School-Induced Dyslexia
and
How It Deforms a Child’s Brain

“When children learn to read....their brains will
never be the same again.”

Stanislas Dehaene
Reading in the Brain
Books by Samuel L. Blumenfeld

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*School-Induced Dyslexia and How It Deforms a Child’s Brain*
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and
How It Deforms a Child’s Brain

By
Samuel L. Blumenfeld

Publisher
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Dedicated to the Memory of

Edward Miller

who proved that the sight-method

produced dyslexia

And

To the Memory of

Charlie Richardson

A fellow toiler in the same vineyard
In November 2007, the National Endowment for the Arts issued an alarming report on the present state of literacy in America, *Reading at Risk*. According to the Report, the number of 17-year-olds who never read for pleasure increased from 9 percent in 1984 to 19 percent in 2004. About half of Americans between the ages of 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.” The survey found that only a third of high-school seniors read at a proficient level. “And proficiency is not a high standard,” said Gioia. “We’re not asking them to be able to read Proust in the original. We’re talking about reading the daily newspaper.”

What was disappointing about the Report is that it did not state the cause of this decline in national literacy: the refusal of our educators to use the time-tested, traditional reading instruction programs that once made Americans the most literate people on earth.

The simple fact is that our reading problem is being caused by an insidious teaching method being used in our primary schools: the sight method. And that is why school-induced dyslexia is now rampant throughout the United States, where primary teachers force children to memorize sight vocabularies, which are the Thalidomide of primary education. All of this has been
corroborated by the most recent brain research.

Sadly, most parents and taxpayers have very little accurate knowledge of what goes on in American public schools. Parents generally tend to be supportive of their children's teachers, and readily accept the diagnoses the schools routinely make of their children's learning problems.

If the child is having trouble learning to read, there must be something wrong with the child. He or she may be dyslexic or learning disabled or the victim of minimal brain damage. And if the child is behaving badly in the classroom, he or she probably has ADD—Attention Deficit Disorder—or ADHD—Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder.

Millions of parents unquestioningly believe what they are told by the school authorities. The result is that when the school recommends that little Johnny or Jane may require medication to solve their behavioral or learning problems, most parents accept the verdict. They, who know their children best, are led to believe that their child has a serious learning disability that requires taking Ritalin or Adderall, or other such powerful schedule D amphetamine drugs, which are as euphoric inducing as any illegal drug being sold on the street.

But what very few parents know is that these problems afflicting their children are actually being caused by teaching methods used in the schools by their ever-so-nice teachers. There is nothing dreadfully wrong with their child. After all the child learned to speak his own language without the help of a certified teacher, and by the time he is five, he has developed a speaking vocabulary
in the thousands of words. He or she doesn’t have a learning disability. It’s the teacher who has a teaching disability.

In this book I explain what that teaching disability is and how it affects millions of children in our government schools. Once you know the truth about how your child’s teachers were trained and how they use their teaching disabilities to ruin your child’s life, you will be in a much better position to decide what to do about your children’s education.

Education is necessary, but government schools are not. Indeed, government schools represent the very antithesis of true academic education. Homeschoolers do a much better job of educating their children than the certified, professionally trained teachers in the government schools. Why? Because parents want the best for their children and will seek out the best and most successful reading programs to use in the informal settings of their homes. That is why the homeschool movement has grown to be as large and vibrant as it now is.

School-induced dyslexia and learning disabilities are very real problems for American parents. But you, as a parent, can prevent it from damaging your child by removing him or her from harm’s way. And if your child has already become a victim of a teacher’s teaching disability, this book provides a way to cure that child’s problem. In the final section of this book is a full phonics reading program, which the parent can use to teach a child to read at home.

This writer has no hope that the training of teachers in the colleges will change for the better in the foreseeable future, or that the government schools will reform the way they do things. We’ve
known about this problem for decades, and all of the efforts of parents, critics, writers, and private educators to reform the system have been met by simply more deception on the part of the government-school establishment.

The solution? Parents must take matters into their own hands. If you want education reform, you can have it tomorrow by removing your child from the government school and providing him or her with a superior education at home or in a private school that knows the difference between educational malpractice and genuine academic instruction. It is hoped that this book leads you to make the right decision.
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Chapter One

Dyslexia: The Disease You Get In School

Dyslexia is an exotic word, concocted from the Greek dys, meaning ill or bad, and lexia, meaning words. It is widely used today to describe a condition that afflicts many normal and intelligent youngsters who, for reasons that seem to baffle most educators, parents and physicians, can't learn to read.

The difference between a dyslexic and a functional illiterate is purely social. Dyslexics are usually adolescents from middle-class or professional families whose parents assume that their child's reading difficulty is more of a medical or psychological problem than an educational one. The child is too smart to be that dumb.

A functional illiterate is simply someone who has kept his reading problem to himself and goes through life pretending he can read, avoiding situations which involve reading, choosing jobs which do not reveal his reading disability. He assumes he's dumb, not sick or mentally impaired.

However, in the last thirty years, with the growth of federally funded Special Education and the
proliferation of early testing, more and more children with reading difficulties are being labeled "learning disabled," or LD, in the first grade or even kindergarten. Over the years these children have been "diagnosed" as suffering from minimal brain damage, minimal brain dysfunction, neurological impairment, perceptual impairment, attention deficit syndrome, or dyslexia.

The Symptoms

What are the symptoms of dyslexia? The Academic American Encyclopedia (Vol. 6, page 320) gives as good a summary of the disease as we shall find anywhere. It says:

"Dyslexia refers to an impaired ability to read or to comprehend what one reads, caused by congenital disability or acquired brain damage. Dyslexia is independent of any speech defect and ranges from a minor to a total inability to read.

"Specialists use the term specific dyslexia to refer to an inability to read in a person of normal or high general intelligence whose learning is not impaired by socioeconomic deprivation, emotional disturbance, or brain damage. Psychologists disagree about whether specific dyslexia is a clearly identifiable syndrome. Those who think it is clearly identifiable note that it persists into adulthood despite conventional instruction; tends to run in families; and occurs more frequently in males. It is also associated with a special kind of difficulty in identifying words and letters, which dyslexics tend to reverse or invert (reading p for q, for example, or on for no). Competing theories exist about the causes and nature of specific dyslexia."
For years I have been telling parents and educators that the kind of reading difficulties afflicting perfectly normal children in our schools today are being caused by the teaching methods and not by any defect in the children themselves.

The educators have been telling us for years now that the reason why so many children are having problems learning to read is because of a learning disability they've been born with. In fact, the official position of the federal government on this issue is summed up in the 1987 Report to the Congress of the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities which defined "Learning Disabilities" as follows (p. 222):

"Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities, or of social skills. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction. [Our emphasis.] Even though a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (e.g., sensory impairment, mental retardation, social and emotional disturbance), with socioenvironmental influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction, psychogenic factors), and especially with attention deficit disorder, all of which may cause learning problems, a learning disability is not the direct result of those conditions or influences."

In other words, according to government researchers, all learning disabilities are due to "central nervous system dysfunction," regardless of all other factors, including teaching methods. In fact,
the federal government is pumping millions of dollars into research on the genetic causes of dyslexia.

Dr. Orton’s Findings

But it is somewhat surprising that there should be so much puzzlement over the cause of dyslexia when, as early as 1929, Dr. Samuel T. Orton, a neuropathologist at Iowa State University, attributed its cause to a new look-say, whole word, or sight method of teaching reading that was being introduced in the schools of America.

As a brain specialist who dealt with children’s language disorders, Dr. Orton had been seeing a lot of children with reading problems at his clinic. In diagnosing the children’s problems he came to the conclusion that their reading disability was being caused by this new instruction method. He decided to bring these important findings to the attention of the educators. He wrote an article that appeared in the February 1929 issue of the Journal of Educational Psychology. It was titled “The ‘Sight Reading’ Method of Teaching Reading as a Source of Reading Disability.” Knowing that he might be stepping on the very sensitive toes of some professors of education, he offered his critique in as diplomatic and respectful way as possible. He wrote:

“I wish to emphasize at the beginning that the strictures which I have to offer here do not apply to the use of the sight method of teaching reading as a whole but only to its effects on a restricted group of children for whom, as I think we can show, this technique is not only not adapted but often proves an actual obstacle to reading progress, and moreover I believe that this group is one
of considerable size and because here faulty teaching methods may not only prevent the acquisition of academic education by children of average capacity but may also give rise to far reaching damage to their emotional life.”

The warning to the educators was quite explicit: this faulty teaching method will harm a large number of children. Educators were expected, by parents and the community, to do nothing that would harm the children in any way, shape or form.

Dr. Orton expected the educators to respond to his findings. They did--negatively. In fact, they accelerated the introduction and promotion of this new faulty teaching method throughout the primary schools of America. And it didn’t take very long before America began to have a reading problem.

The Disease Spreads

Although Dr. Orton went on to become the world’s leading authority on “dyslexia,” and in fact created one of the most effective remediation programs, the Orton-Gillingham method, his 1929 article is nowhere referred to in the literature on the subject.

I came across it quite by accident while doing research for my book, The New Illiterates, which was published in 1973. But why the experts on dyslexia have not found it, I don’t know. Most of them have heard of Dr. Orton. In any case, dyslexia was virtually unheard of in this country until the 1940s when, suddenly, millions of American children were coming down with the
“Millions of children in the U.S. suffer from dyslexia which is the medical term for reading difficulties. It is responsible for about 70% of the school failures in the 6- to 12-year-age group, and handicaps about 15% of all grade-school children. Dyslexia may stem from a variety of physical ailments or combination of them—glandular imbalance, heart disease, eye or ear trouble—or from a deep-seated psychological disturbance that ‘blocks’ a child’s ability to learn.”

