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Green, Bill, Cormack, Phillip, & [Patterson, Annette](#) (2013) Re-reading the reading lesson : episodes in the history of reading pedagogy. *Oxford Review of Education*, 39(3), pp. 329-344.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2013.808617>

# Re-Reading the Reading Lesson: Episodes in the History of Reading Pedagogy

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## Introduction

Debates on the teaching of reading, marked in such policy documents as the Rowe Report (2005) in Australia and the Rose Report (2006) in the UK, have a long history and indeed are at least coterminous with schooling itself. However, history rarely figures in any significant or rigorous way in either the policy or the debate, which are characteristically professional and technical in their orientation, and/or organised around claims and counter-claims regarding the ‘sciences’ of both reading and pedagogy (Cormack, 2011). More needs to be done in the historical investigation of reading pedagogy, however, if a properly informed historical imagination is to be taken seriously in the social field of educational policy and practice.

Drawing on a range of historical sources, the paper looks specifically at what appears in the historical record as a distinctive formulation, or trope: *the reading lesson*. In our research, this is examined across various accounts, in terms of description, commentary, and materials, to reveal a set of striking features regarding the politico-ethical character of not just reading pedagogy (ie the teaching of reading), but also, we argue, literacy education more generally. The concept of the ‘reading lesson’ as it has been mobilised historically is introduced here, and traced through a range of key documents with a particular bearing on Australian educational history, although the field of reference is much broader than that, with a view to outlining how that trope stands in for reading pedagogy as a distinctive social program.

What can be said, at the outset, is that a consistent story emerges from the historical record, a story of *materials, methods and lessons*, brought together in various combinations, but with a remarkable regularity, a coherent pattern of inter-relations<sup>1</sup>. This paper focuses on the concept of the lesson – more specifically, the reading lesson – tracing its emergence at different times and in different forms, across the period at issue. While we focus initially here on the first half of the twentieth century, the history is much more extensive than that, although this can only be gestured at here. We have also become very interested in fact in the genealogy of the term itself (‘lesson’), now seeming so commonsensical as to exist outside of Thought altogether, or at least to allow its silent mobilisation in utterances and statements – in discourse. Our aim, in part, is therefore to defamiliarise the lesson, to unsettle or interrupt its conventional usage.

This paper emerges out of the work of a recent funded research project addressed specifically to the history of reading pedagogy in Australia, with particular focus on beginning reading and the early years of schooling<sup>2</sup>. It is, however, directly related to

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<sup>1</sup> For an initial exploration of reading materials in educational history, see Patterson, Cormack & Green (2011).

<sup>2</sup> ARC Discovery project (2009-2010) – ‘Teaching Reading in Australia: An Historical Investigation of Early Reading Pedagogy, the Figure of the Teacher, and Literacy Education’ (DP0987648). Chief investigators: Phillip Cormack (UniSA), Bill Green (CSU), Annette Patterson (QUT).

an earlier and indeed ongoing project, also funded originally by the Australian Research Council, addressed to the history of English teaching, teacher education and public schooling in Australia. Although that study also makes particular reference to the first half of the twentieth century, it is located within a larger concern with English teaching and curriculum history. That is, while the focus in the current project is on how school reading is first taught and learnt, and hence with beginning reading and early reading pedagogy, our larger interest is with literacy pedagogy more generally, and with thinking historically about reading pedagogy. Links are to be made therefore with a now quite considerable body of scholarly work in English teaching and curriculum history, particularly in the context of Australian schooling (eg Green & Beavis [eds], 1996; Green & Reid, 2002; Green, 1993; Cormack, 2008; Green & Cormack, 2008), and more specifically with the role and significance, historically, of 'reading' in secondary English teaching. In that regard, a range of questions can be asked: What is the full and proper scope of a focus on reading pedagogy? Does it extend from beginning reading to the high school? How is reading taught in high school English classrooms? How is it understood historically? Are there important unacknowledged links between beginning reading ('learning to read') in the early phase of schooling and teaching reading (presumably, 'reading to learn') in the high school, in the context of English teaching more particularly but also with regard to literacy learning across the school curriculum? Why indeed is reading seen, historically and institutionally, as *foundational* for literacy and schooling alike? The paper thus seeks to contribute to the educational history of reading and literacy, as well as adding to existing work on analogous tropes such as the 'literature lesson' (Hunter, 1991) and the 'grammar lesson' (Green & Hodgens, 1996), along with the 'writing lesson' (Derrida, 1976; Green, 1993), as insights and arguments pertaining to the larger history and politics of literacy and English in education and society. As such, it is likely to have interest and relevance well beyond Australia, and certainly for scholarly work on reading pedagogy and English teaching in the Anglophone world and indeed hopefully for educational policy and practice alike.

