

# The Blumenfeld Education Letter



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

Vol. 7, No. 11 (Letter # 63)

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November 1991

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."

## In Search of "Whole Language" in Australia

Australia is like a second America. Its island continent is the size of the United States. It is a fascinating land of discovery, colonization, settlement and immigrants. Its heritage and language is English, like ours, and for the most part we share the same religion and read the same Bible. Although for many years Australia limited its immigration to people from the United Kingdom, it has in recent years adopted a more open-door policy. The result is the kind of ethnic variety similar to that in the United States.

So it is a country that Americans can easily identify with and feel comfortable in. But there are differences. In Australia they drive on the left side of the road as in England. This may seem like a trivial difference until you decide to rent a car. Not too long ago some Americans attending a Rotary convention in Brisbane rented a car and were killed in a head-on crash because they were on the wrong side of the road.

I was invited to Australia by people who had read my books and newsletters and thought that I could help them in their struggle against their own education system which, as I discovered, is every bit as bad as

ours. It took two years for the arrangements to be made. I left Boston on July 30, 1991 and arrived in Sydney on August 1st. You lose a day when you cross the dateline in the middle of the Pacific. The nonstop flight on United from Los Angeles to Sydney was supposed to take 17 hours but we had an unscheduled fuel stop in Fiji which stretched the flight to 19 hours.

At Sydney I went through immigration and passport control. They had misspelled my name on the visa — you need a visa to get into Australia — so I was delayed as they made their checks on their computers. Eventually I got through but by then I had missed my 8:50 a.m. connection to Brisbane. I took the bus to the domestic terminal of Australian Airlines. On getting to the bus I had to go outside where I got a taste of fresh Australian air. This was supposed to be winter, but it was more like a mild spring day.

At Brisbane I was met at the airport by Rona Joyner and her husband Harry, an activist Christian couple in their 70s. Rona, who had planned my tour of Australia, is the founder and director of Stop and Care, a conservative, Christian organization that has been fighting pornography, abortion, sex

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education, secular humanism, etc. since the 1970s. "Stop" stands for "Society to Outlaw Pornography" and "Care" stands for "Committee Against Regressive Education." Rona is responsible for getting MACOS (Man: A Course of Study) out of the public schools of Queensland. She also mobilized opposition to an education bill that would have given the state complete control over private education. Mother of eight children, Rona is small and feisty, absolutely fearless when it comes to facing the Fabian bureaucrats and politicians who are trying to turn Australia into a socialist state.

That first weekend in Australia was devoted to a seminar on education which Rona had organized. It took place at a conference center in a suburb of Brisbane, which is the capital of Queensland. During that weekend I had the pleasure of meeting Rev. Fred Nile, a member of the parliament of New South Wales in Sydney, who has been defending Christian values and traditions against the humanist, socialist enemy for the last ten years. While Rona Joyner may be the Phyllis Schlafly of Queensland, Fred Nile is easily the Jerry Falwell of Australia. He may not have a television ministry, but he has a highly visible parliamentary one, and as such he represents a strong Christian presence in an otherwise highly secularized state legislature.

Australia has six states and a territory (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory) plus an Australian Capital Territory in which Canberra, the federal capital, is located. About 16,000,000 people live in a country the size of the United States, minus Alaska. So it doesn't take very many dedicated activists to influence a country with so small a population.

Australia is currently ruled by a socialist federal government headed by Prime Minister Bob Hawke, leader of the Austra-

lian Labor Party. His commitment to the Fabian program was articulated in a speech he gave at the Fabian Society's centenary dinner in Melbourne in 1984 after he had become Prime Minister. He said:

"We all have to face the fact that if our Government is to make really great and worthwhile reforms — reforms that will endure, reforms that will permanently change this nation — then it is not enough simply to obtain a temporary majority at an election, or even successive elections.

"For our reforms to endure, the whole mood and mind and attitudes of the nation must be permanently changed."

That is why the Fabians have placed so much importance on their control of public education. For, if the whole mood and mind and attitudes of the nation must be permanently changed to achieve Fabian goals, then it is the schools that must do the changing and molding of the young minds.

