

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." HOSEA 4:6

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EDITOR: Samuel L. Blumenfeld

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce those risks.
"Without vision, the people perish."

How To Cure Dyslexia

Recently we received a letter from England written by an intelligent, accomplished and motivated adult who has a "reading problem." He had been taught to read by look-say and exhibits the usual symptoms of dyslexia, and he wanted to know how to cure his disability. Since there are many adults in America struggling with this same problem, we thought it would make an excellent subject for a newsletter. So here is the gentleman's letter, with its original spelling errors, followed by our cure:

Dear Mr. Blumenfeld,

I have just received the information package that you sent me. I saw your advertisement in the New Dimensions' magazine and thought it might be of interest but having little relevance to English/German education methods. Upon receiving and wading through the mass of articles etc. I read the education letter dated Jan. 1988 regarding dyslexia. It was extremely interesting, logical and above all explained the whole problem. It gave me important clues as to my own disabilities with reading and writing. I don't remember which method of reading I was taught, but I am positive it was the look-say method; this would certainly explain my difficulties in reading and writing as a child; and to this day I still have problems with reading or should I say misreading and espe-

cially spelling. I intend to purchase your books for my children, when I get around to having some and perhaps for me to learn what I didn't whilst at school. If you have any information or advice that could help me I would be very grateful, my problems are as follows:

READING

- I can read well enough, but I have to concentrate.
- For some reason I miss words or don't see them.
- I have a fear of reading aloud in public even with family or a child.
- I miss-read or insert the odd word, but I manage to stay within the context of the passage.
- I have a little difficulty in pronouncing new words, I seem to make them fit what I think they should be or I look at a word to quickly and ad-lib, Eg. Alpha Phonics at fist was Alphonics.

WRITING:

- Bad handwriting although it is getting better, I don't have patience for it.
 - Punctuation and especially spelling are sub-standard, but with rereading and the use of a dictionary I can eliminate most mistakes.
 - Sometimes I totally forget how to spell a simple every-day word.
 - I have difficulties with the 'i' and 'e' relationship and the rules regarding word end changes.
- To read this letter it might seem as if I have quite a problem but I don't, I speak very well (posh some

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might say); with a little effort, concentration and the aid of a dictionary I can write quite constructive letters, although the hand-written variety have to be rewritten a few times. Thank God for the invention of this Word Processor. But eventually reading and writing should not take so much thought, it should pass almost effortlessly from eyes to mouth and from mind to pen. I would be grateful for any assistance with this particular journey that I'm on and thank you for your help this far.

Yours Sincerely

R.W.

Motivation is Key to Success

It 's unusual for a dyslexic to be able to see his own problem as clearly as this individual does. Many dyslexics are so crushed, so embarrassed by their disability, which, they fear, is the result of a defective brain, that their sole way of dealing with the problem is to hide it.

The letter writer, on the other hand, realizes that his reading and writing problems are not due to a lack of innate ability or intelligence but are due to the teaching methods used in his primary education.

In my own experience as a tutor and in teaching disabled sight readers to become proficient phonetic readers, I have found personal motivation to be the key to success. Those who resist the teaching or have a hostile, angry attitude growing out of past failure and frustration are the most difficult to retrain. It is hard to blame them for this negative attitude since the damage that was done to them in primary school causes them continued pain and humiliation every day of their lives.

The letter writer, on the other hand, has confidence in his basic intelligence. He simply wants to know how to cure his acquired disability. Obviously, he has the will to do what needs to be done. And so, I recommend the following:

1. First he must realize that the cure to dyslexia lies in becoming a phonetic reader.

That is, he must retrain himself so that instead of looking at our written language as a series of still pictures to be interpreted by spoken language, he will see the written word as a direct, accurate transcription of the spoken word. The sight reader associates the printed word with an idea or picture, as if it were a Chinese ideograph. A sight reader may see the word "father" and say "dad," or see the word "horse" and say "pony." He or she does not hear the written word because the association is between the printed word and an idea rather than the printed word and the actual speech sounds the letters represent.

