

How to Prevent Reading Failure

A Life-Saving Manual for Parents and Teachers

A Book Proposal

By

Samuel L. Blumenfeld

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How Critical Is the Problem of Reading Failure in America?

On November 19, 2007 a *Boston Globe* headline read:

“Young People Reading a Lot Less”

The National Endowment for the Arts had released its 99-page report which painted a dire picture of plummeting levels of reading among young people over the past two decades.

The number of 17-year-olds who never read for pleasure increased from 9 percent in 1984 to 19 percent in 2004. Almost half of Americans between ages 18 and 24 never read books for pleasure.

Endowment Chairman Dana Gioia stated:

“This is a massive social problem. We are losing the majority of the new generation. They will not achieve anything close to their potential because of poor reading.”

According to the report, reading ability has fallen as well. Only a third of high school seniors read at a proficient level. “And proficiency is not a high standard,” Gioia said. “We’re not asking them to be able to read Proust in the original. We’re talking about reading the daily newspaper.”

Apparently, things are not much better among college students. In 2005, almost 40 percent of college freshmen (and 35 percent of seniors) read nothing at all for pleasure, and 26 percent (28 percent of seniors) read less than one hour per week. Even among college graduates, prose-reading proficiency declined from 40 percent in 1992 to 31 percent in 2003.

Reading failure has also exacerbated the dropout problem.

According to Gen. Colin Powell and America’s Promise Alliance, more than one million high school students drop out every year. Dropouts are more likely than graduates to be unemployed, in poor health, living in poverty, on public assistance, and single parents.

Radical reforms are needed to reverse this critical situation!

Let's Be Frank!

Most reading failure is caused by faulty teaching.

That's been proven by

Dr. Samuel T. Orton, neurologist and author of

The 'Sight Reading' Method of Teaching Reading as a Source of Reading Disability

Published by the Journal of Educational Psychology, February 1929.

And by

Dr. Hilde L. Mosse, M.D., Clinical Associate Professor in Psychiatry, New York Medical College, author of

The Complete Handbook of Children's Reading Disorders

A Critical Evaluation of Their Clinical, Educational and Social Dimensions

Published in 1982 in two volumes.

And by

Dr. Rudolf Flesch, author of *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955) and *Why Johnny Still Can't Read* (1981).

And by

Dr. Jeanne Chall, author of *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* (1983).

And by

Mona McNee & Alice Coleman authors of *The Great Reading Disaster* (2007)

Are they all wrong?

First Question:

What is Reading Failure?

It is the inability of perfectly normal, often highly intelligent children to become fluent, highly literate readers.

When reading aloud, they stumble over new words they've never seen before, leave out words that are there, put in words that aren't there, truncate words: they say *paper* although the text says *newspaper* or they say *phone* when the text says *telephone*. They substitute words: the text says *horse* and they say *pony*, the text says *father* and they say *Dad*. When they cannot read a word, they just skip it, or they look at the picture and try to guess the word. In short, they become inaccurate, disabled readers, which leads to learning disability.

They cannot read our phonetic writing system phonetically.

Why?

Because they have not been taught to read phonetically!

They've been taught to read English as if it were Chinese, made up of characters that have to be memorized as if the words were little pictures instead of components of sound symbols. They are being forced to use the Right Brain to perform a Left Brain function, thereby creating a learning neurosis!

And it all starts in kindergarten and first grade where children are given a

Sight Vocabulary

to memorize.

As this author wrote in his book, *The New Illiterates*, in 1973,

"The Sight Vocabulary is the Thalidomide of Primary Education!"

It teaches the child to look at all printed words as whole configurations.

Thus the child cannot see the phonetic structure of the words, thereby creating a handicap which will later lead to reading failure.

Today's primary textbooks are loaded with pictures, which children use to guess the meaning of the text they are reading.

This method of reading may seem successful in the first and second grades, but it's in the third grade, with its expanding vocabulary, that the kids hit the wall.

Their minds simply cannot remember so many new, multisyllabic words by configuration or picture associations.

Second Question:

How Do You Prevent Reading Failure?

By first teaching the child the alphabet, then the sounds the letters stand for, so that the child's Left Brain can develop a Phonetic Reflex, whereby the phonetic structure of all of our printed words becomes transparent and easy to read.

And all of this can be done without pictures!

Third Question:

How Do You Remediate a Child with a Reading Disability?

First you must test the student to evaluate his or her degree of disability.

Two excellent tests are available: The Blumenfeld Oral Reading Assessment Test (BORAT) and the Miller Reading Test, a revolutionary breakthrough in testing for dyslexia.

The tests will indicate the severity of the reading disability.

