Reading Pedagogy, 'Evidence' and Education Policy: Learning from History?

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(Final submitted version for the Special Issue on reading of *The Australian Educational Researcher* – October 2010)

Abstract

This paper examines the Report of the 'Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy' (DEST, 2005) and explores the claims it makes about reading pedagogy and the centrality of particular 'methods' or 'approaches' to teaching backed by 'scientific' evidence. Discourse analysis of the Report shows that its logics allow only certain kinds of evidence to count in policy, and that it reduces difficult social and political issues to questions of technique. This allows the Report to recommend an approach whereby qualitative insights and practitioners' experience can be bypassed through valorising methods developed and verified by scientific researchers. The Report's claims are considered genealogically in the light of historical cases from the early nineteenth century, where educational reformers struggled with the issue of how to educate the children of the poor. In one, the monitorial system promoted by Lancaster in England, there was a focus on reading which made teachers or monitors artefacts of a standardised method. By way of contrast, in Scotland, a classroom approach developed by Stow made the teacher central to the process, as someone who sensitively interpreted and extended students' experiences with texts. Stow's approach would form the model for the modern classroom in compulsory state schooling, while the monitorial system would eventually be abandoned as ineffective. The historical cases demonstrate the dangers of approaches to policy that fail to account for the complex interplay between teacher, student and text in the reading lesson.

Introduction

The Australian Government's 'Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy' was ostensibly established in response to an open letter (Anderson, et al., 2004) sent in March 2004 by 26 psychologists, health and special education academics to the then Federal Minister of Education. The authors of the letter claimed, among other things, that Australian teachers were over-reliant on pedagogical strategies termed 'whole language' at the expense of teaching 'phonics' and, as a result, large groups of Australian children were failing to learn to read. The Report of the Inquiry (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005) itself is dominated by a preoccupation with a contrast between what it characterises as a 'whole language' approach to teaching literacy – an 'approach' it goes to considerable lengths to criticise – and 'code-based methods [that] typically require a high degree of teacher-centred presentation of learning material, with an emphasis on explicit instruction, scheduled practice and feedback' (p.11) which it strongly supports. The key point of differentiation between these two 'approaches' is characterised in the Report by the alleged lack of evidence in support of the former and the scientific backing given to the latter.

It is not my purpose here to enter into a debate about the 'truth' of these claims; rather, it is to consider the way in which 'method' and 'evidence' are deployed in the Report, and to think historically about the link between teaching practice and educational policy, using the Report as a starting point. It is especially noteworthy that the *Teaching Reading* Report argues for a tight articulation between particular kinds of 'evidence-based' research and the 'approaches' that teachers should use to teach reading. The Report argues, moreover, that evidence-based

research, which is also labelled 'scientific', should be the privileged source of advice for teachers and the foundation of national policy.

The next section considers how the Report stakes its claim for a connection between science and policy, and the logics it establishes in shaping reading pedagogy. This analysis is followed by a genealogical examination of the connections between policy and reading, especially in relation to teaching 'method' or strategies. This involves an overview of two influential interventions that were made into popular schooling in the early 19th century to consider how they sought to shape the reading lesson and teaching method and the warrants that were used to justify those recommendations. The concluding section to the paper asks what such an episode in the history of the policy and teaching-reading relation tells us about the current policy moment – a process of estrangement of the present (Foucault, 1977).

The data used in this paper are taken from a current ARC-funded research project, which is conducting an historical analysis of the teaching of reading in the 19th century as part of a history of the present in relation to literacy policy in Australia[1]. The data here are analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), which involves treating the language of the debates about reading pedagogy as articulated through a range of competing discourses which constitute what is possible to say, who is able to speak, and what the appropriate methods are for arriving at the 'truth' of the situation. The critical element of this approach to discourse analysis involves consideration of the effects of constituting the field in this way, what is at stake for the various participants, and who benefits or is (dis)advantaged by these practices. In the case of the *Teaching Reading* Report, I wish to focus on the 'non-obvious ways' (Fairclough, 2001, p. 229) in which its language and modes of argument are involved in shaping social relations of power, and their effects on those involved in schooling. CDA involves analysis not just of target texts – in this paper, the *Teaching Reading* Report – but also consideration of how that text is produced, circulates and relates to other texts, as well as to wider social practices (Fairclough, 1992, p. 73).