## Education for Socialism

In that same year, Mrs. Joan Kirner, former Minister for Education, now Premier of Victoria, also a committed Fabian, wrote in a Fabian Society pamphlet:

"If we are egalitarian in our intention we have to reshape education so that it is: part of the socialist struggle for equality, participation and social change, rather than an instrument of the capitalist system; a vital weapon in the transition to more equal outcomes for disadvantaged groups and classes rather than a ladder to equal educational opportunity for individuals; a catalyst for system change rather than the legitimization of system maintenance."

After the seminar, Fred Nile and I were driven up the coast of Queensland by Rona and her staff of volunteers. On Sunday, Fred and I spoke in Nambour and Gympie, on

Monday at Maryborough, Bundaberg and Gladstone. On Tuesday we drove up to Rockhampton where we were interviewed by the media, after which Rev. Nile was driven to the airport where he took a plane back to Sydney.

That afternoon I had lunch with a local group of liberal clergymen who meet once a month for an ecumenical exchange. The lunch had been arranged by a young Presbyterian minister who had read my book, *The New Illiterates*, and was anxious to converse with me. He generally did not attend these monthly meetings, but he thought I might be able to enlighten the ministers to some degree on the deficiencies of government education. As it turned out, they did not share my enthusiasm for homeschooling.

Later he told me that he had given my book to one of his church members who was also a professor of education. He had asked the professor to review the book which the professor did. He gave me a copy of the review which was very critical of my favorable views on intensive, systematic phonics. The professor was a proponent of Whole Language and said that he held to the views of Prof. Brian Cambourne, an authority on Whole Language.

In the United States we had been told that Whole Language had originated in Australia, and one of the things I had wanted to do in Australia was find out whether or not that was true. If it was, I wanted to know who was responsible for its original development. The professor's mention of Brian Cambourne provided the lead I was looking for.

I spoke in Rockhampton that night to a very appreciative audience and on the following morning flew further up the coast to Townsville. There I was met by Pastor Hugh Gallagher in whose Presbyterian church I would be speaking that evening. That afternoon the Pastor gave me a tour of the city

which reminds one of both Florida and Southern California. Townsville is also the home of James Cook University which I was able to visit the following morning. At the library I asked if they had any information on Prof. Brian Cambourne. Well, it turned out that Brian Cambourne had gotten his PhD at James Cook and that they actually had a copy of his dissertation on hand. Did I want to see it? I could hardly wait.

## A Key Dissertation

The dissertation was entitled "A Naturalistic Study of Language Performance In Grade 1 Rural and Urban School Children." The purpose of the study was to find out where children best developed their language skills: in the home, on the playground, or in the classroom. The results will surprise many. Cambourne wrote:

"[O]f the three settings in which spontaneous speech was recorded, it would appear that the home setting is the most nurturant and the classroom setting is the least nurturant in terms of the development of the skills of sentence-combining. . . . In terms of the way in which Moffett (1968) conceptualizes the relationship between language and thinking, the home environments sampled in this study appear to be ones in which the child is most constrained to 'specify' and 'relate,' which in turn helps move him toward mature thought and speech.

"... This suggests that a secure, warm, parental-like relationship between interlocutors is one of the factors which is conducive to higher levels of performance."

What an endorsement of homeschooling! But Cambourne wrote that in 1971 before homeschooling had become the movement it is today. What did Cambourne conclude from his findings? He wrote:

"One of the implications of this set of relationships is the need for classrooms to be

organised so as to maximise the opportunities to engage in productive conversation of the sort which encourages the kinds of language-use considered to be worth developing. Admittedly, it may be difficult, within the classroom setting, to provide, in ideal form, the conditions conducive to the promotion of dialogue experience fundamental to language development."

In other words, let's make the classroom more like the home, and hopefully we'll get the same results. The problem is that when you apply this theory of language development to the teaching of reading, writing and arithmetic at school it doesn't work at all.

I had hoped to interview Prof. Cambourne sometime during my stay in Australia. He is Head of the Centre for Studies in Literacy at Wollongong University, near Sydney, but when I got there he was out of the country. I had wanted to ask him if he was the father of Whole Language. However, when I got back to the States I got hold of Cambourne by phone and asked him the question. He laughed and said that if anyone could be called the father of Whole Language, it would probably be Don Holdaway of New Zealand, whose book, *The Foundations of Literacy*, is regarded as an important sourcebook by Whole Language proponents. I then asked Cambourne what he thought of the homeschool movement. He said he favored it if it were done by parents who knew what they were doing. However, he was concerned that Christian fundamentalist parents, with their narrow views, would limit their children's educational horizons.