Certainly such a study has implications for understanding the social and moral regulation at work in popular-public schooling, from its very outset. One way of thinking about this is to consider how the lessons of Empire are realised 'out there', in the disparate colonies and countries of the English-speaking world (McCulloch, 1995). Another is to take account of the convergence of technology, religion and government. However this is understood, it is clear that that reading is a moral-ethical practice on and of the self, as is the reading lesson itself. Etymologically, lesson refers to a portion of sacred scripture, or a book to be studied – that is, a matter of content – as much as it does to a period (ie a 'portion') of teaching. The Oxford English Dictionary is illuminating in this regard. It turns out to be linked to 'reading', in fact. It ranges from referring to "the action of reading itself", a reading, and moreover a public reading, or lecture (or course of lectures) through "a portion of Scripture or other religious writing read at divine service". But it also refers to more clearly educational uses and contexts, "something that is or is to be learnt", as in "a portion of a book or dictated matter, to be studied for repetition to the teacher". Further: "A continuous portion of teaching given to a pupil or class at one time; one of the portions into which a course of instruction in any subject is divided [...]". Finally: "An occurrence from which instruction may be gained; an instructive example; a rebuke or punishment calculated to prevent a repetition of the offence" (*OED*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., p843). Religion thus links with education, as regimes of power. The reading lesson is

at once disciplinary and pastoral, an exercise in artful redundancy, the articulation of conduct and disposition, a (mundane) practice of government. There is more that can be said in this regard; but for now this will need to suffice, as we turn to consider some episodes in the educational history of reading in Australia and beyond.

### **Reading (Pedagogy) in Australia**

The 1930s was a period of great energy and innovation in Australian educational history. This is notwithstanding the hardships and often devastating effects of the Great Depression, especially with regard to women teachers (Seddon, 1988), and increasing fiscal stringencies across the various school systems. Campbell and Sherington (2006) indicate that the period was the beginning of the second of two phases of “intensive educational reform discourse and activity ... in the first half of the twentieth century”. One occurred at the turn of the new century, while the other was more drawn out and intermittent, with “many of the ideas broached in the 1930s and 1940s only receiv[ing] implementation in the 1950s and 1960s” (Campbell & Sherington, 2006: 193-194). These phases are key manifestations, as they describe it, of “twentieth-century educational progressive thought” (Campbell & Sherington, 2006: 194). New initiatives emerged in a range of areas and respects, albeit unevenly, across the country. In Victoria, for instance, a new curriculum for primary schools was released, under the leadership of George S. Browne, and heavily influenced by the new Progressivism.

What about reading pedagogy? Reeves (1996: 194) suggests that the 1930s was when “reading and reading instruction became the subject of educational research in its own right in Australia”. Moreover, this was a new view of “reading as science”, with “educational research reflect[ing] the scientific inquiry approach developed in the US and elsewhere” (p194). This has continued to the present day, in fact – its most recent policy manifestation in Australia is the *Teaching Reading* Report (DEST, 2005), as we have discussed elsewhere (Cormack, 2011). Reeves points specifically to the publication in 1936 of a comprehensive primary English Syllabus for Western Australian schools, which formed part of *The Curriculum for Primary Schools* (Education Department, Western Australia, 1936). This document clearly heralded an emergent ‘scientification’ of reading pedagogy, and she notes in this regard the career of Fred J. Schonell, “a West Australian-born teacher” who became the doyen of the scientific approach to reading pedagogy. Beginning in the 1930s, his work “came to fruition in the 1940s”, representing, as she puts it, “the ultimate scientific approach to teaching reading at the time” (Reeves, 1996: 198). Schonell’s work was to influence the field for decades to come.