To complement CDA, a genealogical approach is used to examine the debates about the teaching of reading as represented in the Report. This involves using history to (re-)examine the present – for example, considering how and where such debates have arisen before and under what circumstances. It especially involves attending to continuities and discontinuities in the history of a field in order to elicit the range of discourses that have constituted it (Cormack, 1998). A genealogist understands such concepts as constructed within discourses at particular times, and not being fundamentally the same at all times – somehow lying, therefore, outside of discourse. Genealogical techniques used in relation to policy serve to estrange the 'rationality and consensus of policy production' (Gale, 2001, p. 389), thereby exposing the constructedness of what is presented as common sense.

The *Teaching Reading* report

The Report itself never manages to escape from the binary frame of phonics instruction versus the rest, established by the open letter, even as it attempted to argue for a multiplicity of 'techniques':

> The attention of the Inquiry Committee was drawn to a dichotomy between phonics and whole-language approaches to the teaching of reading. This dichotomy is false. Teachers must be able to draw on techniques most suited to the learning needs and abilities of the child. It was clear, however, that systematic phonics instruction is critical if children are to be taught to read well, whether or not they experience reading difficulties (p.11).

[1] 'Teaching Reading in Australia: An Historical Investigation of Early Reading Pedagogy, the Figure of the Teacher and Literacy Education', an Australian Research Council project (No. DP0987648) between the University of South Australia, Charles Sturt University, and Queensland University of Technology. Chief investigators are Phil Cormack, Bill Green, and Annette Patterson.

This statement on the first page of the Executive Summary established some distance from the open letter, while enfolding its central claim that 'systematic phonics instruction' was critical to reading instruction. In this way, while allowing for different approaches, phonics instruction was installed as crucial to the whole of the process and a hierarchy of 'teaching strategies' was established led by the only one mentioned explicitly in the recommendations – 'systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction' (Recommendation 2, p.14). Also, 'strategies' are identified as the core component of the teaching of reading. This focus on strategies is maintained throughout and, while the term 'strategy/ies' is used forty-four times in the body of the Report[2], what constitutes a strategy is never defined. However, from context it is clear that strategy is a synonym for the more traditional concept of teaching 'method', a term used ten times in relation to what reading teachers do, and usually in terms that indicate there is a variety available. As the Report states, 'teaching practices have long generated debate and ideological controversy, especially as to best *methods* for the teaching of literacy' (p.29, emphasis added). This emphasis on 'methods' and, especially, their competing claims situates the Report firmly in the discourse of 'reading wars' which has dominated curriculum debates in Anglophone nations since the 1960s (Luke, 1998; Snyder, 2008). As Luke notes, such debates have tended to focus on finding the 'best method' as a solution to the problem that schools do not achieve 100% success in the teaching of reading. More will be discussed about method below, but suffice it to say here that this Report rearticulates a long-standing problematisation (Foucault, 2000) in seeking the best methods for ensuring success for all students.

The synonym for method and strategy used most often in the Report is 'approach'. In the body of the Report, this term appears 72 times, with 52 of these uses referring directly to teaching as in this example:

> The Inquiry found that many teaching *approaches* used in schools are not informed by findings from evidence-based research, and that too many teachers do not have a clear understanding of why, how, what and when to use particular *strategies* (p.14, emphasis added).

Through such language, what teachers actually do with students is essentially placed into what might be called, following Latour (1986), 'black boxes', or relatively seamless containers called 'approaches' which can easily be compared and evaluated as to their effects[3]. The use of such shorthand labels for professional practice in the Report means that the teaching of reading can be discussed with an almost complete absence of attention to what teachers' actual work is, beyond selecting and applying an appropriate strategy or approach (Comber & Cormack, 2007). The following quotation is the most succinct version of how this works in the Report:

> Research into effective teaching practices during and beyond the early years provided compelling evidence that teachers need a comprehensive repertoire of strategies and approaches plus the knowledge to select and apply the strategies and approaches that meet individual learning needs (p.38).

