

Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This may be the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

Patterson, Annette, Cormack, Phillip, & Green, William
(2012)
The child, the text and the teacher: reading primers and reading instruction.
Paedagogica Historica, *48*(2), pp. 185-196.

This file was downloaded from: https://eprints.qut.edu.au/48007/

© Consult author(s) regarding copyright matters

This work is covered by copyright. Unless the document is being made available under a Creative Commons Licence, you must assume that re-use is limited to personal use and that permission from the copyright owner must be obtained for all other uses. If the document is available under a Creative Commons License (or other specified license) then refer to the Licence for details of permitted re-use. It is a condition of access that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights. If you believe that this work infringes copyright please provide details by email to qut.copyright@qut.edu.au

Notice: *Please note that this document may not be the Version of Record (i.e. published version) of the work. Author manuscript versions (as Submitted for peer review or as Accepted for publication after peer review) can be identified by an absence of publisher branding and/or typeset appearance. If there is any doubt, please refer to the published source.*

https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2011.644302

The child, the text and the teacher: Reading primers and reading instruction

Annette Patterson, School of Cultural and Language Studies in Education, QUT
Phil Cormack, School of Education, University of South Australia
Bill Green, Faculty of Education, Charles Sturt University

Keywords: reading pedagogy, reading curriculum, literature teaching, sixteenth century reading primers.

Abstract
From the late sixteenth century, in response to the problem of how best to teach children to read, a variety of texts such as primers, spellers and readers were produced in England for vernacular instruction. This paper describes how these materials were used by teachers to develop first, a specific religious understanding according to the stricture of the time and second, a moral reading practice that provided the child with a guide to secular conduct. The analysis focuses on the use of these texts as a productive means for shaping the child-reader in the context of newly emerging educational spaces which fostered a particular, morally formative relation among teacher, child and text.

Detailed historical accounts produced during the twentieth century have provided the modern reader with thorough reviews of various aspects of vernacular reading and reading instruction[1]. These accounts include the types of texts used in England[2] and America[3] and the methods used in reading instruction classrooms.[4] A change, however, in theoretical orientation occurred when research linking basal reading programs with the rationalisation of reading instruction and the deskilling of teachers began to appear

[1] Literacy historians will not need to be reminded that for many centuries, reading was taught separately from writing outside the grammar schools or specialist training schools. This discussion of teaching reading in the vernacular assumes this restricted definition of literacy which also was highly gendered in that girls rarely were taught to write even though they were often taught to read. Boys were taught to read and could then be taught to write. The teaching of reading and writing simultaneously was a radical nineteenth century departure from previous methods and pedagogy.
[2] Frank Davies, *Teaching Reading in Early England* (London: Pitman, 1973).
[3] Charles Carpenter, *History of American Schoolbooks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963); E. Jennifer Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).
[4] Nila Banton Smith, *American Reading Instruction* (Newark DE: International Reading Association, 1938); Anne-Marie Chartier "Cultural Perspective on Literacy Teaching and Methods for Young Readers," *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* Vol. 44, no. 1–2 (2008).

during the 1980s.[5] Other research conducted during the 1980s and 1990s was critical of basal reading programs[6] and of school subject "English" curriculum reforms that involved an agenda driven by neoliberal ideologies that focused on the technical proficiency of reading teachers[7] and on a narrow set of measurable outcomes.[8] This body of critical work questioned the cultural and social dimensions of reading instruction and explored the ideological positioning of the content of the materials used for reading instruction, and was informed by an analysis of the social and political effects of content in relation to the child-reader. These researchers paid particular attention to what was included and what was excluded from both the curriculum and the materials selected for reading instruction, and to the ways in which these omissions positioned both the reading teacher and the child reader as teachers and readers of a particular type.