### **"Whole Language" Not New**

But he stressed that Whole Language was really nothing new. "It's been around a long, long time," he said. Of course, Whole Language is merely the latest adaptation of whole-word, look-say reading instruction.

It has discarded the insipid basal readers in favor of "real literature." And the choice of that "real literature" is in the hands of the teacher. Sometimes that "real literature" is composed of stories that children find frightening and emotionally upsetting. The result has been parent protestations all across America.

In trying to determine where Whole Language came from, it becomes obvious that it was a joint enterprise among Americans, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders and others in the reading instruction field. What they all have in common is an abhorrence of intensive, systematic phonics as the principal means of teaching reading. What they also have in common is a commitment to the principles of progressive education as promulgated by John Dewey.

From Townsville I flew to Mt. Isa, a mining town several hundred miles in the Outback where the geography resembles Nevada. There I was met by Karl and Susan Langguth in their beat-up station wagon. The Langguths have nine children, all of whom are being homeschooled. Since the airport was in sight of the field where the rodeo was to take place that weekend, we stopped off to watch Australian cowboys practice. It was like being back in the U.S.

The Langguths lived in a comfortable, airy house in a quiet residential area. Susan had just given birth to a new daughter, only three weeks old, and it was delightful to see how each of the other children took turns carrying their new little sister around, kissing and patting her.

The meeting that Thursday night was held in the local education hall and about 35 people attended. I talked about the problems of public education in America and how the policy makers in Australia and the U.S. think along the same lines. The purpose of the message was to make parents aware of what was going on and for them to realize

that there was a very good alternative: homeschooling. Several homeschooling parents were present.

There were two dissenters who strongly defended the public system, but they were countered by parents who told their horror stories. One mother described the deterioration of the state schools by relating how much better her older children were taught compared to her younger ones who now have dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder. She could see the changes by what was happening to her own children.

Another mother told about her son being taught death education and of a classroom exercise in which a child was blindfolded and told that she was barefoot and that there were tacks all over the floor and that she had to have total trust in her classmates in order to be led safely out of the situation. It was at that point that the mother removed her child from the school and is now homeschooling.

## Homeschooling in the Outback

In the morning I watched Susan Langguth get her school-age children started on their home-study. They began with a prayer, reading the catechism, reciting patriotic Australian poetry. Then, each got into his or her own subjects, seated at a table by the window. Susan went over their times tables which they recited in unison. It was touching to see one of the sons put his arm around his mother's shoulder as she leaned forward at the table reading with them. What a lovely and loving family, and what happy memories these children will have in later years.

Later that morning I flew back to Brisbane where I then took a plane to Adelaide in South Australia. I arrived at about 6:30 that evening and was met by David Phillips, South Australia director of Festival of Light, a Christian organization. He drove me

through Adelaide, pointing out sites of historical interest. I was impressed with the beauty of the city, its buildings and parks. Adelaide is the capital of South Australia and has a population of about a million.

We drove to his home in Tea Tree Gully, a suburb in the hills around Adelaide, and were greeted by his wife Roslyn and their three children. Roslyn and David had organized a full-day seminar for Saturday in which I would instruct the attendees on how to teach the 3Rs. The seminar, held at a Christian school complex and attended mainly by Christian-school teachers, was a roaring success. I was amazed at how well-organized everything was. That there was a need for such a seminar was obvious from the questions that were asked and the number of books sold. There was a strong desire to get back to an academic-centered curriculum.

On Sunday I spoke at two churches and on Monday visited a local public primary school where a friend of Roslyn's taught 2nd grade. There were 28 children. Phonics and arithmetic were taught incidentally while the class was arranged in groups around tables where the children worked alone or with one another, with everyone doing something else. The teacher was largely a facilitator. Socialization was the main object.

Some of the children were reading out of their little story books. No basal readers were being used, in conformity with Whole Language philosophy. The children were being taught to print first, then learn South Australian Modern Cursive, consisting of printed capital letters and printed small letters that lend themselves to being joined. It was neither good cursive nor simple manuscript. It was a wretched hybrid. This new writing style was mandated by the state, and the teacher could not teach standard cursive even if she wanted to. Later I was to find out that this new writing method was being

mandated in the other states as well but under different names.