The 1936 WA Primary Curriculum is also of interest here for its explicit presentation of the so-called ‘reading lesson’<sup>3</sup>. This is described in great detail and, as Reeves (1996: 197) notes, is “very directive in prescribing the structure of the reading lesson: an Introduction, First Reading, Second Reading, Third Reading, followed by Seat Work”. “Steps in Method” are presented, beginning with a preparatory stage

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting here that this term was employed in the earlier curriculum document, *The Small School Curriculum*, published in 1926 (“The Reading Lesson” – pp 37-39). In the section on Senior Classes, reference is made to the notion of ‘reading power’, which is directly linked to learning: “The development of such power is the only justification of the reading lesson in the senior classes” (Education Department, Western Australia, 1926).

familiarising the pupils with words that are likely to be difficult or new to them, and effort put into “creating a favourable attitude” – “one of co-operation”. This is described thus:

In a short conversation the new story will be associated with the familiar experiences of the pupils, the pictures illustrating the story will be examined, and several questions will be suggested by the pictures – questions that can be solved only by reading the story. The teacher here appeals to the curiosity of the pupils (Education Department, Western Australia, 1936: 47).

There is much that is recognisable in this passage. This is not just in the case of primary or early childhood teachers, or those specifically charged with teaching children to read, but also, we would suggest, for English teachers, working in secondary classrooms. That is, this ‘reading lesson’ has a distinctly modern flavour about it, in some senses at least. Consider for instance *what* is being read: a “story”. Moreover it is illustrated in some fashion; it might even be a picture-book. Earlier, the first stated aim for teaching reading in the junior classes (“Classes I-II”) is “[t]o cultivate a taste for literature” (p46). The “Notes on Reading” describe Reading as “a key subject”, moreover one “... open[ing] to the individual the doors of vast accumulation of racial experience”(p29) – a stark reminder of the ever-present relationship, historically, between language and power, literature and race (Morgan, 1990; Green & Cormack, 2008). Reading is described as “a great socializing instrument”, followed by this extended quotation (which is unidentified):

“Only by reading the great literature of the world has man discovered his universal brotherhood. Recognition of relationships of mind and soul appears, and one’s personal experiences are supplemented by imagination until he may live the life of all peoples. Ethically, this is a wonderful privilege. Only by such vicarious experiences can one arrive at the human understanding which enables him to apply the ‘Golden Rule’” (Education Department, Western Australia, 1936: 29).

Teaching reading aims at “training the pupil to use this wonderful instrument for his personal development, and for social service” (p29), moreover “enabl[ing] him to use it effectively for the purpose of obtaining information and enjoyment from the printed page; and that this information and enjoyment will be pursued for personal and social ends” (p30). There is something very interesting going on here: reading is indeed for personal, individual benefit, but it is also for “social service” and to realise “social ends” – a social good. This is a register of various matters, including the pervasive presence of populational rationality, something that has in fact emerged as a major theme for our inquiry.

There is, moreover, an intriguing amalgam of ‘scientific’ and ‘literary’ orientations and emphases in this Syllabus. While in the earlier years, direct reference is made to ‘phonics’ and the like, to “training the ear” (p42) and “silent” as well as “oral reading”, and to testing, as well as to ‘story’, etc, later sections for the Senior Classes explicitly refer to “the development of literary appreciation” and to “the organization of extensive and intensive courses of reading” (p60). ‘Story’ leads, easily, into

'literature'. A later section is entitled "Literature", opening with quotes from J. Dover Wilson and Stephen J. Brown. The point is made that "[i]t is well to begin by asking ourselves what we expect from the literary side of our English training". The answer is given as follows:

First perhaps should come the enjoyment of our rich heritage; second the realization of its beauty, variety and extent; third an understanding of the wonder and power of genius. Next we may consider the benefits of, direct or indirect, which may be derived from the study of literature as distinguished from mere reading for pleasure and vicarious experience. Knowledge of facts and their treatment, increased vocabulary, exercise of imagination are among them (Education Department, Western Australia, 1936: 69).