The discussion that follows takes a different track into the territory of vernacular reading instruction by suggesting that texts are socially productive and not merely repressive of the subject. The question of interest is not whether a text is ideological and therefore deceptive or repressive. The issue, rather is how texts help form the type of citizen considered desirable at any particular point in time. The paper explores the idea that organised practices involving texts (such as the teaching of reading) contribute to the management of both children and teachers. It addresses this idea first through a brief history of research on early reading books produced in England to teach children to read in English and second through a more detailed exploration of the emergence of the school primer from the time of the Reformation. The paper looks specifically at how that emergence was linked to early attempts at

[5] Kenneth S. Goodman, Patrick Shannon, Y. S. Freeman and S. Murphy, *Report Card on Basal readers* (Katonah, NY: Richard C. Owen, 1988).
[6] Caroline Baker and Peter Freebody, *Children's First School Books* (Oxford,UK/Cambridge Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Allan Luke, *Literacy, Textbooks and Ideology: Postwar Literacy Instruction and the Mythology of Dick and Jane* (London/New York: Falmer Press, 1988).
[7] Roger Openshaw, "Forward to the Past in New Zealand Teacher Education," *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 25, no. 2, (1999): 111–22.
[8] Janet Soler, "Past and Present Technocratic Solutions to Teaching Literacy: Implications for New Zealand Primary Teachers and Literacy Programmes," *Curriculum Studies*, 7, no. 3 (1999): 523–40.

forming public, popular or mass schooling and suggests some ways in which the production of the personal and public comportment of the child-reader was linked to reading instruction.

Research on school readers

The change in orientation of reading instruction research that occurred during the late 1980s was important in that it demonstrated the links between schooling, society, culture and history in a way that encouraged later researchers to focus on the personal and public effects of particular practices. This work included Patrick Shannon's analysis of commercially prepared materials for reading instruction in America,[9] Caroline Baker and Peter Freebody's study of Australian reading materials,[10] and Allan Luke's account of reading instruction materials used in British Columbia.[11] Caroline Baker and Peter Freebody[12] applied a combination of statistical and textual analysis to the content of a beginning reading corpus of 163 basal and supplementary readers used in a "representative educational division of New South Wales, Australia" comprising "65 classes of children in their first and second years of schooling."[13] The researchers provided a useful interpretative analysis of the social worlds of the texts, including, among other things, the specific constructions of gender and representations of animals. They concluded that basal readers can be thought of as "devices through which adults display a preferred version of social order and the place of children in that order."[14]

Allan Luke also examined the cultural and ideological dimensions of reading instruction materials used in schools. Drawing on data from reading instruction in British Columbia from 1946 to 1960, his

[9] Patrick Shannon, *Broken Promises: Reading Instruction in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1989).
[10] Baker and Freebody, *Children's First School Books*.
[11] Allan Luke, *Literacy, Textbooks, and Ideology: Postwar Literacy Instruction and the Mythology of Dick and Jane* (London/New York: Falmer Press, 1988).
[12] Baker and Freebody, *Children's First School Books,* xxii.
[13] Ibid., xxiii.
[14] Ibid., 188–89.

analysis was located within a more explicitly Marxist framework than that of Baker and Freebody. He problematised the assumed association of schooling with literacy and questioned the common assumption that economic progress and social equality result from school literacy practices.[15] A similarly critical perspective informed Patrick Shannon's work. In his discussion of the historical and social role of commercially prepared materials for reading instruction, he concluded that the various components of a basal reading series in America formed "a technology developed to standardize the teaching practices in elementary schools according to the science of reading instruction."[16] However, he argued, no "science of reading instruction" (with its implications of objectivity) existed; rather, reading instruction itself was "a historical and social construct" linked to "political and economic circumstances."[17] A similar point was argued by Janet Soler, who noted that "English as a curriculum subject and its related components of reading and writing can be seen as the product of social and political forces."[18] Historical accounts of reading instruction informed by critical theory and located within a cultural studies framework thus have provided a lively corrective to an historical tradition that favoured empirical or descriptive accounts. The critical work has proved useful in helping researchers to think through the social and cultural implications of particular educational decisions and practices.