The article then described the treatment for dyslexia given a young girl at Chicago’s Dyslexia Institute in Wesley Memorial Hospital on the campus of Northwestern University: “thyroid treatments, removal of tonsils and adenoids, exercises to strengthen her eye muscles. Other patients may need dental work, nose, throat or ear treatment, or a thorough airing out of troublesome home situations that throw a sensitive child off the track of normality.”

Not even the writer at Life magazine was aware of Dr. Orton’s pioneering work on dyslexia and its real cause.

Enter Dr. Flesch

Finally, in 1955, Dr. Rudolf Flesch produced his famous book, Why Johnny Can’t Read, which became an instant best-seller. In it he revealed to parents and the American public the true cause of the reading problem. He 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 fact of all logic and common sense."

He then explained how in the early 1930s the professors of education changed the way reading is taught in American schools. They threw out the traditional alphabetic-phonics method, which is the proper way to teach a child to read an alphabetic writing system, and put in a new look-say, whole-word, or sight method that teaches children to read English as if it were Chinese, an ideographic writing system. Flesch contended that when you impose an ideographic teaching method on an alphabetic writing system you cause reading disability.

Dr. Orton had said as much in 1929, but in 1955 Flesch could cite millions of reading disabled children as substantiation of what he was saying. Naturally, the educators rejected Flesch’s contentions.

Most people, of course, don’t know the difference between an alphabetic writing system and an ideographic one. But one must know the difference in order to understand how and why look-say, or the sight method, can cause dyslexia.
Ours is an alphabetic writing system, which means that we use an alphabet. What is an alphabet? It is a set of graphic symbols—we call them “letters”—that stand for the irreducible speech sounds of the language. In other words, alphabet letters are not meaningless configurations. They actually stand for something. Each letter represents a specific speech sound, and in some cases more than one sound.

All alphabets are the same in that regard. The Russian, Greek, and Hebrew alphabets all stand for the sounds of their respective languages, and the English alphabet stands for the sounds of the English language.

How does one teach a child or anyone else to read an alphabetic writing system? For hundreds of years it was done very simply in three steps. First the child was taught to recognize the letters of the alphabet; second, the child was taught the sounds the letters stood for; and third, the child was then given words and sentences to read.
How was the child taught the letter sounds? In English, it was usually done in the simplest mechanical way possible. The child was drilled in two-letter consonant-vowel combinations. He was drilled in consonant-long vowel combinations such as ba, be, bi, bo, bu; ma, me, mi, mo, mu, etc. He was also drilled in consonant-short vowel combinations as: ab, eb, ib, ob, ub; am, em, im, om, um, etc. The purpose of the drill was to enable the child to develop as quickly and easily as possible an automatic association between letters and sounds. Developing that phonetic reflex is at the heart of learning to read an alphabetic writing system.

**Pictographs and Ideographs**

The first alphabet appears to have been invented in about 1700 B.C. Prior to that invention, the earliest form of writing we know of is pictography--pictures representing objects and actions. You didn’t have to go to school to learn to read pictographs, for the symbols looked like the things they represented.

However, as civilization became more complex, the scribes had to begin drawing pictures of things that did not easily lend themselves to depiction. For example, how would you draw pictures of such concepts as good, bad, dream, reality, persuasion, confidence, memory, intent, liberty, justice, etc.? You can’t. So the scribes drew symbols, none of which looked like the concepts and ideas they represented. Thousands of such symbols--which we call ideographs--were created. And now you had to go to school and be taught what all of these symbols meant.

The result was that literacy was limited to a small class of scribes, scholars, and priests who
spent endless hours memorizing countless symbols in order to be able to read. Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics is an ideographic writing system with some phonetic clues to help memorization. So is modern Chinese. The Chinese use about 50,000 ideographs, of which 5,000 must be mastered if an individual is to be able to read a Chinese newspaper. Thus, ideographic writing is cumbersome, difficult, and time-consuming to master.

**The Invention of the alphabet**

According to Stanislas Dehaene, author of *The Reading Brain*, “The first traces of an alphabetic system, called Proto-Sinaitic, date from 1700 B.C. and were uncovered in the Sinai peninsula, close to the turquoise mines first worked by the Pharoahs of the Middle and New Kingdom. The writing system borrowed the shapes of several Egyptian characters, but used them to represent a Semitic language. Signs no longer referred to meaning, but to speech sounds alone, and in fact solely to consonants. In this way, the inventory of written symbols were dramatically reduced: two dozen signs were enough to represent all the existing speech sounds with perfect regularity.”

In other words, the invention of the alphabet permitted human beings to do much more with much less. But what is most curious about alphabetic writing is that it was first used in the Sinai where Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses, as we know, was raised by an Egyptian princess and undoubtedly learned to read Egyptian hieroglyphics. According to Dehaene, the new alphabetic writing system “borrowed the shapes of several Egyptian characters, but used them to represent a Semitic language.” Is it possible that Moses invented the alphabet and applied it to the language spoken by the Hebrews?
What we do know is that the Ten Commandments, which Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, were written in alphabetic writing, not in Egyptian hieroglyphics. So there is an important spiritual dimension to the invention of alphabetic writing, which later permitted the Hebrew sages to write the Torah, the Five Books of Moses. Apparently, alphabetic writing was then picked up by the Phoenicians who used it mainly for commercial purposes and then by the Greeks who then used the system for writing philosophical dialogues, histories, and dramas.

What is equally important about the invention of the alphabet is that it shifted the reading process from the right-brain hemisphere to the left brain, the center of language learning. The human being has the unique ability to develop language, which no other species has. Spoken language is a purely human faculty.

As Noah Webster has said: “Language, as well as the faculty of speech, was the immediate gift of God.”

Behavioral psychologists believe that human language is an evolutionary development from animal “talk,” which consists of chirps in birds, meows in cats, and barks in dogs. But what the behaviorists ignore is the fact that animal “talk” is merely a function of vocal chords, not the animal’s brain, whereas human language is a faculty of the brain, not merely that of vocal chords.

As Bertrand Russell has written: “No matter how eloquently a dog may bark, he cannot tell you
that his parents were poor but honest.

The endowment of human beings with a language faculty, centered in the left-brain, has led many to believe that this endowment is of divine origin. There is no other scientific explanation to account for this unique trait which all human beings are born with. The fact that the left brain is the center of this faculty has intrigued scientists who specialize in brain anatomy.

Alphabetic writing revolutionized literacy. It made it easy for anyone to learn to read. It also made it easy to expand a language’s vocabulary by inventing new words to represent new concepts and new objects. It made it easy to put abstract ideas on paper. Rome adopted the Greek alphabet, but changed the shape of its symbols to stand for the Latin language. When the Romans conquered Britain, they imposed the Latin alphabet on the Anglo-Saxon language spoken there. But there was a problem. The Latin alphabet had only 25 symbols, while the Anglo-Saxon language had over 40 sounds.

And that is why the English alphabetic system has so many irregularities. The original Semitic alphabet stood mainly for consonants. In Hebrew, the first letter, Aleph, represents a vowel. The rest of the letters are consonants. The Greeks and Romans added some symbols to stand for vowels. But English has about 20 vowel sounds but only five vowel letters, which makes the English writing system more complex than Spanish or Armenian.

But the complexities of the English alphabetic system doesn’t mean that it cannot be taught. Indeed, it can not only be taught, but mastered. The result is that some of the greatest literature
in any language has been produced in English. Oddly enough, the world is adopting English as a world language because of its enormous richness and the fact that the English speaking world has produced so much of modern invention, commerce, and culture. That is why learning English has become compulsory in many countries.
Chapter Three

The Sight Vocabulary
And How It Damages the Brain

In writing my book, *The New Illiterates*, in which I did a painstaking, line-by-line analysis of the Dick and Jane reading program, I came to the conclusion that anyone taught to read exclusively by that sight-word method was at risk of becoming dyslexic. Requiring a child to memorize a sight vocabulary, in my estimation, was putting that child on the high road to dyslexia, especially because it used the right brain to perform a left-brain function.

The fact that the human brain is divided into two hemispheres, with specialized functions in each hemisphere, has become the subject of intense study among brain scientists, particularly those concerned with the issue of dyslexia.

Stanislas Dehaene writes (p.209): “Literacy drastically changes the brain--literally!...The literate brain obviously engages many more left-hemispheric resources than the illiterate brain--even when we only listen to speech. Most strikingly, literacy did not only alter brain activity during
language listening tasks, but also affected the anatomy of the brain. The rear part of the corpus collosum, which links the parietal regions of both hemispheres had thickened in the literate subjects. This macroscopic finding implies a massive increase in the exchange of information across the two hemispheres--perhaps explaining the remarkable increase in verbal memory span in literates.”

So we know that literacy has a positive affect on brain development. But what does dyslexia do to the non-reader’s brain? Dehaene writes:

“The comparison of the dyslexic with their respective control groups reveal a clear anomaly. A whole chunk of their left temporal lobe was insufficiently active. Furthermore, this reduced brain activity was observed at the same location and to the same degree for all three nationalities…. [T]he left temporal lobe seems to be systematically disorganized….This decrease in temporal lobe activity was found in adults who had suffered from lifelong reading deficits. But reduced activity can also be seen in young dyslexic children aged from eight to 12 years old.”

Using the right brain to perform a left-brain function causes cognitive confusion, which is viewed in the left brain as being disorganized. And it is the learning of the sight vocabulary which causes this symbolic and cognitive confusion and left-brain disorganization. Learning an alphabetic system is the function of the left temporal lobe, and memorizing a sight vocabulary thwarts that function. That is why, in The New illiterates, I called a sight vocabulary "the Thalidomide of primary education." It does to the brain what the drug did to the fetus that
emerged from the womb without arms.

Several years ago, I had a demonstration of how easy it is to turn a perfectly normal child into a budding dyslexic. A father, in his early forties, brought his 5-year-old kindergartner to me for an evaluation. The boy had had ear infections which the parents thought might interfere with his learning to read. He had some difficulty distinguishing m’s and n’s, and his teacher said that the boy “wasn’t catching on.” Previously, the parents had signed a statement that they would make sure that the child did the homework assigned by the teacher.