The student must then be taught our entire English alphabetic system and drilled sufficiently in the letter sounds so that a Phonetic Reflex can be developed to replace the Whole-Word Reflex. This can take time. And for some students it can be a difficult process to undergo. But there is no other way to acquire the needed Phonetic Reflex, that is, the automatic ability to see the phonetic structure of our printed words and sound them out.

This book will provide the teacher and tutor with a complete phonetic instruction program to be used to teach beginning children to read phonetically and remediate older students with reading disabilities.

By eliminating reading failure from our education system, we will see a decrease in functional illiteracy among our youngsters, an increase in intellectual curiosity, a new interest in studies that require high literacy, and a decline in the dropout rate.

About the Author

Samuel L. Blumenfeld, author of ten books on education, has spent the last forty years dealing with America's critical reading problem. He first became aware of the problem in 1960, when, as editor at Grosset & Dunlap in New York, he was asked to join the advisory board of the Reading Reform Foundation. When he asked what was the purpose of the foundation, he was told that its aim was to get phonics back in the schools. "Get phonics back in the schools?" he asked. "Since when was it taken out? How could you learn to read without it?"

He was then advised to read Rudolf Flesch's book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, published in 1955. In that book 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." He further explained that when you impose a "sight method" on a phonetic system, you create reading disability, otherwise known as dyslexia.

In 1973, Blumenfeld wrote his own book on reading, *The New Illiterates*. In researching that book he made the startling discovery that the sight method of teaching reading had been invented in the 1830s by the Rev. Thomas H. Gallaudet, the teacher of the deaf and dumb in Hartford, Connecticut. The method was tried with normal children in the primary schools of Boston and proved to be a disaster.

In writing that book Blumenfeld also did a line-by-line analysis of the Dick and Jane whole-word reading program and came to the conclusion that any child taught to read by that method would most likely become dyslexic.

Not satisfied with simply criticizing the teaching methods being used in the schools, Blumenfeld decided to provide parents with the tools they needed to teach their own children to read phonetically at home. He wrote *How to Tutor* and *Alpha-Phonics: A Primer for Beginning Readers*. Both books have been used by thousands of parents to teach their children to read at home with great success.

Blumenfeld has lectured on the reading problem in all 50 states as well as in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada. He found that all the English-speaking countries have the same reading problem that we have in the United States. In fact, the latest book on the subject, *The Great Reading Disaster*, is about the UK!

Blumenfeld's articles have appeared in a variety of magazines. His latest book, *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Connection, A New Study of the Authorship Question*, was published in June 2008.

SAMUEL L. BLUMENFELD

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December 3, 2007

Ms. Marian Lizzi
Editor
Perigee
Penguin Group (USA) Inc.
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014

Dear Ms. Lizzi:

As you probably know the most critical problem plaguing American education is the high degree of reading failure among our students. And so, I am enclosing a book proposal which I hope will interest you: *How to Prevent Reading Failure*. The simple truth is that reading failure can be prevented thus saving hundreds of thousands of youngsters the misery of failure.

How to Prevent Reading Failure is the result of thirty years of research and experience with the reading problem, its causes and cures. I have taught in private schools, substituted in public schools, and done much private tutoring.

I am also the author of a very successful reading program, *Alpha-Phonics*, which has been used by thousands of home-schoolers and teachers during the last twenty years. At present I am working with several Chinese colleagues to develop an English instruction program for the Chinese based on *Alpha-Phonics*.

If the proposal interests you, please let me know via email, and we can discuss it further.

Thanks in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

SAMUEL L. BLUMENFELD

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March 3, 2008

Jane Nevins
Editor-in-Chief
The Dana Press
1001 G Street, NW Suite 1025
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Ms. Nevins:

You probably are aware of the devastating report on literacy that was issued last November by the National Endowment for the Arts. Comparing itself to the famous *Nation at Risk* report, it presents an alarming view of the decline in literary book reading in the United States. The report states: "*Reading at Risk* is testimony that a cultural legacy is disappearing, especially among younger people. Indeed, at the current rate of loss, literary reading as a leisure activity will virtually disappear in half a century."

Add to the above the recent call by Gen. Colin Powell for action concerning the staggering dropout rate among urban high school students. More than one million inner-city students drop out every year. According to America's Promise Alliance, dropouts are more likely than graduates to be unemployed, in poor health, living in poverty, on public assistance, and single parents.

I have been writing and lecturing on the subject of literacy for over thirty-five years, and believe that the enclosed book proposal, *How to Prevent Reading Failure*, offers a realistic way of countering the negative trends indicated by these alarming reports.