One of the ideas explored through this paper is that reading instruction is linked to practices for producing "the self". Writing in 1938, Nila Barton Smith commented that the reading teacher of the future would be engaged in "developing superior ability in reading, fostering independence in study, encouraging depth in thinking, nourishing values, refining sensitivities, and establishing a lifelong thirst for learning."[19] The teaching of reading, in her view, was not simply about learning decoding skills or

[15] Luke, *Literacy, Textbooks, and Ideology*, 13.
[16] Shannon, *Broken Promises*, 42.
[17] Ibid., 43
[18] Janet Soler, "Renegotiating Cultural Authority: Imperial Culture and the New Zealand Primary School Curriculum in the 1930s," *History of Education*, 35, no.1 (2006), 11.
[19] Smith, *American Reading Instruction*, 13.

becoming expert in deciphering text. Of the six aspects of the teaching of reading cited by Smith, only one – "developing superior ability in reading"[20] – was related to traditional ideas about the acquisition of skills. The five remaining aspects were related to the ethical dimensions of reading instruction. Little in the histories of reading instruction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries suggests that Smith's imagined teacher of the future would be engaged in activities that differ greatly from those of reading instructors of the past. Inculcating the correct means for decoding a text alongside the equally important work of shaping the character or "nature" of the child were also the twin concerns of nineteenth-century reading teachers. Reading instruction has been tied to the dual goals of teaching deciphering skills and teaching ethical comportment for a long period. A reading teacher of the future would be as concerned with trying to achieve these twin goals as the reading teacher of the past. Few accounts however have focussed on the development of a unique relationship among the text, the teacher and the child as a means for achieving these twin goals: most accounts provide an analysis of the content of reading materials or an analysis of reading methods while assuming that the teacher was at best irrelevant or at worst a hindrance to process.

A brief history of early reading books

There were originally three types of texts for teaching beginning reading: the hornbook, the ABC, and the primer. The hornbook was first mentioned in 1678 in American records[21] and was imported from England, where it had a long tradition as a text for teaching reading, with references dating back to the

[20] Ibid., 14
[21] Nila Barton Smith, "The Future of Reading," in *Reading Instruction: An International Forum,* ed. M. D. Jenkinson (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1966), 15. See also, E. Jennifer Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America, 81-104.*

fourteenth century.[22] Hornbooks were not, strictly speaking, "books" since they consisted of only one sheet of paper attached to a hard surface. They were made of various materials, including bark or wood, iron, pewter and ivory. Most commonly, they comprised a flat piece of rectangular wood with a sheet of paper fixed to the front. The paper usually contained the alphabet, but later versions of the hornbook included syllables and religious selections, thus allowing the book to serve the dual purpose of reading instruction and religious instruction. The piece of paper was protected by a thin sheet of "horn" which formed a translucent cover, thus protecting the paper from damage. A frame was fixed to the wood and secured the "horn" cover, but one section of the frame was left open to allow the paper to be changed in a way similar to a modern picture frame. At one narrow end of the hornbook was a handle, which usually had a hole for string so that the book could either be held by the handle, thus further protecting the "page" from finger marks, or hung around the child's neck when not in immediate use, thus protecting it from loss or theft[23]. Nila Banton Smith (1938) in her extensive work on the history of American reading instruction found no evidence that hornbooks were produced in America, although there is plenty of evidence to suggest that they were imported and sold from the early seventeenth century through to the middle of the eighteenth century.[24]

The second type of text for teaching beginning reading instruction was the ABC. This type of text was widely used in Europe from very early periods as a separate form of reading material from the hornbook. It included the letters of the alphabet, the Pater Noster, the Ave Maria, the Credo, and two prayers. It dated from the fifteenth century in this form. During the seventeenth century, it became more common to include simple illustrations which accompanied the letters. Until the eighteenth century, however, there was no standardisation of the alphabet. Letters followed a different order in different

[22] Carleton Brown, *A Register of Middle English Didactic and Religious Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920), Register 899.
[23] E. Jennifer Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*, 81-82.
[24] Banton Smith, *American Reading Instruction*, 16–17.

ABCs, and there was some uncertainty about what letters actually constituted the alphabet. In addition, upper and lower case versions of the alphabet differed in particular respects: u and v rarely appeared in lower-case English alphabets, "but in capital alphabets only one form was used for both vowel and consonant and this form might be either U or V."[25]

The ABCs were important in teaching reading not so much in terms of the shape or appearance of the letters, or their order in the alphabet, but in terms of their names. The names were a central feature of the methods of teaching spelling and reading until well into the nineteenth century. The early ABCs, hornbooks and spelling books did not name the letters: the practice of listing the names of the letters alongside the alphabet became popular during the second half of the seventeenth century, but after about 1830 the practice became much less common.[26] Beginning readers were expected to learn the names of the letters before learning the sounds of the letters. In order to spell, students had to demonstrate that they could say the name of each letter in the word as presented. In order to read, students had to demonstrate that they could put together, in order, the sounds made by the letters of the word. Spelling was assumed to be a necessary prerequisite to reading.

