

# **Some Essential Advice for Young Parents**

**By Samuel L. Blumenfeld**

It is always a great pleasure to be here at Pensacola Christian College, to enjoy fellowship with your excellent faculty, and have an opportunity to speak to you, the best of American youth. You are the best because your lives are so strongly attached to God who gives you the will to excel and make the most of His gifts.

Therefore, much is expected of you, because the country needs you so badly. We have so many difficult problems that you are going to have to face and solve because you're going to be here, and people like me won't. And you are going to need God's help in order to succeed.

I believe that my generation, which is that of your grandparents, did all right. Tom Brokaw, the TV newscaster, has called us the greatest generation because we fought and won World War II and went on to create the foundation of our wondrous high-tech economy. I like to think that the generation of our founding fathers was indeed the greatest. They actually created a benign political system that has managed to survive, despite the incredible efforts of sinful man to destroy it.

So you must be ever mindful that your generation will also be tested. I admire those of your generation who are already being tested in Iraq and Afghanistan. They have shown remarkable courage and determination as they battle the terrorists and try to give the people of Iraq and Afghanistan a new life of freedom.

But the Iraqis are finding out that freedom isn't free. It has to be fought for, and died for, just as Washington's army fought and died for our freedom, and many more Americans have died in so many wars to maintain our freedom.

But we not only have enemies in foreign places, we have them here at home. I am referring to those among us who want to destroy our religious heritage, those who will stop at nothing to remove every monument of the Ten Commandments in our public buildings. I also refer to those so-called educators who continue to dumb-down our children and yet charge the taxpayer a huge price for doing the job.

And that is why I am here today. I've been asked to talk to you about a problem you are no doubt aware of and will have to deal with in the near future. Most of you in the next few years will marry, hopefully, a member of the opposite sex and build a family. You will have children who have to be educated. There is so much joy, happiness, agony, and anxiety in that transition from lone individual to one attached to another, a loved one, and to future children. You will create sons and daughters who will be the arrows in your quiver, your helpers and perhaps caretakers when you are old. And rest assured you will all get old. No one is exempt. And so you want to be sure that you give your precious children the best education that you can.

The best education is actually far less costly than the worst. The worst education can cripple you intellectually and turn you into a functional illiterate with greatly reduced professional opportunities. It can make you bitter, resentful, and miserable.

Many such victims live in our inner cities and resort to drugs, gangs, and violence. They also hate the system that turned them into victims. And that is why schools are so often the target of vandals.

To give your children the best education, you must first teach them the three R's. You would think that that would be a simple thing to do, but it isn't. No one is born knowing how to teach someone to read and write and do arithmetic. And that is why former President Clinton's idea of sending out a million volunteer tutors to teach our children to read, while the professionals couldn't do it, was so preposterous. My own personal experience taught me something about amateur tutors who mean well but haven't the faintest idea what they are doing.

When I was in college, I tried to teach my illiterate mother to read. My parents were immigrants from Poland, and my mother, who became an orphan early in life, never was taught to read. And so I was constantly aware of the embarrassing limits illiteracy posed on an otherwise intelligent human being. So I determined to teach my mother to read.

Now, I assumed that because I had learned to read quite easily and loved to read that I would be able to teach my mother. I taught her the alphabet. She learned it quite well. But then I wasn't sure how to go on from there. So I wrote out short sentences, which I taught her to read by sight: "Sarah is my name. My name is Sarah," and the like. I tried teaching her some rhyming words to convey the phonetic idea, but I did not teach her the letter sounds. And, of course, she didn't catch on, and I didn't know why.

Today I know why. It took me twenty years to find out. Unbeknownst to me I had been using a whole-word approach which I later found out causes reading disability. Imagine, there I was, in my collegial ignorance, using a teaching method, which would not get rid of my mother's illiteracy, but would give her a reading disability.

And the only reason why I had learned to read was because I had teachers in the primary grades who taught us phonics, but not in any organized way. I had been taught the long and short vowels and the consonants and that was all I needed to become a good reader. But I knew nothing about our English Alphabetic System and how easily it can be mistaught.

In fact, no one in a public school is taught our English Alphabetic System *per se*. Today, most American teachers teach reading by the whole-word method, as if the alphabet didn't exist. And if they teach phonics at all, they merely teach some phonetic rules.