Mastering the Alphabet

Alphabetic writing is a sound-symbol system in which the basic association is between letters and sounds. When properly taught, the pupil is drilled in the letter sounds so that an automatic association between letters and sounds is developed. This then permits the pupil to sound out the words he or she is reading. The reason why phonetic readers read with ease and enjoyment is because once they've developed this automatic association between letters and sounds, the reading process becomes as effortless as speaking or listening.

The letter writer instinctively understands this when he writes: "reading and writing should not take so much thought, it should pass almost effortlessly from eyes to mouth and from mind to pen." But his look-say training has placed an association stumbling block in his path, and this blockage can only be removed by retraining.

Removing the Blockage

The simplest and easiest way to do this is to get copies of *Alpha-Phonics* and *How to Tutor* and to teach oneself our English alpha-

betic system. Can one do it without a tutor? Yes. Anyone, who wants to, can learn how our 26 letters stand for 44 irreducible speech sounds, just as anyone wanting to learn to read Russian would have to learn to recognize the 32 letters of the Russian alphabet and the sounds they stand for. The process is the same, except that if you didn't speak Russian someone who did would have to articulate the sounds for you. Or, if you were shown their equivalents in the English alphabetic system, you would be quite able to articulate the sounds yourself. However, since the letter writer is an intelligent speaker of English, he should have no trouble articulating the isolated sounds our letters stand for.

In both *Alpha-Phonics* and *How to Tutor*, our English alphabetic system is taught in a logical, systematic way, so that by the time the learner reaches the end of the course, he or she knows the spelling forms of all of our speech sounds and should be able to read anything in English with accuracy.

While both books teach the same things, they are different in format. In *How to Tutor* the lessons are printed in regular book-size type with the instructions appearing on the same page as the lesson. While the book was made to be used by a tutor to teach another to read, it is particularly ideal for an adult teaching himself. *Alpha-Phonics*, on the other hand, is a larger sized book devised specifically for direct tutoring of others. The lessons have large sized letters, and the instructions are in back of the book for use by the tutor. *Alpha-Phonics* is ideal for a tutor or parent teaching someone else — child or adult — to read.

The English Alphabet

The reason why the English alphabetic system must be taught in a logical, systematic way is because we have only 26 letters to

represent the 44 sounds in the language. This anomaly, or mismatch, is due to the fact that the Roman conquerors of Britain imposed their Latin alphabet on the local inhabitants, who, it must be admitted, did a rather ingenious job of adapting it to their own language. Indeed, they did such a good job that writers, using the system, have managed to produce some of the world's greatest literature, including the King James Version of the Bible, the plays of Shakespeare, the poems of Milton, etc. In other words, the English alphabetic system has served the writers of English very well indeed.

26 Letters for 44 Sounds

However, when you use 26 letters to stand for 44 sounds, you will have to make some rather interesting and novel accommodations. Some of the letters will have to stand for more than one sound, and some of the sounds will have to be represented by more than one letter. For example, the "th" sound is represented by t-h; the "sh" sound is represented by s-h; and the "ch" sound is represented by c-h. The letter *a* stands for at least four sounds: long *a*, as in *apron* and *April*; short *a*, as in *cat* or *bat*; the "ah" sound as in *car* and *father*; and the "aw" sound as in *all* and *call*.

How does one know which sound to make when the letter *a* appears? By having learned the appropriate sounds in their spelling families. And that is the way the sounds are taught in *Alpha-Phonics* and *How To Tutor*. In both books the sequence of lessons takes into account all of the special aspects and eccentricities of our alphabetic system. The short *a* is taught first in conjunction with the consonants. Then the rest of the short vowels are taught in conjunction with the already learned consonants. Next, the final and initial consonant blends are taught, and finally the long vowels are taught in their

their great variety of spelling forms. Lessons on the other vowel sounds and spellings are interspersed in the final third of the program.

Actually, there are about 20 vowel sounds in English, but we use only six letters to represent them. That's one of the reasons why English spelling requires a little effort to master. Another is that English pronunciation has changed over the centuries but the spellings have not. Also, English has incorporated words from Latin, Greek, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Hebrew, Yiddish, Arabic, etc., all of which has complicated our spelling. Attempts have been made to simplify English spelling, but with very limited success.

