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University of New England

Symposium:
How to Teach Reading:
Exploring the Macro and Micro Politics of Reading Methods and Initiatives

BERA 2001 Annual Conference, University of Leeds, September 13-15

Contact details:
bigreen@csu.edu.au
joreid@csu.edu.au

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Abstract: 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.

Introduction

In this paper we present an historical study of the politics and practice of 'method', with particular reference to the teaching of reading. Our discussion here 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 (Green, Cormack and Reid 2000; Green and Reid 2000). This project, *Schooling Australia: A Curriculum History of English Teaching, Teacher Education and Public Schooling*, is a critical-historical investigation of public education in Australia, with particular reference to New South Wales and South Australia. It aims to map and analyse the shape of English curriculum and teacher education in NSW in the first half of the twentieth century.

Like the present moment in history, this period involved large-scale economic and social reformations in Australia. It was also a time when English curriculum was being constituted as central to the task of shaping subjectivity, along with the future citizenry for a changing nation. We want our historical investigations to help us to rethink current conceptions of English in schools at the present time — when radical social and cultural change has raised new questions about the school curriculum, teacher education, and the kind of worker-citizen they promote. In doing this, we seek to make the present strange partly by marshalling stories from the educational past, in the spirit of what has been called 'history of the present' (Tyler and Johnson, 1991). Our specific focus here is reading, although we frame this explicitly within the larger context of English teaching. Answering the question 'How to teach reading' always involves engaging a prior question — 'What is reading?' In our view,

this is something that needs to be considered more historically, as Robert Morgan advocates for English more generally:

One way of answering the question 'What is English?' is to ask 'What was English?' That is, in exploring how the past has left its marks in subtle or blatant ways upon the present, we often reveal what is taken for granted within a subject area (Morgan, 1995, p11).

We begin with a review of the relationship between English teaching and reading pedagogy, with particular reference to primary schooling. We then go on to contextualise the question of Method in historical and sociological frameworks, and situate the debate over reading methods within the larger framework of curriculum in subject English. From here, we focus on a particular instance of the teaching profession's embrace of an apparently successful method in our research period. This is the phenomenon of the "Jones Method", from the 1920s. We present our study of this particular method as a case-study in the kind of methodological fixation that characterises the historical scene of reading pedagogy, now seemingly as much as ever. Our aim is to harness and demonstrate the power of an historical perspective for understanding and enabling us to see present circumstances as effects of particular discursive traditions that are not (and never have been) fixed, immutable, or offering up the 'right answer'.

English as Reading?

Our concern here is with exploring a particular view of the relationship between English teaching and reading pedagogy — more broadly, our inquiry is addressed to the history and politics of English teaching. Immediately, however, there is a problem to engage: the fact that 'English', as a distinctive curriculum formation, has a somewhat monolithic and perhaps overly familiar identity in the educational imagination, on the part of both the public and the profession. Interrogating and interrupting that familiarity becomes an important task, therefore, as we see it. This is specially so at an historical moment in which English teaching and public education are increasingly under strain, to the point indeed where there is a pervasive sense of ending, or at least decline. At the same there is a complex obduracy about 'English' that bespeaks, Terminator-like, a continuing, persistent, terrifying presence, which as yet has not been adequately explained or understood.

What is particularly striking about the historical record is that English teaching, in the form we know it today and in its central, hub-like significance in the school curriculum, emerged across so many sites at roughly the same time. Across Australia, it was the first decade of the twentieth century, as indeed in England (Ball 1985) and New Zealand (Soler 1999), while in North America it appears to have been the previous decade. Statements abound such as the following:

English is the basis of the curriculum. The teaching of English aims not merely at enabling a pupil to acquire the mechanical arts of reading and writing but mainly at giving a command of the use of the mother-tongue by which he gains access to the printed and written thoughts of others, and by which his own thoughts are expressed orally and in writing (NSW Department of Public Instruction 1905).

The new Primary Syllabus for New South Wales brought together for the first time, under the heading 'English', what it describes as "various related subjects as follows: ... Correct speech, reading, writing, spelling, composition, recitation, grammar". English was clearly marked out in its centrality, as "the basis of the fabric of instruction, the root from which the whole course must grow ... the centre of gravity of the syllabus ... the chief corner-stone of the educational edifice" (Board, 1903, p4). Elsewhere in Australia, other states took similar paths, and in much the same terms of reference - a common influence being the discourse of the New Education. Writing some three decades later, but still very much within the same spirit, educators such as Cole (1933, p221) observed that "[s]ince the child comes to school to be systematically civilized, English, for all English-speaking countries, becomes the main subject of the primary curriculum". This is a sentiment and a viewpoint that clearly remained fundamental for Peter Board, Director of Education in NSW in 1904 and architect of the original Syllabus. In the 1930s he (re-)asserted that English was "the corner-stone of the curriculum, for it is the subject the treatment of which in the school contributes the largest quota towards the ultimate equipment of the pupil for life" (Board, 1932, p85).