It should be noted here that there is nothing particularly revolutionary or new about this view of teaching reading, in a policy sense. As Reid and Green (2004, p. 14) note in their historical account of the 'methods' debate, this attention to method has been a feature of policy on reading instruction since at least the beginning of the twentieth century in Australia, as in most other industrial nations. Indeed, the evidence is that teachers have been using a range of methods for some time. For example, in his major review of literacy education in Australia,

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[2] Word counts refer to the number of times a word appears in the body of the Report – that is, excluding contents, references and appendices.

[3] The concept of a 'black box' was used by Latour and Woolgar (1986, p. 259) in their seminal study of the construction of 'scientific facts', and referred to the process of 'rendering items of knowledge distinct from the circumstances of their creation'.

Freebody (2007, p. 29) cites a large Australian study from the 1930s that found 'the order of popularity in teaching method is: phonic, look-and say, and alphabetic. Usually two or three of these are employed in combination.'

The focus on method is bolstered by the only explicit reference to 'history' in the Report (in a footnote on the first page), which claims that the 'disagreements' between whole language 'approaches' and explicit phonics 'have their origins in the 16th century' (p.1). In this way, method is reified as something which is effectively timeless, as if educators writing about reading and learning to read in the 1500s were referring to the same processes that students and teachers face today – an issue to be returned to below. It is 'disagreements' about method which are made fundamental to the field, and which can be made amenable to the truth effects of science.

Having established methods (or 'approaches'/'strategies') as the key component of policy in teaching reading, the Report goes to great lengths to arbitrate between them and 'identify best practice' in the teaching of reading. It is here that the appeal to science is at its strongest, where a great deal is made of late 20th-century understandings of what counts as 'evidence' and indeed what counts as 'research'. Frequent use of formulations such as 'evidence-based research', 'rigorous evidence-based research' and 'evidence-based practice' provides a platform for claims about the efficacy of specific 'approaches' to the teaching of reading. The same form of words used in the Report's first recommendation is used in varying combinations throughout, as in this example in a section on the preparation of teachers:

> Thus, there is need for a major focus on teacher quality, and building capacity in teachers towards quality, evidence-based teaching practices that are demonstrably effective in maximising the developmental and learning needs of all children (p.19).

Such overwording – 'evidence-based' *and* 'demonstrably effective' – is common, especially in the Report's recommendations where there is a clear anxiety to allow only some kinds of research to count in informing practice. The term 'evidence' appears 23 times in the Executive Summary alone. The definition of 'evidence-based research' from the Report's glossary makes it clear that only research involving 'rigorous data analysis and statistical modelling of data' and subject to 'expert scientific review' (p.85) will count as evidence for practice.

Frequently co-located with 'evidence' is the descriptor 'effective', usually used in relation to approaches or teaching practices (as in the above quotation). 'Effective' is used 26 times in the Executive Summary and operates in a similar way to 'approach' or 'method' to reduce a plethora of possible social, philosophical and political debates to a technical notion amenable to experimental verification. Once again, what counts as 'effective' is never explicitly defined. The grammar of the Report, however, clearly places the responsibility for defining effectiveness in the hands of scientific researchers, as stated in the first sentence of the Executive Summary:

> Underlying this report by the Committee for the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy is the conviction that effective literacy teaching, and of reading in particular, should be grounded in findings from rigorous evidence-based research (p.11).

One way to verify the central issues in a discourse is to consider what aspects of it are picked up and become a point of debate or commentary by those who are authorised to speak within that discourse. There was at the time a great deal of media interest. This generated reports and commentaries coinciding with the conduct of the Inquiry and following the publication of the

Report[4]. Working from the headlines alone, the focus of media reports about the Inquiry and subsequently the Report tended to focus on 'basics' and 'phonics' as key. In this way, the media reports revoiced the 'whole language versus phonics' binary taken up in the Report as signalling a return to the past and an appeal to the 'basics'. There were some interesting differences between the papers, with city-based papers tending to report on how their State's curriculum aligned with the Report. Australia's only national paper *The Australian* stood out through featuring many more articles than the other papers – 30 articles, with 17 referencing the Inquiry – and investing heavily in the central arguments of the open letter through its opinion pages. These articles showed the way that science was being used as a warrant for policy and as a weapon for de-legitimising the experience and practices of teachers and, especially, 'education faculties':

> The Education Minister, who yesterday unveiled a strategy to reintroduce phonics around the nation, said national literacy levels were "unacceptable" and teaching methods were failing children. "Unfortunately, a lot of teachers have not been taught how to teach our children reading in the most scientific way," he said ('Nelson concedes phonics alone won't lift standards', *The Australian*, 9 December 2005).

