

# 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 these risks.

**"Without vision, the people perish."**

## **The Political Agenda Behind "Whole Language"**

In our February 1991 issue we revealed that there was a political agenda behind the whole-language movement. In an article by whole-language advocates in *Education Week* of Feb. 27, 1985 we read:

The accumulating evidence clearly indicates that a New Right philosophy of education has emerged in this country. . . . [B]y limiting reading instruction to systematic phonics instruction, sound-symbol decoding, and literal comprehension; and by aiming its criticism at reading books' story lines in an effort to influence content, the New Right's philosophy runs counter to the research findings and theoretical perspectives of most noted reading authorities.

If this limited view of reading (and, implicitly, of thinking) continues to gain influence . . . the New Right will have successfully impeded the progress of democratic governance founded on the ideal of an educated — and critically thinking — electorate.

First, what is the so-called New Right's philosophy of education that threatens to impede "the progress of democratic governance"? The New Right's philosophy of education is the same philosophy espoused by our Founding Fathers who gave us our limited form of government as outlined in the

U.S. Constitution. In those days, education was considered primarily a parental concern. In fact, home-schooling was the rule and children were taught to read and write at home or at a Dame's School before they went on to any form of formal education. And since there was a strong religious component in education, it was implicitly assumed that the purpose of education was to pass on to the future generation the knowledge, wisdom and values of the previous generation.

That, of course, is no longer the case. When the progressives took over American education at the turn of the century, their goal was to use the schools as the means of changing America from a capitalist, individualistic, believing nation into a socialist, collectivist, atheist or humanist nation. Their vision of a socialist America is to be found in the futuristic novel of Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, published in 1888. In that novel Bellamy, a Unitarian journalist, projected the fantasy of a socialist America in the year 2000. It was that vision which moti-

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vated John Dewey and his colleagues to educate young Americans in a manner which would lead them to turn America into a socialist society.

### **"Democratic Governance"**

And so, when educators write of "democratic governance," what form of government are they talking about? Obviously they are not talking about the form of government created by our Founding Fathers. They are talking about something else.

John Dewey often used the word "democracy" as a euphemism for socialism, and as we know, communist countries often referred to themselves as democracies. Thus communist East Germany was known as the German Democratic Republic, even though its government was totalitarian and socialist. An article in *The Reading Teacher* of Nov. 1987 states:

Whole Language views the learner as profoundly social. Thus practice congruent with Whole Language includes participating in a community of readers during small group literature study, peer writing workshops, group social studies projects with built-in plans for collaborative learning.

What the writer has described is reading as a social activity rather than an individualistic one. Yes, it is possible to have a group of readers seated in a circle all reading copies of the same book. But that does not make it a social activity. The simple fact is that when a reader is reading a book or anything else, he or she is engaged in direct one-on-one contact with the writer. The message of the writer is being taken in by the mind of the reader. This is an individualistic activity. Yes, the group of readers, after reading the same book, can discuss it. But if each individual's understanding of the book were not different, there would be no need for a discussion. In other words, the reader is an

individual, and his or her reading activity is an independent experience.

Whole language teachers are attempting to "socialize" reading, to make it a collective experience, in complete contradiction to how reading actually takes place. In reality, a "community of readers" is really a community of believers all believing the same thing. The same article speaks of a "political vision woven through Whole Language beliefs. . . . Its goal is empowerment of learners and teachers."

What does learning to read have to do with political power? Why should a child in primary school, struggling to master the three R's, be concerned with "empowerment"? Perhaps we can gain an idea of what the educators mean from an article by Frank Smith in *Phi Delta Kappan* of Jan. 1989. Frank Smith, along with Prof. Ken Goodman, is one of the top gurus of the whole-language movement. He writes:

Literacy is power. Literacy can do more than transform thought; it can transform the world. Literacy can raise social consciousness and provide a means for the expression and fulfillment of this consciousness. . . . Paulo Freire's pedagogic technique raises social consciousness not as a way of using literacy but as a means of acquiring it.

### **Critical Consciousness**

Smith's reference to Paulo Freire is quite revealing, for Freire is a leading Marxist theoretician who has used adult literacy campaigns in the third world to foment Marxist revolution. Freire used a form of "critical consciousness," which he called conscientization, to awaken critical thinking in the minds of the oppressed. Phillip Berryman, in his book, *Liberation Theology*, writes: "Implicit in the 'Freire method' is a political agenda that can be called revolutionary, although Freire and his followers are highly critical of all attempts to organize in a top-

down manner. . . . They believe that through a *concientizacion* (conscientization) process 'the people' themselves must decide what sort of organizational approach they will take. Freire himself has worked with socialist and revolutionary governments in Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, and Angola."

