The Blumenfeld Education Letter

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

Vol. 7, No. 12 (Letter # 76) EDITOR: Samuel L. Blumenfeld December 1992

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."

Miscue Analysis: Training Normal Children to Read Like Defective Children

Back in the early 1900s, when the professors of education were working overtime to find "scientific" justification for changing reading instruction in American schools from alphabetic phonics to the look-say, sight, or whole-word method, many studies were done to see what kind of effect the new method would have on children's reading ability.

One study done by Myrtle Sholty, published in the February 1912 issue of the *Elementary School Teacher*, revealed that the two methods of teaching reading produced two different kinds of readers: objective and subjective. The alphabetic-phonics method produced fluent, accurate, objective readers while the sight method produced impaired subjective readers who guessed at words, omitted words, inserted words, substituted words, and mutilated words. The sight readers' lack of phonetic knowledge put them at a distinct disadvantage. They were unable to accurately decode the words since they looked at them as whole configurations, like Chinese ideographs, with no connections to the sounds of the language.

Reading researcher Geraldine Rodgers, in an unpublished manuscript on the history of reading instruction (p. 728), states that Sholty's experiment merely confirmed what had been discovered in 1903 by German psychologist Oskar Messmer, who had identified the two types of readers. Rodgers writes:

"When William Scott Gray [future editor of 'Dick and Jane'] published his summary of American reading research in 1925, which has been the foundation for all 'histories' of 'reading research' ever since, he 'naturally' omitted Messmer's German work, and 'accidentally' misreported Sholty's research in his brief summary so that it was no longer recognizable concerning either its nature or its conclusions.

"Sholty was reporting on her tests with three little girls half-way through second grade, so the tests must have been done before 1912, probably after February, 1911. Of the three second-grade girls, two were reading words in parts, for sound, but one was reading only whole words for meaning. However, all three little girls at the University of Chicago experimental school were 'helped' by context guessing, which was

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obviously necessary because of the small amount of phonic training used at the experimental school. Sholty specifically referred to Messmer's research and noted that her research results were in line with his conclusions."

In 1914, psychologist Walter F. Dearborn, who reviewed the Sholty study, wrote about Messmer's observations:

"The chief differences between these types [of readers] are said to be that the objective readers have a rather narrow span of attention in reading, but see accurately what they do see, and seldom guess or 'read into' the material perceived, and that the subjective readers have a wider span, are influenced more by words lying in indirect vision, depend on relatively meager visual cues such as large word wholes, and that they are more likely to misread because of the large apperceptive element which they supply to the reading."

And so it was well known by the top psychologists involved in creating the new look-say or sight reading programs that these whole-word instruction methods produced inaccurate subjective readers. Despite this, the professors proceeded to devise and publish the textbooks based on this very defective methodology.

How Defective Children Read

Another very significant study, published in the November 1914 issue of the *Elementary School Teacher*, was done by Clara Schmitt, an assistant in the department of child study at the Chicago Board of Education. She analyzed the errors made in oral reading by two groups of children: one mentally defective, the other normal. She wrote:

> The child may show an ability to recognize words from the printed page to a greater or less extent, but this recognition with the defective child consists, largely, merely of a mechanical type of visual memory which serves as a stimulus for its associated vocal prototype. The child who learns words in this way only is always dependent upon his teacher since he can acquire for himself no new or unfamiliar word from the printed page. He can become somewhat independent of his teacher only if he learns phonetic values. Defective children are sometimes capable of acquiring very large visual vocabularies, but show themselves quite deficient in perceiving phonetic relationships. Children of the first grade may be expected to acquire the simplest phonetic elements of the English language. The child who can obtain a visual vocabulary with facility, who gains a perception of the simple phonetic values, and who learns to combine them correctly for the independent learning of new words is considered a favorable reactor so far as the subject of reading in the first grade of the public schools is concerned.

The normal children chosen for the test were average good readers, aged 7 to 11. The defective children were between the ages of 10 and 16 who had been in special rooms for defective children for at least one year. Since at that time the official policy of the Chicago public schools was to teach children to read phonetically, both the normal and defective children had been taught the same way. While the normal children learned to read phonetically with ease, the defective children had problems. Miss Schmitt writes:

> The phonetics which underlie the reading process is the great stumbling-block of the defective child. Seldom is one found who has this accomplishment. He may be able to learn a very few of the simplest combinations, such as consist of one or two consonants and a vowel. The normal child progresses in his knowledge of phonetic values to such an extent that he becomes independent of the teacher in so far as the illogical complexities of our English spelling permit. At the fourth grade the normal child is able to work out new and unfamiliar words with approximate phonetic correctness.