This connection between science and policy was repeatedly asserted over the four years, and were maintained after the Minister of Education changed, as well as a change of government in late 2007. Science was deployed as a way of differentiating between evidence worthy of application to policy. For example, in one debate an academic (also, one of the authors of the open letter) attacked the viewpoint of a Report critic and children's author by claiming that the author 'doesn't know anything about reading at all. She's not a scientist' ('Nelson concedes phonics alone won't lift standards', *The Australian*, 9 December 2005). 'Dusty' academics in education faculties could also be attacked by characterising their work as 'unscientific'.

To summarise, three key logics can be identified in the discourse of the Report and its associated media coverage which work to make quite direct links between research, policy and teaching. First, the Report establishes science and its practitioners as the privileged providers of 'evidence' about what works in classrooms. In so doing, the Report not only rules out researchers who do not practice 'scientific' research, but also the experience of teachers and school leaders who work with children every day. Importantly, what is also ruled out is any sense in which history could be a source of evidence, as history is cast as one long unchanging debate which only science can resolve.

Second, the Report places what teachers do within 'black boxes' labelled methods or approaches which can be scientifically compared and verified. As seamless entities, these methods could become empty signifiers onto which a variety of aspirations could be written – whether being tied into governmental anxieties about the 'need for an increasingly skilled workforce' in the Report (p.25), or into neo-conservative agendas to expunge so-called 'postmodernist stances' and other 'fads' from education ('Rudd must not allow curriculum hijacking', *The Australian*, 10 September 2008). The appeal of the concept of method is to reduce messy social and political problems of education to apparently technical problems of practice and measurement.

Finally, the Report argues that scientific research can bypass the experience of education faculties and teachers by warranting methods, or combinations of methods, that the teacher can take from the shelf and apply directly to practice. Within such a logic, student readers are made almost completely invisible – they become effects or skill sets, without identities, or even bodies – and what teachers should or might do with students becomes a metric available

[4] The data for this review were any articles that appeared in *The Advertiser* in Adelaide, *The Age* in Melbourne, the major Sydney papers and the national paper, *The Australian*, from the announcement of the inquiry in 2005 until the end of 2008 which featured key words around the teaching of literacy and/or reading.

for evaluation according to 'what works' ('Gillard wants teaching techniques that work', *The Australian*, 14 May 2008). In the following section, these logics, especially the relationship between the teacher and method, and the teacher and the child reader, are considered genealogically. I take as a case some of the ways in which the teaching of reading was imagined in schooling innovations of the early 19th century.

Teaching reading in the early 19th century: Genealogical insights

Within the space constraints here, it is not possible to conduct a comprehensive genealogical analysis of a problematisation such as the search for the best or ideal 'methods' to teach reading, not the least because this is a field with a long and complex history. What I focus on here is the problem of teaching the children of the poor as it confronted policy-makers in the early 19th century. Two different approaches to the problem proposed by Lancaster in England and Stow in Scotland are examined.

By the late 18th century, the industrial revolution in Britain had produced a new middle class, large populations of working-class people in squalid conditions in swollen cities, as well as significant populations of the poor who were reliant on local parishes for basics such as food and shelter. In this context, one English social reformer with an interest in the condition of the poor – Joseph Lancaster – was to prove influential. Lancaster, among others, developed and promoted a system of schooling that would come to be called the monitorial system. As explained in the preface of a book published in 1816, the key was to reduce the 'expense attendant on the [then] common methods of teaching'. He devised 'economical plans' by which:

> one master might conduct a school of 1000 children with perfect ease; and that while their progress in learning was much more rapid than in the old method, the expense for each child need not, in a large school, exceed 5*s*. or 6*s*. per annum … (Lancaster & British and Foreign School Society, 1994/1816, p. 2)