Freire is considered a "master dialectician" by his progressive American admirers and colleagues who revere him as a sort of Brazilian incarnation of John Dewey, whose socialist spirit still hovers over the education establishment. In the introduction to his recent book, *Literacy: Reading the Word, and the World*, written with radical professor Donaldo Macedo of the University of Massachusetts, Freire writes:

The illiteracy crisis world over, if not combated, will further exacerbate already feeble democratic institutions and the unjust, asymmetrical power relations that characterize the contradictory nature of contemporary democracies. The inherent contradiction in the actual usage of the term "democracy" is eloquently captured by Noam Chomsky, *On Power and Ideology* (1987), in his analysis of the United States society.

"'Democracy,' in the United States rhetoric refers to a system of governance in which elite elements based in the business community control the state by virtue of their dominance of the private society, while the population observes quietly. So understood, democracy is a system of elite decision and public ratification, as in the United States itself. Correspondingly, popular involvement in the formation of public policy is considered a serious threat. It is not a step towards democracy; rather, it constitutes a 'crisis of democracy' that must be overcome."

In order to overcome, at least partly, this "crisis of democracy," a critical literacy campaign must be instituted. It must be a literacy campaign that transcends the current debate over the literacy crisis which tends to recycle old assumptions and values concerning the meaning and usefulness of literacy, that is a notion that literacy is simply a mechanical process which overemphasizes the technical acquisition of reading and writing skills.

. . . [W]e call for a view of literacy as a form of cultural politics. In our analysis, literacy becomes a meaningful construct to the degree that it is viewed as

a set of practices that functions to either empower or disempower people. In the larger sense, literacy is analyzed according to whether it serves to reproduce existing social formation or serves as a set of cultural practices that promotes democratic and emancipatory change. . . . [L]iteracy cannot be reduced to the treatment of letters and words as purely mechanical domain. We need to go beyond this rigid comprehension of literacy and begin to view it as the relationship of learners to the world, mediated by the transforming practice of this world taking place in the very general milieu in which learners travel.

## "Empowerment"

That's about as good and clear a description of whole-language theory and practice as one is likely to find anywhere. Reading as a mechanical skill is rejected in favor of a new consciousness-raising critical literacy to be used ultimately to change our political system. Thus, the political agenda is the central motivating force behind the whole-language movement, and that's why the theme of "empowerment" is constantly evoked by its promoters. Frank Smith writes:

Of course, there is no way that students will be empowered until teachers themselves are empowered. And this will not happen until teachers are autonomous in their classrooms. Teachers can be held accountable by the community outside for raising literacy, but not told by external authorities precisely how literacy is to be achieved.

The basic question is, Who is to be in charge of classrooms — teachers or outsiders? All the prescribed programs, all the pre-specified and detailed objectives, and all the mandated assessments are impositions from outside. They interfere not only with the autonomy of teachers but with the ability of teachers and students to act together in pursuit of learning. . . .

I see but one solution for all these problems. Teachers must become more professional; they must regain control of classrooms, assert themselves politically, and demand that all outside interference in educational practice be halted. . . .

How are teachers to achieve this autonomy? The answer involves professional and political issues and demands professional commitment and political clout.

And so the teaching of reading has been turned into a political struggle for the minds and hearts of American children who hold the key to America's future.

## The Exclusion of Parents

Smith's insistence that teachers take full control of the classroom, assert themselves politically, and act together with the students "in pursuit of knowledge," infers that parents are to be excluded from the process and to have no say or influence over what or how their children are to be taught. The indoctrination of the students is to be the sole responsibility of their teachers.

That such indoctrination should include political content was made clear in an article in *Young Children* (Jan. 1989) entitled "Children's Political Knowledge and Attitudes," coauthored by three professors. They write:

There is a clear rationale for early childhood educators to explore and promote political socialization in young children, and to play an important role in it. Children have and express political knowledge and attitudes. . . . Early childhood educators have an important role in helping children understand their social and political environment. Teachers can choose to model positive citizenship, practice a consensus decision-making process, and foster feelings of altruism and benevolence, all the while providing language opportunities to help children learn politically oriented vocabulary.