A simple religious manual called a primer appeared as early as 813, after the Council of Mainz decreed that children should be taught some basic religious selections[27]. The primer, thus has a long history, although this 813 text was not particularly linked to reading instruction. It was a manual of church services that contained those texts considered to be essential for spiritual well-being and which formed the basis of the church service. By the Middle Ages, the primer consisted of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and possibly a few Psalms. It tended to be expensively produced and bound and, as such, unsuitable for use as a school book. Prior to the sixteenth century,

[25] Ian Michael, *The Teaching of English from the Sixteenth Century to 1870* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 26.
[26] Ibid., 30.
[27] Davies, *Teaching Reading in Early England,* 129-132.

reading instruction, instead, tended to be based on the ABC or on the hornbook, since both of these were cheap to produce. Eventually, however, the functions of the ABC, hornbook and religious primer were combined in a "school book" that was inexpensively produced, using the rapidly developing technology of the printing press. When the alphabet and syllables were added to the religious primer, it became the principal resource for reading instruction, serving both the need for a relatively cheap book for teaching reading and for instructing children in the rudiments of religion. Learning to read in the vernacular and learning the basics of (usually Protestant) religious practice became inextricably connected through this simple invention.

The original intention of the ABCs was to teach beginning readers to recognise, name, and sound the letters of the alphabet. The function of the primer was to guide the parishioners through the church service. In combining these twin functions in a single textbook, the pedagogy of beginning reading melded a phonics-based method for teaching reading with the inculcation of Christian principles. In this sense, then, the primer became a means for instructing beginning readers as well as a means for teaching students the path to holy living and salvation. In its 150 years of life, the religious purpose of the primer was always dominant, although its contents and theological emphasis varied in the many succeeding editions.

The *New England Primer* is, perhaps, the quintessential example of a reading primer designed to inculcate Christian values of a particular type while teaching the skills of reading. Published at Boston between 1685 and 1690, it formed the basis in the Americas of beginning reading instruction for the next 150 years.[28] The British Library holds an impressive collection of various editions of this primer, and others used in North America through to the nineteenth century. The collection provides valuable

[28] Mary Florence Thwaite, *From Primer to Pleasure in Reading: An Introduction to the History of Children's Books in England from the Invention of Printing to 1914, with an Outline of Some Developments in Other Countries* (London: Library Association, 1963/1972), 228.

insights into the design and composition of primers. However, the primers themselves do not disclose a great deal about how they were used. It is necessary to look elsewhere for information about pedagogy and about the effects of particular teaching strategies relating to primers. Several excellent histories of reading instruction and of children's reading books in America and elsewhere, such as those by Tuer (1968),[29] Clodd (1900)[30] and Smith (1938)[31] have been written during the past 100 years. These books provide extensive historical information of an empirical kind and tend to support the idea that the school text book, or primer, provided one of the means by which a child reader could learn particular Christian moral lessons as well as basic reading skills.

The belief that people should be taught to read in order to read the Bible, reflect on their conduct, and understand their own behaviour in relation to others became widely accepted through the Reformation. However, the means for delivering mass reading instruction that would help people to meet these goals remained beyond the scope of most governments and teachers during this period. It was not until the nineteenth century that the political and technical conditions (statistics, public funding, legislation) conducive to the formation and deployment of agencies and programs (schools, teacher training institutions, education bureaucracies) that could serve an entire population were in place[32].