The core of the monitorial system was that one 'master' could select 'monitors' from among the best of his pupils and appoint them to drill their fellow students in a strictly regulated fashion – an approach labelled 'mutual instruction'. Pupils were arranged into 'classes' – or groups of students who were studying at about the same level in their 'ABCs, or 'addition and subtraction'. There was no upper limit to the number that could be in a class, as each could again be divided into 'drafts' under the care of a monitor. The task of the master was to test pupils to ascertain which class they should enter, and then promote them from class to class once they had mastered the lessons for each. This was a system modelled on the factories that made the towns in which the poor lived so that instruction was scaled up to produce efficiencies of production.

A central role of the monitorial school was the teaching of reading to poor children. Lancaster wrote extensively about exact methods for teaching reading, including the equipment needed, such as seating, charts, alphabet wheels, and the order of learning of the alphabet and syllables:

> The 1st class learn the alphabet
> 2d class, words and syllables of 2 letters.
> 3d class do 3 letters
> 4th class do 4 letters
> 5th class, reading lessons of 1 syllable
> 6th class do of 2 syllables
> 7th class read the Testament
> 8th class read the Bible, and are a selection of the best readers (Lancaster & British and Foreign School Society, 1994/1816, p. 19)

This precision of specification was extended to the 'methods' of teaching reading – something learned 'simultaneously' with writing, which was an innovation – which were designed to allow a monitor, barely older than the children he taught, to manage a 'draft' of eight students. The following instructions for the teaching of the first class provide an insight into one method involving the draft standing in a semi-circle around an alphabet chart:

> Another method of teaching the alphabet is, by a large sheet of pasteboard suspended from a nail on the school wall: eight boys from the sand class, are formed into a circle round this alphabet, standing' in their numbers, 1, 2, 3, &c. to 6. These numbers are pasteboard tickets with No, 1, &c. inscribed, suspended by a string from the button of the bearer's coat, or round his neck. The best boy stands in the first place; he is also decorated with a leather ticket, gilt, and lettered, *merit*, as a badge of honor. He is always the first boy questioned by the monitor, who points to a particular letter in the alphabet, "What letter is that?" If he tell readily what letter it is, all is well, and he retains his place in the class; but if he fail, then he forfeits it, together with his number and ticket, to the next boy below him who answers the question aright (Lancaster, 1995/1806a, pp. 18-19, emphasis in the original).

In this method, the monitor simply watched for error, and allowed the pupils to correct each other and provide an accurate 'reading' of the alphabet. This same system of 'mutual instruction' was used for the writing lesson, and for dictation and, together, they formed the key methods for teaching reading. Importantly, in the monitorial system, the numbers of classes learning simultaneously could be imagined as extending *ad infinitum* and machine-like in its reach to the children of the poor.

A key feature of the Lancaster system was that the teacher (in this case, the monitor) becomes an artifact of, and relay for, the method – just another element of an articulated machine which includes materials, architecture, bodily arrangement and movement, voice and eye: 'The children stand in semicircles. The monitors direct their pointers to the syllables and words printed on the large boards which are hung against the wall. Each pupil in succession reads a syllable or word' (Lancaster & British and Foreign School Society, 1994/1816, p. 19). Lancaster's manuals and pamphlets contain strong claims of evidence that the system works as intended, as well as appeals to the authority of its patrons, including none other than the King himself and most of the royal family (Lancaster, 1995/1806b, p. 1):

> On this plan a boy not 17, conducted a school in Somersetshire, for twelve months, under the patronage and immediate notice of the Duke of Somerset. At the commencement of the School, of 70 children: there were not six could read, at the end of six months, there were only six *not able to read*, every boy who could read, could also write, and the majority could cypher (Lancaster, 1995/1806a, p. i, emphasis in the original).