Janet Soler describes the corresponding New Zealand situation thus: "'English' became a prescribed compulsory subject of the New Zealand primary school curriculum in the 1904 syllabus" (Soler, 1999, p33). Moreover:

The 1904 syllabus, like its predecessors, included 'writing', 'spelling', 'dictation', 'composition', 'grammar' and 'reading' as prescribed subjects. Unlike its predecessors, this syllabus included these six subject prescriptions under the general subject heading of 'English', which was to be introduced as a compulsory subject from Standard One to the highest levels of the primary school (Soler, 1999, p34).

Several questions can be asked at this point. Why *English*? Why English *now* (or then)? What can be said, and what needs to be understood, about the emergence of 'English' across geography such as this? Was it simply a manifestation of the project of imperialism? And if so, what *differences* are to be observed?

For instance, it would appear that English in New Zealand over the early decades of the twentieth century was clearly and decisively shaped by what can be called literary ideology. It was influenced in important ways by the discourses that characterised the 1921 Newbolt Report, by all accounts a key document in the curriculum history of English teaching. Soler writes of the 1904 Primary English syllabus that it can be seen as

the vehicle which initiated the transformation of literary instruction from the mechanical teaching of reading and writing in the Revised Code of 1862, to the subject of 'English' and the teaching of literature, poetry, composition and 'the mother tongue' (Soler, 1999, p35).

While there was a similar effect evident in Australia, it can be argued that it was differently inflected and realised. In Queensland, for instance, Putnis (1986) observes, apropos of the early twentieth century, that "[i]n the case of English we see how literary studies developed in the shadow of grammar school classics and in the wake of the mechanical approach to grammar and the three Rs in primary schools". New South Wales is interesting in this regard, too. It was clearly progressive in its educational reform initiatives and ambitions,

particularly under the aegis of Peter Board, its innovative, visionary Director. Nonetheless there was a persistent tension in curriculum development and policy over this period between the culturalist orientation of English teaching and the English subjects and its governmental problems and challenges. Indeed this is something that has arguably been evident all throughout English curriculum history — an enduring conflict between 'rhetoric' and 'reality', or between the theoretical discourse of English teaching and its programmatic realisation.

One manifestation of this is in the conceptual and historical relationship between 'literature' and 'literacy'. This is a central issue in understanding English teaching as a curriculum formation. For our purposes here, it needs to be linked directly to the question of the relationship between English as a secondary school-subject, of long standing and ready intelligibility, and English in the primary school. In Australia at least, there was a period of about thirty years, in the latter part of the last century, when 'English' was more commonly a secondary phenomenon, with the term having fallen right out of fashion and favour in the sphere of the primary school curriculum. It returned with a vengeance over the 1990s, and would now appear well and truly (re-en)trenched. At the same time, there are growing debates over the question of 'English' itself, its relevance and its orientation, and the emergence of a strong emphasis on 'literacy' as a preferred curriculum organiser, at the explicit expense of 'literature'. This too needs to be understood historically. From the outset, English teaching was linked to literary ideology. 'English-as-Literature' was the dominant meta-paradigm. Notwithstanding internal developments and debates, 'literature' has remained central to the discourse of English teaching for over a century now — although increasingly under scrutiny, and increasingly becoming problematic.

In the context of the primary school, however, especially given the institutional division of schooling into primary and secondary sectors, this has meant problems of coherence and intelligibility for the curriculum formation of English. What *was* 'English' in the primary school? Was it to be seen, in the same way, as linked organically and explicitly to literary culture and the literary paradigm? Increasingly it would seem, that was not the case. A movement was observed of 'English-as Literature' to the secondary school, with the primary school becoming more focused on 'English-as-Literacy'. A split occurred, then, between 'literature' and 'literacy' — with the latter, among other things, being seen increasingly as foundational for the former. It is at this point that the issue of *reading* emerges, as a matter of particular concern. A further distinction is constructed between 'literature' and 'reading'. Primary teachers teach reading, while secondary (English) teachers teach literature. The split extends accordingly to the 'how' and the 'what' of reading. Yet a marked tension remains, and pervades the whole system — how to deal with what is so manifestly a 'dividing practice', on so many levels and in so many senses?

For the purposes of this paper, we want to concentrate on just one aspect of this phenomenon and this tension. This is the emergence of an increasingly scientised pedagogy in the primary school, with particular reference to the teaching of reading. It is something that cannot be separated, however, from the growing significance and consolidation of Education as a 'science', over the course of the twentieth century, linked particularly with the growth of Psychology and the emergence of new technologies and rhetorics of measurement and control. With regard to Australia, Noelene Reeves (1996) locates this new concern for reading pedagogy as a 'science' in the period between the two world wars. As she writes:

At about this time, reading and reading instruction became the subject of educational research in its own right in Australia. Australian educators were aware of the research activity into

reading and reading education being conducted overseas. Educational research reflected the scientific inquiry approach developed in the US and elsewhere, and educational measurements were being applied to skill acquisition, reading rates and readability of text. Standardised testing and reading levels had come to be regarded as true indicators of attainment (Reeves, 1996, pp194-195).