The use of primers

Thus, from their inception, primers were used in the formation of particular types of conduct, not in a cause-and-effect relation, but through a complex intermeshing of texts and strategies for teaching reading *and* for teaching the construction of particular modes of being. Primers underwent a shift from

[29] Andrew W. Tuer, *History of the Horn Book* (New York: B. Bloom, 1968).
[30] Edward Clodd, *The Story of the Alphabet* (New York: D. Appleton, 1900).
[31] Smith, *American Reading Instruction*.
[32] See David Hamilton, *Towards a Theory of Schooling* (London & New York: Falmer Press, 1989), 97 – 119 for an account of the emergence of "simultaneous instruction" and "class teaching" which allowed the scaling-up of reading teaching and thus its extension to "the masses".

their primary role as "educational" texts designed for use in church services and private devotion to "school" texts designed for use in reading instruction in "schools".. As texts suited for general educational use in church services, primers were large, expensively bound books designed to impress the mostly non-reading church-attending public. Only gradually, over a period of several centuries, were they taken up by teachers and used within schools for specific teaching and learning purposes. The formal church service played a role in general educational practice and, as such, the priest was as much a teacher as a preacher.[33] However, the priest's use of the church primer differed markedly from the teacher's use of the reading primer, even though the content of each text was similar and in many cases the texts were identical. It is the *use* to which the text was put in the different locations that is of interest. Until well into the eighteenth century, reading was assumed to be a passive/responsive skill which afforded no new insights but only reinforced previously held beliefs. Reading was a receptive tool initially comprising listening and recitation. Its practice included the uncritical reception of the ideas of others (usually adults or "betters").

It is difficult to know when the primer became a book of reading instruction for children, although it seems safe to assume that when the alphabet appeared as part of the text, it was intended for reading instruction as well as for religious instruction. Charles Butterworth draws on Chaucer's *Prioress' Tale* for evidence of the use of primers for instructing children;[34] however, Chaucer's account is ambiguous and it is not clear that the child was learning to read from the primer. When John Colet wrote in 1511 the rules under which the new school at St Paul's would operate, he indicated that its aim was to increase knowledge of God and Jesus Christ and to inculcate "good Christen lyff and manners in the Children.

[33] See Robert Scholes for an exploration of this theme in *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[34] Charles C. Butterworth, *The English Primer (1529–1545)* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 4.

And for that entent I will the Chyldren lerne first aboue all the Cathechyzon (Catechism) in English."[35] The "Catechism in English" did not include an alphabet; rather, it was a mix of Christian doctrine and a summary of the Creed. However, the insistence that it be learnt first is an early indication of the pedagogical role of early, religious, vernacular-language texts. Interestingly, Colet made a reference to the connection between literature (classical) and vocation when he commented that he hoped that children who learnt the texts (both English and Latin) would "procede and growe to parfyt lyterature, and come at the last to be grete clarkes."[36] Despite the expression of this male vocational ideal which would have included learning to read (first) and then to write, Colet's school catered for both boys and girls as did almost all schools for children in England during this and subsequent periods.

The teaching of vernacular reading, for its own sake, did not become popular until the seventeenth century; however, there were other reasons for teaching vernacular reading to children and these became apparent toward the end of the fifteenth century. During the latter half of the fifteenth century, salvation was viewed increasingly as an individual matter rather than something that was conferred by the church through its emissaries, the priests. Widespread discontent in Europe with the authority of the church and an increasing focus on nationalism prompted church reformers such as the Augustinian friar, Martin Luther, and his university colleague, Philipp Melanchthon, to pursue new avenues for assisting individuals to attain salvation. One of these avenues was to be through teaching children and adults to read the Bible and other religious texts in the vernacular, an idea that was taken up with some enthusiasm in England during the reign of Henry VIII. This shift in thinking about how people gained access to the words of the Bible meant that vernacular translations of the Bible, traditionally only available in Latin, had to be created and made available in an accessible form.

[35] Cited in Butterworth, *English Primer,* 7.
[36] Ibid., 8.