But what is particularly interesting in this study is the discovery that the defective children made very different kinds of errors, even though they had all been taught to read phonetically. Miss Schmitt writes:

> The errors in pronunciation made by the normal children in this and the second reading test were always in favor of a word which had considerable visual or phonetic resemblance to the correct word. The errors made by the defective children with the

first selection which was perfectly familiar to them in content, at least, were absurd as far as visual or phonetic values were concerned, but were calculated to fill in the context. The defective child reads, for instance that the fox saw a vine with *berries* [instead of *grapes*] on it. Because of the great prevalence of this type of variation the performance of the defective group cannot be compared with that of the normal.

In other words, it was easier for the defective child to substitute a word which fitted the context than decode the word accurately, which means that the defective children were reading like nonphonetic sight readers. *And that is the way normal children are being taught to read today!* For example, in *Evaluation: Whole Language, Whole Child*, a book explaining the wonders of whole language, the authors write:

The way you interpret what the child does will reflect what you understand reading to be. For instance, if she reads the word *feather* for *father*, a phonics-oriented teacher might be pleased because she's come close to sounding the word out. However, if you believe reading is a meaning-seeking process, you may be concerned that she's overly dependent on phonics at the expense of meaning. You'd be happier with a miscue such as *daddy*, even though it doesn't look or sound anything like the word in the text. At least the meaning would be intact." (p. 19)

In other words, a whole-language teacher would prefer that a child read more like a defective child than a normal child! But even the early advocates of the whole-word method realized that they would have to teach some phonics. This was obvious from an analysis made by Josephine Bowden in 1912 of how children learned a "sight vocabulary." She found "no evidence in any of the cases studied that the child works out a system by which he learns to recognize the words. That he does not work out phonics for himself comes out quite clearly in the transposition test. Furthermore, only once did a child divide a word even into its syllables." Her conclusion:

Under the methods of instruction employed with this class as outlined above, it appears that these beginners in reading have after two months or more of instruction secured a sufficient concept of the general appearance of a very limited number of words to recognize them as wholes, that in doing this they made use of only very general cues or points of differentiation between words and have not noticed the finer points of distinction between words and parts of words. It appeared very doubtful to the experimenter whether, under this method of teaching words as visual wholes, the pupils would of themselves, have come to make this latter necessary analysis with much success. Without some foregoing analysis and subsequent synthesis, the differences between words are not great enough to be recognized merely from the total visual appearance. The early introduction of phonics may supply, in some measure, this analysis.

Contrast what Josephine Bowden wrote in 1912 about the necessity of teaching phonics in a look-say reading program with what whole-language guru Frank Smith wrote in *Reading Without Nonsense* in 1985 (p. 129):

"Children do not need a mastery of phonics in order to identify words that they have not met in print before.... Once a child discovers what a word is in a meaningful context, learning to recognize it on another occasion is as simple as learning to recognize a face on a second occasion, and does not need phonics. Discovering what a word is in the first place is usually most efficiently accomplished by asking someone, listening to someone else read the word, or using context to provide a substantial clue."

Three Important Facts

The difference between Josephine Bowden and Frank Smith is that Bowden came to her conclusions after observing real children in a real classroom, whereas Smith writes from theory alone. What is important about the three early experiments conducted in Chicago is that they taught us three important facts about reading instruction. The Sholty experiment confirmed that the two teaching methods — phonics and whole-word — produce two different kinds of readers. Phonics produces accurate objective

readers; whole-word methodology produces error-prone subjective readers. The Schmitt experiment reveals that today's normal children who are taught to read by look-say make the same kinds of errors that defective children, incapable of learning to read by phonics, make. In other words, we are training normal children to behave like defective children! And the Bowden experiment proved that without some phonics, the whole-word method was dismally inadequate as a reading instruction program.