There is a sense, then, in which reading in the primary school becomes subject to 'science' at much the same time as reading in the secondary school becomes enshrined as 'art', in the form of "English as Reading". As Morgan notes, this involves — "carefully fashioned ways of relating to a restricted range of print artefacts" (Morgan, 1995, p14).

More particularly in the primary school, reading pedagogy becomes a matter for scientific investigation and practice. With Science as its organising frame — or rather, modern(ist) science - comes a renewed emphasis on 'method'. Here, twentieth-century developments and preoccupations in reading pedagogy and educational science link back to four centuries of scientific culture, deeply intricately with the project of Modernity. David Hamilton (1989) highlights the effects of the Scientific Revolution, from the sixteenth century onwards, on pedagogic practice and ideology, pointing in particular to a new concern for 'method', itself increasingly reconceptualised. 'Method' comes to refer to "a formalized set of operations" (Hamilton, 1989, p23), characterised by systematicity and linearity, and linked to notions of repetition and regularity — a new focus on and a new organic sense of "connection between order, efficiency and improvement" (Hamilton, 1989, p47). In Walter Ong's terms, 'method' refers to "a routine of efficiency" (cited Hamilton, 1989, p52); it becomes a technology for the organisation and control of practice, in the interests of 'social efficiency'.

An important point arises here. The linked notions of systematicity and organisation, rationality and order, are arguably central to the programmatic practice of popular education, and to public schooling as a form of governmentality. The challenge is one of managing populations and regulating individuals, along with the distribution and flow of always-limited resources. Education and schooling need accordingly to be methodical, so that it can be both predictable and accountable, and yet efficient. An enormous investment goes into the construction of an educational science, a power-knowledge complex focused on pedagogic practice. This is evidenced in influential manuals such as that of Cole (1933), organised as it is in terms of 'general method' and 'special method'. Whereas the latter refers to specific school subjects, the former is addressed to general issues of pedagogy and psychology — "an ordered array of pedagogic principles" (Cole, 1933, p ix). As Cole (1933, p1) puts it, evocatively: "In the course of his endeavour to reconcile the child to the curriculum, the teacher is compelled to have recourse to certain broad methods of procedure, and to a large variety of useful technical devices". Yet it is not enough to think in such generalist terms about the practice of pedagogy; just as important is what he calls 'special method':

it is not enough to comprehend the [general] principles of method, nor even to have studied a number of illustrations of their application in practice. The teacher needs also to know the special methods which are applicable to the treatment of each subject. He understands about self-activity, but how is he going to teach spelling? (Cole, 1933, p x).

How, indeed? Our concern here, however, is with reading, and it is to this that we now want to turn our attention.

Historicising Reading Methods

In 1926, advice to teachers on 'Educational Efficiency' provided a clear statement as to the importance and centrality of reading to the project of schooling:

It would be difficult to over emphasise the importance of securing efficiency in Reading and Literature in our Primary Schools, for they are the basis of a sound knowledge of English. "The importance of English in the Elementary Schools" states the report on "The Teaching of English in England" "is absolute and unchallengeable. It is not so much a subject as the body and vital principle of all school activity" (Hayes, 1926, p41).

From the turn of the twentieth century, reading instruction in primary schools has been understood as part of the work of English teaching. Prior to this time, 'Reading' was an 'R' unto itself. Indeed, Michael places the beginning of a coherently understood subject 'English' as occurring about 1870. His survey of 300 years of the teaching of English prior to this time spread across, and drew on, textbooks devoted to the teaching of "reading, spelling, rhetoric, logic, composition, grammar, elocution, poetry, fiction, drama" (Michael, 1987, p2). During the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although "teachers of course had their methods [...] they did not follow, or discuss, a Method."

Their central concern was the relation between the teaching of reading and the teaching of spelling. At no time was there complete agreement as to how the two skills should be related, and during much of the period there was little conception of them as separate skills. Until well into the nineteenth century the dominant view was that reading was learnt through spelling, which should therefore precede it; but in fact the early stages of both processes were taught in such close relationship that they cannot be distinguished (Michael, 1987, p14).

It is predominantly throughout the last century that instruction in reading has become increasingly understood in terms of 'Methods', as answers to the problems faced by modern industrialised national governments trying to introduce mass (and increasingly compulsory) education among the populace. We have written elsewhere (Reid 1999) of early accounts of the teaching of reading, where attention to method was a nicety that was often overlooked in the interests of what was, often, quite 'ruthless efficiency':

Mrs Wesley's methods of teaching her children to read are perhaps most widely known. [...] When one of the Wesley children reached the age of five, a day was set aside to teach it to read. All in turn began their lesson at nine in the morning; by five o'clock they knew their letters, 'except Molly and Nancy, who were a day and a half before they knew them perfectly', for which their mother thought them very dull. On the following day the child was ready to tackle the first chapter of Genesis (Musgrove, 1966, p26, citing Southey, *The Life of Wesley*, 1820).