The boy’s pediatrician recommended that the child be core evaluated. At a core evaluation, teachers, counselors, and psychologists discuss what’s wrong with the child with the parents. They then recommend an individualized learning program. The father had heard about me and wanted my advice about the need or desirability of a core evaluation. Having served as a teacher in a private school for children with learning and behavioral problems, I had participated in several core evaluations and was familiar with the process. But I wanted to meet the child and judge for myself whether or not he needed any kind of core evaluation.

The 5-year-old turned out to be very friendly and from all appearances perfectly normal. First, I wanted to see if he could learn to read by intensive phonics. He was able to recite the alphabet but he had not yet learned the letter sounds, and his ability to identify all of the letters correctly required more work on his part. This was quite normal for a 5-year-old.

But I wanted to demonstrate to his father that the boy was quite capable of learning to read by
phonics. So I turned to Lesson One in my Alpha-Phonics book and I explained to the youngster that the letter $a$ stood for a short $a$, which I then articulated quite distinctly. I asked the boy to repeat the sound, which he did. Then I pointed to the letter $m$ and told the boy that the letter $m$ stood for the “mmm” sound. And the boy was able to repeat the “mmm” with no problem. I then demonstrated that when we put the short $a$ together with the “mmm” we get the word “am.”

I then introduced the letter $n$ and its sound, “nnn.” The boy repeated the sound quite nicely. I then joined the short $a$ with the “nnn” to create the word “an.” The boy repeated the word. I told him that $an$ was a word and asked him if he had ever used it. He said no. So I told him to listen to me, and I said, “I have an apple.” He got the message.

Meanwhile, through all of this he sat on his dad’s lap and was smiling happily. I went through the rest of the consonants in the lesson: s, t, and x, showed how the words as, at, and ax were composed of two sounds, articulated the sounds, had him repeat them and demonstrated their use in short sentences. I asked him if he knew was an ax was. He did.

The purpose of the lesson was to show the father that his son was quite capable of learning to read by phonics, emphasizing that it required patience and repetition. Repetition, the use of flashcards, were needed to produce automaticity—the development of a phonetic reflex. I did not think that the boy’s hearing problem was even a problem. I was sure that his pronunciations would improve as he learned to read phonetically and that his very minor problem with $m$ and $n$ would clear up as he became a reader.
The father then showed me the papers his son had brought home from school. The math papers were simple counting exercises. There was also an exercise in categorizing. One exercise, which was supposed to test the youngster's ability to follow instructions, was somewhat confusing and got the child a failing grade in the exercise. That upset the father.

Learning Sight Words

But what really perked my interest was the Dolch list of basic sight words which the child was required to memorize. The teacher had given the child this list of 90 words which were to be memorized with the help of the parent—five words per week, from January to June. The first week's words were: a, the, yellow, black, zero. Second week's words: and, away, big, blue, can. Third week: come, down, find, for, funny. Fourth week: go, help, here, I, in. And so on. Now, the child had hardly learned the alphabet and was not aware that letters stand for sounds. So why was he being given this arbitrary list of words to memorize by sight? Most of the words were perfectly regular in spelling and could have easily been learned in the context of a phonics reading program.

E. W. Dolch was a professor of education in the early 1920s who composed a list of the most frequently used words in English. It was thought that if children learned several hundred of these words by sight, that is, by whole-word recognition, before they even knew the alphabet or the letter sounds, they would have a jumping head start in learning to read.

But what Dolch didn't realize is that once the child began to automatically look at English
printed words as whole configurations, like Chinese characters, or little pictures, the child would develop a whole-word or holistic reflex or habit, which would then become a block against seeing our alphabetic words in their phonetic structure. And that blockage would cause the symptoms of what is known as dyslexia.

The Importance of Developing the Right Reflexes

You might ask, what is a reflex? A reflex is a quick, automatic, habitual response to stimuli. There are two sorts of reflexes: unlearned (unconditioned) and learned (conditioned). An unlearned reflex is innately physical, such as the automatic reaction of our eyes when we go from daylight into a dark tunnel. The response is automatic and thus unlearned. A learned reflex is the kind we develop through habitual use, for example, in learning to drive. When we see a red light ahead, we automatically apply our foot to the brake pedal. We do this without thinking, in the middle of a conversation, or on a cell-phone, or listening to the radio. That’s a learned reflex.

A learned reflex is not easy to unlearn. For example, an American who rents a car in England, where they drive on the left side of the road, must suppress his right-drive reflex if he is to avoid a head-on collision. In that case, the American driver can no longer rely on his normal reflexes, and must think about every move he makes while driving. Likewise, when an American pedestrian in London wants to cross a road with heavy traffic, he habitually looks to the left, but in London he must look to the right to avoid being hit by one of those huge double-decker buses.
That learning to read involved the development of conditioned reflexes was well known by the professors of reading, especially when teaching a child to read by the sight method. Professor Walter Dearborn of Harvard University, wrote in 1940:

“The principle which we have used to explain the acquisition of a sight vocabulary is, of course, the one suggested by Pavlov’s well-known experiments on the conditioned response. This is as it should be. The basic process involved in conditioning and in learning to read is the same. . . .

“In order to obtain the best results from the use of the conditioning technique, the substitute stimulus must either immediately precede, or occur simultaneously with, the adequate stimulus. As we have explained before, the substitute stimulus in the case of learning to read is the word seen and the adequate stimulus is the word heard.” (School and Society, 10/19/40, p.368)

And so, it was well understood by the professors of reading that in learning to read, it was necessary to develop automaticity, a reflex. But the correct reflex to develop in learning to read an alphabetic writing system is a phonetic reflex, which comes about by learning the letter sounds and being drilled sufficiently in the consonant-vowel combinations so that the learner can see the phonetic structure of a word and can automatically sound out a multi-syllabic word by articulating each syllabic unit. In other words, the child automatically associates the letters with sounds. When that phonetic reflex is acquired, reading becomes easy, fluent, enjoyable, and accurate.
Chapter Four

How Do Children Learn a Sight Vocabulary?

Any Way They Can

While we know how children learn to read phonetically, no one seems to know how children learn a sight vocabulary. Indeed, teaching children to read in the Twentieth and Twenty-first centuries by a method preceding the invention of the alphabet does not make sense. After all, alphabetic writing has tremendous advantages over the older forms of writing. For the first time man had an accurate, precise means of transcribing the spoken word directly into written form. It was the most revolutionary invention in all of history. It did away with hieroglyphic and ideographic writing and accelerated the speed of intellectual development and the expansion of vocabulary, thus expanding knowledge and brain power. It also made learning to read simple and available to the population as a whole.

In light of these advantages, it seems strange that professors of education in the early twentieth century would decide to teach American children to read English as if it were an ideographic writing system. How could you possibly teach children to read that way? To a logical mind the
whole idea seems not only absurd but insane. Yet, that is what the professors did, and what most primary school teachers continue to do today.

Essentially, the sight method works as follows: the child is given a sight vocabulary to memorize. He or she is taught to look and say the words without knowing that the letters stand for sounds. As far as the learner is concerned, the letters are a bunch of arbitrary squiggles arranged in some arbitrary, haphazard order. The learner's task is to see a picture in the configuration of the whole word—to make the word *horse* look like a horse.

Of course, the word *horse* does not look like a horse. So how does a child remember that the word is horse? Anyway he can. There isn't a professor of education anywhere in the world who can tell you how a child learns a sight vocabulary. The only research we know of that addressed that question was done by Josephine H. Bowden at the elementary school of the University of Chicago around 1912. A description of the studies was given by Prof. Walter F. Dearborn in 1914 as follows:

In the first study the pupils, who had had no instruction in reading, were taught by a word method without the use of phonics and the problem was to determine by what means the children actually recognized and differentiated words when left to their own devices. The following quotation indicates the methods employed by the experimenter: "First, incidents; for example, one day when the child was given the cards to read from, it was observed that she read with equal ease whether the card was right side up or upside down. This incident suggested a test which was later given. Second, comments of the child; for example, when she was asked to find in the context the word 'shoes,' she said that 'dress' looked so much like 'shoes' that she was afraid she would make a mistake. Third, questioning; for example, she had trouble to
distinguish between 'sing' and 'song.' When she had mastered the words she was asked how she knew which was which. Her reply was, 'by the looks.' When questioned further she put her finger on the 'i' and the 'o.' These three types of evidence correspond to introspection with the adult. The fourth type of evidence is a comparison of the words learned as to the parts of speech, geometric form, internal form, and length. Fifth, misreading; for example, 'dogs' was read 'twigs,' and 'feathers,' 'fur.' Sixth, mutilations; for example, 'dogs' was printed 'digs,' 'lilac' was written 'lalci.'"

Some of the conclusions may be cited, first as regards the kind of words most easily learned on the basis of word forms. Four out of six children learned more "linear" words, *i.e.*, words like "acorns," "saw," in which there are no high letters, than of any other group. In but one case were the "superlinear" words more easily recognized....

Misreadings or the mistaking of one word for another occurred most frequently in these early stages, first when the words were of the same length (which again controverts Messmer's findings); secondly, when words had common letters, the "g" and "o" of "igloo" caused it to be read as "dogs"; thirdly, when the initial letters of words were the same; and fourthly, when the final letters were the same. Words were recognized upside down nearly as easily as right side up, but [only] two children noticing any difference. The word seems to be recognized as a whole, and as the author notes, recognized upside down just as the child would recognize a toy upside down.