The classroom walls were covered with every possible form of animal pictures and cartoons. There were exhibits of the children's "writing," all printed. One youngster was sprawled on the floor copying a story out of one of the very large books used on an easel by the teacher. He was printing each word laboriously. The atmosphere reminded me more of a kindergarten than a 2nd grade classroom.

## **Kangaroos and Educators**

On Tuesday, Roslyn took me to Flinders University for a visit with Prof. Geoffrey Partington, one of the leading conservative academics in Australia who has written extensively and critically on the trends of modern progressive education. On Wednesday Roslyn took me to the Cleland Reserve where I was able to feed the kangaroos, observe koala bears, wombats, dingo dogs and other native animals. Then, at 4 in the afternoon, we went to the Education Department of South Australia for a meeting with the people in charge of primary education which Roslyn had arranged. I was confronted with three very cordial ladies: the Superintendent of Curriculum for early primary education; a reading specialist who was also in charge of the Writing, Reading Assessment Project, much like our NAEP; and the principal of a junior primary school and acting head of the Junior Primary Schools Association.

All three were totally committed to a Whole Language curriculum à la Frank Smith, Don Holdaway, Ken Goodman, Brian Cambourne ad nauseam. The reading specialist admitted that systematic phonics taught children to read well, but they merely became "word bakers," she complained, with little comprehension. I tried to be as

reasonable as possible in my arguments, but it was a lost cause.

On Thursday morning I flew to Melbourne, the capital of Victoria. That evening I gave a five-hour seminar to Christian-school teachers on the 3Rs in a suburban Christian school. They asked lots of questions and bought lots of books. The next morning I was driven to the home of Babette and Charles Francis in Melbourne. Babette, a Catholic Indian who married an Australian, is one of the leading Christian activists in Melbourne. Her husband Charles is a Q.C. — Queen's Counsel — and has defended homeschoolers before the Supreme Court of Victoria. They have 8 children.

Later that morning Babette drove me to the offices of the National Civic Council where I spoke to staff members in their board meeting room. The Council had been founded in the 1950s by Bob Santamaria, one of Australia's leading Catholic anti-communists. The Council puts out excellent publications dealing with all of the social and moral issues confronting Australians. In the evening I took part with several other speakers in a large meeting in a church filled to capacity. It was a very successful meeting. On Sunday I spoke at a small church in the suburbs, and on Monday evening spoke to a very good audience in the country town of Shepparton, north of Melbourne. The next day I went by bus to Canberra, Australia's federal capital, where I was met by Peter Frogley who heads Light Educational Ministries which distributes Christian books throughout Australia.

## **Billion-Dollar Parliament**

On the following day Peter took me on a tour of this beautifully designed national capital with its impressive buildings. We visited the National Library, the High Court building, and the new billion-dollar Parlia-

ment building. The latter is very big and modern, outfitted with beautiful marble, wood and brass, but spiritually sterile. On the inside it could have been an airline terminal or convention center. On the outside it could have been a large nondescript building on a university campus. Its most distinctive feature is the huge flagpole on top of the building.

Peter and I were able to sit in the observer's gallery in the House of Representatives chamber and watch Bob Hawke and his opposition counterpart engage in some minor verbal dueling during a question session. The gallery was filled with youngsters learning all about "democracy."

That evening I spoke to a small audience made up mainly of young homeschooling parents. A very receptive audience. The next morning Rona Joyner met me at the bus terminal, having flown in from Brisbane, and we took the bus to Sydney. There we were met by Margaret Ratcliffe, a very bright Christian activist of about 60 who helped plan the Sydney phase of my tour. She drove us to a parking garage near Parliament House where Fred Nile had arranged a press conference for me. We walked in bright warm sunlight to Parliament House, got passes and went up to Fred's office on the top floor of a beautiful modern building with a sunlit atrium.

When Fred and his wife Elaine were free they joined us in the conference room where we had sandwiches and tea and waited for the press to appear. But we were preempted by the coup in Moscow and the press was too busy with Gorbachev news to have time for us. Margaret then drove us on a tour of Sydney harbor which is breathtakingly beautiful. Eventually we wound up at her home where that evening a reception was held for me and Rona.