As the responsibility for teaching young children to read shifted from the family to the schoolroom, and from the mother to the teacher (Steedman 1992), conscious attempts were needed to emulate the successful practices of the immediate past. This particular and fairly common sort of teaching practice this became known as the 'alphabetic' method of teaching reading. It has become since the base-line Method, against which others have been measured and counted.

Getting over Method?

Allan Luke (1998, p305) noted that "[i]n Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the US and England the "great debate" over literacy education has taken the form of a near-continuous debate over which instructional approach is best able to 'solve' student reading and writing problems." In most of these places, the adjudication of literacy debates takes the form of state-mandated literacy curriculum and what is increasingly being seen as the phenomenon of 'Death by a Thousand Outcomes'. Where researchers and experts on reading cannot agree, and see a moral and intellectual obligation to debate and continue to research their often competing claims, educational systems, by contrast, must act. Luke sees the search for a successful method of teaching reading and writing as misguided and doomed inevitably to fail some children in our schools:

Many of us working from sociological and cultural perspectives on literacy education have tried to change the subject of the great debate, to shift it sideways. We have argued that there is no "right" way of teaching reading and writing, but that different curricular approaches — and their attendant textbooks, classroom events, assessment instruments, and adjunct materials — shape literacy as social practices differently. The ways that literacies are shaped have uneven benefits for particular communities and, unfortunately, the outcomes of literacy teaching continue to favour already advantaged groups in these communities (Luke, 1998, p306).

We are writing here from an Australian perspective, and in particular from the state of NSW, where the English K-6 Syllabus specifies that all teachers should heed Luke's words. While in Australia, no individual state system has legislated a particular method by which teachers must work to achieve the outcomes the state has mandated for children in particular years of schooling, this is not the case in all English-speaking countries. NSW has instituted a syllabus requirement that teachers ensure a 'systematic' and 'explicit' approach to the teaching of reading, one that requires them to have a sophisticated and broad knowledge about reading. Where teachers feel insecure in their knowledge of a range of instructional methods, such requirements encourage them to seek out and institute 'the method' that seems to have brought successful results for others. Rather than teaching reading in a set and prescribed fashion, NSW teachers are required to ensure that they provide their students with time to learn to use and to learn about what Luke and Freebody (1990, 1999) have called the 'Four Resources' model for reading.

This set of resources was earlier (Freebody and Luke, 1990) seen as 'Roles of the Reader'. It characterises successful reading as a complex interconnection of four reading processes and practices (decoding, comprehension, knowledge of textual function, and critique) that all readers need in any act of reading that goes beyond 'barking at print'. In many ways this can be seen as an anti-Method model. It requires teachers to provide instruction that will assist children to 'decode' a range of cultural texts, 'participate' in the meanings generated by them, 'use' the range of texts and textual forms in purposeful and appropriate ways, and 'analyse'

the social and cultural norms taken for granted as 'natural' in the texts they encounter. One of the strengths of this model is that “[i]t shifts the focus from trying to find the right method to whether the range of practices emphasised in one’s reading program are indeed covering and integrating a broad repertoire of textual practices that are required in new economies and cultures” (Luke and Freebody, 1999, p6).

This model of reading instruction arguably represents the 'best we can get' in the early twenty-first century. It is certainly preferred by the NSW system, which, as a large centralised educational bureaucracy responsible for the education of children over extensive metropolitan and rural and remote areas, has invested considerable effort and energy into its K-6 English Syllabus and range of Support Documents (DETNSW, 1998). As Doyle (1992) explains, this can be understood as the State system's response to social change:

Because social demands and political circumstances often change rapidly, the institutional curriculum becomes a convenient instrument for school systems to convey responsiveness to external communities.

Buildings, instructional materials, and teachers are difficult and expensive to change, but the curriculum, that is, the language for talking about schooling, can be changed with relative ease (Doyle, 1992, p488).

It is clear that expert and careful teacher use of this framework in planning for reading instruction all through the primary school (and beyond) would provide the sort of reading curriculum that might best ensure success for most readers and for the system. Yet it is also clear that it demands high-quality knowledge, preparation and organisational skills from teachers. Throughout the century in NSW, however, it has been acknowledged that there is little to be gained from a narrower and more technical legislation of 'method':

The history of reading instruction and literacy education more generally is characterised by a persistent recurrence of preoccupations about 'method'. In 1926, the NSW Syllabus did not prescribe any particular method for the teaching of reading, "it leaves the teacher free to use those methods which appeal to him most. In many ways this freedom is desirable, but it throws the responsibility upon the teacher of having some definite means of attack" (Hayes, 1926, p43).

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.

