

*The American Reformation Movement's*

## **BOOKMARK**

Independence Square, Suite 106, Box 138  
7341 Clairemont Mesa Boulevard  
San Diego, California 92111

P.O. Box 85152 MB 138  
San Diego, CA. 92138

### SAMUEL BLUMENFELD'S HOW TO TUTOR

Scene #1: 1959--adorable little Davey Gamble sits patiently in his first grade classroom while Mrs. Hancock distributes a Dick & Jane reader on the opening day of school. Adorable little Davey's mother has already taught him how to read real books. Adorable little Davey takes one look at the moronic reader before him, rises, and, in his first words uttered within the hallowed walls of a public school, declares that this book is stupid, that he is not going to read it, and he hurls the book on the floor. Adorable little Davey is off to a great start.

Scene #2: 1974--scholarly W. David Gamble, the ink still wet on his bachelor of arts degree, enters into a California State Teaching Credential program at a local grad school. Scholarly W. David Gamble's mother is a bit sceptical of all the gobbledygook which her charming offspring is imbibing. Scholarly W. David Gamble chuckles condescendingly at his mother's consternation, aware that she knows nothing about behavioral objectives, psychomotor-and-cognitive-and-affective domains, self-actualization, holistic grading, and all the other things that make an educator a professional. She just doesn't understand.

Scene #3: the present--humbled and repentant Daddy Gamble is teaching reading and writing and arithmetic to 5-year-old David and 3-year-old Christina (the third student in this one-room schoolhouse is due in April). Humbled and repentant Daddy Gamble has abandoned all behavioral objectives, all levels of domains, each and every thing he learned in pursuit of his now-destroyed California State Teaching Credential. Humbled and repentant Daddy Gamble, being a quick learner, has taken two and a half decades to discover that his mother was right.

Daddy's bookshelves, which once bulged with ponderous tomes articulating the latest studies in educational psychology, esteem-enhancement, global-interdependence curricula, student-centered learning, etc., are now virtually bare. There sits a Bible, the McGuffey readers, Ray's arithmetic, various storybooks and children's literature, and Samuel Blumenfeld's How to Tutor, published by The Paradigm Company. In 1973, Mr. Blumenfeld published the first edition

of this book, which presently sells for about ten bucks; in 1974, I made the decision to ignore Mr. Blumenfeld and spend several thousand dollars (and two years of my life) in pursuit of a California State Teaching Credential and a master's degree in education; to put it eloquently, I blew it.

MR. BLUMENFELD ON TUTORING. Readin' and 'ritin' and 'rithmetic. That's what this little book is about. Mr. Blumenfeld is concerned that the proper foundation be laid here in the Three R's, because everything else is built upon these skills. "It is estimated that at least one third of the children who enter public school do not learn to read--not because they can't, but because of widespread educational malpractice that prevents them from doing so. State supervision, accreditation and certification have not only not prevented educational malpractice in the public schools but have guaranteed that it will continue for many years to come." (pg. 10) Educators who can't educate have invented a multitude of "learning disorders" with which to afflict the children of America in order to cover up their own inadequacies.

Mr. Blumenfeld thus has written a book for Moms and Dads and anyone who wants to help young children learn (or older ones who never learned properly). A State teaching credential is not necessary (or desirable) to be a tutor; patience, an understanding of the young mind, and a knowledge of the subject matter are. Tutoring obviously is done on a one-to-one basis, or in very small groups, and thus allows the tutor to help the child focus his attention on the matter at hand, and to make sure that complete understanding has been achieved before going on to new material.

The introductory section of the book contains many a good suggestion for the aspiring tutor. The author emphasizes that the young scholar must not be buried under a work-load beyond his developing abilities, but neither must he be shielded from the fact that learning requires mental effort and practice. "In order to maintain the appropriate pace of instruction, you will have to be sensitive to the child's rate of learning. It is better to give him a little more of what you think he can learn than less. By giving him more, you don't give him a chance to be bored. In addition, by giving the child a little more to learn than his present capacity, he becomes accustomed to the process of exerting mental effort. This is important, for although we should try to make learning as interesting, exciting, and as pleasant as possible, there is no escaping the fact that learning requires mental effort--mental work--and the sooner the child becomes accustomed to the process of mental work, the sooner he will understand, appreciate and enjoy the whole process of intellectual mastery." (pg. 20)

MR. BLUMENFELD ON THE FIRST R. "Reading is the most important single skill a child will learn during his entire school career, for on the ability to read depends the development of everything else. In fact, reading is the beginning of real intellectual development, and if the child is not taught to read properly, his entire intellectual development will be handicapped. The reason for this is quite simple. Language is the vehicle of thought." (pg. 29) Amen. Here is where a child's educational future is determined. If this skill is learned,

then all the kooky NEA-approved gobbledygook in the world might not cripple the student forever. If this skill is not learned, then the youngster better have a great jump shot, because basketball will be his only alternative.