Lancaster's view of teaching bears some remarkable similarities to those presented in the *Teaching Reading* Report, at least in terms of the proposed articulations between proven methods and expected learning outcomes. Historically, we know that Lancaster's predictions were not to be fulfilled. As Hamilton (1989, p. 99) reports, by the 1830s the monitorial system fell out of favour as an ideal for educating the poor, even though the system endured in some places, including Australia, well into the 19th century (Reeves, 1996). The monitorial school did provide a model for systematising education which could be built upon, however, the results of its methods were disappointing. A major criticism was that what was learned in the reading lesson was never actually understood and that the little knowledge gained could be seen as 'dangerous' because it was not accompanied by moral guidance in the use of that knowledge. For the critics, such as Robert Owen and James Kay-Shuttleworth, the key problem was that monitors – themselves only students not much older than those who were being taught – were not only unable to act as sufficient relays for the knowledge of the schoolmaster, they were also not in a position to provide any 'moral authority'. This was a key criticism by Scottish educationalist, David Stow, who had developed from the late 1820s

a model of schooling which depended on a different kind of teacher-pupil relation. Stow, like Lancaster, was concerned with the education of the poor, in his case in the industrial city of Glasgow. The key to Stow's view of suitable schooling was the influence on pupils of a well-trained schoolmaster who managed to connect school lessons, including those in reading, to the life of the child through 'proper superintendence'.

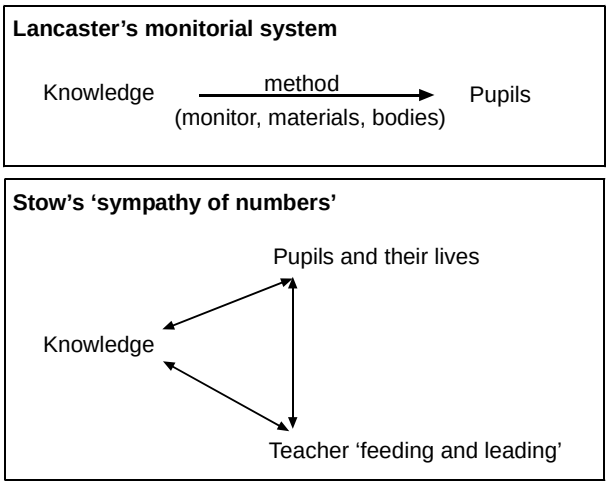
Stow developed a new conception of 'simultaneous' instruction which involved children being instructed by the 'master' in the gallery – a concept developed from Wilderspin (1832) in England which was a tiered platform which allowed all the children to meet the eye of the teacher where all simultaneously attended to the master's words, and listened to other pupils' answers and reading. Stow's reading lessons still included attention to the alphabet, to syllables and so on, but added lessons from the teacher in the meanings of words through connection with real objects, as well as attention to articulation and the oral performance of reading. The key to all lessons (including those where the master observed the children at play) was that the teacher helped the pupils to attend to how the knowledge connected to their lives and to make the appropriate moral judgements. This involved:

> … superintendence by the master, to observe the children, and afterwards to train the understanding to the true nature of their conduct, and to cultivate proper thought as well as correct behaviour (Stow, 1854, p. 18).

Thus, instead of Lancaster's 'mutual instruction' there was the 'sympathy of numbers' where the lessons were taken from the master as well as from other pupils, and those lessons were connected to the conduct of life and not just the knowledge at hand. Stow emphasised the centrality of a well-trained teacher in this regard, through what he called the 'Training System' where trainees were provided extended education in a normal seminary connected to the infant school he ran. Promoted in England by its chief education civil servant, Kay-Shuttleworth (Selleck, 1994), this was the system that was to prove the basis of modern public schooling that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, was funded by the state in most industrial societies. By the turn of the century, too, in Australia, systems for the training of teachers in teachers' colleges and universities were being established by the state education departments (Vick, 2007).

Central to Stow's view of education was a relationship between the pupil and the teacher which mediated the knowledge to be learned – whether it be a reading lesson or a lesson in science. Stow (1854, p. 7) urged the 'simultaneous exercise of [pupils'] intellectual, physical, and moral powers' by a teacher who avoided 'mere teaching or instruction—stuffing instead of *feeding*, forcing instead of leading or *training*' (p.12, emphasis in the original). The teacher who (morally) trained was one who mediated knowledge with and for the students and found a way to make it their own. Figure 1 is a representation of the different models of teaching proposed by Lancaster and Stow. In Lancaster's model, the monitor is an artifact of the method operating in a one-way relation from the knowledge to be acquired to the pupils.