Which brings us to the subject of "miscue analysis." Frank Smith explains the concept of the miscue in *Understanding Reading* (p. 151):

> The prior use of meaning ensures that when individual words must be identified, for example, in order to read aloud, a minimum of visual information need be used. And as a consequence, mistakes will often occur. If a reader already has a good idea of what a word might be, there is not much point in delaying to make extra certain what the word actually is. As a result it is not unusual for even highly experienced readers to make misreadings that are radically different visually — like reading "said" when the word is actually *announced* or *reported* but which make no significant difference to the meaning. Beginning readers often show exactly the same tendency .... The mistakes that are made are sometimes called *miscues* rather than *errors* to avoid the connotation that they are something bad (Goodman, 1969). Such misreadings show that these beginning readers are attempting to read in the way fluent readers do, with sense taking priority over individual word identification.

One could write a book about the utterly perverse reasoning in that paragraph. In the first place only a sight reader could make the kinds of errors Smith illustrates. A phonetic reader will make entirely different kinds of errors, perhaps something on the order of scanning hastily and reading *deported* for *departed*, but then correcting himself because the sentence doesn't make sense. On the other hand substituting "said" for "announced" is the kind of error that Schmitt found that defective children made even though they had been taught to read by a phonetic method.

I can confirm this tendency on the part of retarded individuals to read as Schmitt observed from my own experience as a tutor. For ten years I tutored a retarded young man and taught him to read by intensive phonics. Yet, he often made the kinds of errors Schmitt observed. Whenever he came to a word he could not read, he substituted a word which made no sense phonetically. In other words, sounding out the word was not his first means of word attack, even though the word might have been one he had previously read correctly. Whenever he did this, I had him spell out the word, and suddenly his phonetic knowledge came to the fore, and he read the word correctly.

Misleading the Public

When Frank Smith tells us that normal beginning readers make the same kinds of mistakes that defective children make, what he should tell us is that normal beginning readers *taught to read by the whole-word method make* the same kinds of errors that adult sight readers make! It is one of the dishonest tricks that whole-language advocates play, by not telling the reader when speaking of miscues what kind of beginning reading instruction was used with the individuals being examined. The very fact that the word "miscue" is used instead of "error" is a good indication of the intellectual dishonesty at work, the fancy sleight of hand being used to confuse the public.

Apparently, the idea of "miscue analysis" was dreamed up by Prof. Kenneth Goodman and his wife, Yetta, two of the leading founders of the whole-language movement. In my opinion, miscue analysis is probably the worst form of educational malpractice ever invented. What they do is take a poor sight reader — a victim of the whole-word method — and try to improve

his guessing "strategies." After all, it was Ken Goodman who defined reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game." In other words, no attempt is made to train the poor sight reader to become an accurate phonetic reader. As long as the sight reader's word insertions, omissions and substitutions relate more closely to the meaning of the text, they are acceptable. In short, the purpose of miscue analysis is to make sure that the pupil remains permanently crippled as a sight reader and never becomes an accurate phonetic reader. Ken Goodman writes in *The Whole Language Catalog* (p. 100):

"Miscue analysis helps people to realise that many of the miscues kids are making are sensible, even remarkable sometimes, in what they reveal about the language processes that the reader would have to go through to have produced them."

Yetta Goodman writes in the same article:

"Insertions and omissions can give you tremendous insight into whether a reader is proficient or not. Proficient readers tend to make insertions more than less proficient readers; certain kinds of omissions tend to be things that are acceptable to the syntax and semantic structure of the text, and good readers make them all the time. Other kinds of omissions indicate kids who want to leave out words that they are afraid to try and identify."

Can you believe it? A reader is more proficient if he or she reads something that isn't there — that is, inserts a word in the text — than a reader who doesn't! Of course, the Goodmans have no intention of teaching these sight readers to become phonetic readers. Ken writes:

"The concept I put in the place of 'remedial' is 'revaluing'; that is where the intent of the teacher is to help the child to revalue himself or herself as a reader and to revalue the process; to help the child move away from the process of sounding out and attacking words, and toward making sense out of print and legitimising the kinds of productive strategies that the kids have been using and had thought were cheating. These kids are often their own worst enemies in that their beliefs about themselves and their ability to learn get in their way constantly; they're very easily discouraged. So a lot of patient time taken to help them revalue themselves is the most essential thing."