This is the characteristic tenor of much literary ideology, and is familiar enough in the historical record of English teaching (Green, 1990; Morgan, 1990). It is discernible moreover in the passage already cited, above, referring to a much earlier stage of reading and schooling, in the emphasis placed on "developing a favourable attitude", on "co-operation" and "conversation", on engaging children's interest and provoking their "curiosity". Importantly there is work to be done in this regard both by the teacher and the text, the 'story' – an alliance, an affinity. Teacher *and* text work upon the child, together teaching reading. This is an exemplary expression of what has been described as the combined operation of pedagogic and literary authority – the Teacher and the Text. In this way, a reciprocity is to be observed between the 'reading lesson' and the 'literature lesson', even as, within the hierarchical economy of the school, the former modulates into the latter.

Almost two decades earlier, the Newbolt Report, a key document in English curriculum history, was released in the United Kingdom (Board of Education, 1921 – henceforth, 'Newbolt'). Although it is often recalled as referring more specifically to secondary education, its address in fact is much wider. Indeed it is best seen as speaking the relationship between culture and education more generally, as well as specifically to the state of English teaching and the English subjects. It is also acknowledged as highly literary in its orientation, and as embracing a view of 'Literature' writ large, with patent echoes of both Matthew Arnold and William Wordsworth (Reid, 2004). Its understanding of 'English' embraces schooling as a whole, and moreover an important continuity is posited from the beginning to the end of formal schooling. A chapter is devoted specifically to elementary education, moreover, and to English in the primary school, and we now turn to that.

The teaching of reading is clearly recognised in the Report as a central feature of primary English teaching. The now well-known aphorism that "every teacher is a teacher of English, because every teacher is a teacher in English", is particularly apposite for the elementary school, with "[t]he whole of the time table ... available for the teaching of English" (Newbolt, p63). 'Reading' had a crucial role in the curriculum, although its pedagogical meaning was being transformed:

The essentials, in addition to speech-training, are that the children should understand and feel what they read, and that the

teacher himself should be a good reader. From the very beginning, reading should be treated, not as a mechanical trick, but as a means of getting at ideas (p80).

More is asked of the child than simple decoding, then, and similarly the teacher is reconstituted, being obliged to become “a good reader himself, capable of showing by his own example that reading is not a mechanical process, but a social and humane accomplishment, and a method of interpreting literature” (p81). Beyond a certain point, moreover, it is suggested that ‘Reading’ as such be subordinated to ‘Literature’:

[I]n view of the associations which have gathered around the term ‘Reading’, we suggest that when the mere technique, the recognition and use of the symbols, has been mastered, the lesson should be called ‘Literature’ rather than Reading (p81).

The ‘reading lesson’ is thereby absorbed into the ‘literature lesson’. It would seem too that, discursively as well as rhetorically, the ‘mechanical’ is hereby set against what can be described as the ‘poetical’ – later, for instance, it is asserted that “[t]here is no lesson like the poetry lesson for producing that intimacy between teacher and class which makes school a happy place” (p87). As we have seen, seeing school constructed as “a happy place” is important: an environment conducive for both learning and becoming.

Two things are noteworthy here. Firstly, there is an undeniable implication here that reading as such pertains more specifically to learning (and indeed “mastering”) “the mere technique, the recognition and use of the symbols” – the ‘how to’ of reading. The shift to the ‘what’ of reading draws in and through literature, or literary texts. There is little sense in the Report of the actual process of learning to read, or of teaching children to read, at least in the earliest stages of engaging with print.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the point is made that reading is also to be identified, still, with “reading aloud”, notwithstanding the observation that this had been “criticised most severely” (p79) in the submissions to the Committee. ‘Literature lessons’, in contrast, are associated with ‘books’, with ‘content’, and with “the importance of wide and varied reading” (p82). Moreover: “The main objects of the literature lessons will be (i) increased command of the language, (ii) the acquisition of knowledge, (iii) appreciation and enjoyment of literature” (p82). Crucially it is the teacher’s presence and participation that is stressed, viewed as much morally as pedagogically (“the great crux is the personality of the teacher” – pp. 83-84). A strong emphasis is placed on the risks and even dangers of a reading pedagogy that underplays or undervalues the role and significance of the (reading) teacher, and especially in those circumstances for instance “*when literature is taught by the wrong person*” (p84 – our emphasis).

