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## Reading and New Ideas

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### READING AND NEW IDEAS

Why is it that when someone comes along with a new idea in reading that it seems to enjoy such sudden popularity and widespread utilization for a while? What eventuated from the idea is not of particular concern here—but why did the idea seem to have almost immediate success? A close look at the mercurial careers of a number of *new* approaches, methods, and strategies in the teaching of reading, prompts a few observations.

In the first place, we need to give proper credit to the innovator for the energy and original impetus he gave the idea. Whether an approach is the result of studies and statistical computation or is simply wrung out of experience, the person who presents it to the public always adds the strength and force of convincing personality. Second, a *new* method apparently has the aura of magic associated with it. The mere fact that it is new is often a major selling point with many teachers. Charles Dickens, characterizing the American personality during a brief visit to our nation in the last century, noted our impatience with existing things and our constant search for novelty.

Our pressing need in this decade is to examine this urge to try something different, and to reflect on what it may mean to us as professional teachers. We might stop to think about what *Reading Instruction in America* by Nila Banton Smith and *Teaching to Read, Historically Considered* by Diack, are trying to impress on our minds—that there are really no brand-new methods and approaches in this field. What works for one group of students in a given period of time in a certain place is not the answer for each classroom in all areas. We are making a mistake in judgment, therefore, when we attend conventions and conferences with the singleminded goal of finding out what is *new* in the field—it very well might not be for us at all—whether it's new or not really doesn't matter if it's not right for us.

Thus, if we wish to improve upon the world of reading for our students, we would do best by examining our own fitness to different concepts—We must realize that we, individually, are the *new* items in the field of reading each year; by looking for what works in given circumstances, and by attempting to use those parts of various ideas in our own classrooms that work for us, we can have a new and successful teaching experience every year.

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