As Dewey (1916/1966, p170; cited Doll 1998) wrote, "nothing has brought pedagogical theory into greater disrepute than the belief that it is identified with handing out to teachers recipes and models to be followed in teaching". Nowhere has the search for successful teaching programs and methods been more intense than in the field of literacy education. This is true in all English-speaking countries and we in Australia are well aware from our own

histories of methods of teaching reading that have gone by such names as ‘phonics’, ‘look and say’, ‘language experience’, and the associated products and reading series that have accompanied them. We are today able to choose from such general and specific packages for literacy instruction as 'The Spalding Method', 'Cued Articulation', 'Reading Recovery', 'Letterland' and, tele-marketed around the nation for concerned parents, 'Soundway'.

Reading Methods in the Past

In this section we take a look behind the official syllabus requirement for teachers to choose wisely in 'attacking' the teaching of reading, to examine the record of more popular and vernacular educational thinking during the first half of the twentieth century in NSW. While we know what the Department was saying officially to teachers and to the public, through its printed materials, the textbooks it authorised for trainee teachers, and its annual reports to the Minister for Education, we focus here also on what teachers were saying to each other. Our sources are the professional journals *Education* (Organ of the NSW Teachers' Federation) and the *Education Gazette*, published by the NSW Department of Education. These monthly circulars record much of interest to us in our search to understand the practice of teaching reading during this period.

According to one early Australian commentator (Archibald, 1922), the situation we have outlined above of the teaching of reading, during the mid-late nineteenth century in England Michael (1987), was very similar for NSW, as it was for other British colonies (Soler, 2000). The alphabetic method was in general use in New South Wales up until the New Syllabus of 1904:

After that date, phonic methods gradually superseded the alphabetic method, though much spelling was still done by the letter names. The primers and readers supplied by the Department of Education were based on phonics. The 1st Primer, for example, contained lists of words, e.g., **hit, bit, pit, sit** &c., to be read by the children. Other lessons consisted of disconnected sentences containing similar words, while a few lessons were composed of continuous narrative. Needless to say, these last named were the favourite lessons in the book (Archibald, 1922, p179).

Archibald explained that now that a system teacher education had become established in New South Wales in the 1900's, “word and sentence” methods of reading were introduced to student teachers, and in this way gradually spread to schools. At this time, professional development for teachers was provided in the form of ‘Evening Extension Courses’ at the new Teachers’ College, and these too focussed on this ‘freer’ method of reading. As Archibald writes:

By 1915, word and sentence methods, with a more or less definite system of phonic teaching, were used in most infant schools. From experience of the results obtained by word and sentence methods at North Newtown I can affirm that the change was justified. The reading in the upper classes was fluent and expressive, and new reading matter was attacked with confidence. In all classes the reading period was a favourite one. [...] but in many schools a definite phonic plan appeared to be lacking (Archibald, 1922, p180).

In the first NSW example of a smart teacher finding a niche and filling it, the ‘Ellis Method’ was developed and demonstrated at Arncliffe Public School by a Miss Ellis during 1916 and 1917. Archibald explains:

... much enthusiasm was aroused at the definite phonetic teaching given, and the ingenious method of dealing with hitherto unphonetic words. After the comparative indecision of past reading methods, it was felt that her method supplied everything definite and thorough. It was accordingly introduced into many schools (Archibald, 1922, p180).

Just a year or two after its introduction, though, *The Education Gazette* published a report warning teachers of some problems with the Ellis Method. Miss Venables, Assistant in charge of the Kindergarten and Lower First Classes at Bowral District School, wrote the following critique of the system for the District Inspector, Mr Cotterill, who subsequently saw fit to publicise it more widely:

It seems to me that there is a great danger in teaching to read in this way. It is a danger that is common to every system of teaching to read that gives young children power to read a set of symbols as sound combinations [...]. People are being accused just now of reading unthinkingly, of following the blind leadership of third-rate politicians, of walking through life chained to the popular philosophy of the moment — and we are asked to train children to think. [...] A method of teaching to read that introduces a printed word as a set of sound symbols and not as the written expression of an idea, is going to increase the existing tendency towards the use of empty verbiage [...].

The disadvantages I have referred to are common to all methods of teaching to read. The child whose experiences have been limited, and lacking in vividness, will suffer through being taught to read too soon, no matter what method is used. The child who has lived a full and varied life will have a wider range of ideas, and the written word will instantly call up its associative ideas. I believe one day we shall not teach children to read until they have first lived (Venables 1918, p299).

After a good three years of using the Ellis Method, Archibald too had her criticisms of it, which she summarised as follows:

1. The method does not follow the natural development of perception, as it begins with elements in themselves meaningless to the children, and proceeds to combine them into words.
2. The method is so logical that it is practically an adult method. [...] with children of 6 years of age it entails an amount of reasoning that is foreign to the child’s stage of development.
3. The early reading is so restricted that it is very hard to awaken interest in the child [...] A skilful teacher, of course, will introduce interest into any lesson, but the interest in this case is extraneous and is not inherent in the subject itself.