This should not disturb us, for our spelling, or orthography, is a remarkable repository of information about the history and origins of our language.

Applying Phonetic Knowledge

2. Once the learner has completed learning the English alphabetic system, he or she must learn how to apply this newly acquired knowledge to his or her reading. The letter writer is aware that he misreads, inserts "the odd word," misses words or doesn't see them. He also has difficulty in pronouncing new words and he mutilates words by reading too quickly. In short, he makes all of the errors that look-say readers typically make.

Now comes the more difficult part: transforming or changing a sight reader into a phonetic reader. That can only be done by having the pupil read aloud, interrupting him whenever he makes an error, no matter how small, and by teaching him to apply his phonetic knowledge.

My own experience as a tutor has taught me that look-say reading habits do not automatically disappear after a pupil has learned the alphabetic system. It requires conscious

effort on the part of the pupil to overcome these bad habits. And that is why it is very important to make the pupil aware of his misreadings.

Most look-say readers are not aware of the errors they make because they were taught that accuracy is not important and they were encouraged by their teachers to guess and "take risks." Today's teachers, in particular, do not even bother to correct sloppy reading, let alone sloppy spelling. But pupils know the difference between what is correct and what is not. And that is why they don't want to read aloud in class, for fear of appearing stupid. Accuracy may not matter to the teacher, but it does matter to the pupil who is terrified at the thought of making a fool of himself in public.

The Importance of Accuracy

The letter writer knows the feeling all too well. He writes: "I have a fear of reading aloud in public even with family or a child." Why? Because he knows that accuracy is not only important but is also a reflection of his competence and intelligence. In other words, he desperately wants to be accurate but is prevented from being so by the way he was taught to read. In short, he was crippled by the teaching methods used in his primary school.

And the crippling goes on. In the United States today children are taught to read by the much-touted "whole language" method, which is just another form of look-say. *The Washington Post* of 11/29/86 reported, "The most controversial aspect of whole language is the de-emphasis on accuracy." The article quoted Julia Palmer, president of the American Reading Council, as saying, "Accuracy is not the name of the game." What, then, is the name of the game? Sloppy reading!

How can we help the letter writer become an accurate, confident reader? It is

unlikely he will be able to find a suitable tutor who will listen to him read aloud and correct him when he makes mistakes and show him how to use his phonetic knowledge in deciphering the new words he will encounter. It would be ideal if he could find such a tutor. But, if not, there is a way he can do it himself.

Self-Teaching

If the letter writer will read aloud into a tape recorder, and then play back the tape while following the text, he may be able to see and hear his own errors, and mark them on the text. Then he ought to reread the text, again into the tape recorder, to see if he can correct himself. Over a period of time, by becoming aware of his errors, the letter writer should be able to achieve the accuracy he wants.

He must also keep a vocabulary notebook, that is, write down in a notebook all of the new words he encounters, breaking them up into syllables and learning to pronounce them correctly. Over a period of a year he will accumulate thousands of new words, and he should make it a habit of frequently reading down this vocabulary list in order to become more familiar with the words and develop quick recognition.

Being able to see the syllabic structure of a multisyllabic word is the key to becoming a phonetic reader. That is why it is important to break up each new multisyllabic word into its syllables. He must continue to learn to read all new words in this way—that is, see words in their phonetic structure and associate the syllables with their sounds.

Incidentally, a syllable is a unit of speech with one vowel sound. It can have none or many consonant letters attached, but it can only have one vowel component. For example, all of the following are one-syllable words: *a, at, meet, prom, prompt, thrust, scrunch.*

Two-syllable words can be as simple as *a-go*, and *a-men* or as complex in spelling as *prompt-ness, earth-quake, or spend-thrift*. Dictionaries show how to divide multisyllabic words into their syllable components or pronunciation units.

Spotting One's Own Errors

The biggest problem sight readers have is knowing when they've made an error in reading. However, the easiest, and probably most obvious way for sight readers to know they've made an error is when they can't understand what they've just read. If the sentence doesn't make sense, then chances are that a reading error was made. The reader then must reread the sentence to find the error. It is not unusual for sight readers to make the same error in rereading. Therefore, the rereading must be slow and word-for-word.

