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ABSTRACT

A study examined the historical development of the Cathedral Basic Readers (a.k.a. the Dick and Jane readers), a special edition used to teach reading in Catholic schools. Three questions served as a guiding framework: (1) what factors led to the creation, development, and discontinuance of this Reader series? (2) what were the differences between the Basic Readers and the Cathedral Readers? and (3) how did the Basic and Cathedral editions change across time periods? Data sources included archival manuscripts, interview transcripts, and the two reading textbook series. Results indicated that the number of text differences increased and the picture differences over the Cathedral editions were more frequent in first and second grade texts. The representation of different races and ethnic groups was more common in third grade books over the editions and most frequent in the 1963 Cathedral edition. In addition to replacing stories in terms of fidelity to Catholic principles, occasionally words were changed or illustrations modified to reflect the average American Catholic home. Findings suggest that the Basic and Catholic books for each paired edition were quite similar. (CR)

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**DICK AND JANE MEET JOHN AND JUDY:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATHEDRAL READERS**

Dr. Thecla M. Spiker

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to trace the historical development of the Cathedral Basic Readers (a.k.a. the Dick and Jane readers), a special edition used to teach reading in Catholic schools. The following research questions served as guiding frameworks: What factors led to the creation, development, and discontinuance of the Cathedral Basic Reader series? What were the differences between the Basic Readers and the Cathedral Readers? How did the Basic and Cathedral editions change across time periods.

Methodology

Materials from three sources served as data in this study- archival manuscripts; interview transcripts; and two reading textbook series--the Basic Reader series and the Cathedral Readers.

Historiography. The analytic procedures used for interpreting the data in this study were informed by works of the historiographers. I began by locating and reading archival documents while identifying initial chronological and conceptual patterns throughout. By checking one source against another, I carefully attended to the credibility and reliability of the patterns I constructed from the data sources.

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Constant comparative analysis. Guided by the writings of researchers in the field, I sought data examples across a range of editions to be used in defining the differences between the Basic and Cathedral Readers. This involved several steps:

1. From a review of the textbooks themselves, I developed a set of categories to use for coding information to describe differences between matched sets of editions as they changed over time.

2. From the story inspections, these categories were refined and clearly demarcated as the research proceeded, and rules were established for assigning noted differences to a particular category. Coding tallies were recorded on classification matrices which were then inspected to identify patterns.

3. As categories evolved from the data, they prefigured the direction the research was to take. When no new categories were generated and new data were not added to existing ones, data saturation was reached.

4. I kept field notes not only on the data collection process but also on comparisons with other materials.

### Data Analysis

Question 1. The data generated from the archival artifacts and personal interviews were evaluated for authenticity, integrity, and consistency. The information was then arranged in chronological order in an attempt to piece together the story of the Cathedral Readers.

Question 2. I began by reviewing the data collected from the coding of the stories from the matched set editions. Inconsistencies were clarified, and I summarized the information by creating a series of tables which provided information about story differences by editions and grade levels. This tabulation procedure allowed me to identify patterns concerning the differences between the two editions.

Question 3. In order to identify the differences occurring over time, the stories were further analyzed several ways. These differences were identified, cataloged, and scrutinized for patterns.

## Results

Creation and evolution. The first two questions investigated the factors influencing the creation and editorial revisions of the Cathedral Readers. Seven editions of the Cathedral books were published, with the first series appearing in 1922. Further Cathedral editions were printed by Scott Foresman in 1927, 1931, 1942, 1947, 1951, and 1962.

Over time, the editing process became more complex and sophisticated. The balance of Basic Reader stories to new religious selections was usually around 80 percent to 20 percent, respectively. Generally, the number of text differences increased, and picture differences over the Cathedral editions were more frequent in first and second grade texts. The representation of different races and ethnic groups was more common in third grade books over the editions and most frequent in the 1963 Cathedral edition. In addition to replacing stories, editors evaluated the remaining stories in terms of fidelity to Catholic principles. Occasionally words were changed for

more precision in the search for representing truth or illustrations were modified to reflect the average American Catholic home. There were few heavy-handed revisions in these stories, and the Catholic Faith was presented in a loving and compassionate spirit of Christianity rather than a more evangelistic or condemning gospel. Even though religious stories were only a small percentage, the teachers' guidebooks incorporated the Catholic philosophy of education into all selections, thereby creating reading texts with a strong Catholic identity.

Longitudinal differences. As a way to answer the third research question, samples of classic and contemporary stories from each grade were examined to identify differences in story narratives between the Elson/Basic and Cathedral editions over time.

Upon inspection, it appears that the Basic and Cathedral books for each paired edition (i.e., 1941 Basic, 1942 Cathedral) were quite similar. The general pattern was for the text in the Cathedral stories to undergo some editing, but illustrations from retained stories were usually the same. Over time (i.e., 1930, 1936, 1941), stories in the Elson/Basic Readers were also edited from edition to edition, and they frequently received up-dated pictures. It made no difference whether the stories were classic or contemporary; each received the same careful editing and revision attention.

## Discussion

The Elson/Basic Reader series was the most popular basal reading program in the 20th century, and it became a prototype for American publishers for almost 50 years. In response to the need for appropriately religious text, the Catholic Church responded by supporting the development of reading materials such as the Cathedral Readers for use in its educational

programs. Through the use of religious stories and the suggestions in the teachers' guidebooks supporting Catholic virtue and devotion, reading instruction brought back the religious and ethical values that were part of the early American heritage.

Additionally, in deciding to create an edition like the Cathedral Readers, Catholic educators were identifying with the mainstream culture. At this point, they were just as prosperous, cultured, and American as any one else living in this country, and the ideal Catholic family looked very much like the ideal family presented in the public sector. Thus, through the creation of textbooks such as these, it signified that one could indeed be American and Catholic at the same time.

### Significance of the Study

At this point in time, the Basic and Cathedral Readers are a memory of the many baby boomers who learned to read using these textbooks. But the memories are also on the verge of extinction as the people who created them move into the pages of history. In the end, as an attempt to capture and summarize the creation and development of these popular readers before the opportunity to gather this information is forever gone, this study contributes to the historical literature on textbooks in several ways. First, it outlines in general terms the development of the popular Basic Reader series. Second, as a classic example of instructional intervention and adaptation, it details the creation, development, and demise of the Cathedral edition of this series.

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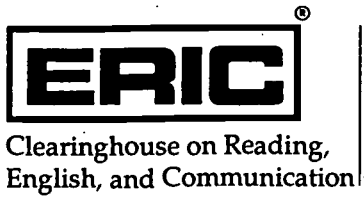
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