4. It has the disadvantage of other phonetic methods based on a differentiation of type. The child has to examine the word so closely that it is likely to affect his eyesight (Archibald, 1922, p181).

She goes on to say that, after experiencing the “intensive drill” required by the Ellis method, the arrival of another phonetic method, “[i]n which the elements of words were introduced in a play way, was received with relief” (Archibald 1922, p181). This new method was one devised by George Jones, a teacher who had been appointed to Bundarra public School In the north-western district of New South Wales in the late 1880s. He remained at Bundarra for twenty-five years, during which time he had ample opportunity to reflect on the need for, and design, a method of teaching reading that from all accounts had considerable success among his pupils. Indeed, as it was described at the time:

No educational method has so entirely taken possession of teachers as this way of teaching reading. Teachers are by nature of their work, usually critical and not a little conservative, but in this instance their eagerness to acquire the new method is unprecedented (*Education*, May 15, 1920, p168).

As the Inspector for the region was able to compare the success enjoyed by the children at Bundarra school with that of children taught by other teachers, the method Mr Jones had devised perhaps inevitably came to the attention of Head Office and other interested parties. In December 1919, Mr Jones was invited to address the NSW Teachers' Federation Annual Conference. He demonstrated his system of teaching reading, and the report of the session allows us some insight into the reasoning behind his method:

The principle was one that they had in operation in the Bundarra district for over 12 months. He saw the difficulties long since when handling young classes himself, and also when his assistants took charge of the young ones. He had come to the conclusion that the fault lay with the mother tongue, which was full of phonic difficulties. In order to make it thoroughly phonetic he sat down night after night and formulated a new alphabet. That alphabet consisted of letters and signs. There were 19 vowels, 16 consonants and one silent letter in the alphabet [...] Anyone could take it up with the use of the chart and the necessary notes for their guidance. The child must feel that it was interested. The fault in the past lay not with the child, but with the system. (*Education*, Jan 15, 1920, p66).

The ‘Jones Method’ differed from the ‘Ellis Method’ in one key aspect: it involved the children in hand movements (hand play’) and special diacritical marking of the words that they were learning to read. To explain this, we turn once again to Archibald:

The children first make a ‘sound’ in their hands. For example, the long sound of **i** is represented by the hands being placed together at the tips of the fingers, and then coming down in a tent shape, the letter **m** is shown by the hands being placed horizontally together. The combination of these two hand movements gives the word “my”. The various vowel sounds are arranged in progressions, which have a certain similarity of movement. In this way the children

associate sounds and hand movements. The next step is to associate these sounds with diacritical marks, which bear a close resemblance to the hand play, e.g. **i** is shown by the diacritical mark \wedge . Which resembles the tent shape previously made by the hands. The next step in association is connecting the diacritical mark with its letter equivalent, e.g. \wedge may be written as **i**, **igh**, or **y**. A favourite exercise with the children is that of “dressing” the signs, e.g., the following would be written on the blackboard:

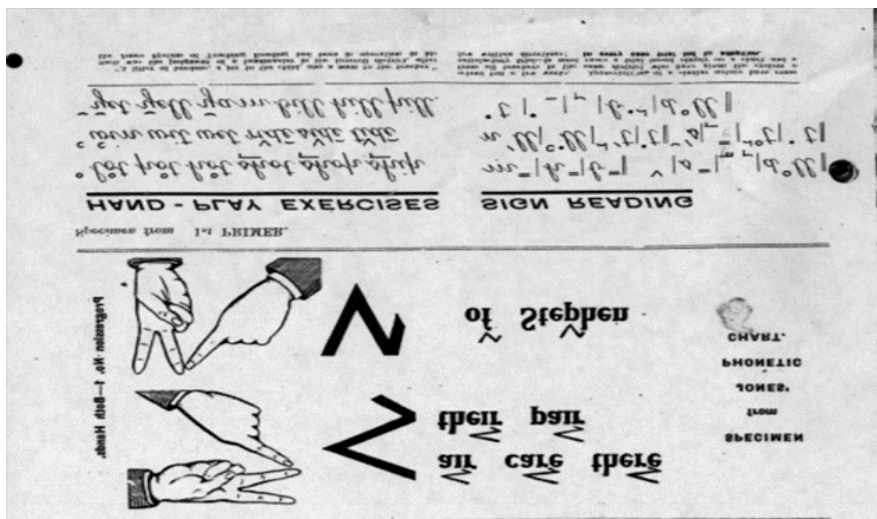
d⁺ n⁺ h⁺ s⁺ b⁺ t

and the children would write the corresponding words underneath—

+ + + +
dan has a bat

In this way the children obtain a familiarity with words in [an] easy and pleasant way (Archibald 1922, p181) (see appendix).