In other words, early childhood education will include political indoctrination by way of vocabulary development, which is very much in line with Freire's methodology. Concerning empowerment, William T. Fagan, in an article entitled "Empowered students; empowered teachers" (*The Reading Teacher*, April 1989), writes:

Teachers have power over how reading and writing are taught, over how children experience reading and writing within the school text. . . . Teachers who impose a narrow view of reading or writing

(word sounding, precision in spelling) may confuse children so that they begin to feel powerless in the school context.

The putting down of phonics — "word sounding and precision in spelling" — is a constant theme among whole-language leaders. Kenneth Goodman, in *What's Whole in Whole Language*, writes:

Phonics methods of teaching reading and writing reduce both to matching letters with sounds. It is a flat-earth view of the world, since it rejects modern science about reading and writing and how they develop.

Apart from the atrocious grammar, Prof. Goodman's arguments can be exposed for the sham they are. Educational researchers are anything but true scientists. Their "experiments" are often conducted to produce pre-conceived outcomes. In teaching children to read an alphabetic (sound-symbol) writing system, intensive, systematic phonics has been proven to produce better, more fluent readers than look-say or whole language. There has always been a political agenda behind the whole-word method. John Dewey wrote in *Democracy and Education* in 1916:

The notion that the "essentials" of elementary education are the three R's mechanically treated, is based upon ignorance of the essentials needed for realization of democratic ideals. (p. 192)

Isn't it interesting that the three R's, "mechanically treated," produced our highly literate Founding Fathers who could write a Declaration of Independence and create a free society where literacy became virtually universal?

Dewey's socialism was so extreme that he even denied the individual ownership of his own mind. He wrote:

When knowledge is regarded as originating and developing within an individual, the ties which

bind the mental life of one to that of his fellows are ignored and denied.

When the social quality of individualized mental operations is denied, it becomes a problem to find connections which will unite an individual with his fellows. Moral individualism is set up by the conscious separation of different centers of life. It has its roots in the notion that the consciousness of each person is wholly private, a self-inclosed continent, intrinsically independent of the ideas, wishes, purposes of everybody else. . . . (p. 297)

In *School and Society* Dewey wrote:

Earlier psychology regarded mind as a purely individual affair in direct and naked contact with an external world. The only question was of the ways in which the world and mind acted upon each other. The entire process recognized would have been in theory exactly the same if there were one mind living alone in the universe.

At present the tendency is to conceive individual mind as a function of social life — as not capable of operating or developing by itself, but as requiring continual stimulus from social agencies, and finding its nutrition in social supplies. The idea of heredity has made familiar the notion that the equipment of the individual, mental as well as physical, is an inheritance from the race: a capital inherited by the individual from the past and held in trust by him for the future. The idea of evolution has made familiar the notion that mind cannot be regarded as an individual, monopolistic possession, but represents the outworkings of the endeavor and thought of humanity; that it is developed in an environment which is social as well as physical, and that social needs and aims have been most potent in shaping it — and the chief difference between savagery and civilization is not the naked nature which each faces, but the social heredity and social medium.

Freire echoes Dewey's views on individualism when he writes:

The individualistic ideology ends up negating social interests or it subsumes social interests with individualistic interests. . . . The individualistic position works against the comprehension of the real role of human agency. (p. 59)

Freire also puts down the teaching of the "mechanics" of reading. He writes:

I always saw teaching adults to read and write as a political act, an act of knowledge, and therefore a creative act. I would find it impossible to be engaged in a work of mechanically memorizing vowel sounds, as in the exercise "ba-be-bi-bo-bu, la-le-li-lo-lu." Nor could I reduce learning to read and write merely to learning words, syllables, or letters, a process of teaching in which the teacher fills the supposedly empty heads of learners with his or her words. (p.34)

But at the heart of Freire's philosophy is the notion that education and politics are inseparable. He writes:

From the critical point of view, it is impossible to deny the political nature of the educational process as it is to deny the educational character of the political act. . . . But it is in this sense, as much for the educational process as for the political act, that one of the fundamental questions arises: in favor of whom and what (and thus against whom and what) do we promote education? And in favor of whom and what do we develop political activity? The more we gain this clarity of understanding through practice, the more we perceive the impossibility of separating the inseparable: the education of politics. We can understand, then, that it is impossible to even think about education without considering the question of power. (p.38)

What we educators have to do, then, is to clarify the fact that education is political, and to be consistent with it in practice. (p.39)

Obviously, there exists within the American education establishment a network of '60s leftists—well versed in the writings of Paulo Freire, John Dewey and other radical educators—who are now so well organized and entrenched in positions of power and influence throughout the university system, that they can virtually dictate how reading is to be taught in just about every primary school in America. And that is why we strongly urge parents to remove their children from the public schools and either teach them at home or put them in good private schools.