Obviously, this can be a laborious process. However, if the learner chooses reading materials that are interesting and worth reading, then the retraining can be more of a pleasure than a pain. I have found the *Reader's Digest* to be an excellent source of interesting articles on a wide variety of subjects. Also, chapters from books of high interest to the learner are recommended. The subject matter may indeed be so engaging that the learner will be strongly motivated to read the entire work, regardless of its difficulty.

The Right Reading Materials

While learning to read phonetically, the student might as well be learning something else at the same time. That's why the choice of reading materials is important. We read for knowledge and enjoyment. Most schools, however, force children to read materials that provide neither knowledge nor enjoyment. And that is why so many children get

the notion in school that reading is boring and irrelevant.

Improving One's Writing

3. The letter writer also wants to improve his writing. His bad handwriting can be improved with some patience and effort. First, he should learn to write the cursive letters in their proper forms and then learn how to connect them correctly and legibly. This should be done slowly, using good models. (The writing section in *How To Tutor* provides such models.) Speed will increase with proficiency. But proficiency should always come first.

As the letter writer learns to read phonetically, this should also improve his spelling. Punctuation is learned by simply reading and copying good texts and understanding why the punctuation marks are where they are. The purpose of punctuation, of course, is to make the text easier to read and understand and reduce ambiguities. It provides the text with the graphic equivalent of inflection and rhythm. Quotation marks and apostrophes clarify meaning. Commas, colons, semi-colons and dashes help organize thoughts on paper.

In a sense, writing should be as easy as reading phonetically. However, painstaking writers will often write and rewrite until they are satisfied that they have expressed exactly the ideas they want to put forth. Rewriting, revising and editing are parts of the process of thinking. In speech, we often find the right word eluding us. In writing, we can take the time to find the right word. Good writing, in fact, is little else than refined speech or thoughtful speech.

Spelling Rules

The letter writer also has difficulty with some of our spelling rules. Spelling rules are

writing conventions that must be learned by study and practice. The more one writes, the better one learns the rules, not as rules but as conventions that favor consistency, common sense, and logical practice. A writer who constantly makes spelling mistakes has simply not stopped long enough to study the words he keeps misspelling. What he should do is make a list of the words he most often misspells and juxtapose the correct spellings next to them. He should refer the words back to their spelling families so that he can learn their spelling patterns. As the sight reader becomes a phonetic reader, his spelling will improve.

Mastering the System

Actually, learning to read phonetically is merely mastering the mechanics of our alphabetic writing system. After that, one is learning about the English language and how to use it. That's when we get into grammar, structure, vocabulary, syntax, word origins, etc. And that, in itself, often becomes a pleasurable lifelong pursuit.

Because the use of language is so distinctly a human trait, it commands an interest equal to any other in life. Language is the tool of thought, and before one can make maximum use of that tool, one must master the basic mechanical skills of reading and writing.

How long will it take for the letter writer to become a proficient phonetic reader? It all depends on how much time and effort he puts into the task and how badly he wants to get rid of his disability. As stated earlier, motivation is the key to success. It is the driving force that enables people to overcome insurmountable obstacles.

We wish the letter writer great success in his quest for self-improvement and literary excellence.

Letter From South Africa

Dear Dr. Blumenfeld

CERCOS is a research "think tank" founded in 1946 by the three Afrikaans-speaking Dutch Reformed Churches. Originally called "The Anti-Communist Action Commission" (Anticom), we changed our name in 1985 to Centre for Reformed and Contemporary Studies (CERCOS) to indicate the broadening of our task.

We are researching all major secular ideologies competing with Biblical Christianity: Fascism, Marxism, Social Democracy, New Age Humanism, Secular Humanism and Libertarian Anarcho-Capitalism. . . .

I have just returned from the States and the UK [where I was given] a copy of your *N.E.A. . . . I've read most of Is Public Education Necessary?*

These works of yours are very relevant here. I talked with one of the first Afrikaans remedial reading specialists in the Cape Province a while back. She told me that they are now getting the first Afrikaans illiterates in the school system! That's very hard to do because Afrikaans is an almost perfectly phonetic language! They use American Look-Say methods now, she said.

