:

> The adventures of talking animals have always
> possessed a fascination for little people, but too
> many such stories are filled with fighting, killing,
> and trickery which render them unfit for a little
> child's reading. These simple tales of good little
> Cubby Bear contain no element of harm, and teach
> lessons of kindness, helpfulness, and friendliness.
> (Ellingwood, p. iii)   —

The teacher's guidebook to the 1931 edition of
Scott, Foresman's Elson Basic Readers declared that,

> . . .the total number of different words in each of
> the early books should be restricted to a minimum that
> will insure interesting material and reasonable
> progress. No more than three new words are presented
> per page in book one. (Gray and Liek, p. 13)

When William S. Gray became senior author with the 1941-42
edition called the New Basic Readers, he continued the

emphasis on vocabulary control. He also felt "desirable

social-emotional adjustment" could be promoted by taking

the minds of students with home problems off their

troubles. In the Guidebook is stated,

> When such deprived children lose themselves in
> stories about Dick, Jane, and Sally, they experience
> wholesome release from their problems. Sordid
> surroundings disappear while children live vicariously
> in a pleasant, attractive home. Family conflicts, the
> absence of a 'real' father or mother, the strain of
> high standards, or the sense of neglect are forgotten
> as children share with Dick, Jane, and Sally the
> warmth and understanding of happy family
> relationships. (Gray et al., 1951, pp. 23-24)

In the 1920s new basals encompassing the latest

research and philosophy of education poured out from

publishers at an unprecedented rate. The sales force put

in the field to sell these new basals provided "perhaps

the most effective teacher and administrator education to

permeate the country," according to Gans (1963, p. 126).

Despite the improvements of larger and simplified type

faces, color illustrations, and controlled vocabularies,

Gans felt,

> The project of producing, through limiting
> vocabulary and repeating words, a book that will be
> right for the limited reading power of the beginner
> and still be a book has proved to have insurmountable
> difficulties. (p. 133)

She felt the resulting basal reader could ruin a child's

respect for good books (1963, p. 134).

A great variety of reading tests was produced

along with the new basals in the first part of the

twentieth century. These new tests led to what Zimet has
called "achievement test literacy" (1972, p. 127). The
goal of reading which had been at first to open the Bible
to individuals, then national unity, and then to open the
great literature of the world became the getting of scores
on achievement tests. A decline in the number of words in
primers and the increased repetition of those words began
in the nineteen twenties and was not reversed till the
nineteen sixties.

Gibson and Levin in their study of the psychology
of reading saw 1920 as the start of a long period of what
they considered to be a fruitless emphasis on curricula
based research which used achievement test scores to
measure the effectiveness of reading programs (1975, p.
4). Livingston wrote,

> . . .testing, as practiced in most schools today,
> fails the field of literature, it even loses thousands
> of children to literature, for it neglects to ask the
> essential questions: how does this book, this
> conversation, this passage help a particular child to
> look at life, what identification does the individual
> make with the character or situation, what special
> moments or words or vision plant themselves deep into
> the mind and heart of a boy or girl? There is no
> immediate answer to these questions. (1974, p. 539)

Criticism of Basal Content

Child, Potter and Levine's Study

It took almost thirty years after the development
of research based basals before their content began to be

systematically examined in terms of what effect they might have on the developing personality of children. The psychologists, Child, Potter, and Levine examined 914 stories in thirty third grade reading texts in general use that were published between 1929 and 1942. They found that in these stories "only one case of what can be classified as verbal or intellectual activity occurs" (a boy listening to the radio) and only one case occurred of "intellectual construction" (an adult who wrote a song) (1946, pp. 8 & 17). Child characters were found to be very active while adults were sedentary (1946, p. 9). While activity directed toward a specific goal was usually rewarded, exploratory activity was freqently punished in children though not in adults (1946, p. 9).

Adults, with one exception, in the stories were found to always have the answers. Children who sought information on their own instead of going to authorities were often punished (1946, p. 12). Furthermore,

> . . .independent action initiated by child characters
> and indeed by anyone, is more likely to be punished
> than similar behavior which is performed under the
> direction of a superior. (1946, p. 46)

The investigators found a "general absence of stories which deal with the realistic difficulties that occur in a child's efforts at affiliation" (1946, p. 23). Likewise, "The problems of aggressive behavior in children is here handled, in child characters, by simply neglecting it"

(1946, p. 32). They comment on "the unrealistic optimism", the lack of failures, and the lack of methods for handling failures in the stories they studied (1946, p. 45).

Child, Potter, and Levine were most concerned over the portrayal of females as "relatively helpless" in comparison to males and the fact that almost three times as many males appeared as central characters (1946, pp. 46-48). They concluded,

> There can be no excuse for the greater attention to males in the claim that males have achieved more in society and hence that there is more to write about them. These stories are, with few exceptions, not about individuals of outstanding achievement but simply about the life of everyday people. The implication of this difference for a girl is that being female is a pretty bad thing, that the only people in everyday life who are worth writing about or reading about are boys and men. (1946, p. 49)

They also found that "animal characters seem to furnish an outlet for the expression in child-like characters of aggressive and rebellious tendencies" and that fairy tale characters were also used to portray unpleasant human characteristics (1946, pp. 51-52).

Bettelheim's Studies

In a 1961 article in the School Review, the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim stressed the importance of reader content for the emotionally disturbed child. He argued that the development of specialized techniques of teaching reading led to the conception of reading as a

tool when it is "essentially a goal" (p. 381). "Tool thinking," he wrote, "is concerned with tools, with how best to master and perfect them, without due concern for why we devised them in the first place" (p. 381). While students read better than ever, they lose sight of the goal of reading "which is the independent acquisition of knowledge through one's own efforts, motivated by one's own curiosity" (p. 383).