The print in this book is probably a bit too tiny for the young soon-to-be-reader. Therefore, the tutor should transcribe the lessons onto a paper for the student. The child is first taught that the alphabet is a set of sound-symbols. The letters are taught as symbols for sounds, nothing more. Mr. Blumenfeld wants the students to associate "A" with a sound, not with a picture of an apple, or an aardvark, or whatever. You'll save money by not having to buy flashcards with elaborate pictures and a little tiny letter buried in the corner. The little learner is then taught the sounds of several letters, and right off the bat he is reading the following words: am, an, as, at, ax, Sam, man, has, sat, and tax. He is immediately reading sentences such as Sam has an ax., and, Sam sat. Your little scholar is reading real words without having to memorize the shape of unknown letters, without having to look for "clues" in accompanying pictures, and without Dick and Jane and their rabid dog Spot. A good deal.

I must admit that I am not impartial in my enthusiasm for Mr. Blumenfeld's system. I taught my children to read using Mr. Blumenfeld's Alpha-Phonics and the McGuffey Readers. Alpha-Phonics is an oversized book containing lessons almost identical to those given in How to Tutor, except that the lessons are calligraphed in larger print, making it perfect for little hands and eyes. At first glance, these two books by Mr. Blumenfeld don't look like very much fun. No pictures, no color, no games, no activities, no nothing. Just reading. No Apples, no Bears, no Cats, no Dogs, not even a Zebra. Just reading. The only thing a child will get out of these book is the ability to read. Pity, huh?

MR. BLUMENFELD ON THE SECOND R. This section of the book does not deal with the development of composition skills, but with handwriting. I learned a very interesting thing when I first picked up this book. My mother had taught me reading and arithmetic before I went to school, thus I was impervious to the destructive forces around me. She did not teach me cursive handwriting, thus I was at the mercy of the California public school system. When I stared at page 149 of the book, I knew that something was wrong. It finally dawned on me--I have never learned how to write. Page 149 is a cursive alphabet, small letters and capitals. When I write a capital letter, I do not use the cursive form, I use the manuscript (printed) form. If someone were to have shown me a cursive capital "Q", I would not have had the slightest idea what it was. Looks like a funny "2" to me.

Well, okay, so I've never learned something a second-grader should know. What else is new? Mr. Blumenfeld wants today's children to escape my fate. He does not favor teaching a child the manuscript form, and then teaching him cursive later. He thinks learning to read and learning to write go together, and both require practice. "Introduce the subject of handwriting by telling the child that learning to read is only half of learning to use the alphabet. The other half is writing. Reading permits us to read the messages of

others. Writing permits us to send messages of our own. Just as you learn to communicate with others by both talking and listening, you must also learn to communicate by reading and writing." (pg. 148) Also, we are not to be engaged in a sprint when teaching this skill. "In the beginning, while good writing habits are being formed, speed is of no importance. Correct letter formation is our primary goal, and enough time should be given so that each letter is learned thoroughly. When it is a matter of creating lifelong habits, what is taught at the beginning should be taught well." (pg. 152)

My former football coaches often felt constrained to remind me that I unquestionably am the clumsiest person of all time; thus I was a bit unsure that little hands could handle the rigors of cursive handwriting. To allay my fears, Mr. Blumenfeld writes that "there is a basic simplicity at the heart of our cursive handwriting system. All cursive script can be reduced to three basic pen movements: the overcurve and the undercurve, both of which originate in the oval, and the push-pull slant stroke. The entire cursive alphabet is made up of these three natural basic movements in a variety of combinations." (pg. 143) The system taught here is a solid and functional one. This cursive is not quite as aesthetically beautiful as, for example, the style taught in the Spencerian Penmanship series, but it is certainly a worthy goal toward which to strive.

MR. BLUMENFELD ON THE THIRD R. "What is arithmetic? Arithmetic is simply the art of counting. All arithmetic functions (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division) are merely different ways of counting. In addition we count forward. In subtraction we count backward. In multiplication we count in multiples, which is merely a faster way of counting forward when dealing with great quantities. In division, the same principle is applied in the reverse direction." (pgs. 188-189) Well. Isn't that refreshing? No ludicrous New Math nonsense, just addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. How nice.

The child begins by learning to count. "As he is taught to count verbally, he is also taught to associate the number symbols with specific quantities. He does this by counting units. To do this he can use fingers or pennies. Since our ten-base system is derived from our fingers, our fingers are the most natural and convenient counting board the child can have. The use of these concrete units are only necessary up to ten, for beyond ten he is dealing with ten plus units of one, and all this can and should be done with the ten Arabic symbols he will be using for the rest of his life." (pg. 196)

The little scholar starts off adding one to various numbers, and by the time he gets to Lesson 67, he is dividing 39 into 8754. Not bad progress. Again, the exercises listed in the book should be copied onto a piece of paper.