This concerns me because my little boy (Afrikaans speaking) is having a few problems in his first year at school for this very reason!

Would it be possible to send me a copy of your *The New Illiterates* and could you tell me where I can get Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read* and *Why Johnny Still Can't Read*?

Mark R. Kreitzer

CERCOS

P.O. Box 5834

Pretoria

Republic of South Africa 0001

Comment:

We sent Mr. Kreitzer a copy of *The New*

Illiterates. If any of our readers have copies of Dr. Flesch's books that they would like to send to Mr. Kreitzer, please feel free to do so. He will make sure that they are widely read. It would be interesting to know why the Afrikaans education establishment has permitted look-say to be used in their schools, thus creating an unprecedented "reading problem" among Afrikaans-speaking children in South Africa. Apparently the lunacy of the International Reading Association has infected South Africa.

Former Labor Secretary Blasts Public Education

Former Secretary of Labor William Brock made the following comments about public education in an interview with *Time*, 7/23/90:

"We have public education at the elementary and secondary level that ranks below every industrial competitor we have in the world We are the only country in the industrial world that says to one out of every four of its young people, 'We are going to let you drop out of sight; we are not going to give you the tools to be productive.'

"Education is the most backward single institution in all the U.S. It is not for lack of money. It's a lack of intelligence and will and competence. It is a bureaucratic inertia that is unbelievable and inexcusable. Between 38 cents and 41 cents of our education dollar gets to the classroom. That is an act of irrationality. . . . In the city of New York there are more school administrators than there are in all of France. In the state of New York there are more administrators than there are in all of the European Community, and the E.C. has 12 countries and 320 million people."

Vital Quotes

"I believe that the decline in education is probably responsible for the widespread use of drugs. To live in the midst of a civilized society with a level of knowledge closer perhaps to that of primitive man than to what a civilized adult requires (which, regrettably, is the intellectual state of many of today's students and graduates) must be a terrifying experience, urgently calling for some kind of relief, and drugs may appear to many to be the solution. . . .

"This is no longer an educational system. Its character has been completely transformed and it now clearly reveals itself to be what for many decades it has been in the process of becoming: namely an agency working for the barbarization of youth."

George Reisman, prof. of economics,
Pepperdine University, *The Intellectual Activist*

Parents for Unalienable Rights In Education (PURE) 3rd Annual Conference Oct. 19-20, 1990 Boise, Idaho

"A Parents Rights Strategy for the Nineties"

It's time for parents to start organizing a long-range campaign to repeal compulsory school attendance laws. Only by going on the offensive will parents be able to defend their rights to educate their children without interference from state bureaucrats and government educators. Only by repealing compulsory school attendance will educational freedom be restored in America.

Speakers will include Samuel L. Blumen-

feld, Sharon Pangelinan, Bob Forrey, David Gamble and David Barrett.

The conference will be held at the Broadway Ave. Baptist Church, 2530 Broadway Ave., Boise, Idaho 83706. For information call The Montgomery Institute (208) 888-2315 or The Blumenfeld Education Letter (208) 322-4440.

Retired Teacher's Three Daughters Use *Alpha-Phonics*

We thought you'd be interested in this letter from a retired public school teacher who now encourages home schooling:

"I retired seven years ago from a career — teaching kindergarten in a public school. I became interested in home schooling about 3 years ago when our oldest daughter chose to home school. Since then two more of our daughters have chosen to teach at home, and we're all excited about the unfolding of these young personalities. Our three daughters were constantly asking my advice on how to best teach phonics, they were truly overwhelmed by the plethora of teaching materials. I feel that the Lord directed me to the best phonics teaching book available and now all 3 daughters are using *Alpha-Phonics*. I'm impressed with *Alpha-Phonics*; it's so thorough & orderly. It teaches discipline in learning and yet isn't crammed with busy work. I've since ordered a copy of *How To Tutor* for each daughter to build her confidence and maintain her enthusiasm.

"I now realize that the reading curriculum in our public schools was detrimental to so many children. Endless repetition & busy work must have been so discouraging to those youngsters. My biggest regret is in feeling that I wasted the learning potential of many of those children under my care.

—Name withheld by request.