Martin Luther's predecessors did not have the benefit of the printing press. This invention greatly assisted the ability of Luther's reformist movement to disseminate ideas in parts of Europe and later in England.[37] Young Luther and other church reformers believed that individuals should not have to rely on the priests to interpret the word of God, particularly since priests on the whole were considered to be corrupt and immoral. Rather, individuals should be able to read and interpret for themselves through a direct relationship with the text and in doing so, come to know themselves as servants of God. When Biblical authority (to be accessed directly by individuals reading the texts) began to take precedence over priestly mediation, there was an assumption that children should be taught to read vernacular versions of the Scriptures and the Commandments in order to be able to hear and look at the words of sacred texts that would help them to be guided by a Christian ethic thanks to the commentary of pastors. Thus, a shift in thinking occurred in parts of Europe and then in England during the sixteenth century, away from priestly mediation of Biblical authority toward direct access to the Scriptures by individuals expected to take responsibility for their own salvation. However, direct access to word of God was not possible without the intervention of the teacher who assumed an increasingly important role not simply as an instructor but also as a moral guide. It was not enough to simply recognise the words on the page. Increasingly the expectation was that the reader would be able to interpret or comprehend the words, ideas and morals of the printed texts. The means, however, for this access via mass reading instruction was not to arrive in England until the nineteenth century via the invention of effective mass schooling practices[38]. While the materials used for teaching reading did not vary a great deal following the invention of the printing press, the purpose and context of their use was radically transformed through

[37] See Carmen Luke for a comprehensive overview and analysis of the relationship among technological advances, teaching children and religion in *Pedagogy, Printing, and Protestantism: The Discourse on Childhood* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989).

[38] David Hamilton, *Toward a Theory of Schooling*, 75 – 96.

the invention of mass schooling, particularly in terms of the relationships among the text, the teacher and the child.

Early attempts to implement mass schooling

The linking of "education" and up-bringing with issues of state ("protection", "good government", and "religion") through the child's exhibition of moral traits of character such as "moderation", "piety" and "virtue" provided an early example of an enunciation of the goal of mass public education. However, there is often a gap between goals and "outcomes" and the articulation between these various elements was not achieved until the middle of the nineteenth century, when mass, state-funded education became a reality in England. In order to succeed, the machinery of mass education required a combination of a range of social, economic, and political conditions, including the separation of church and state, a state-organised bureaucracy, an administrative structure and state or public funding. During the early part of the nineteenth century the idea that reading was simply a passive-responsive practice involving an uncritical reception of the text began to be challenged by educators seeking the means to provide mass access to reading. Schooling was still a variable option for parents and children's labor remained an important source of income for most families. Schools were not readily accessible, teachers were untrained and the problem of how to provide inexpensive access to schooling for the mass of children in urban and rural areas posed a serious challenge. The provision of education remained largely in the hands of the church and bitter disputes between Catholics and Protestants and between church government ensured over funding and the provision of suitable texts and suitable teachers. The individual method for teaching reading which had prevailed for centuries did not work when large numbers of children were involved. Lancaster and Bell each designed their own system, called the monitorial system, for teaching large numbers of children and although it proved to be

inexpensive it became apparent in the early part of the nineteenth century that it did not work as a means for teaching reading which was almost the sole aim of these schools. Meanwhile, the texts for teaching reading remained much the same as they had throughout previous centuries: the horn book and the primer which stretched back to Chaucer's time and the spelling book first published in England in 1596[39] provided the foundation or basal texts for teaching reading. Clearly, a different system was required for teaching large numbers of children not only to read but to conduct themselves appropriately and social reformers in England and Scotland set about inventing what we now recognise as modern, mass education.

From primer to "reader"

State education, or "popular education," as it was called in England, was based largely on the pioneering work of the infant school educators, David Stow and Samuel Wilderspin.[40] Using a Scripture precept as a device for describing his approach, David Stow's pedagogic method focused on the need to "train up the child in the way he should go"[41] and he referred to his approach as "the infant system of moral training"[42]. This approach rested on the Christian tradition of treating reading as a means for moral and ethical self-instruction (as it had for centuries before) but this new approach involved the installation of a new type of mediator, the kindly, observant, watchful teacher.[43] As the Christian reader deciphered the text, he or she also was meant to seek self-understanding. Self-understanding, in turn, should result in