In other words, the main therapeutic purpose of miscue analysis to convince the defective reader that it's okay to be a defective reader, as long as the miscues make sense. But, of course, in the workplace such nonsense does not hold water. An error is an error no matter what else you may call it, and to try to convince a child that an error is not an error will not serve him well when he is an adult confronting the demands of a technologically advanced economy that requires accuracy and precision in thinking and performing and reading. Ken Goodman writes:

"If you understand reading as a transactive process, and that the sense that the reader brings to the text is at least half of what is going on, then we understand what strategies develop that are necessary to deal with the print in the context of that. You can't make reading easier by pulling the process apart and teaching reading skills as such."

Whole-Language Nonsense

Thus, according to whole-language theorists, "the sense that the reader brings to the text" is just as important as the text itself. But supposing the student picks up a book on a subject he knows nothing about? What "sense" other than ignorance does he bring to the text? Many whole-language teachers know nothing about intensive, systematic phonics. But they bring a "sense" of hostility to any arguments in favor of intensive, sys-

tematic phonics. I know this to be true, because I have addressed whole-language teachers whose hostility prevented them from even beginning to understand what I was talking about. And I have no doubt that any of them who start reading this article as a "transactive process" will probably want to burn it rather than finish reading it.

The quest for truth requires a respect and appreciation for accuracy and precision of thought. If, to begin with, you denigrate accuracy in reading, you denigrate the pursuit of truth.

If you want to get an idea of how miscue analysis works, Yetta Goodman and Wendy Hood give an illuminating case history in *The Whole Language Catalog* (p.102). The subject being analyzed is a 7-year-old second grader by the name of Aaron. Goodman and Hood write:

"The procedure involves listening to the unaided oral reading of a complete story or article, asking readers to reflect and retell following their reading and analyzing the responses they make to the text. . . . The unexpected responses readers make are known as miscues. . . .

"Aaron's miscue analysis provides a wealth of information about his reading. . . . Rarely does Aaron self-correct his predictable miscues that result in acceptable sentences. But Aaron responds differently when his predictions are unacceptable. . . . Aaron often reads to the end of the sentence with an unacceptable miscue before he decides to reread and self-correct. It seems that he is not yet confident enough to self-correct more quickly and needs the additional context to confirm or disconfirm his miscues. . . .Whenever he can, Aaron produces a real word substitution that results in an acceptable and meaningful sentence. . . . Aaron is comfortable omitting words to maintain the flow of the story, especially adjectives . . . which are not necessary to retain the structure of the sentence.

"Aaron's miscue profile allows us to plan appropriate reading experiences for him. . . . We talked about why omitting is sometimes a good strategy. He said it helps him 'keep the story going.' Looking at some of his substitutions, we also talked about reading through to the end of a sentence and substituting a 'best guess' that makes sense."

In short, the whole purpose of the miscue analysis is to help the child become a better guesser instead of an accurate phonetic reader who does not need to guess.

Are reading teachers taken in by this? You'd better believe it. The authors write:

"As teachers work with miscue analysis, there are two common responses. Teachers become excited about what they are learning about reading and their students. Reading specialists say that they have never known as much about their students as they know when they do miscue analysis. The second common response is 'I will never be able to listen to a student read in the same way again.'"

All of which indicates that none of these teachers have the faintest idea what an alphabetic writing system is about and how a child should be taught it. In my opinion, miscue analysis is the cruelest hoax ever perpetrated on unsuspecting children. To convince a normal child that it is perfectly all right to read as if he had a defective brain is so heinous a form of miseducation as to be nothing short of a crime.

Do these teachers know what they are doing? Undoubtedly, many of them have read Frank Smith's *Understanding Reading*, one of several whole-language bibles. A book note on p. 103 of the *Whole Language Catalog* states:

"Smith deftly dismantles the logic behind the popular traditional approaches to teaching reading, and in uncompromising detail explains what reading is and what

teachers can do to support it. Interwoven throughout is his sociopsycholinguistic theory of learning."

Dismantling the logic behind the traditional approaches to teaching reading sounds a lot like deconstruction. And that is the key to the whole-language movement: sociopsycholinguistic deconstruction.

Homeschoolers Score High In Socialization

In findings that counter one of the major criticisms of homeschooling, a University of Florida study has shown that homeschooled youngsters don't lag in social development compared with children who attend conventional schools.

The study compared two groups of 70 children from 8 to 10. One group was educated exclusively at home; the other in public or private schools. The children were videotaped at play, and their behavior was observed by trained counselors, who did not know which children were educated at home and which in traditional schools.