## One Family's Experience With Whole Language

Recently, we got a phone call from a father in New Hampshire who related what had happened to his daughter when she was being taught to read by the whole language approach in the local school. The town, incidentally, has gained a reputation among educators as being a pioneer and leader in the whole-language movement, and its schools are held up as models of whole-language practice. I urged this gentleman to commit his story to paper so that I could convey it to our readers. He did so. However, he requested that his name and the name of the town not be made public for fear of the ugly repercussions that might befall him and his family, which gives you an idea of the intimidating nature of our public educators and their allies in the community. Here's the letter:

In response to your request of May 17, 1991 I have written down my first grade daughter's reading experiences of this school year as I have observed them. I make no claim to having any special "qualifications" for the observations I've made or for the conclusions I've reached other than the following: I knew my daughter very well; and I have attempted to be a careful witness to, and supporter of, her academic endeavors. Therefore, I can present the following facts with a clear conscience. And I believe these facts speak for themselves.

On August 30, 1990 our local newspaper ran a brief piece called "Kid Poll." In it several children were asked, What would you do if there were no school? My daughter, one of the kids polled, answered, "I'd stay home and read books and do adding myself with my flashcards. That's what I'd do." This response, though rosy, gives an indication of the anticipation my daughter had on the eve of her entry into first grade. My wife and I had taught her basic phonetic concepts and my daughter understood, to a degree, how to go about sounding out words.

With the beginning of school, progress seemed rapid. In less than a month my daughter had latched onto the concepts of reading and would read aloud by herself with great enthusiasm. My wife and I reported

this amazing progress to her teacher, and we rejoiced in this first great step. It, indeed, gave us high hopes for the future.

Unfortunately, those hopes were disappointed. The zest and excitement for reading so evident in early October began to fade. In November voluntary reading at home virtually ceased. This puzzling development prompted another visit to the teacher, but we were assured that my daughter was just taking a pause—a common phenomenon which would pass in due time. My wife and I, having found our daughter's teacher to be a caring and conscientious person (and this is an assessment to which we still firmly hold), we became much less concerned and decided to wait.

But the next weeks brought only a further decline in interest. While reading with my wife in early January, my daughter, frustrated and irritated, closed her book and walked away after struggling through just one sentence. She was just no longer able to read properly. To be sure, she could "read"—in a strange sort of way. She would go right along, skipping words, adding some, making bad guesses at what she didn't know, all the while thinking she was reading. However, oblivious to the cumulative effect of all her errors, my daughter was perceiving only a vague sense of what the words were actually stating. My wife's and my efforts to get her to stop, look at each word, sound it out and not proceed until she understood it, had become exercises in contention and frustration.

Several times I made specific efforts to get my daughter to discipline herself to slow down and accurately read only the words that were written and this intensive work did have its results. She would seem to rediscover the abilities she had already proven herself to have in October. But after just a day or two more at school, she would be right back to where she had been before our intensive sessions. This resulted in my having a very unusual sense that there was a tug-of-war going on for my daughter's mind.

In early February I decided to do some research on the subject of the public schools. A friend lent me a videotape of a speech Dr. Blumenfeld had given to a group of homeschoolers in Albany, New York, several years ago. In it he made the almost unbelievable assertion that the "look-say" method of teaching or, by inference, any system of teaching based on the "look-say" method—including "Whole Language," the system used at my daughter's school—is inherently and fundamentally flawed, and that this flawed system actually produces in many children the symptoms of dyslexia. And he listed its symptoms.

The next day I asked my daughter to sit down and read with me and, remarkably, I heard every one

of the seven or eight symptoms Dr. Blumenfeld had mentioned on the tape manifested within one paragraph. It seemed apparent that our daughter, a decent enthusiastic reader in October, was a budding "disability" case in February.

Having now recognized the problem, and recognizing also that our local elementary school seems totally dedicated to the Whole Language system, my wife and I decided to remove our daughter from the school rather than have her erroneously classified as a disability case and placed unnecessarily in a "remedial" program. Through Dr. Blumenfeld's videotape we knew what the remedy was, and within a month we had my daughter enrolled in a school where a phonics-based reading program is taught. Happily I can now report that at this date my daughter is again a happy, enthusiastic reader, and my wife and I again look forward to future progress.

We are grateful to the letter writer for having debunked the myth about the efficacy of whole-language instruction. We are also delighted to know that our message is indeed reaching people through the time-tested vehicle of word of mouth. The spectacular growth of home-schooling — from Fairbanks to Miami, from Honolulu to Boston — indicates that more and more parents are becoming aware of the true nature of today's public schools. They want out!