Once again we are reminded of the importance of the figure of the Teacher within the technological complex of both reading and schooling, and of what has been described as the teacher-pupil couple, or “a special kind of teacher-student relationship”

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<sup>4</sup> In this regard, it is useful to note the Bullock Report (1975), another key text in English curriculum history and indeed in educational history more generally. More explicit and extended treatment is to be found there of reading pedagogy; however, there is no space to address this here.

(Patterson, 2000: 289). We have already seen how ‘teacher’ and ‘text’ come together in curriculum discourse. (This leaves, of course, the ‘reader-text’ relation still to be thematised.) Such pairings must be mapped onto each other, however, and indeed are contingent on each other. Hence reading pedagogy is perhaps best realised in terms of a programmatic ‘triplet’: *teacher/text/reader*. In his account of ‘the literature lesson’, Hunter (1991: 67) refers to “the specific tripartite relation between teacher, student and text”. While the details of that account may need to be supplemented, nonetheless how that relation is played out historically is obviously relevant here. The Report was certainly read and referenced in Australia, although the extent of this could only be verified by a detailed scrutiny of materials cited in teacher education curricula and the like, which we haven’t yet done. But its view of English and of reading would certainly appear to be influential, where it was not simply congruent with prevailing ideas of the period.

An influential earlier publication, Charles Long’s “The Aim and Method of the Reading Lesson” (1904) brought together much of the available literature on reading pedagogy, although he would seem particularly influenced by the American educator, F. W. Parker (Rogers, 1985: 165). Long’s monograph has been described as “the most thorough to this time on the teaching of reading” and as “fill[ing] a great need”, and it was apparently “reviewed with praise”. Moreover: “From the time of publication it was used as a standard text in training teachers in reading” (Rogers, 1985: 165). A South Australian school inspector called it a “valuable little book”, observing that it was something “which every teacher would do well to mark, learn, and inwardly digest” (*EG*, September, 1904, p134). What is immediately striking still about the monograph, originally presented as a university extension lecture<sup>5</sup>, is firstly how quickly it moves from the practical-technical to the moral-ethical register, and secondly, how invested it is in the discourse on ‘method’. This can be seen in the Preface, where we find the following:

The many methods of teaching reading (particularly the first steps) described in text-books on school method in general, and the boundless belief in, and extravagant claims on behalf of, certain special methods by their advocates (in some cases ignorant or unmindful of primary public school conditions), have had, I feel sure, the effect of befogging teachers (Long, 1904: vi).

He goes on to refer to the importance of children acquiring “a taste for reading” (vi), as a key principle of reading pedagogy. While this latter theme emerges across the monograph as a whole, it is noticeable that very quickly Long proceeds to expound his own preferred ‘method’: “[T]here is available, at the present time, a method which has been formulated after much trial and discussion, and which is, it seems to me, eminently sound and workable” (pp 10-11). As he puts it: “if teachers will only adopt the correct aim, and put into practice the method that I shall describe, the much sought-after improvement will be assured...” (p11). This ‘method’, derived as he indicates largely from Parker and based on the so-called “Quincy Methods”, is moreover avowedly oriented to the normal primary school setting, and yet consistent

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<sup>5</sup> An extension lecture was one advertised and available to teachers not enrolled in a university course.

with the New Education, particularly in its emphasis on ‘self-activity’. Reading is for understanding, for meaning, for thinking – for “getting thought by means of written or printed words arranged in sentences, and oral reading is for giving the thought to another ... secur[ing] the thought” (p12).

What is intriguing, moreover, is that the focus shifts rather quickly “from teaching the first steps in reading”, and what is presented as “the preparatory training of the child to read with ease” (p14) in the early years, to the upper primary school, which in effect remains the reference-point from then on. This shift is presented in the following way: “In the lower classes of a primary school, the technical elements of the art demand more attention than the spiritual”. Hence, “to secure ready recognition of the word and distinctiveness of utterance is then the teacher’s main objective” (p13). Word recognition and reading aloud are crucial features of beginning reading, it would seem, together with regular and repeated practice. “What the method really is”, Long writes, “is a combination of the word, the sentence, and the phonic systems” (p18). This is familiar enough; and so too is the pedagogy outlined for the upper (primary) school, which emphasises meaning and context, and even what much later would be described as ‘wholes’ over ‘parts’: “The primary aim, as far as the reading lesson is concerned, is to find a meaning that fits the context” (p21).