The general conclusions of the study may be quoted:

"The comments and the questions, as well as the misreading, seem to show that children learn to read words by the trial and error method. It may be the length of the word, the initial letter, the final letter, a characteristic letter, the position of the word in the sentence, or even the blackness of the type that serves
as the cue. . . . There is no evidence in any of the cases studied that the child works out a system by which he learns to recognize 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. There is some evidence that the child is conscious of the letter, except in the of “E,” who so analyzed the word “six.” Sometimes, when the child seemed to have made a letter analysis, he failed to recognize the word a second time, and in some cases did not learn it at all.”

And so, it was obvious to the professors as far back as 1914 that the sight method was a totally horrendous, inaccurate, inefficient and illogical way to teaching a child to read. And despite Dr. Orton’s warning in 1929 that the sight method would harm many children, they proceeded to put their new reading programs in all of the schools of America.

Inventing Look-Say Strategies

The writers of the new look-say reading programs realized that they had to beef up their sight-vocabulary primers with a battery of “word recognition strategies.” They provided configuration clues: putting sight words in frames; picture clues: loading the page with illustrations depicting the words; context clues: inane stories in which the word could be easily guessed on the basis of context; and phonetic clues: teaching initial and final consonant sounds to reduce the ridiculousness of some of the guesses.

It is important to note that teaching phonetic clues is not the same as teaching intensive, systematic phonics. The latter helps the child acquire an automatic association of letters and sounds and teaches blending. The former provides phonetic information that is stored in the
brain and requires effort to retrieve. Learning an isolated consonant sound without knowing the other sounds in the word makes no sense at all.

That this sight method of teaching reading can cause the symptoms of dyslexia is not difficult to surmise. What are the symptoms? Dr. Harold N. Levinson, founder of the Medical Dyslexic Treatment Center in Lake Success, New York, and author of *Smart But Feeling Dumb*, which he dedicated to the “40 million dyslexic Americans,” lists the symptoms as follows: (1) memory instability for letters, words, or numbers; (2) a tendency to skip over or scramble letters, words, and sentences; (3) a poor, slow, fatiguing reading ability prone to compensatory head tilting, near-far focusing, and finger pointing; (4) reversal of letters such as *b* and *d*, words such as *saw* and *was*, and numbers such as 6 and 9 or 16 and 61.

These symptoms sound just like the very mistakes made by those children back in 1912 who were trying to learn a sight vocabulary. Some of those children even read the words upside down!

### Ruining Spelling

It is obvious that if you are told to look at a word as a picture, you may look at it from right to left as easily as from left to right. You will reverse letters because they look alike and you have not been drilled to know them by sound as well as by sight. In alphabetic writing, the sounds in the word follow the same sequence in which the letters are written, which makes reversing letters virtually impossible. A sight reader will be a poor speller because the sequence of letters seems completely arbitrary, with no rime or reason. But to a phonetic reader the sequence of letters is
most important because it follows the same sequence in which the sounds are uttered.

Other symptoms include transposing letters in a word, for example, abroad for aboard, left for felt, how for who; confusing words with others of similar configuration, such as, through, though, thought or quit, quite, quiet or reality and reality; guessing at unknown words.

Dr. Kenneth L. Goodman, America’s top professor of reading and chief advocate of the sight method, calls reading a “psycholinguistic guessing game.” And that’s exactly what it is for most American children in today’s primary schools. The result is an explosion in Special Education, which has become the growth industry for educators so worried about the dropout problem. The primary schools create the learning disabilities, and the federal government is funding a new industry to deal with them. In the 1976-77 school year there were 796,000 learning disabled students in Special Education. In 1983-84 there were 1,806,000. Dyslexia is booming!

Obviously, the prevalent methods of teaching reading cause dyslexia. I have visited many American cities on my lecture tours and have seen for myself the sight-word basal reading programs being used in today’s primary classrooms all across the country. Yes, they now teach more phonics, but not in the intensive systematic way that would produce the needed phonetic reflex. They teach letter sounds as information that the student may or may not use while looking at the words as little pictures. The educators call that a “balanced approach.” But the scale is tipped in favor of the sight-method.
Don Potter's Experience

According to Donald Potter, a highly effective tutor of children in Odessa, Texas: “One of the cardinal signs of whole-language instruction is the confusion of ‘a’ and ‘the.’ I know they look totally different, but the kids continually confuse them. I take it that the ‘determiner slot’ in the sentences can be filled with either ‘a’ or ‘the’ and still make good sense. The kids have been taught to read with syntactic clues (along with graphemic and semantic). This training CAUSES them to make these substitutions. The parents (and researchers) are fooled into thinking that the kids have dyslexia when they are really just performing as they have been instructed in their ‘How to Guess Reading Classes.’ The a/the confusion is only one of many examples of syntactic substitutions. The sentence will always make sense, even though they have read the wrong word.”.

Which means that the minds of millions of American children are being crippled, their futures handicapped, their self-esteem destroyed by educators who should know better. This criminal malpractice is going on in virtually every community in the nation. And yet, there is little one can do about it. The professors of education won’t listen—after all, they write the textbooks. The book publishers publish what the educators want and what the textbook committees will adopt. The classroom teachers know no other way to teach; the professional organizations promote these faulty methods; and principals, administrators, and superintendents leave the teaching of reading to the “experts.”

Also, holistic readers are encouraged by their teachers to substitute words, as explained by a
The article states:

"The most controversial aspect of whole language is the de-emphasis on accuracy. American Reading Council President Julia Palmer, an advocate of the approach, said it is acceptable if a young child reads the word house for home, or substitutes the word pony for horse. 'It's not very serious because she understands the meaning,' said Palmer. 'Accuracy is not the name of the game.'"

When does accuracy become the name of the game in Ms. Palmer's system of education? Probably, never, for if you teach children in primary school, through invented spelling and word substitutions, that accuracy is not at all important, they may never acquire a sense of accuracy, unless forced to do so by the demands of the workplace.

What we do know is that when you impose an inaccurate, subjective ideographic teaching technique on a phonetic-alphabetic writing system which demands accurate decoding, you create symbolic confusion, cognitive conflict, frustration and a learning breakdown. In addition, I strongly suspect that Attention Deficit Disorder, otherwise known as ADD, is a form of behavioral disorganization created by a teaching disorganization. It is the symbolic confusion, cognitive conflict, learning blocks and frustration caused by holistic teaching methods that literally force children to react physically to what they instinctively know is harming them. They may not know exactly what it is the teacher is doing that is harming them. But they certainly
know that they are being harmed. And that is why they react.

**Circumventing the System**

But there is some hope. The enormous growth of the homeschool movement has spurred the development of many new phonics programs which are being used at home. Also, there are more and more private and church schools that teach children to read with intensive phonics. And here and there one finds a teacher in a public school who teaches phonics. But phonics in a public school is usually taught as “bootleg phonics,” that is, surreptitiously.

However, for the nation as a whole, there is little hope that the vast majority of schools will change their teaching methods in the foreseeable future. The fact that more and more children are being labeled Learning Disabled, Dyslexic, or ADD, and are being given drugs each day in order to attend school, is a sad indication that the schools are committed to programs that harm children.

One would expect American business leaders, who need literate workers, to be in the forefront of those urging education reform. But the problem is that business professionals go to educational professionals for information and ideas and are given the usual song and dance in which the professional educators have become expert practitioners.

Professionals in other fields cannot believe that educational professionals are deliberately miseducating American children and causing dyslexia. And so, considering how poorly
informed our business leaders are and how difficult it is to reach them, let alone brief them on this rather complex subject, there is little likelihood that they will act effectively on behalf of the children entrapped in the government schools.
Chapter Five

How Edward Miller Was Able to Prove
That the Sight Method Causes Dyslexia

Back in 1973, after completing my book *The New Illiterates*, I became convinced that the sight method of teaching reading could cause dyslexia—that is, the inability to see the phonetic structure of our alphabetically written words. Without having been taught the alphabetic principle and drilled in the letter sounds, it was impossible for a child to see something he did not know existed.

In that book I also uncovered the fact that the sight method had been invented back in the 1830s by the Rev. Thomas H. Gallaudet, the director of the American Asylum at Hartford for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb. The good Reverend was able to teach the deaf to read by a sight method, juxtaposing a picture of a cat with the word cat. In that way the deaf were able to acquire a limited sight vocabulary and read primary texts.

He then thought that this method might work with normal children, sparing them the drudgery of learning the alphabet and the letter sounds before acquiring a considerable reading vocabulary.
He produced a small primer based on this method in 1836, *The Mother's Primer*, and it was adopted by the Boston Primary Schools in 1837. Horace Mann was Secretary of the Board of Education, and he favored the new method.

But by 1844, the defects of this new teaching method were so apparent that the Boston schoolmasters issued a blistering attack against it, and urged a return to the traditional alphabetic-phonics method of teaching reading. I reprinted that critique in my book in order to demonstrate how early the defects of the sight method were recognized by responsible educators who were not seduced by the siren songs of the reformers.

But in my lectures, I encountered parents who told me that their child was already dyslexic before attending school. How could that be? Were they born that way? I could not honestly answer that question until the fall of 1988, when a man by the name of Edward Miller called me from his home in North Carolina. Ed had seen me on a television interview in 1984 and was so astounded by what I had said about dyslexia that he decided to get my book on the National Education Association, *NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education*.

Miller was particularly interested in this subject because he himself was dyslexic and had been so since the first grade. He had been taught to read in a rural school in North Carolina by a young teacher fresh out of college who used the sight method. At first Miller thought that it was stupidity that was causing his reading problem. But in the fourth grade he proved that he was not stupid by memorizing the multiplication table and winning a prize in class.
From then on Miller saw his reading problem merely as a handicap that had to be compensated for by all sorts of tricks. For example, he found that he could pass many essay tests by writing short, simple sentences in which all the words were correctly spelled. He might get a C for his efforts, but C’s were better than F’s.

Miller even made it through North Carolina State College. In fact, despite his reading disability, he was able to become a math teacher and finally an assistant administrator in a high school in Hollywood, Florida.