[39] Edmund Coote, *English Schoole-Maister* (Menston: Scholar,1596/1968); Thomas Dyche *Guide to the English Tongue,* (Cumberland: Neilsen & Weir, 1709/1800).
[40] Samuel Wilderspin, *The Infant System: For Developing the Intellectual and Moral Powers of All Children, from One to Seven Years of Age* (London: J.S. Hodson, 1852). See in particular Chapter IX and the descriptions of the invention of the gallery/simultaneous teaching method.
[41] David Stow, *Moral Training, Infant and Juvenile, As Applicable to the Condition of the Population of Large Towns*, 2nd ed. (Glasgow: William Collins, 1834), 100.
[42] Stow, *Moral Training*.
[43] Ian Hunter, "Learning the Literature Lesson: The Limits of the Aesthetic Personality," in *Towards a Critical Sociology of Reading Pedagogy: Papers of the XII World Congress on Reading*, ed. C. D. Baker and A. Luke (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1991).

self-regulation. The belief that learning to read required a combination of textual decoding and decoding of self under the watchful gaze of the sympathetic teacher informed discussion about reading instruction through the second half of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. Stow introduced "stories" alongside the traditional religious primer in order to help children reflect on aspects of their own behaviour. Chalmers points to a wide range of texts used in the teaching of reading at the turn of the eighteenth century,[44] and many of these texts continued the preoccupation with religious and moral themes. Stow encouraged teachers to read stories to and with the children as a means of arousing their interest in learning to read so that they might continue the habit of reflecting on experience beyond the school. However, Stow, like many a reformer of his age, lacked the administrative and bureaucratic apparatus necessary for the widespread implementation of his ideas. Without state-backed mechanisms for installing the program across the country, both Stow's efforts to inculcate moral reading practices across a stratum of the population (the children of "common" folk) could not be realised. However, Stow's experiments in classroom teaching (or "simultaneous instruction") and his promotion of the ideal of the sympathetic teacher coincided with attempts in England to invent and establish a state-funded, popular education system. James Kay-Shuttleworth was the person charged with responsibility for convincing Parliament of the necessity for such an education system and he successfully argued for the adoption of Stow's approach.[45]

Most educators, by the nineteenth century, were careful to stress the importance of avoiding a didactic approach to "moral training", and Stow was no exception. Rather, he argued, the teacher's role was that of guide or facilitator. The child should be encouraged to draw his or her own conclusions from the reading material. This approach continued to be refined throughout the nineteenth century. In advice

[44] G.S. Chalmers, *Reading Easy 1800-50*, (London: The Broadsheet King, 1976).
[45] Ian Hunter, *Culture and Government: The Emergence of Literary Education in England* (London: Macmillan, 1988); and Ian Hunter, *Rethinking the School: Subjectivity, Bureaucracy, Criticism* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994).

to teachers about selecting and reading fables and fairly tales with young children, for instance, Charles McMurry claimed:

> True moral training is rather calculated to awaken in the child judgments of right and wrong, of good and evil (on simple illustrative examples). Not the impression left by a moralizing discourse is the germ of a love of the good and right, but rather the child's judgment springing from its own conviction. 'That was good.' 'What a mean thing.'[46]

The ideal was that children would draw their own conclusions from the reading material, although it is clear that they received a great deal of guidance from teachers. Then, as now, teachers taught through discussion and example the "right" or expected response to the text, thereby establishing norms of behaviour and conduct. Stories, however, also could be used as a direct means to illustrate a particular aspect of behaviour and help children to recognise and adjust their conduct. The following comment by McMurry is representative of the types of advice given to teachers at the time: "Often when a child has committed some fault, it is useful to refer by name to the fable that fits it. [...] the fable is a kind of mirror for the vices of the young."[47] Character development and the inculcation of self-regulatory practices were at the heart of reading instruction and with the emergence of popular schooling and systematic training for teachers came the practical means to implement reading instruction across an entire stratum of society, one that hitherto had no access to reading. The key to effective reading pedagogy was the new, and still developing role of the teacher/moral guide.