The study found no big differences between the two groups in self-concept or assertiveness. But the videotapes did show that youngsters who were taught at home by their parents had consistently fewer behavioral problems, says psychotherapist Larry Shyers, who did the study for his dissertation in the university's College of Education.

"The results seem to show a child's social development depends more on adult contact and less on contact with other children than previously thought," he says.

He says the study suggests that children taught at home behave better because they tend to imitate their parents, while traditionally schooled children model themselves after other children in the classroom.

Traditionally schooled children were considerably more aggressive, loud, and competitive than homeschooled children of the same age, Shyers says. Homeschooled children, on the other hand, tended to talk quietly, play well in groups and take the initiative in inviting other children to join them.

Homeschooling has become more common as dissatisfaction with public schools has grown. Shyers says more than 6,000 homeschools are registered in Florida, estimating that between 10,000 and one million students nationwide are educated at home. (*The Executive Educator*, Sept. 1992)

Letters

August 19, 1992

Dear Mr. Blumenfeld,

This letter will find you, Lord willing. If not, He has a better plan.

My wife and I "happened" across your phonics book via the Conservative Book Club. The Lord spoke to our hearts, so we purchased.

As a result, our 8 year old son with Down's Syndrome learned to read in 2 days.

Secondly, my wife—classed as dyslexic in 4th grade — has learned to read and spell upon this re-education.

She is so excited and is expanding her horizons based upon your insights. Her excursions are accelerating into art-paintings, our sons' arithmetic development and her kite business. She intuitively grasped the symbol connection with mental ideas.

Also, I now have a discussion companion in education issues. Her enthusiasm is becoming political. She would like 50 Dick & Jane pamphlets for her friends.

I would like to place/request the order of pamphlets under the guise of public school teacher (15 years - mathematics).

My degree is in engineering math and I

have to say I believe you have penetrated the labyrinth of miseducation. (I'm sure you know of Dorothy Sayer's "Lost Tools of Learning" — another exposure of ignorance in education.)

My points of interest are starting a private school, joining a conservative teachers' group and getting help in my current teaching situation (high school — remedial arithmetic — I have *How to Tutor*). Any resources or ideas I would appreciate.

Sincerely,
Paul Stewart
Visalia, CA

Comment: I called Mr. Stewart, first to thank him for the letter and his kind comments and second to get more information about his Down's Syndrome child. Apparently, the youngster caught on to the alphabetic principle very quickly and made rapid progress.

Since Mr. Stewart teaches in the California public school system, I told him I would appreciate knowing what was going on in the state schools. He very kindly sent me a second letter, as follows:

November 7, 1992
Dear Mr. Blumenfeld,

This is my first respite in busyness since we spoke via telephone about your phonics book. My son, Duncan, has progressed and is in the 2nd highest reading group of four in his 1st grade class. In my heart, I know the Lord Jesus is going to continue using your phonics in many other arenas.

Interestingly, the school principal, Mr. Nava, has asked to see the *Alpha-Phonics* text and may reinstitute phonics as a major portion of the language curriculum. If a Down's Syndrome kid can read using phonics, maybe there is hope for mere mortals.

My wife is now leading an advertising campaign for your "Magnum Opus" and may be due a commission if any more sales are forthcoming. Seriously, our hearts are full of gratitude for your endeavor of the past. We are reading *How to Tutor*. I've read your book on starting a private school (in response to my church's request to start such), and, am beginning *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education*.

In particular, I've enjoyed your synopses of Dewey's writings and have relayed them to my teaching colleagues. Many of them are dismayed to hear the underpinnings of current educational reform. Specifically, my principal has conveyed that he will brook no opposition to his pet theories.

In one discussion, the principal retorted that my teaching methods (similar to the symbol absorption phonics uses) in mathematics are from the Middle Ages. In response, I asked if that meant the method was false or flawed. He merely proclaimed, in a louder voice, "The Middle Ages! Don't you know human nature has changed since then?" (Instantly, the Lord brought to mind the words of Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.")

To sum up and change subjects — "the truth will set you free" is becoming real life and I can see the Lord working. All this from your writings.

You had asked me to write a gloss on the state of mathematics in California. Please see the appended effort. Hope it is sufficiently condensed but substantive enough for analysis. I would be happy to expand if need arises.

Sincerely,
Paul Stewart

Comment: Mr. Stewart's gloss on the state of mathematics in California does not easily lend itself to our newsletter format. However, we shall work on it and present it to our readers in a future issue.