**Reading Rudolf Flesch**

It was by reading an excerpt from Rudolf Flesch’s book, *Why Johnny Can’t Read*, in a newspaper in 1956 that Miller became aware that there were two ways of teaching reading: the phonetic way or the look-say, or sight way. He realized that he had been taught by the sight method and had adjusted to his reading handicap in as successful a way as possible.

But it wasn’t until 1986 that Miller decided to investigate the matter of dyslexia further. His young grandson, Kevin, then in the first grade, had developed a reading problem. In the pain and suffering of his grandson, he saw a repeat of himself. He knew that Kevin had learned to read by the sight method because the boy could read his little sight vocabulary books rapidly. But when it came to the little phonetic books that Miller had given him, Kevin had extreme difficulty. Miller could see that his grandson was trying to guess the words. The process of sounding out the words was too painful.
In observing this phenomenon, Miller recalled what he had read in my NEA book about the Russian psychologists, Luria and Pavlov, and of how they had devised a way of artificially inducing behavioral disorganization by introducing two conflicting stimuli to the organism. Miller believed that he was seeing the same process at work in Kevin. He was sure that Kevin had learned a way of reading at an early age that was interfering with his attempt to decode the little phonetic books.

Kevin had apparently learned a way of reading that conflicted with the phonetic method, and it was causing "dyslexia." But Miller wondered how the boy could have developed such a strong automatic sight way of looking at words without any formal reading instruction. The answer came when Miller examined the little preschool books that Kevin had been reading, including the popular Dr. Seuss books, the contents of which Kevin had memorized by sight. Indeed, if Kevin had become a sight reader by having memorized the words in these books, he would indeed have had a problem by entering a first-grade class in which the teacher was using a phonetic reading program. That explained how a child could enter school already "dyslexic."

To my mind, that was a very significant discovery by Miller. It answered the question I had previously been unable to answer. It also brought my attention to the entire field of preschool readers which millions of children are memorizing, thus causing reading problems that would affect their ability to learn at school, problems that parents would assume were caused by something wrong with their children.
Dr. Seuss's 223 Words

Indeed, most parents are unaware that the Dr. Seuss books were created to supplement the whole-word reading programs in the schools. Most people assume that Dr. Seuss made up his stories using his own words. The truth is that a textbook publisher supplied Dr. Seuss with a sight vocabulary of 223 words which he was to use in writing the book, a sight vocabulary in harmony with the sight reading programs the schools were using. Thus, the children would enter first grade having already mastered a sight vocabulary of several hundred words, thereby making first-grade reading a breeze.

Because the Dr. Seuss books are so simple and so delightful, many people assume that they were easy to write. But Dr. Seuss debunked that idea in an interview he gave Arizona magazine in June 1981. He said:

They think I did it in twenty minutes. That damned 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 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.”
So Dr. Seuss was quite aware what the educators were up to. He was correct in citing John Dewey, the progressive educator, as the culprit in this insidious changeover from phonics to the sight method, which Seuss believed was one of the greatest causes of illiteracy in America. But somehow that insight, made by America's most famous writer of children's books, has escaped our educators.

Meanwhile, bookstores are now awash with colorful preschool books that turn children into sight readers without parents knowing what is being done to them. Knowledgeable parents will teach their children phonics while also reading these beautifully illustrated books. But most parents will be completely unaware of the harm they are causing by allowing their children to memorize these books. They may even be pleased when their kids are able to "read" these books easily and happily. Nowadays, publishers are selling books for preschoolers with audio tapes so that children can learn to read by the sight method without the help of their parents. There ought to be a warning on these books informing parents that their children can become dyslexic if they memorize these books by sight.

Meanwhile, Miller went to great lengths to bring his ideas about "educational dyslexia" to the powers that be in government and the universities, but found little enthusiasm or interest in his work. Some of these experts on dyslexia, doing research on large government grants, were not interested in any theories that might undercut their own well-financed projects.
Creating the Miller Test

And so, Miller decided to do something that would force the experts to recognize that the sight method of teaching reading could cause dyslexia. He began experimenting on a test which would demonstrate beyond any doubt that there was such a phenomenon as “educational dyslexia.” It took about ten months of work before he finally devised an ingenious test that anyone could duplicate, which would indicate clearly whether a child, or adult, was a sight reader or a phonetic reader and at what point the child’s reading mode became permanent. The test would also provide the means of scientifically measuring the severity of an individual’s dyslexia.

The test consists of two sets of words: the first set consists of 260 sight words taken from two of Dr. Seuss’s books, *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*. The second set consists of 260 equally simple words drawn from Rudolf Flesch’s phonetic word lists in *Why Johnny Can’t Read*. The sight words are arranged in alphabetic order across the page. They include such multi-syllabic words as *about, another, mother, playthings, something, yellow*, while the words from Flesch’s book, also arranged alphabetically across the page, are all at first-grade level, single syllable and phonetically regular. In other words, for a child who knows his or her phonics neither set of words poses any problem.

By now hundreds of children have been given the Miller Test and what it shows is that children who are taught by the sight method read the sight words rather quickly with few errors, but when they are then required to read the one-syllable, phonetically regular words, they slow down.
considerably and make many more errors. For example, on tests conducted by Miller, an eleven-year-old child was able to read the sight words at 51 words per minute with no errors, but read the phonetic words at 17 words per minute with 91 errors. That child was clearly dyslexic. A second child, aged 7, read the sight words at a speed of 44 words per minute with no errors, but read the phonetic words at 24 words per minute with 47 errors.

Both youngsters had become dyslexic. The fact that they could read the sight words at over 30 words per minute meant that their word-identification mode was automatic and, therefore, permanently fixed. Their cognitive block against phonics had been established by the way they had learned to read. Unless the blockage was removed through intensive remedial intervention, it would remain a major lifelong handicap, preventing them from pursuing careers that require accurate reading skills.

The Difference between a Sight Reader and a Phonetic Reader

Ed Miller’s test dramatically illustrates the startling difference between a holistic, sight reader and a phonetic one. And these are otherwise totally normal children. Are there people who are born dyslexic? Yes, but they are afflicted with so many other neurological problems that their inability to learn to read is simply only one of them. There are children born with all sorts of handicaps and defects that are recognized at birth or soon after. But despite these handicaps, many of these children are quite educable.

The best way for parents to prevent educational dyslexia is to teach their children to read
phonetically before giving them the Dr. Seuss books or any other preschool books to read. They should avoid having their children memorize words by their configurations alone, because once that mode of viewing words becomes an automatic reflex, it will create a blockage against seeing the phonetic structure of the words.

A preschool child who has memorized a sight vocabulary will do well in kindergarten and first grade, and even in second grade. But as the child moves into the third grade where reading demands are much greater, involving many new words which the child's overburdened memory cannot handle, the child will experience a learning breakdown.

But the problem can also show up in the first grade where the teaching method is phonics-based. This is often the case in many private and religious schools where reading is taught phonetically. If a child enters the first grade in such a school after having already memorized several hundred sight words from preschool readers, that child will most likely have already developed a blockage against looking at words phonetically. That's why we see "dyslexia" among some first graders.

When they entered school at the age of 5 or 6, these children felt very confident, very intelligent. After all, they had all taught themselves to speak their own language very nicely without the aid of teachers or school. And when they enter school, they expect to be able to learn to read with the same competence. And, normally, this is what happens when they are taught to read phonetically and begin to master our alphabetic system.
If children have been taught to read holistically, mastering our alphabetically written words becomes a superhuman task. And because the holistic teaching method seems to defy all logic and common sense, their minds react against such teaching just as their stomachs would if some sort of poison were eaten. The stomach throws up, rejecting the poison, and I suspect that ADD is a form of mental rejection of pedagogical poison.

What other defense does the child have against pedagogical poisoning? What Ritalin does is lower the defense against such poisoning. The child becomes a docile, defenseless victim of whatever nonsense the teacher is inflicting on the child. And the child is usually dumped into Special Education for the rest of his or her academic career.

Fortunately, homeschoolers are in the best position to guard their children against the kind of pedagogical poisoning that is turning millions of normal children into LDs. They can begin teaching their children to read phonetically as early as the child wishes. Above all, they must avoid having their preschoolers memorize words holistically without any knowledge of the letter sounds. If you tell children that letters stand for sounds, they will begin to understand what our alphabetic system is all about.

Ed Miller died in July, 2010. He enters the Pantheon of those who have provided humanity with the means to improve our lives, and in particular the lives of school children. That is not what can be said of those who, as professional educators, are inflicting untold harm on American school children.
Chapter Six

How Using the Right Brain to Perform a Left Brain Function Can Cause Dyslexia

The human brain is divided into two hemispheres, each with different functions. The left brain is the center of language development. The right brain deals with spatial functions: art, distance, depth, perspective, etc. The human being is quite distinct from every other species, in that we have the faculty of speech, the ability to use voice sounds to represent meaning. Thus, we develop spoken language.

Other species can make voice sounds, but these sounds are the functions of their vocal chords. Only the human being has this unique brain faculty that permits him to develop spoken language: the ability to use speech sounds to represent objects, feelings, emotions, and ideas.

It is language that has permitted man to create civilization, write history, communicate with each other in the most intimate manner. In other words, language permits us to have knowledge of
the power that created us, knowledge of the objective world, knowledge of others, and knowledge of ourselves. We think in terms of language. We formulate scientific knowledge by the use of language. We argue with our tongues. We pray with language. We develop complex philosophical ideas with language. We speak to ourselves in language. And that is why the distance between the highest jungle primate and the human being is eons apart.

Modern scientists have become quite interested in the functions of the brain and of its development from infancy to adulthood. Investigations of brain damage and how they affect behavioral functions have become the focus of intense scientific interest. Soldiers whose left-brain hemispheres have been injured will have speech difficulties. Victims of stroke will also suffer loss of normal speech. Anyone who has been around an individual who has suffered a stroke will be keenly aware of the stroke's affect on speech. However, with the invention of brain-scanning machines, we can now actually see how the brain functions under different normal and abnormal circumstances.