In order to learn the English Alphabetic System you must know the first important fact about the system: that we have a 26-letter alphabet that stands for how many sounds?

That's right, 44. How many Americans know this fact? How many teachers know it? It is one of the best kept secrets in American education.

And the reason for this ignorance is somewhat unbelievable. You know, it is easier to believe a credible lie than it is to believe an incredible truth. And in this case, the truth is indeed incredible. Would you believe me if I told you that our educators are deliberately dumbing down the people of this country, and that this dumbing down process has become the permanent and acceptable way of doing things.

There are a number of reasons why this is happening. First, the ruling elite doesn't want competition from people coming out of school smarter than they are. Second, the ruling elite is anti-Christian and they want as few people as possible to be able to read the Bible. Third, the ruling elite depend on an ignorant electorate to keep them in power. And that is why they continue to provide an educational process that dumbs down the population.

And although we know how to solve our present educational problems, the elite establishment promotes reforms that simply make the system worse. But the fact that reforms are being advocated deceives the public into thinking that these reforms are supposed to make things better.

Let me give you an example. New elementary schools are being built all over the nation at great cost to the taxpayer, who assumes that they will improve education. In fact, these new schools guarantee that things will get worse because they have built organized chaos into the classroom configuration itself. The sense of order that I experienced when I was going to school in the 1930's and 40's no longer exists. It has been replaced by organized chaos. The result is that today's elementary school children have no idea what order is. And that is why they do not teach the English Alphabetic System, because it would impose order on a system that relishes disorder, not only in academics but also in morals.

When did this dumbing down policy begin you might ask? I can tell you exactly when, and by whom, it began. The entire process was outlined by the venerable John Dewey in an essay he wrote in 1898. In that essay, entitled "The Primary-Education Fetich," he launched an attack on how the three R's were being taught in American schools. He wrote:

There is . . . a false educational god whose idolators are legion, and whose cult influences the entire educational system. This is language study—the study not of foreign language, but of English; not in higher, but in primary education. . . .

The plea for the predominance of learning to read in early school life because of the great importance attaching to literature seems to me a perversion.

Dewey then argued how important it was for the child to experience life through classroom activities, projects, and social interaction before learning to read. He wrote:

No one can clearly set before himself the vivacity and persistency of the child's motor instincts at this period, and then call to mind the continued grind of reading and writing, without feeling that the justification of our present curriculum is psychologically impossible. It is simply superstition: it is a remnant of an outgrown period of history.

Of course, Dewey was wrong. The most remarkable growth in children during these early years is not their ability to crawl and run but the incredibly rapid growth of their brains and use of language. And that is why children enjoy learning to read at ages five to seven because it greatly expands their mental powers, which does much more for their intelligence and self-esteem than running and jumping. But then Dewey warns:

Change must come gradually. To force it unduly would compromise its final success by favoring a violent reaction. . . . There are already in existence a considerable number of educational "experimental stations," which represent the outposts of educational progress. . . . After such schools have worked out carefully and definitely the subject-matter of a new curriculum,--finding the right place for language-studies and placing them in their right perspective,-- the problem of the more general educational reform will be immensely simplified and facilitated.

There you have the dumbing-down plan in its inception. That it would produce massive functional illiteracy in America was well understood by the progressive elite of the time. For example, G. Stanley Hall, who was Dewey's professor of psychology at Johns Hopkins University, and later became president of Clark University, wrote in 1911 of the advantages and benefits of illiteracy:

Very many men have lived and died and been great, even leaders of their age, without any acquaintance with letters. The knowledge which illiterates acquire is probably on the whole more personal, direct, environmental and probably a much larger proportion of it practical. Moreover, they escape much eyestrain and mental excitement, and other things being equal, are probably more active and less sedentary....Illiterates escape certain temptations, such as vacuous and vicious reading. Perhaps we are prone to put too high a value both on the ability required to attain this art and the discipline involved in doing so, as well as the culture value that comes to the citizen with his average of only six grades of schooling by the acquisition of this art.

Have you ever heard anything more preposterous coming out of the mouth of a college president? You see truth *is* stranger than fiction. The idea of the top people in our education establishment planning the deliberate dumbing down of a nation must boggle the mind. How could rational Americans conceive of such a plan, a plan that has not only been successfully carried out, but continues to be carried out in this very day.