Figure 1: The mediation of knowledge in early 19th century models of teaching



In Stow's model, the method became the entire relation between knowledge and the pupils' 'intellectual, physical and moral powers' – a relation mediated by the activity of the teacher who used their knowledge of the pupils to shape the lesson and the very soul of the student.

Reading, method and history

This brief glimpse into the reading lesson in the early 19th century provides a standpoint from which to reconsider the present policy moment. Clearly today, populations served by schools and the purposes of schooling are very different from those proposed by Lancaster and Stow, for whom Christian morality was the key to a healthy and happy nation. However, Stow's model of pedagogy proved a flexible and enduring human technology, able to be adapted in Australia and elsewhere to the need for a public education system that precluded religious instruction. In many ways, the moral instruction of the scripture lesson in Stow's schools could be folded into the English lesson via a reading program based on materials that served broadly Christian and, later, national and imperial purposes, a process largely complete by the turn of the 20th century (Hunter, 1987; Patterson, 2002).

From a populational perspective, Stow and Lancaster developed their influential innovations in relation to particular target groups – the burgeoning poor of fast-growing industrial cities. This raises the question of whether the Report is also being addressed to the education of a populational group. The Report itself acknowledges that, by international measures, Australia is in the top echelon of nations when it comes to reading education, but that 'some are still not achieving acceptable literacy standards' (p.6). It is this population that is singled out in the Report as the particular target of the reforms being proposed (some 10-20%, depending on the measures it cites). However, unlike Lancaster and Stow, the connections between the reforms proposed and the populations at whom they are targeted are only tangentially described. Speaking in the universal(ist) language of science, the Report glosses over the conditions in which these students find themselves and of the schools which they attend. In the Report problem groups are referred to as those experiencing 'reading difficulties' or through euphemisms such as 'diverse groups of children' (Recommendation 13, p.21). However dissimulated (Thompson, 1990) in the technical language of science and global competitiveness, the Report is clearly driven by governmental concerns to raise the achievement level of groups who traditionally do not succeed in school including, especially, those in poverty. Thus there are strong continuities in this regard between the concerns of the early 19th century reformers and the *Teaching Reading* Report.

In terms of the purposes of schooling, Stow and Lancaster both put their faith in (Protestant) religious morality as a means for educating the young of the poor in appropriate forms of citizenship. On the other hand, the Report focuses on much more secular concerns connected

with (neo)liberal goals of individual achievement and the economic demand for 'an increasingly skilled workforce' (p.11). Lancaster saw the ability to read as a significant precursor for access to morally improving texts of scripture (the higher classes used the Bible as their reading material). On the other hand, Stow saw all lessons, from the Infant school on, as a means for learning both reading and morality – an education of the self from the start. The *Teaching Reading* Report tends to a more Lancasterian view of reading as a *precursor* to desired development as a 'skill that begets many other skills' (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005, p. 26 citing Heckman [2000]). Thus, while the purposes might be different, the positioning of reading/literacy is similar to Lancaster's which perhaps explains why the Report so emphasises early literacy acquisition via phonics instruction and places approaches that emphasise meaning in a secondary position.

Another clear continuity of the early 19th century with the present can be identified – both the Report and the 19th century manuals emphasise specific knowledge about letters and sound-symbol relationships. Lancaster, like the Report, insisted that the path to effective learning was the application of a method which situated the teacher as an artifact of that method, explicitly directing the children's attention to knowledge about sound-symbol relations. However, with the perspective of history on the monitorial schools, it can be seen that an efficient method for delivering knowledge economically and at scale, while important, is not enough. Children rarely sit (or stand) still long enough to be the ideal students that methods imagine them to be. Knowledge without meaning – in the immediate or long-term sense – is not enough to make it engaging or enduring. Method without interaction and the possibility of mediation of someone who knows (and cares about?) the pupils doesn't work, at least for the young of the industrial state, as Stow asserted. The almost complete absence of attention to the relationship between the student and the teacher in the Report, indeed, stands as a stark discontinuity with Stow and perhaps as a warning to any model that places too much faith in method alone, as did Lancaster's.