Of late there has been considerable interest in the subject of dyslexia and how this disease affects brain functions. It is thought by some investigators that we can see the origin of dyslexia in some actual brain damage or distortion. They assume that this brain anomaly is the cause of dyslexia instead of being the result of the child being forced by educators to use the right brain to perform a left-brain function. This is done by forcing children to look at our alphabetic words as little pictures when in reality our alphabetic words are symbolic representations of language sounds.
Back in the early 1800’s, the Reverend Thomas H. Gallaudet was able to have his deaf pupils use their right brains to learn a sight vocabulary because they could not hear language. That permitted the deaf to associate the printed words with pictures and thereby learn a sight vocabulary. But when that same method is applied to normal children with normal hearing, it creates reading problems. Why? Because a sound-symbol system cannot be learned as a picture meaning system. Yet, today, in American schools, and in schools in Canada, England, Australia, and New Zealand, children are being taught to read as if our printed words are pictures instead of the representations of language sounds.

Recent brain research has shown how faulty teaching methods can actually alter the physical form of the brain. Two recent books provide the results of extensive research on dyslexia: *The Brain that Changes Itself* by Norman Doidge (Penguin Books, 2007) and *Reading in the Brain* by Stanislas Dehaene, a French neuroscientist.

Dr. Doidge deals with the adaptability of the brain, or its plasticity. The leading researcher in the field of neuroplasticity is Michael Merzenich. He has proven that dyslexia, even in adults, can be cured. Since I’ve tutored numerous dyslexics and cured them of their condition, I’ve known that the brain is plastic enough to change a sight reader into a phonetic reader. It means creating a phonetic reflex to replace the holistic one. This is not always easy to do. It depends on the individual. But first I teach the student the entire alphabetic system with Alpha-Phonics. Then, I show the student how to apply his new knowledge to the printed page. That may require weeks or months of getting rid of sight-reading habits and learning how to look at the phonetic structure of words.
I tutored one 8-year-old who found it painful to make the transition from sight reader to phonetic reader. He could not look at the page directly. He had to sit sideways. And sometimes he burst into tears. But eventually we succeeded. But from that experience I learned why so many dyslexics do not want to undergo an intensive course in phonics. It would be too painful.

In 1996, Merzenich and his colleagues formed a company, Scientific Learning, devoted to using neuroplastic research to help people “rewire their brains.” They developed a computerized training program for language-impaired and learning-disabled children called *Fast ForWord*. Doidge writes (p.70): “The program exercises every basic brain function involved in language from decoding sounds up to comprehension—a kind of cerebral cross-training.”

Doidge writes further (p.72): “A Stanford group did brain scans of twenty dyslexic children, before and after *Fast ForWord*. The opening scans showed that the children used different parts of their brains for reading than normal children do. After *FastForWord* new scans showed that their brains had begun to normalize. (For instance, they developed increased activity, on average, in the left temporal-parietal cortex, and their scans began to show patterns that were similar to those of children who have no reading problems.)”

What does all of this mean? First, it means that stimulating the brain makes it grow. It also means that neuroscience has finally caught up to those of us who have been curing dyslexia by the old-fashioned way: teaching the English alphabetic system by intensive phonics. But the one thing the neuroscientists have not investigated is how the schools induce dyslexia by the use of
faulty teaching methods in the classrooms.

But Doidge emphasizes the importance of exercising the brain (p.41). "The irony of this new discovery," he writes, "is that for hundreds of years educators did seem to sense that children’s brains had to be built up through exercises of increasing difficulty that strengthened brain functions. Up to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a classical education often included rote memorization of long poems in foreign languages, which strengthened the auditory memory (hence thinking in language) and an almost fanatical attention to handwriting, which helped strengthen motor capacities and thus not only helped handwriting but added speed and fluency to reading and speaking.... But the loss of these skills has been costly; they may have been the only opportunity that many students had to systematically exercise the brain function that gives us fluency and grace with symbols."

What an extraordinary endorsement of classical education by a leading modern neuroscientist! You would think that those professors who teach in our colleges of education would learn something from our brain scientists. Unfortunately, they are wedded to their agenda which calls for impairing the brains of the children in their charge.

Dr. Stanislas Dehaene’s view on the way reading is taught conforms with our own. He writes (p.326): “We now know that the whole-language approach is inefficient: all children regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds benefit from explicit and early teaching of the correspondence between letters and speech sounds. This is a well-established fact, corroborated by a great many classroom experiments. Furthermore, it is coherent with our present understanding of how the
He is well acquainted with the research conducted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that was used to justify using the look-say method in our schools. He writes (p.3): “Recent research on the brain’s reading networks proves it was wrong.” But how long will it take for today’s educators to acknowledge what the brain scientists are telling us?
Chapter Seven

What We Now Know About the Reading Brain

Dr. Stanislas Dehaene is the Director of the Cognitive Neuro-Imaging Unit at Saclay, France. He is not a member of the American psychological establishment, and therefore quite capable of being objective in his pioneering study of the reading brain.

The fact that American teacher's colleges, professors of reading, and behavioral psychologists have not bothered to take a critical look at the teaching methods in our schools that are creating reading disability, indicates that a true neuroscientist detached from our corrupt establishments was needed to provide a fresh look at the problem of dyslexia. His book, *Reading in the Brain*, represents a significant break through the educational iron-curtain that protects the establishment against scrutiny.

That is not to say that Professor Dehaene believes that American educators are deliberately creating reading disability. He and others in the establishment have all heard of Dr. Samuel T. Orton and the Russian neuroscientist Alexander Luria, but none of them seem to have read what
Orton wrote in the Journal of Educational Psychology in February 1929. His article was entitled *The Sight Method of Teaching Reading as a Source of Reading Disability*. Nor do they seem to have read Luria’s book on how to deliberately create behavioral disorganization.

Thus we find in the *Gale Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders* a long article on Reading Disorders, or dyslexia, that ends with this startling bald-faced lie: “There is no known way to prevent reading disorder.” Since most reading disorders are caused by teaching children sight vocabularies, the only prevention is to teach phonics first along with cursive writing.

Were the editors of the Gale Encyclopedia lying or just ignorant? My view is that the editors were incapable of believing that today’s professional educators would deliberately and knowingly create dyslexia. And I assume that Dr. Dehaene would find the idea incredulous for the simple reason that scientists are supposed to be honest and objective and expect professionals in other fields to be as honest and objective. But we know that Soviet science was enlisted by the Soviet government to advance the cause of communism, and in this country “educational psychology” was used to advance the agenda of the Progressives.

Simply put, the best way to prevent dyslexia, or reading disability, in normal children is a good phonics-first program in the schools, such as Sue Dickson’s remarkably effective Sing, Spell, Read and Write program.

But let us quote from Dr. Dehaene’s book to see how much progress has been made in understanding how the brain deals with the reading process:
“Modern brain imaging methods now reveal, in just a matter of minutes, the brain areas that activate when we decipher written words.... The insight into how literacy changes the brain is profoundly transforming our vision of education and learning disabilities.... Early research on reading erroneously supported the whole-word approach. Recent research on the brain’s reading networks proves it wrong.”

In other words, Dr. Dehaene repudiates the experiments that James McKeen Cattell conducted in Prof. Wundt's laboratory in Leipzig in 1885 that became the scientific basis for abandoning traditional phonics in favor of the whole-word method, which spawned the Dick and Jane reading program, and created the greatest reading problem this nation has ever known. This method was also adopted throughout the English-speaking world, thus lowering the literacy levels in virtually all of these nations. And it is still being used today in American public schools.

Is it not ironic that several primitive reaction-time experiments conducted by a 21-year-old student became the “scientific” basis for changing the way reading is taught in virtually all the schools of the English-speaking world? Had Cattell ever taught a child to read before those experiments? Not that we know of. But it is likely that he taught his own children to read in the traditional manner.

Dr. Dehaene continues:

“We have discovered that the literate brain contains specialized cortical mechanisms that are
exquisitely attuned to the recognition of written words....These experiments demonstrate that global word shape does not play any role in reading. Our visual system pays no attention to the contours of words or to the pattern of ascending or descending letters: it is only interested in the letters they contain.”

Yet, American primary teachers still teach children to look at our printed words as whole pictures which, according to Dr. Dehaene, have no relation to the reading process. He writes, “Modern brain imaging confirms that this region [the left hemisphere] plays such an essential part in reading that it can aptly be called the 'brain's letterbox.'”

For decades now we’ve known that the left hemisphere deals with language and reading and the right hemisphere deals with spatial phenomena. Dehaene writes:

“Words and faces also have different preferred hemispheres. When we recognize a word the left hemisphere plays the dominant role. For faces, the right hemisphere is essential. Although both hemispheres are initially equally stimulated, words quickly get funneled to the left and faces to the right....This lateralization is another invariant and essential feature of reading.”

Dehaene also provides information on why children learn to speak so early in life. “Many researchers see that anatomical asymmetry as one of the major probable causes of the lateralization of language to the left hemisphere. Not only is the left plenum temporale already bigger than the right prior to birth, but the brains of infants are already powerfully and asymmetrically activated then they listen to speech in the first few months of life.”
In other words, children are born with the left hemisphere larger than the right, for the simple reason what we are all programmed before birth to speak language. And that is why children can learn to read phonetically quite early because of this left hemisphere dominance. But what sight-reading does is impair the growth and development of the left hemisphere, thus actually changing the brain’s physical contours. Indeed, we can surmise that it was the left brain’s dominance that led to the invention of the alphabet, which took full advantage of the left brain’s language power.