As a publisher, I know you are concerned with the problem of declining literacy among young Americans. The reading reforms I advocate strengthen the language faculty of the brain, thereby enhancing the skills of the mind. When a young student respects his mind, that person will respect himself and strive to make something positive of his life.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

SAMUEL L. BLUMENFELD

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November 26, 2007

Greg Daniel
Vice President and Associate Publisher
W Publishing Group
P.O. Box 141000
Nashville, TN 37214

Dear Mr. Daniel:

Believe it or not, the teaching of reading is *still* the most serious problem plaguing American education. Reading failure is responsible for destroying the futures of countless young Americans, and yet it can be completely prevented. And that is the subject of the enclosed book proposal: *How to Prevent Reading Failure*.

The New York Times of August 30, 2006 reported: "The average score on the reading and math portions of the newly expanded SAT showed the largest decline in 31 years."

A more recent study by the National Endowment for the Arts reports a plummeting decline in book reading by young Americans.

The very well financed public schools of Washington, DC, are still at the bottom in reading scores. Why? The proposed book explains why. It deals with this problem head-on, and shows how we can stop this decline by using teaching methods that produce high literacy.

With reading decline so much in the news, I believe that this book will be bought by many parents, educators, and legislators grappling with the problem and seeking solutions. Incidentally, I've written many columns on this subject for WorldNetDaily and have received many excellent responses from readers.

I trust that you will give this proposal your most serious consideration. With many thanks in advance, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

How to Teach Reading Without Pictures

... and Why You Should

A book proposal

by

Samuel L. Blumenfeld

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Why This Book

Most educators and publishers do not realize that teaching reading with lots of pictures can be harmful.

Children taught to read with lots of pictures will be reluctant to read books without pictures later on.

But children taught to read without pictures will read books with solid print because they can.

The lack of pictures does not turn them away.

The fact that most fiction and nonfiction books have few or no pictures means that those who need pictures will be deprived of great reading experiences because of their school-acquired handicap.

Another important reason why children should be taught to read without pictures is because pictures encourage guessing.

And because the printed word is associated with a picture, this makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the learner to see the phonetic structure of the word so that he or she can read it correctly.

Our alphabetic writing system is a phonetic one, requiring learning the alphabet letters and the sounds they stand for.

When a child has mastered the system through drill and practice, he or she becomes a phonetic reader able to sound out any printed word. The printed word emits the sound of its spoken equivalent. Thus, reading combines sight and sound, so that the reader sees the word and hears the sound.

What does this mean for reading instruction?

Plenty!

Implications for Reading Instruction

The purpose of this book is to help teachers become successful at teaching reading, to help them become experts at teaching children our wonderful phonetic reading system without pictures.

Back in the early 1980's, when I became aware that the schools were teaching children to read with a picture system, I decided to write a primer that parents could use to teach their children to read phonetically without pictures.

And, of course, thousands of parents have used the program very successfully, proving that pictures were not needed in teaching reading.

Indeed, that's the way children were taught to read, long before pictures were used, back in ancient Rome and early America.

The learning of our phonetic system can be a great pleasure for children on the road to literary mastery.

Just as young pianists must do a lot of drill before mastering the keyboard (incidentally, without pictures!) so must young readers learn the letter sounds and practice reading them in many different combinations. This will help them acquire ease and fluency in reading, the ability to handle any printed word they encounter.

This book will outline the techniques of teaching reading without pictures, explaining the peculiarities of the English alphabetic system which uses 26 letters to represent 44 sounds.

Such teaching can be fun and exciting for both teacher and student as they learn the ins and outs of our magnificent writing system used by the greatest authors in English literature.

About the Author

Sam Blumenfeld is one of the world's leading experts on the teaching of reading. He has taught in both private and public schools and as a private tutor. His books on education include:

The New Illiterates

How to Tutor

Alpha-Phonics: A Primer for Beginning Readers

For ten years Blumenfeld edited *The Blumenfeld Education Letter* in which he wrote critically about the way children were being taught to read in American schools.

He has lectured in all fifty states and in Canada, Australia and New Zealand on the problems of reading instruction.

He is Massachusetts chairman of the Reading Reform Foundation which advocates the return of phonetic instruction in our schools.

Blumenfeld's articles on literacy and other topics have appeared in such diverse publications as *Esquire*, *The Reading Informer*, *Practical Homeschooling*, *Reason*, *Education Digest*, *American Legion Magazine*, etc.

Born in New York City and educated in its public schools, including Stuyvesant High School, he has a B.A. degree from The City College of New York and spent two years in Paris studying at the Sorbonne.

For ten years he worked in the New York book publishing industry at Rinehart, Viking, World Publishing, and Grosset & Dunlap.

At present he is working with several Chinese colleagues to produce a program for teaching Chinese children to read English phonetically.