And the reason why they were so successful is because parents were kept in the dark. It wasn't until 1955, when Dr. Rudolf Flesch wrote his sensational book, *Why Johnny Can't*

*Read*, that parents became aware of the changes in teaching methods that was causing the problem. Flesch wrote:

The teaching of reading—all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks—is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense.

And what was the reaction of the educators to Flesch's revelations? They circled the wagons and created the International Reading Association, which has imposed on the teachers of reading their dumbing-down methods. And despite all of the efforts of some individual teachers and parents to restore the teaching of phonics, the professors of education have maintained their grip on the educational jugular. Their views can be summed up in the words of Professor Anthony G. Oettinger of Harvard, who told a group of communications executives in 1981:

Our idea of literacy, I am afraid, is obsolete because it rests on a frozen and classical definition. Literacy, as we know it today, is the product of the conditions of the industrial revolution, of urbanization, of the need for a work force that could, in effect, "write in a fine round hand."

Of course, Dr. Oettinger is wrong. The emphasis on literacy in America is a result not of the industrial revolution but of the determination of the Puritans to create a Bible commonwealth in the New World. The need to know the Word of God is what made Americans the most literate nation on earth. And that tradition today is alive among American Christians, which is why so many of them homeschool their children or send them to private Christian schools. Oettinger went on:

The present "traditional" concept of literacy has to do with the ability to read and write. But the real question that confronts us today is: How do we help citizens function well in their society? How can they acquire the skills necessary to solve their problems?

Do we, for example, really want to teach people to do a lot of sums or write in "a fine round hand" when they have a five-dollar hand-held calculator or a word processor to work with? Or, do we really have to have everybody literate—writing and reading in the traditional sense—when we have the means through our technology to achieve a new flowering of oral communication?

And we do have a new flowering of oral communication, and it's called Rap, the new cultural phenomenon. So there you have the dumbing-down agenda iterated by a Harvard professor, a member of the elite who wants to deprive millions of children of a proper education in literacy. However, he doesn't advocate doing away with compulsory schooling. Although Dr. Oettinger doesn't want to teach the children to read, he still wants to control their education, their destiny, and the destiny of our country.

The slaveholders in the Old South deliberately kept their slaves illiterate for obvious reasons. Professor Oettinger is like that slaveholder of old. He wants to control whether

or not someone else's child will become literate. He is not concerned with what the parent may want, and I doubt that there is a single parent in America who doesn't want his or her child to learn to read.

Now you know why the dumbing-down process is deliberate and ongoing. So your duty as future Christian parents is to know why you must never send your child to a public school.

But you must also be aware that the marketplace, when it comes to children's books and instructional materials, has been thoroughly corrupted by the educational system itself. An example. You are all familiar with the Dr. Seuss books, many of which you probably read as a child. Did you know that these books were written in accordance with whole-word guidelines? Dr. Seuss revealed as much in an interview he gave *Arizona* magazine in June 1981. He said:

They think I did it in twenty minutes. That [darned] *Cat in the Hat* took nine months until I was satisfied. I did it for a textbook house and they sent me a word list. That was due to the Dewey revolt in the Twenties, in which they threw out phonic reading and went to word recognition, as if you're reading a Chinese pictograph instead of blending sounds of different letters. I think that killing phonics was one of the greatest causes of illiteracy in the country. Anyway, they had it all worked out that a healthy child at the age of four can learn so many words in a week and that's all. So there were two hundred and twenty-three words to use in this book. I read the list three times and I almost went out of my head. I said, I'll read it once more and if I can find two words that rhyme that'll be the title of my book. (That's genius at work.) I found "cat" and "hat" and I said, "The title will be *The Cat in the Hat*."

As a result, many children, with the help of their parents, memorized the words in the Dr. Seuss books and became dyslexic or reading disabled. By memorizing the words, the child had acquired a holistic reflex, that is, the automatic tendency to look at each word as a whole configuration, like a Chinese character. However, if the child had been taught to read with intensive systematic phonics, that child would have acquired a phonetic reflex and been able to see the phonetic structure of each word in the Dr. Seuss book. But how many parents know that?

So be warned. First teach your children to read by intensive systematic phonics before giving them the Dr. Seuss books to read. What is really crucial is that you teach your child to read in the proper phonetic way from the very beginning, avoiding all of the harmful practices that now prevail among American teachers.