## Letter From Barbara M. Morris

Dear Sam,

Congratulations on your excellent May 1991 Letter ["Why Schools Don't Educate"]. The third paragraph on page 8 made my day. "Its [The Public school's] atheism is so deep, so pervasive, so blasphemous that it has rendered the system unsalvageable. It permeates the curriculum to such an extent, that most children emerge from the system permanently damaged morally, spiritually and academically." That says it all! Working with young people in the pharmacy, I experience daily the reality of your words. Truly, in so many ways, they are permanently

damaged. I also see and feel the reality of those words every time I fill a prescription for a young girl who has just been to the local abortuary and needs antibiotics, pain killers, and, of course, three months worth of birth control pills so she and her boyfriend(s) can engage in "responsible sex." Surely, the success of sex education must exceed the most devilish dreams of those who promoted it way back when.

Sam, I continue to be angry (to put it mildly) with the Christians and "conservatives" who understand fully the government schools' agenda, yet continue to support government schools with the misleading promise that if only the parents, the government or whatever will do this or that the system can be fixed. What is it -- are so many of our trusted leaders carrying a hidden agenda? Are there so many people making their living from the public education industry that we can never hope for an end to the nightmare?

We have a local Christian radio station KPRZ that airs several talk shows. I've sent my tax credits materials to one of the hosts who promotes tax credits but I've never received an acknowledgement. Led by misguided leaders he trusts, he is certain that tax credits will provide "choice" without harming the public schools. Who says all the sacred cows are in India?

However, the wonderful news according to your Letter is that Chris Whittle intends to develop a nationwide chain of for-profit schools. That is so incredibly exciting! I just hope that if he gets his project off the ground it doesn't get co-opted by the same "friends" who are doing so much mischief right now. Please continue to inform your readers of his progress.

Thanks for listening, Sam, and God bless your continued efforts.

Sincerely, Barbara M. Morris  
June 16, 1991, Carlsbad, CA

## Dewey's Pragmatic Oath

John Dewey offered to replace the traditional oath, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," with the following:

"I swear to tell the approximate truth, the tentative truth, the relative truth, so help me future experience." (*School and Society*, 11/11/39)

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## Vital Reading

*The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum*, by Rousas John Rushdoony, Ross House Books, Star Rt. 1, 3900 Highway 4, Murphys, CA 95247, \$8.00.

Anatole France once said: "The book which isn't worth reading twice, isn't even worth reading once." Dr. R. J. Rushdoony's *The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum* is not only worth reading twice, you will probably want to read it many more times than that in order to properly assimilate the extraordinary range of knowledge, insight, and wisdom that fills its 194 pages.

The great virtue of this book is that it presents the clearest, most thorough and concise statement of the Christian world view regarding education to be found anywhere. Dr. Rushdoony sums up his views in these words:

"Christian education is of necessity not only theological in nature but theocentric. It is God-centered because God as Lord requires all things to serve Him. The Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us that 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.' Every area of life and thought must be in line with this purpose, and education especially so. Humanistic education seeks to glorify man and to enable man to enjoy himself; it is doomed always to fail. Christian education cannot be secular education

plus the Bible. The Bible is not added to an existing curriculum; the Bible must establish, govern, and condition the curriculum, or else we do not have Christian education."

It is Dr. Rushdoony's contention that the government schools, which presently represent the humanist establishment of religion in America, can never be made to serve Christian needs. "Until we recognize that schools are establishments of religion, and that all education is inescapably a religious activity, we cannot come to grips with our cultural crisis," he writes.

In other words, the public schools can never be neutral, for in the author's view, neutrality in education is merely another humanist myth. Rushdoony sees the government schools of America as the battleground where the souls of American children are being fought over and, for the most part, lost. These schools "teach and propagate a philosophy of life which does more than omit Christianity: It is radically at war with Biblical religion."

He concludes: "The great issue of the years ahead is the developing battle between Christianity and Humanism. It is a war unto death," and "education is at present the central theater of war."

What should a Christian education consist of? Dr. Rushdoony goes into great detail concerning virtually every subject: religion, mathematics, science, literature, music, history, government, language, composition, grammar. Indeed, if you are a Christian school educator, parent, or home-schooler, you will find answers to many of the questions that have inevitably arisen concerning the nature of Christian education. Written by one of Christendom's clearest thinkers, this book is indispensable reading for anyone who takes Christian education seriously.