Dehaene writes: “We now understand why the whole-language method deluded so many psychologists and teachers even though it does not fit with the architecture of our visual brain....Children learn to read only because their brains already contain the required architecture....These brain regions are genetically predisposed to form a network that allows for language acquisition....At the age of five or six...they possess a vocabulary of several thousand words and have mastered basic grammatical structures of their languages....The discovery of phonemes is not automatic. It requires explicit teaching of an alphabetic code....The deep effects of phonemic awareness prove how profoundly the acquisition of the alphabetic code changes our brains.”

As for dyslexia, Dehaene writes: “In dyslexics the left temporal lobe seems to be systematically disorganized.”

Wasn’t it Luria who, with his colleagues in Pavlov’s laboratory, experimented on ways to
artificially create behavioral disorganization? For what purpose? That question has never been asked or answered. It is a question this writer would like to ask of Dr. Dehaene. The good professor explains:

“All brain imaging studies of dyslexia find a reduction of brain activity in this area [left hemisphere] when it is compared to that of normal readers....Their brain activity, moreover, is much greater than normal in the right temeripo-parietal region. This anomaly reflects the lack of rapid access to word phonology, together with a compensatory reliance on right hemisphere pathways that are not typically seen in normal readers. The basic layout of the cortex and its connections appears disorganized in dyslexics.”

In other words, when the right brain is required to perform a left-brain function, you get brain disorganization. Dehaene adds: “In dyslexics the left-temporal region is partially disconnected from the rest of the brain.”

This finding alone should shock our educators into understanding how damaging their teaching of sight vocabularies is on the children they are teaching. Finally, Dehaene writes:

“All children have similar brains. Their cerebral circuits are well tuned to systematic grapheme-phoneme correspondences and have everything to gain from phonics—the only method that will give them freedom to read any text.”

Of course, Dr. Dehaene is telling us something we’ve known since 1929 when Dr. Orton warned
the educators that the sight-method of teaching reading could cause reading disability. And we were further alerted by Dr. Flesch who, in 1955, told us why Johnny couldn’t read. And we were even informed by the Boston schoolmasters in 1844 why the whole-word method produced reading problems.

But Dr. Dehaene’s significant contribution to all of this is his use of brain imaging to show the real damage done to a child’s brain when the child is taught to read with a sight vocabulary. Dr. Dehaene’s repeated insistence that children should be taught to read by way of intensive phonics will no doubt fall on deaf ears in our teacher’s colleges where our professors of reading still adhere to the religion of whole-language.

But at least we now have cognitive neuroscientists to back our stand on the need for primary schools to start teaching phonics-first in kindergarten and first grade. That, indeed, is great progress.
Chapter Eight

What Is Whole Language?

It's refreshing and encouraging to know that neuroscientists like Dr. Dehaene have denounced Whole Language as a faulty way to teach reading. He advocates teaching phonics first, which insures that the child will become a fluent, efficient reader. But most parents haven't the faintest idea what Whole Language is. If they did know they would oppose it strenuously.

The best way to define Whole Language is to simply quote its proponents, who've written books on the subject. They are not at all reticent about describing their idea reading progress. In a book entitled "Whole Language, What's the Difference?" written by three whole-language professors in 1991, we read on page 32:

Whole language represents a major shift in thinking about the reading process. Rather than viewing reading as "getting the words," whole language educators view reading as essentially a process of creating meanings ... Meaning is created through a transaction with whole, meaningful texts (i.e., texts of any length that were written with the intent to communicate meaning).
It is a transaction, not an extraction of the meaning from the print, in the sense that the reader-created meanings are a fusion of what the reader brings and what the text offers ... Although students who learn to read in whole language classrooms are, like all proficient readers, eventually able to "read" (or identify) a large inventory of words, learning words is certainly not the goal of whole language.

Another passage from page 19 of the same book may be even more illuminating:

From a whole-language perspective, reading (and language use in general) is a process of generating hypotheses in a meaning-making transaction in a sociohistorical context. As a transactional process ... reading is not a matter of "getting the meaning" from text, as if that meaning were in the text waiting to be decoded by the reader.

Rather, reading is a matter of readers using the cues print provides and the knowledge they bring with them (of language subsystems, of the world) to construct a unique interpretation.

Moreover, that interpretation is situated: readers' creations (not retrievals) of meaning with text vary, depending on their purposes of reading and the expectations of others in the reading event. This view of reading implies that there is no single "correct" meaning for a given text, only plausible meanings.
Now you might think that all of this pedagogical insanity is taking place in some kind of political vacuum. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Whole language practice is very politically oriented. We read on page 23:

Learning is a social process ... Although whole language educators accept the importance of learning through individual interactions with the environment (Piaget 1967), they lean more heavily on Vygotsky's ideas about the social nature of learning (Vygotsky 1978).

Whole language takes seriously Vygotsky's notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (Engstrom 1986) which entails stressing the importance of collaborations (between students and teachers and between peers) through which students can transcend their own individual limitations.

You might ask: Who is Vygotsky? Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Soviet psychologist who worked with Pavlov's colleagues at the State Institute of Experimental Psychology in Moscow in the 1920s and '30s. James Wertsch, Vygotsky's biographer, writes:

[It] is important to note that Vygotsky was a staunch advocate of dialectical and historical materialism. He was one of the creators of Marxist psychology ... People such as Vygotsky and his followers devoted every hour of their lives to making certain that the new socialist state, the first grand experiment based on Marxist-Leninist principles, would survive.
Vygotsky's colleague, Alexander Luria, wrote: "Vygotsky was ... the leading Marxist theoretician among us ... in [his] hands, Marx's methods of analysis did serve a vital role in shaping our course."

Apparently, these same methods of analysis are also serving to shape the course of the whole-language agenda. The three professors, cited earlier, state on page 67:

The whole language theoretical premise underlying which topics are pursued and how they are treated is: "All knowledge is socially constructed."

Therefore all knowing is political. In an effort to promote critical literacy and thus to help children learn to read the world, not only the word (Shor & [Marxist revolutionary] Freire 1987), teachers who work with theme cycles try – no matter whether the topic is overtly "political" or not – to show how the topic is related to other more general questions.

They try to demystify social institutions by helping children investigate connections between surface facts and underlying social structures, between lived experience and structural features of class, gender and race. They know that not making connections is as political as making connections.

No further explanation needed. But what about phonics, you might ask? Here's a view of phonics given in another book on whole language, "Evaluation: Whole Language, Whole Child." We read on page 19:
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.

The response of any sane educator to that kind of imbecilic pedagogy is that any child who looks at the word "father" and says "daddy" can't read. It's as simple as that. But tell that to a Whole-Language teacher. It is therefore to be rejoiced that Dr. Dehaene and other neuroscientists have not been fooled by Whole Language and are warning parents and educators, as Dr. Orton did in 1929, that this ludicrous form of teaching should be thrown out of the schools.
Why is there a Black underclass? Why, after over 140 years of freedom from slavery and the benefits of compulsory, universal education, do we find in every large American city thousands of African-Americans who live in poverty, are functionally illiterate, and engaged in drug trafficking, gang violence, and crime?

It is true that the Black middle class is growing, and that many African-Americans have achieved great success in virtually every field of endeavor.

But then, why is there such a phenomenon as a black “underclass” in today’s technologically advanced America, with so many people living without hope in this land of opportunity? Wasn’t universal education supposed to lift up the African-American to the same standard of economic prosperity as everyone else? Theoretically, that is what should have happened. But it didn’t. Why?
Census statistics on illiteracy provide some clues. In 1890, illiteracy among African-Americans over the age of 10 was 57.1 percent. In 1900, it was 44.5 percent. In 1910 it was 30.4 percent. And by 1920 it was down to 22.9 percent.

Among white Americans only 2.0 percent were illiterate. In other words, great strides in literacy were being made among African-Americans from 1890 to 1920.

According to the 1920 Census, the percentage of illiterates among African-Americans ranged from 38.5 percent in Louisiana to 2.9 percent in New York. The Census of 1930 showed an even greater improvement in literacy among African-Americans. In 1930, illiteracy among African-Americans in the urban population was 9.2 percent; in the rural population 23.2 percent; in the rural non-farm population, 20.5 percent.

That same 1930 Census revealed that 4,283,753 of a total population of 122,774,046 Americans, or less than 4 percent, were considered illiterate.

But if we move fast-forward 63 years to 1993 we find a U.S. Government report revealing that 90 million American adults can barely read or write! Indeed, it is estimated that 50 percent of African-Americans today are functionally illiterate! What happened in the interim to produce this literacy catastrophe?

Two things happened: (1) The rise of the Eugenics Movement which declared African-Americans racially inferior and relegated them to a non-academic, manual education. (2)
rise of the Progressive philosophy of education which denigrated high individualistic literacy in favor of socialization.

The great tragedy is that African-Americans had made great educational advances in the first half of the 20th century. But from 1950 onward began the great slide into academic failure for many African-Americans.

The acclaimed film, *The Great Debaters*, dramatically tells the story of Black academic achievement in the racially segregated South of the 1930s. It reveals how education was stressed as the way out of poverty and ignorance. Indeed, the increase in African-American literacy and intellectual development during that period produced a vibrant culture of great writers and readers. But the film doesn’t provide a clue as to why that process of educational advance was stopped and reversed.

Actually, it all started in 1898 when John Dewey, leader of the Progressive Education movement, advocated moving education away from individualistic high literacy in favor of social collectivism. He wrote:

"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."

Indeed, he was able to get his fellow educators to accept a completely new educational philosophy based on collectivism and socialism. And it was understood among them that a
decline in individual-centered literacy was essential in carrying out their plan for a new collectivist society in America.

And it was Professor G. Stanley Hall, a leading progressive educator and mentor to John Dewey, who wrote in defense of illiteracy in 1911:

“Very many men have lived and died and been great, even the 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 eye-strain and mental excitement, and, other things being equal, are probably more active and less sedentary... Perhaps we are prone to put too high a value both upon 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.”