There are some excellent phonics-first programs available to the young parent. The Abeka Reading Program, produced here at PCC, plus my own two books, *How to Tutor* and *Alpha-Phonics*. They will provide you with what you will need.

What is most important, however, is that you understand the principles behind the traditional way of teaching the Three R's, the very primary program that John Dewey and his colleagues worked so hard to erase from American memory.

First, you should know something about the history of our writing system. The earliest form of writing was purely pictorial. The ancients drew pictures on walls of caves that looked like the things they represented. The picture of a tree looked like a tree, an animal like an animal, a man like a man. You didn't have to go to school to learn to read such symbols.

But as civilization became more complex, the scribes had to represent ideas that did not lend themselves to depiction. For example, how do you draw pictures of such concepts as system, method, determine? You can't, so you create symbols to stand for these concepts that have no resemblance to them. You simply announce that this symbol stands for determine. It doesn't look like determine, but it's determine. The scribes created thousands of such symbols none of which looked like what they represented. And now you did have to go to school to learn what all of the symbols stood for.

However, about 3000 B.C. someone in the area of northern Israel and southern Lebanon made a remarkable discovery. That unknown someone discovered that all of human language is composed a very small number of speech sounds, and he created a set of symbols to stand for the speech sounds of the language, and thus an alphabetic system of writing was invented. It quickly replaced ideographic writing and quickly spread throughout the ancient world, doing for the ancients what the computer has done for us: making it possible to use much less to do much more.

The result was a tremendous expansion of language and also a very easy means of organizing knowledge. The Greeks wrote their famous works of philosophy and drama in alphabetic writing. In fact, the word alphabet itself is derived from the first two letters in the Greek alphabet: Alpha and Beta.

Most important of all was the appearance of the Holy Scripture written in alphabetic Hebrew. As you know Moses was reared and educated by an Egyptian princess and was no doubt taught to read Egyptian hieroglyphics. Yet when he came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, they were written in alphabetic writing. The mystery is: who taught God the alphabet?

Is alphabetic writing of divine origin? A question that needs an answer. In any case, the Romans created their own set of letters to stand for the sounds of Latin. However, when they conquered the British islands, they imposed the Latin alphabet on the people who lived there. And that is why the English Alphabetic System uses 26 letters to stand for 44 sounds.

But when you have only 26 letters to represent 44 sounds, you will have to make certain accommodations. Thus, some of our letters represent more than one sound. For example, the letter a stands for long a as in April, it stands for the short a as in hat or cat, it stands

for aw as in hall or ball, and it stands for ah as in father. So, how do you learn to articulate the proper sound when you see the letter a? You learn that by learning the spelling families in which these words occur. However, you can see how a learner could become easily confused if you didn't know what you were doing.

When I discovered that there was such a thing as an English Alphabetic System, I decided to learn its ins and outs and how best to teach it. I wanted to devise a reading program that would be easy to teach and easy to learn. All of that is in my book, *How to Tutor*.

Also, you should know how easy it is to cause dyslexia. All you have to do is give a child a list of sight-words to memorize, which is routinely done in American schools, and that child will acquire a holistic reflex. That reflex, or habit, becomes an obstacle to seeing the phonetic structure of the words. And that's what dyslexia is: the inability to see the phonetic structure, the syllabic units, of our alphabetically written words. You cannot expect a child to see the phonetic structure of our words if he or she has not been taught to read by phonics.

Also the excessive use of pictures in our primers lead children into word guessing. Pictures do not teach anyone to read. They are little more than a distraction.

So what are we to do about our present state of growing illiteracy? In September of 1993, our U.S. Education Department reported that an estimated 90 million American adults—half the adult population—read and write so poorly that they can hardly cope with the literacy demands of our society. They are indeed condemned to lead stunted lives.

But what is really alarming is that the rest of the world is busy learning English, which has become the language of our global economy, while Americans are still being dumbed down so that they have a crippled command of their own language.

However, believe it or not, I have a solution to the problem, a radical, revolutionary solution that would vastly change our culture and be very easy to implement. Simply require every high-school and college student to take a course in the English Alphabetic System so that they would know how to properly teach reading. We would quickly become the most literate population on earth and thereby improve our minds and increase our happiness. I hope that Pensacola Christian College will be the first pioneering institution to make this a reality.

Thank you for your kind attention, and may the Lord bless you in your endeavors to serve Him and your country.