One important challenge of the industrial revolution for the nations of the late 19th century was the need to educate the population to deal with new knowledge that was increasingly being produced in print form. As Chartier (2008) has shown, highly successful methods for teaching populations to read had been developed prior to this time – for example, 'all inhabitants from Sweden and Finland had learnt to read during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries without going to school' (p.9). However, this was a different kind of reading context – the young were learning to read shared religious texts being read aloud constantly and eventually learned by heart. In other words, children went from known words and texts and were helped to break them down into letters and syllables – hence 'oral memory' (p.13) of texts was an important context for learning. The forms of reading that were becoming important in the late 18th century – reading unknown texts on unfamiliar topics – were very different to those earlier forms, and demanded new kinds of pedagogy and schooling to learn. This insight not only calls into question the continuity from the 16th century to the 21st that the *Teaching Reading* Report claims – the reading being taught was *not* the same thing – it also problematises the approaches to teaching reading being promoted within it. While the Report does occasionally acknowledge the new forms of texts and reading being created by the digital and multi-modal revolutions, its main methodological focus is relentlessly on traditional print texts and alphabetic systems. History indicates that new pedagogies are required for new forms of texts and reading practices (New London Group, 1996), yet discussion of these possibilities is overwhelmed by a concern to address old debates and (re)create methodological certainties.

Do these historical insights into the teaching and learning of reading 'count' as 'evidence' that might guide the development of policy in the early 21st century? In the *Teaching Reading* Report, this is clearly not seen as supportable – history is raised only to be dismissed on the first page as a pointless repetition needing to be excised through the application of science. However, as Freebody (2007) shows in his major review of the teaching of literacy, there are

versions of 'science' which are perfectly amenable to forms of evidence beyond those defined as scientific by the Report. He cites the work of Edmund Huey (1920), the founder of modern scientific research into literacy, as promoting the importance of observational work on 'everyday reading and writing practices' (Freebody, 1990, p. 5) and who 'kept one eye steadily on the research and one on the practitioner' (p.40) in considering recommendations for practice. This is a view that understands that teaching is more than a scientifically perfectible technology – teaching will always work with the (im)possible affordances of the social, political and cultural contexts in which it is placed (Green, 2009). This is not to say that science doesn't have a place, but only in concert with other approaches. Freebody (1990, p. 21) notes that the 'particular ways in which "the teaching of phonics and phonemic awareness" is or might be optimally enacted in those classrooms where the target categories of students are prevalent are not empirically established'. He argues that experimental research needs to be allied with 'ethnographic, observational, documentary methods' to better understand and support professional practice. I take 'documentary' methods to include the possibility of historical approaches. McCulloch notes that policy that ignores or misuses history:

> … considers education policy to be a technical or managerial exercise, with little or no reference to the traditions, interests, expectations, hopes and fears that are historically embedded in education systems, or even to the histories of the people involved in these systems who are expected to change their philosophies and assumptions, to negate their own experience in implementing new policies (McCulloch, 1991, p. 8).

Beyond recognising the histories already built into practice, historically informed policy (McCulloch, 1991; Silver, 1990) has great potential to provide what Ladwig (1994) termed 'socially recognisable evidence'. In the case of reading policy, this should include exemplary documentation of classroom practices and, especially, consideration of the ways in which particular practices can be related to the socio-historical contexts in which they were placed, which are recognisable to both practitioners *and* researchers. In the Australian and international scene there is a much scholarship on the history of the teaching of reading (see, for example, Freebody, 2007; Openshaw & Soler, 2007; Pearson, 2000) which provides compelling evidence for policy.

What is needed is a pedagogical understanding of the teaching and learning of reading which situates it as a contingent process involving relations between a teacher, a learner, and the subject matter within the context of the uses of texts in broader social settings (Lusted, 1986; Sellar & Cormack, 2009). 'Method' or the technologisation of that relationship can only ever be a sketch of the possible modes of practice and never a roadmap to follow slavishly because there is so much about literacy, and the lives of children and teachers, that is constantly changing. It is the nature of the relations between the child, the material to be read, and the teacher that is key to the success of the reading lesson.

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Bionote

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