On Friday morning I gave another seminar on the 3Rs to about 30 parents and

teachers at a church in one of the suburbs. In the evening I took part in the Festival of Light's annual conference at St. Columba's Anglican Church in West Ryde. Fred Nile opened the evening, an American pastor by the name of John Anderson followed, and I spoke last. On Saturday morning I spoke first and was followed by Sam Waller, General Manager for Curriculum of the Board of Studies for New South Wales. He outlined the state's education syllabus — the same affective rot that has destroyed American education. He was followed by Dr. Fenton Sharpe, Director General of Education, who outlined their reading program, which fitted a perfect description of Whole Language, plus their program on values. It sounded exactly like what Americans were getting in their public schools.

## Arguing With Educators

On Monday we were back in Parliament House where Fred Nile had arranged a luncheon for me. The invited guests included some bureaucrats from the education department with whom I argued for the next hour. Also present was Dr. Susan Moore, an American who has lived in Australia for 25 years. Her specialty was learning disabilities and she defended my position on intensive phonics. Fred, as usual, was the perfect host, a true servant of God who considered it his duty to bring truth and enlightenment to his colleagues.

There isn't enough room in this short narrative to tell of all the people I met and all the things I did in my week in the Sydney area. Suffice it to say that I spent some days at the home of Ian Hodge, Paradigm's distributor in Australia. Here too was a house full of beautiful children being homeschooled by devout, loving Christian parents. Certainly the birthrate of Christian homeschoolers in Australia augurs well for the future of

that country.

On Friday I attended a luncheon at Parliament House, arranged by Fred Nile, to honor Dr. Dmitri Kouznetsov, the Russian scientist who became a creationist. He explained how he first accepted creation before he accepted the Creator. Now he is an active Baptist. It was an inspiring talk, after which I was driven to the airport for a flight to Coolangatta on Queensland's Gold Coast. There I was met by Steve Gustavson, an American who has lived in Australia for 20 years, is married to an Australian, and practices law. That evening I spoke at his church and on the following morning gave a 5-hour seminar on the 3Rs at a church near Brisbane.

On Sunday morning, which was Australian Father's Day, I spoke at Steve's church on the importance of the father as the spiritual head of the family. On Monday afternoon I spoke at a gathering of homeschoolers in a small town on the road to Lismore where I also spoke at a very well attended meeting that evening. The next morning Rona and Harry drove me back to Brisbane. There was a little farewell gathering that evening, and on the next morning, September 4th, I departed Australia. My five weeks had been very well spent, and I was sad to leave a country where I had been so warmly and hospitably treated and where my lectures had been so greatly appreciated.

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## Letter to the Editor

Dear Mr. Blumenfeld,

Thank you for Alpha-Phonics!

We have a 14-year-old son who has Downs Syndrome. He began his formal "education" at age of three. After 10 years of special education in the public school system, he had a reading vocabulary of 76 words.

His teachers used a sight-word recognition system and considered that a "good score". He was very frustrated with his inability to read, so he would copy his siblings by pretending to read.

I began to search for a reading program. In reading through the home-school book section at the library, I found a recommendation for the book How to Tutor. After reading that book, I started our son on the phonics program immediately. Within one month, he could read over 100 words—more than he had learned in 10 years of schooling!!! I was thrilled and so was he.

We spent about a half hour a day after school, and he continued his progress slowly, but surely. Many of the words were unfamiliar to him, such as "rap" and "jab", so I explained the meanings and his vocabulary expanded. We have seen a remarkable change in his articulation. When he learned the "th" sound and saw that "bath" ended with "th", he stopped saying "baf". His speech is much clearer and his sentences are more complete.

It has been a year since we started the Alpha-Phonics program and he is finishing the last pages. He is so pleased to be able to read library books, sing along with the hymns at church, and inform the driver what the signs along the road say. Our son does not have a very high I.Q., but he was able to learn to read using phonics. I am sure there are many children in special education programs that could also learn using this system, and I would highly recommend it to other parents.

Thank you for Alpha-Phonics!

Sincerely,  
Jeanette Metzger

Goshen, Indiana  
October 2, 1991