

Abstract

Green, B. and Reid, J. 2001, *Historicising the 'Methods' debate: Reading Pedagogy and Primary English Teaching in Australia*. British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Leeds, September 13-15.

The history of reading instruction, and literacy education more generally, is characterised by the persistence of preoccupations about 'method'. In many ways this can be described as a truly global phenomenon, certainly featuring right across the English-speaking world. How to teach reading is a seemingly never-ending story about the search for 'one right method' — the Truth about reading pedagogy. Relatedly, the historical field is marked by struggles over the pros and cons of different approaches, or opposing 'methods'. Moreover, in the context of the so-called 'Reading Wars', how to read and how to teach reading are often confused and sometimes even effectively conflated. Given the importance of reading in the project of schooling, there is value accordingly in interrogating and exploring this history.

This paper presents a historical study of debates organised around particular methods in the teaching of reading. It is contextualised by a larger curriculum-historical study of English teaching, teacher education and public schooling in Australia, in the first half of the twentieth century. We consider a particular instance of the teaching profession's embrace of an apparently successful method in this period. The phenomenon of the 'Jones Method', as it was known, is examined as a case-study in the kind of methodological fixation that characterises the historical scene of reading pedagogy, now seemingly as much as ever.