What is of interest to us here is both the familiarity of both Venables’ and Archibald’s critiques, and the connections that many junior primary teachers today can make with these methods. Further, although we may never before have heard of either the Ellis Method or the Jones Method, we in Australia have certainly heard of the Spalding Method, devised in similar circumstances just ten years later in the US, and rediscovered here in the early 1990s. Jones’ method attracted attention from within the Education Department, and was sponsored by several Inspectors who recommended his work. In 1920 he was removed to Mortdale in Sydney, “to afford fuller opportunity for him to explain his reading methods to the many more teachers of the metropolitan district. Mr Jones has many busy days and nights before him in this year” (*Education*, May 15, 1920, p168). From this point followed a series of regular advertisements for Jones’ seminars, in the Teachers’ Union paper *Education*, and in the official Education Department paper, *The Education Gazette*. Jones produced a series of publications, including the Jones Phonetic Chart (at a cost of 5/- “mounted on linen with wooden rollers” or 3/6 for the manilla card version), and a series of textbooks (the First Primer with coloured illustrations cost 9d).



The accompanying Teachers' Handbooks cost 2/6 each. The Education Department's strong sponsorship and recommendation for professional development in this method lasted well over five years, thus ensuring a full coverage of the approach through the state, and, interestingly, interstate. Jones' *Teachers' Handbook* was named as a recommended text in the nationally-used *The Principles and Technique of Teaching in Elementary Schools* (Elijah 1924), written and published out of Victoria.

We are able to see more clearly how the Jones method worked in practice from an account by Hayes in 1926. By this time he is able to assume teachers' familiarity with the principles of the method when giving advice about how the youngest readers should be taught. He writes:

One successful teacher begins as follows:—

"What do we use when we want to say something?"

"Our tongue."

"Yes. Sometimes we use our hands also."

The teacher makes a beckoning gesture to one child.

"How did you know I wanted you?"

The teacher makes a gesture indicating "go away."

"You see we can talk with our hands. Dumb children always talk this way. They make words with their fingers and we can also."

The teacher makes MAN using Jones' hand signs, at the same time saying the word. Gradually the word is said more slowly, the hand signs keeping pace. The children are encouraged to imitate, and attention is drawn to the position of the hands. When commencing the word— "the three fingers pressed together just as our lips are when we say the word; then we open the mouth with the tongue level; then the tongue goes up to touch the roof of the mouth. Now we will write the word. First three fingers III; now make them round at the top, just like two lips pressed together **m**; now the open-mouth **a**— this ? is the tongue; the letter looks something like an apple.

Now two fingers touching the roof **n**."

Next a man is drawn and the word is written underneath. Again the word is broken into letters and the children are told that we call them sounds. They are asked to give words with the sounds **m**. "Mat, " "Milk, " "mum, " are given. The same method is followed with **a** and **n**. To complete the lesson, the children attempted the drawing of a man and the writing of the word beside it (Hayes, 1926, p44).

Part of reason for the success of the Jones Method seems to lie in the help it provided to both the child and the teacher. In what was one of several 'advertorial' pieces for 'The Jones System of Teaching Reading (Copyrighted)' that appeared in several issues of *Education* each year through the early to mid 1920s, Jones¹ claims that: "The child becomes self-active,

¹This article in fact bears no mark of authorship. However an Editorial Note that accompanies it, explaining that Education was unable to secure patents for the designs, which "prevented Mr Jones from being able to place the matter at our disposal", suggests that Jones is indeed the author.

self-reliant, and finds out how to sound words for itself. Thus the teacher finds that the irksome stage of elementary teaching of Reading has lost its boredom" (*Education*, February 1920, p92). He goes on to speak directly to his clientele in the following words:

Besides being of great value in the kindergarten and infant classes, there is a special value to be placed upon it in schools of one teacher. In such the attention of the teacher is diverted owing to so many classes needing aid. As a preparatory aid to a new Reading lesson, the diacritics are marked where necessary, and as these enable the pupils to pronounce the words for themselves, the lesson is learned by silent reading, and the thought content arrived at while the teacher is engaged elsewhere. This is a claim of precious value to such teachers as well as to the children (*Education*, February 1920, p93).

By May, it was reported that "intense enthusiasm" had gripped "Bundarra on the Gwydir", with "teachers for thirty miles around assembl[ing] to hear Mr Jones explain his method of teaching to read." (*Education*, May 15 1920, p168). What was clear, however, was that it seemed to work. Eighteen months later, Jones and his publisher were advertising a Summer School at Fort Street from January 9-13, 1922 (*Education*, December 15, 1921 p21). We may well ask, then, what happened to the 'Jones Method' over the rest of the century. What critiques could be - and were - made of it? What *superseded* it?

Certainly, in the following years, we could find no more 'advertisements' for the method, although by this time it was significantly well known among teacher educators (e.g. Elijah 1924), and student teachers were presumably informed about this method in their teacher education. Articles and materials focussed on the teaching of writing replaced discussion about reading for a year or so, with the introduction by the Department of a new simplified cursive handwriting style, and increasing discussion about spelling.