What follows however is an extraordinary passage, as “an illustration of the method”. This can be reasonably taken, we suggest, as a fictive-descriptive account, a quasi-ethnographic history of a reading lesson, or perhaps a series of them, linked thematically. The focus is Byron’s “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage” – in itself, a significant selection and an ambitious text for a primary class, one might well surmise, at least from our present vantage-point. In actual fact, it is “some stanzas” from the poem “that together form a perfect unity (a quality desirable in all such material), and constitute a masterpiece of poetic description” (p23). The lesson as it unfolds involves pre-reading activities, silent reading to familiarise oneself with its content and “to get the thought”, pronunciation work, practice in delivery, and emphasis on comprehension. With regard to “the poem as a whole”, the teacher presumably directs the pupils with questions such as these: “Of what is the poem a description? Where did the storm take place?” – following which, “[t]he teacher should show a picture of Lake Geneva, ascertain that his pupils know its position and that of Mt Jura, and tell them that Byron wrote the verses *they are going to read*, after witnessing a thunderstorm, when he was living in the neighbourhood of Geneva” (p25 – my added emphasis). We can ask at this point: *When* is a reading? What constitutes ‘reading’ here? What makes some activity ‘not-reading’? – because much has in fact been and is happening with regard to engagement with the text, these “stanzas”, surely. The teacher’s role is clearly marked out, as are the steps in working through the poem. Under the heading ‘Comprehension’, a set of twenty-four questions is presented (eg “Do you think the poet is right in the idea he seems to have that, in the interval just before a thunderstorm, the odour of flowers is more evident than at other times?”). Regarding ‘delivery’, among other observations and questions: “Should the last line be read slowly or quickly? Why?”.

Reading aloud is conceived as central to comprehension<sup>6</sup>, and thus to understanding and appreciation, and providing space for it to occur individually in large classes is an organisational skill teachers need to develop. However, “the doing of it as I have described is the teacher’s most potent means of imparting a taste for reading literature – literature that is the glory of the nation, and of the race” (p37). This neatly frames the moral project of the (reading) lesson. Long goes on, moreover, to distinguish sharply between literature (“books that provide something more than temporary entertainment”) and “the ocean of printed matter” which surrounds the child. The teacher’s task consists in “training [the child] to appreciate and value what is good and fine”. The pedagogic import is clear: “What is there in this lesson that teaches me something that I did not know before? What is there in it beautiful, or grand, or improving? Does the selection as a whole teach me anything that will tend to make me wiser, or better, or stronger than before?” (Long, 2004, p37). This is, then, the work that goes into producing a distinctive subjectivity, a ‘reader’ – moreover, a *good* reader. The child becomes the teacher, via the text, an inter-subject. Teacher, text and child work together to produce what must be, in the service of the nation, the race, and the British Empire. “We learn in order to read, as well as read in order to learn” (Long, 2004, p38), and moreover in reading we learn how to be – hence the centrality of the reading lesson to the project of schooling.

### **An International Phenomenon?**

While clearly in circulation in first half of the twentieth century, then, the trope of the reading lesson can be traced back well before this time. Our research reaches back into much earlier periods, both in Australia and overseas, most notably in the United States and the United Kingdom. This is, indeed, a good instance of the transnational movement and flow of educational discourse and practices, which certainly included pedagogies and policies (Cormack). More specifically, there was a long history of ongoing transactions of this kind between Australia and Britain, as a key aspect of colonial and imperial process (McCulloch, 1995). This was broadened, consequently, to take specific account of the role and significance of the United States in this regard, in accordance with the rise and consolidation of the Anglophone ‘West’. However, Europe (especially the Germanic states) clearly figured notably in the educational imagination, and was a regular source of insight. What is interesting is how often there are quite detailed accounts of reading lessons, as well of kinds of lessons marked by subject matter. A few examples must suffice.