Character development through self-examination and reflection became the focus of reading instruction in the infant schools of Stow and Wilderspin, as teachers struggled to find a means to moderate the habits and manners of the children of the working poor in industrialised cities and towns. The Protestant Christian habit of treating reading as a means for combining text decoding with self-examination proved a useful tool in the state's battle to regulate problem populations. The acquisition of

[46] Charles Alexander McMurry, *Special Method in Primary Reading and Oral Work with Stories* (New York: Macmillan, 1905), 51.
[47] Ibid., 54.

literacy was to be linked through the "popular" school to the control by the child reader of techniques for self-regulation in the interests of "good conduct". The whole process was to be managed by the "new" teacher of reading who was imagined by the architects of popular education in America and England, and who came into being through the work of the "normal schools" or "teacher training" institutions. The teaching of reading, for the new teacher, was not simply the teaching of a set of skills for decoding text, but involved the important work of helping children to understand their world, their experiences and themselves, in order to shape their own behaviour in line with approved social norms and practices. As noted above, this normative self-shaping mission of reading instruction emerged as a point of contention for mid/late twentieth-century work on ideology, which began to critique the social mission of reading instruction on the grounds that the reading material (or the readers) were repressive of gender, cultural and other differences.

In the early years of reading instruction, prior to its institutionalisation and systematisation within the "popular" schools, learning to read the primer was the first step toward being able to recognise letters, words and sentences. It was considered suitable reading material since it also provided the child with a knowledge of religious texts (typically, prayers, catechism and hymns) and encouraged piety. Sectarian disputes, however, increased the necessity to find less "inflammatory" reading material, or to produce texts that were considered broadly supportive of Christian principles but "neutral" in terms of allegiance to a denomination. Secular literature in the form of fables, myths, legends and fairly tales was favoured for its apparent neutrality. Many of the stories, however, were difficult for young children to read and teachers believed that they discouraged the child in the early stages when decoding or the acquisition of skills was vital to the child's progress. The field of educational psychology began to provide a guide at the turn of the twentieth century to understanding the cognitive aspects of the reading process and a focus on "child development" gained popularity during the 1930s. This resulted in the

production of modern forms of the school readers, with their "staged" or "developmental" approach as a means for teaching reading. The producers of these readers appeared to have kept in mind the belief of earlier educators in the power of texts to shape personal conduct. Clearly, as Luke has noted, the conduct they had in mind was based on the values of white, Protestant, middle-class society.[48] The important work of critiquing the material and approaches used in classrooms as a means for teaching reading at all levels of education has been continued in Australia through the critical literacy movement[49] and, as the remarks above indicate, this type of critique now has a history of more than fifty years. This paper adds to, and complicates, that work by showing the importance of an historical perspective on the ways in which social practices emerge and are deployed within improvised social institutions such as the school and demonstrates the complex relations existing among various social practices and programs.

Modern readers, familiar today, although different in content from the primers, carry a similar intent; that is, they aimed to inculcate principles of "proper conduct". The content, however, may not be the only important factor in an investigation of reading instruction. The use to which the material is put, the conditions under which is it used, and the governmental effects of its use are equally important issues. Comments linking reading instruction with strategies for managing populations are not uncommon.[50] These strategies, materials and techniques can be viewed as evidence of the ideological project of reading teaching. They also can be seen as an indication of the range and historical trajectory of an array of disparate technologies cobbled together over periods of time to form reading pedagogies designed to inculcate particular modes of conduct.

---

[48] Allan Luke, *Literacy, Textbooks, and Ideology*.
[49] Sandy Muspratt, Allan Luke, and Peter Freebody (eds), *Constructing Critical Literacies: Teaching and Learning Textual Practice* (New Jersey: Hampton Press,1997); and B. Comber and A. Simpson (eds), *Negotiating Critical Literacies in Classrooms* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000).
[50] Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

Conclusion

An important role for reading instruction has been the formation of self-regulating citizens. The invention of the primer as a book for teaching reading in the vernacular provided those educating the children of non-elite classes with a means for combining reading instruction with a focus on the moral and ethical demeanour of the child-reader. The combination of "skills acquisition" with a focus maintained by the teacher on moral and ethical issues related to the person of the reader has remained a trademark of beginning reading instruction through to the present day. Moral and ethical issues may appear at different periods, in the guise of religious piety, middle-class values or even a focus on cultural diversity and gender equity. The ideological implications of piety, middle-class values or critical literacy are important issues not unrelated to our attempt, here, to explore the uses to which reading materials are put, the pedagogical techniques and strategies deployed with and through them, their historical trajectories, their targets, and their composition under particular conditions within the early reading classroom.