By 1928, in a piece discussing 'Spelling in the Primary School', a practising teacher ("No. 139") underlined the continuation of the earlier link assumed between the teaching of reading and spelling. Asking "How far are we, as teachers, responsible for the condition of present day spelling?", this teacher offered the following:

I would like to state that I have heard sound teachers of nearly thirty years experience express the opinion that they cannot achieve the results that they formerly obtained. I know that it is not due to any falling off in enthusiasm on their part, nor yet lack of effective methods. But I believe that, unconsciously, many of them have suffered from the effects of pinning their faith too closely to a particular method of teaching reading, forgetting that none is perfect (*Education*, September 15 1928, p358).

This teacher went on to outline what s/he saw as the "method which approaches nearest to perfection". Such a method would be "one that makes greatest use of the faculties of touch, sight, hearing and speech — in other words, uses hand, eye, ear and lip — one that will give the child those best weapons for attacking the spelling 'demons' which are to confront him" (*Education*, September 15, 1928, p358). Indeed, Elijah, in his 1924 discussion of the Jones System (as he called it), provided a practical critique. He noted, first of all, that:

A unique feature of the system is the hand-play introduced in connexion with it. Reading is thus introduced by the play-way. Sounds are associated with action, and progress in word-pronunciation is rapid and effective (Elijah, 1924, p56).

He then went on to advise, however:

It cannot be denied that the process makes word-recognition easy, interesting, and pleasurable; but it is doubtful how far the hand-play introduced is, in the end, and actual gain, and to what extent spelling is affected by the phonographic treatments that characterises the process (Elijah, 1924, p58).

That the Jones Method of teaching to read was so successful at this time can perhaps also be attributable, in part, to the fact that the vernacular understanding of 'Reading', at this time, was still very much reading aloud. Archibald, speaking as an acknowledged expert Infants Mistress in the official Departmental publication *The Educational Gazette*, expressed a wider view of reading. She considered that the following criteria should be considered in judging a 'packaged' reading method before teachers chose to implement it in their classrooms:

The following tests may suitably be applied in summarising the merits or demerits of any reading method:—

1. Does it create from the beginning a definite connection between the child's spoken language, with which he is already familiar, and the new written language he is now attempting to learn for the first time?
2. Is it sufficiently elastic to allow of the introduction of a certain amount of motor activity in the early stages?
3. Is it so planned that very soon the emphasis may be placed on the real aim of reading, viz. thought getting, and so a love of reading be fostered in the children?
4. Does it provide a means for the mastery of the mechanical difficulties of reading? (Archibald, 1922, p179)

Elijah also described for teachers what he saw as the "best method of teaching reading". For him, this "begins with whole words, combines reading with writing, utilizes phonic analysis as an aid to the recognition of new words, and at all stages of the work connects the written or printed symbol with the mental image, form, or representation which it should call up" (Elijah, 1924, p55).

Certainly, in 1928, "No 139" reflected on the state of teachers' knowledge about the teaching of reading in a way that rings true to our situation today:

During the past fifteen years or so, we have had a rich crop of methods for teaching reading, none of which I wholly condemn, but I cannot help thinking that teachers have not always understood the principle underlying the methods adopted, and floundering as one learning to swim, they have not achieved the results which the author or an enthusiastic exponent of that method can and does achieve (*Education*, September 15, 1928, p358).

Conclusion

Our aim in this paper has been two-fold. Firstly, we have sought to contribute to a growing body of work in Australian curriculum history, with reference to English teaching and the English subjects. It is becoming very clear to us that what is needed is a large-scale research program, one that well and truly pushes beyond secondary schooling, and that the question of English in the primary school is something that warrants further and more systematic investigation. Secondly, we have sought to focus on a particular construction of 'English as Reading', and to illuminate something of the history and politics of reading pedagogy. This is all too often glossed over or overlooked in contemporary policy and practice, certainly in the Australian context. As Elkins (1993) has written: "Relatively little has been done to preserve, document or conduct research in the history of reading instruction in Australia." We offer this account as a contribution in that regard.

Our research indicates very clearly that there is an extraordinary regularity in the discourse of 'reading wars' and 'methods debates'. Indeed we are struck by the marked (dis)continuities in the historical record. A recent newspaper article, under the title "Controversy dogs the teaching of reading", reports yet another attempt ('in the present') to prescribe reading pedagogy. In a familiar scenario, science and government are yoked together in a problem-solution cycle, with reading described as "a very complex issue, like any other public health issue (Ornstein, 2001). The answer, it would seem, lies in 'scientific research': "Teaching children to read is a lot like curing a deadly disease — first scientists must identify promising approaches, then they need to test their hunches". Hence: "While 'reading wars' between the advocates of phonics and whole language methods have swept the US for years, the philosophical debate is giving way to scientific research" (Ornstein, 2001). This is the latest in a recurrent manifestation of public, professional and policy anxiety around the question of reading. It won't be the last. English teachers and reading educators — along with policy makers — would do well to attend more to the lessons of history

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