When I become Emperor, I am going to decree that anyone with a State teaching credential may not come within 1000 feet of a child. The rest of us will know how to teach those blessed State-certified-teacherless children if we listen to Mr. Blumenfeld.

# Basic Training

*Learning to read needn't be like boot camp*

## How To Tutor

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld, The Paradigm Company, 1986 (first edition: 1974), \$11.95 298 pages, paperbound.

P.O. Box 45161  
Boise, Idaho 83711  
(208) 322-4440

Samuel Blumenfeld is without question one of the most trenchant and influential education writers of our day. The education establishment, does not accord him such distinction. To them he is anathema — a pariah to be contemptuously ignored. That is certainly to his credit.

Yet, the education establishment is unable to ignore Mr. Blumenfeld. His books, articles, seminars, public speeches, and regular appearances on radio and television programs make that impossible. He is, perhaps, best known for his excellent exposés, *Is Public Education Necessary?* and *NEA: Trojan Horse In American Education*, both of which sent shockwaves nationwide through that establishment. In those two seminal books, he made available to the general public for the first time a scholarly yet readable history of American education that explained how we devolved from the best-educated nation in the history of the world to “a nation at risk” — barely able to compete academically with “third-world” countries. In short, he exposed the education establishment for the pernicious fraud that it is.

This exposure has created a dilemma for conscientious parents. They know what is wrong in education, but they are at a loss over what to do about it. They feel particularly impotent in the area of teaching basic academic skills. The education establishment “experts” have quite successfully arrogated that province as their own exclusive domain and have enshrouded it in mystery not to be understood by the uninitiated.

Fortunately for us, Blumenfeld has addressed this issue as well. As usual, he has done a splendid job of it. Actually, his writings have been, from the very be-

ginning, more concerned with solutions — offering parents and teachers practical, concrete assistance — than with criticism of the many glaring faults of our public school system. His first book, *How To Start Your Own School — and Why You Need One*, published in 1972, helped to launch today's burgeoning private school movement. The following year his book, *The New Illiterates — and How To Keep Your Child from Becoming One*, was published, providing parents with an excellent guide to systematic phonics instruction. That same year he came out with his third book, *How To Tutor*.

## Back to the Basics

From the practical standpoint of empowering parents to take back control of their children's schooling, *How To Tutor*

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**Many parents  
have found this book  
to be a Godsend.**

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is the most important of Blumenfeld's six superb books on education. With this slim volume, anyone who can read can teach the 3 R's.

In 117 easy-to-follow lessons, Blumenfeld takes you step-by-step from the alphabet through vowel and consonant blends, to irregular word spellings and pronunciations. He has organized the sequential lessons exceptionally well and capably explains why this exercise follows that, and why a particular pedagogical method is faulty and another is sound. He has a clear understanding of the learning process, how the mind works. He anticipates the questions that both student and tutor may have. His systematic phonics course will work for illiterate adults as well as for children.

“Of the three R's,” says Mr. Blumenfeld, “writing has been the most neglected in the elementary school curriculum for the last thirty years.” Despite the pronouncements of some educators to the contrary, he believes that “cursive

writing is one of the indispensable tools of literacy . . . and it should be taught to every child thoroughly and systematically from grade one onward.”

He then covers the proper procedure for teaching penmanship, from selecting the right pencil and paper to dotting the i's and crossing the t's. And for the south-paws, instead of throwing them a curve he provides special coaching that will help get them to first base.

In the past several years, a number of major studies have pointed out the alarming decline in American students' mathematical skills. The reason for this is quite plain, says Blumenfeld. As in the areas of reading and writing, today's youngsters are not being given a proper foundation. They do not master basic arithmetic before moving on to more advanced and more abstract mathematical concepts. In 67 lessons, Blumenfeld takes the tutor and student in a natural progression from counting through basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, to fractions, decimals, money, and then to measurements of time, weight, liquid and distance.

The beauty of this book is that it makes it all so very simple and straightforward — and it works! Many parents and professional teachers have found it to be a Godsend. There is no reason for parents to fret that their children may be academically shortchanged. Whether their children are being home-schooled or taught in an institutional setting, by utilizing this one volume, parents can guarantee that their offspring will be able to read, write, and compute proficiently.

Mothers who need to supplement the family income without leaving the home will find in *How To Tutor* all they need to know to start a thriving home business. Tutoring several students a week, they can earn a respectable wage while helping to solve our national illiteracy problem. Elementary school teachers and remedial instructors too will find this book to be an indispensable classroom aid. ■

— WILLIAM F. JASPER