Horace Mann, the distinguished American educator, describes a lesson he observed in a Prussian classroom, during his European tour, as reported in 1846. As he writes:

In the case I am now to describe, I entered a classroom of sixty children, of about six years of age. The children were just taking their seats, all smiles and expectation. They had been at school but a few weeks, but long enough to have contracted a love for it. The teacher took his station before them, and after making a playful remark which excited a light titter around the room, and effectually arrested attention, he gave a signal for silence. After

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<sup>6</sup> That this emphasis on speech with regard to reading pedagogy has a long history, extends at least back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is demonstrated by the Australian historian Alan Atkinson (2007), in his account of speech, schooling and the nation.

waiting a moment, during which every countenance was composed and every noise hushed, he made a prayer consisting of a single sentence, asking that as they had come together to learn, they might be good and diligent. He then spoke to them of the beautiful day, asked them what they knew of the seasons, referred to the different kinds of fruit-tress then in bearing, and questioned them upon the use of tress in constructing houses, furniture, etc. Frequently, he threw in sportive remarks which enlivened the whole school, but without ever producing the slightest symptom of disorder. During this familiar conversation, which lasted about twenty minutes, there was nothing frivolous or trifling in the manner of the teacher; that manner was dignified though playful, and the little jets of laughter which he caused the children occasionally to throw out, were much more favourable to a receptive state of mind than jets of tears (Mann, 1846, 95-96).

Much can be said about this passage, which opens the account. The teacher's presence, his comportment, are crucial: he "[takes] his station before them", the pupils, the class. He commands ("arrests") their attention, and engages them in "this familiar conversation" of the world about them, his manner "dignified but playful". The lesson itself is many things, with "elements of reading, spelling, writing, grammar, and drawing, interspersed with anecdotes and not a little general information" (p100). It focuses on the word-concept 'house', as *sign*, to which the children are introduced and which they come to understand, in orchestrated usage. "The responses of the children were sometimes individual, and sometimes simultaneous, according to a signal given by the master" (pp 97-98). The word is mobilised in various ways, orally and on slates and paper, in exposition and explanation ("The first question was, what kind of a house was that on the black-board?"). The Word becomes World.

As Mann concludes: "[T]he method I have described leads to conversation", moreover "conversation with an intelligent teacher" (p102). Much is gained through this "conversation", this exchange, which educates, illuminates, improves. It makes for the child to become a literate social being:

A child trained in this way will never commit those absurd and ludicrous mistakes into which uneducated men of some sense not unfrequently fall, viz., that of mis-matching their words and ideas,-- of hanging, as it were, the garments of a giant upon the body of a pigmy, or of forcing a pigmy's dress upon the huge limbs of a giant. Appropriate diction should clothe just ideas, as a tasteful and substantial garb fits a graceful and vigorous form (Mann, 1846: 102-103).

From the United States, a further example of the reading lesson is provided in Patridge's account of the "Quincy Methods", later in the same century. Chapter 5 is entitled "A Lesson in Reading". It opens with a statement of *purpose* ("To train the pupils to get thought from printed sentences"), *teacher's preparation* ("Looking through the story to know what words it contains, with which the children are

unacquainted; and arranging the manner of giving the lesson”), *pupils’ preparation* (“All the reading that they have ever done”), and *plan*, which is presented in six steps or stages. The movement here is from contextualisation (“Have the children tell all that they can think of about the pictures, and thus arouse an interest in the text of the lesson”) through various language activities (ie not just ‘silent reading’) to production (“[t]he final text which tells if the word is known,-- that they can use it properly in written work” [pp 371-372]). Following this is an extended account of a lesson, and a classroom in action, effectively dramatised in prose. Again, much can be said of this account, as a representation of reading pedagogy. We want to make just a few points.

Firstly, the class is divided into ‘divisions’, and the main part of this ‘scene’ is about the teacher working with “the third division” – presumably a management strategy, enabling her to engage with large classes. The pupils in this group move to the teacher’s “platform”, lining up before her; they are working with “some second readers” (p372), She asks them if they remember “the lovely story we read yesterday”, and having ascertained that they do (and moreover that they’d like the experience repeated) she then indicates nonetheless that “it would be better to read something new” on this occasion. The ‘lesson’ unfolds from there.