For Bettelheim, "The problem of teaching to read, then is primarily one of convincing pupils that the printed word holds the answers to important questions about which they are curious" (p. 384). Looking at basal readers, Bettelheim found a lack of significant content and that the readers in fact lead the child to have unrealistic expectations as to how families lived. Parents never argued, mother was always ready to play with the children, father was never tired after work, and there was never any sibling rivalry (pp. 386-87). Thus the content of basal stories aggravated rather than alleviated emotional problems children might have by making them abnormal in terms of the world the texts portray.

Bettelheim summed up his review of basal reader content by declaring,

> Today, by trying to make learning easy, pleasant, and amusing, we often end up by creating unrealistic images of life and people. This danger is further aggravated by the fact that during the child's first years in school his readers do not present him with

new subject matter. The whole reading program is
essentially built around things or experiences with
which he is already familiar. If this then is all we
learn through reading, why should we learn to read,
even if the learning is made easy and pleasant?
So while children now could theoretically learn to
read better and more easily, in reality learning is
often vacuous. True enough, later on and in the
higher grades they read books that are more
stimulating, but by then we have made some children
unnecessarily dissatisfied with or uninterested in
education. (p. 388)

While not scrapping the progress made in how to teach

reading, Bettelheim called for a renewed emphasis on

reader content (p. 389).

Bettelheim has returned to his criticism of basal

readers several times since his original article in 1961.

In 1974 he criticised American basal readers for not

showing parents at work and reported reactions of students

to basal readers who felt that readers should "either give

a picture of what life was really like, or not pretend to

do so" (p. 16). He also felt,

Either directly, indirectly, or by implication,
the readers powerfully suggest that school is best
avoided. Not only school, but all life is depicted as
a row of tedious and senseless activities. (p. 20)

Bettelheim felt that the child needed to be convinced

"that reading will help him with his psychological

difficulties" by showing him that reading "helps him with

what concerns him most deeply" (p. 22).

In 1981 Bettelheim and Zelan criticised primers as

"full of endlessly repeated words passed off as stories"

(p. 27). They also felt that primers were anti-

intellectual and confused children because while school is

serious business the "explicit message of the text and

pictures is that the child should think--that is,

read--only about playing" (1981, p. 28). In 1982

Bettelheim and Zelan's <u>On Learning to Read: The Child's</u>

<u>Fascination with Meaning</u> was published. This book carried

on the basic criticism of primers that appeared in the

previous articles. They found pre-primers and primers to

be "boring" and an "insult to the child's intelligence"

(p. 7). Furthermore,

> . . .the texts predominantly used during kindergarten,
> and the first two and sometimes three grades are
> uninteresting and without merit, if not outright
> offensive. (p.13)

The two felt,

> If, rather than concentrating on developing
> reading skills, educational efforts from the very
> beginning were concentrated on developing the desire
> to become literate--essentailly an inner attitude to
> reading--then the final result might be that a larger
> segment of the adult population would be literate.
> (p. 21)

Instead of providing meaningful content, primers made out

that "having fun is life's only purpose" (p. 236).

Bettelheim and Zelan concluded that children's primers

"ought to contain only selections that have both meaning

and literary merit" (p. 306).

Other Studies of Basal Readers

Another psychologist, Klineberg, examined fifteen widely used readers published between 1957 and 1962. He found only one example of a non-white American in them (an Indian family stereotypically portrayed). Of the white Americans, they were "almost exclusively North European in origin and appearance" and blonde (1963, p. 75-76). Poverty hardly existed outside fairy tales, and the stories were filled with friendly, smiling, well-to-do people (1963, p. 77). The moral values of "honesty, fair play, cooperation, family solidarity, work and thrift, friendship, independence, cleanliness, courage, and forgiveness" were well illustrated without overt preaching (1963, p. 87). Klineberg felt it was "never too early to tell children the truth" and that the stories should do more to stimulate children's curiosity and to supply them with information (1963, pp. 77 & 87).

The psychologists Blom, Waite, and Zimet in a 1968 study analyzed 1307 primer and preprimer stories in twelve of the most freqeuntly used reading series. They found that "neutral 'Polyanna' stories predominate and that there is a striking absence of stories which directly convey moral, ethical, and cultural values" (p. 318). They found that "activities appropriate for boys end in failure more frequently than do activities appropriate for girls." Stories had nine times as many child characters

younger than the first grade reader as older with younger
sisters being most prevalent (p. 320).

In setting, the stories were thirty-eight percent
suburban, twenty percent rural, and one percent urban
compared to actual population figures in the United States
of thirty-three percent suburban, thirty-six percent
rural, and thirty-one percent urban (p. 321). They
concluded,

> It is possible to describe the gestalt for the
> stories in this original national sample of commonly
> used first grade readers in the United States. The
> activities are neutral and redundant without much
> significance and variation. They are happy family
> centered and tend to be ambiguous as to sex role. A
> child is most always with other children and is seldom
> alone. Older age children as siblings and peers
> rarely appear. In contrast, there tends to be a
> regressive pull through the emphasis on family
> attachment and younger siblings, animal stories,
> anthropomorphized figures, and ambiguity in sex role.
> The setting is most typically in the suburbs, rarely
> in the city, and usually in and around a home. Pets
> are amusing, cute, and frustrating nuisances.
> This gestalt represents a striking divergence from
> the realities of community, family, and child life and
> from what is known about child development. (pp.
> 321-22)

Richard R. Waite did a content analysis of seven
multiethnic basal series and compared the results to the
twelve series described above. Only two of the series
emphasized urban settings (1972, p. 73). Only one of the
series by a non-major publisher "depicted real children in
real situations" (1972, p. 78).

Grenda examined four Canadian first and second
grade reading textbooks for their portrayal of Canadian