But it is worth noting how the term ‘lesson’ itself is deployed here, with one pupil described as hunting through his reader and “[finding] the lesson referred to”, that is, the previous one, which is presumably what is called a ‘story’. Later, the teacher is described as “bringing her wandering talkers back to the lesson” (p373). Is this referring to the new ‘story’ they are engaging with, now, or to the teaching-learning activity that is organised around the text? Secondly, after a long presentation of what happens as, together, teacher and pupils work through it, closure is announced (“That will be all we shall have time for. Now you may go’, notifies the teacher, and at the word, the reading class disperses” [p387]), although a writing class now ensues, with the same children. However, the larger ‘reading lesson’ is not over yet. There is still ‘Clarence’ to deal with – an errant boy, it would seem, and a member not of “the third division” but certainly of the larger class group. “The reading lesson is over, but Clarence is not yet disposed of...” (p389). What follows is an extraordinary depiction of pedagogic power, of symbolic violence – but we shall leave the matter there.

## **Conclusion**

Our main point is simply this: These are accounts of reading lessons, yes, but much more is going on than simply learning to read *per se*. Or rather, learning to read must be understood more comprehensively and reflexively than might be assumed, if we were indeed to buy into a commonsense, unproblematised view of reading pedagogy. Teaching reading emerges from the historical record as a complex social practice, deeply inscribed in a force-field of discourses, programmes and effects. Moreover, there is something resonantly symbolic in the figure of the reading lesson itself, signifying at once power and desire, and always the dreams and designs of government. And yet we are returned again, in the end, to the mundane practice(s) of subjectivity, in the situated work of teachers, texts and readers.

What becomes clear, however, is the extent to which, in the period up to and to some extent including the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reading pedagogy was above all else a moral project, and a matter of moral regulation. Reading was in the service of becoming docile yet productive bodies and the formation of appropriate forms of

subject-citizenry. Learning to read was about entering into print culture and the Text of the Law – to operate within the ambit of someone else’s text. This was notwithstanding constant incitements to enjoyment and investment, to engagement, since this was as much a strategy of co-optive cooperation as meaningful and significant in itself, as has been argued in the case of the history of English teaching (Brass, 2011a, 2011b). Historically, this is further evidence, then, of what might be termed the contradictory politics of reading pedagogy. Subsequent developments and debates in the teaching of reading, over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and subsequently, indicate a shift from this moral project to one based in science, and more particularly the scientific project of psychology. This was consistent, of course, with the development of Education as a discipline; it might even be speculated that the new educational industry of testing and measurement was an important factor in shaping and informing Education’s disciplinary destiny.

And what of Literature, and the literature lesson, as the other side of and counter-point to the reading lesson? How was literary-oriented reading pedagogy re-positioned and re-organised as an explicit of English teaching, particularly although by no means solely in the secondary school?<sup>7</sup> It needs to be said that even in secondary English teaching, a recent emphasis on cultural training and moral regulation emerges as a counter-discourse, specifically developed under the rubric of “the reading lesson” (Mellor & Patterson, 1994). All this raises various questions about the relationship between ‘literature’ and ‘reading’, English teaching and reading pedagogy, Art and Science. That remains a matter for further exploration. Suffice it to say, then, that the reading lesson, as outlined here, remains a powerful trope in educational history, with ongoing relevance and resonance in the Present: a reminder of the complexities of government and the intransigence of the social. What is significant about the reading lesson, in its historical insistence? It signifies a reassuring regularity in the practice of schooling and the project of literacy, a pattern readily imposed upon the potential chaos of the classroom, as a microcosm of the work involved always in organising and regulating the social world.

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<sup>7</sup> Due acknowledgement needs to be made here of the resurgence of a literary emphasis in primary school reading pedagogy in the 1960s and 70s, and subsequently, for instance in literature-based reading programs and a renewed emphasis on children’s literature (Holdaway, 1979; Meek [ed], 1985).

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