And 70 years later, in 1981, we find Harvard Professor Anthony Oettinger telling an audience of communications executives:

“The present ‘traditional’ concept of literacy has to do with the ability to read and write... 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?”
Ironically, young Blacks have developed a new oral expression to compensate for their lack of high literacy. It's called Rap!

Of all Americans affected by this change in educational philosophy, African-Americans have suffered the most. They have had a much more difficult time adjusting to the new curriculum and teaching methods than any other group. As a result, a great negative gap has grown between the academic achievements of African-Americans and their white compatriots.

A report from the Massachusetts-based Schott Foundation, *The 2010 Schott 50 State Report on Black Males in Public Education*, paints a bleak picture of how young black men fare in school: fewer than half graduate from high school. And in some states, like New York, the graduation rate is as low as one in four.

The Report reveals that the overall 2007-2008 graduation rate for Black males in the U.S. was only 47 percent. Half of the states have graduation rates for Black male students below the national average. The report highlights concerns that New York's graduation rate for its Regents diploma is only 25 percent for Black male students. New York City, the district with the nation's highest enrollment of Black students, only graduates 28 percent of its Black male students with Regents diplomas on time. Overall, each year over 100,000 Black male students in New York City alone do not graduate from high school with their entering cohort. These statistics point to a national *education* and *economic* crisis.
Frustrated and discouraged by their inability to learn to read, many Black high-schoolers drop out and wind up on the streets. They form gangs and angrily take their revenge on society by anti-social, criminal behavior which lands them in jail.

The simple truth is that faulty teaching methods in our public schools deliberately prevent many black students from succeeding academically. The look-say method of teaching reading produces the symptoms of reading disability. It teaches children to read English as if it were Chinese, an ideological writing system. Many children simply cannot learn to read by this method, yet the primary schools still persist in using it. Can this be changed? Can the process that produces the underclass be done away with? Yes! But only if an aroused and informed African-American community demands the kind of radical change that is necessary.

It has been shown that Black children can learn to read very well provided they are taught in the proper phonetic manner. This is the way black children were taught before the decline in literacy began in the 1950s with the introduction of the sight method. What is needed is an insistence by African-American parents that their children be taught to read by the traditional method which created high literacy among American blacks, and which Professor Oettinger denigrated. “Do we really have to have everyone literate?” he asked. If not, then why must everyone be forced to go to school? The basic concept of compulsory school attendance was to make sure that everyone learned to read, not just the elite.

The solution is doable. But it may require as much effort on the part of Black parents and leaders as was needed in the Civil Rights movement.
Chapter Ten

Teach Your Child to Read with Alpha-Phonics

Paul Lukawski’s Testimonial

Alpha-Phonics is the reading program I developed back in 1983 to help parents teach their children to read at home in the proper, traditional phonetic manner. I analyzed the English alphabetic system with all of its irregularities, and arranged the program so that any parent could teach it and any child could learn it.

Thousands of parents have used the program with great success, but a Testimonial by Paul Lukawski, a high school teacher in Florida, provides the best description of the power of Alpha-Phonics as a teaching instrument. It can create miracles. Here is Paul’s testimonial as I received it:
May 19, 2008

I have been a high school English teacher for 14 years. I remember in college wanting to know how to teach children to read. I went to a teacher college established in 1910. The school had one of the oldest teacher colleges in the country. Its College of Education enjoyed an excellent reputation. I asked three different professors how do you teach reading. I received three different vague responses.

After I completed my second year of teaching, I realized that my students could not read. I taught grades nine through twelve. The second year, I had three classes of ninth graders. I assigned the novel *To Kill a Mocking Bird* for them to read. I realized that most of my students could not read the novel’s literate narrative.

It was during this time that I heard Samuel Blumenfeld interviewed on shortwave radio. At this time the Rodney King verdict had come in and there was rioting in the streets of L.A. He said that the reason the people were rioting was that they did not have jobs. They did not have jobs because they were illiterate. He said you could tell they were illiterate by listening to the lyrics of the songs they listened to and by the way they talked.

I was intrigued by what he said because it verified my experience as a high school teacher. He then said the schools were at fault because of the way they taught reading. I was again intrigued because of my experience in college trying to determine how to teach children to read. I was never taught it in college.
Mr. Blumenfeld had made two provocative statements on the radio, but I knew them to be true because of my personal experience. I then decided to buy a couple of his books, including *Alpha-Phonics*. My third year of teaching, I had a class of ninth graders that consisted of the worst performing students in the school. These students were in the dropout prevention program. They were waiting until they turned sixteen to drop out of school. I teach in our state’s poorest county and our district at that time had a high drop out rate. Also in the class were several students from Mexico and one from Haiti. These students were speakers of other languages (ESOL). Their only problem was that they had a limited understanding of English. Everyday in the class was a struggle with disruptive behavior; and if I could finish class without a student being sent to the office for discipline problems, I considered it a success.

The students had chronic discipline problems; they had trouble with the law, every problem you could imagine. After two months of getting absolutely nowhere with the students I decided that I would try an experiment. I was going to use *Alpha-Phonics* beginning with lesson one to teach those that wanted to learn how to read. I told the class that those that wanted to learn would sit on this side of the room, and those that did not were to sit on the opposite side of the room. The only rule was a student could not interfere with the *Alpha-Phonics* lesson.

Until this time, everyone sat scattered around the back of the room, as I did not have a seating chart. Any student, when given the option, will not sit in the front of the room with the teacher. The stage being set, I began the first day by reading the directions from the “Teachers Manual” to *Alpha-Phonics* and beginning with lesson one. I wondered what response I would get.
I was shocked by the response of the students. Nothing could have prepared me for what happened. If someone had told me what would happen I would not have believed them. With the exception of a few students who sat on the other side of the room because they did not want to participate, all of the students followed along as I wrote the lessons on the board. I would write the lesson on the board, read it out loud, and then have them read. The students leaned forward in their desks and followed along.

The next day the students all sat in the front of the room. Everyone would raise their hand and want to read. Indeed, after the first few days, the students would fuss among themselves to read out aloud. They fought over who could write the lessons on the board. Everyone wanted to read aloud. Everyone sat in front of the room. There were no discipline problems. The entire class had been transformed. I had discovered a disturbing truth.

We worked through the book; and about halfway through the book, we began reading *Sounder* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. One youth in the class who could not read and who had been a behavior problem told me that every night he would sit with his dad as his dad read the sports section of the papers. He said he always wanted to read the paper with his dad, but he could not because he did not know how to read. A few weeks after starting *Alpha-Phonics*, he entered the class one day and told me that as he was driving down the road he began to sound out the words on the signs. He was excited because he was never able to do that before.

We had started *Alpha-Phonics* in October and the semester ended in December. I would not be
seeing the students anymore. We had completed about three fourths of the book and read the two novels. I would begin each class by doing about 15 minutes of Alpha-Phonics and then read from the novels. The students were eager and well behaved. The youth who began reading the signs told me that in evening he could now sit with his dad and read the sports section along with him. They would talk about what they had read.

Three Spanish-speaking students learned English this way.

The following year, I tried another experiment. I had one student who was identified as having ADD/ADHD. He was notorious. He was a ninth grader. This was his first year at our school. I had another student who was in trouble with the dean’s office constantly. I gave both of them Sam’s Blumenfeld Oral Reading Test (BORAT), and they scored between the 1st and 2nd grade levels. I made an arrangement with other teachers to have both students come to my class for fifteen minutes while I did an Alpha-Phonics lesson with them.

Because I began in August, I was able to finish the whole book with them by Christmas. I gave both students the BORAT posttest. One boy had doubled his reading score and the other was close behind him. The boy with ADD/ADHD was never antsy or hyperactive when he was working on the lesson. He was a completely different child when he was with me. Indeed, his teacher would often allow him to stay the whole hour with me because he had many behavior problems in her class. He never had a behavior problem when working on Alpha-Phonics, neither did the other child who was constantly getting into fights and being suspended. When these two youngsters worked on Alpha-Phonics with me they were totally different children.
The following year, I worked with some other children. I had developed a system where I
would set aside ten minutes each class period and do a few lessons while the rest of the class
would work quietly on their own at their desks. I would use the BORAT to identify the illiterates
in my class. I would then ask them if they had ever had an A in English. Invariably they would
say, “No.” I would ask them if they would want one. They would say, “Yes.” I then would say
that all they had to do was work with me for ten minutes a day on Alpha-Phonics until we were
done with the book. When we were done with the book, I would choose several pages at random
for them to read from. If they could read the pages to me, they would receive an A. I told them
that that was all they had to worry about in the class. I was not interested in what they did
regarding the usual coursework. That was the incentive I offered them. It was up to them.

One youth had failed the ninth grade and was taking his ninth grade English class over again
with me. He was also taking his tenth grade English class. His tenth grade class met next door to
mine first period. He would then come to my class second period. His tenth grade teacher was
the same one he took the year before, the class, which he had failed. He was working ten minutes
a day on Alpha-Phonics for several weeks, when one day the door that communicated between
my room and the neighboring room opened. It was his tenth grade teacher. She called me over to
her and asked what it was I was doing with him. I told her Alpha-Phonics. She said, “Look!” The
whole class was watching Channel One and chatting. It was during homeroom. The whole class,
except this youth, who was busy reading a book I had given him. The teacher was flabbergasted.
She knew he was illiterate and could not believe that he was able to read.

One day I was working with this boy at my desk when we had a new student enter the class. He
had just been released from a juvenile detention. He knew the youth I was working with and sat by him as we worked together. He was curious about what we were doing, and I explained it to him. He said that he could not read either. He explained that he started having trouble reading in the third grade. He said that when the time came to read aloud he would intentionally get into trouble so he would be sent to the office so that he would not have to read. He could not take the embarrassment. He did not want anyone to know that he could not read. The boy I was working with chimed in and said that he was the same way. They both recounted events when they would get into trouble on purpose so they could avoid reading. They would even start fistfights. The boy who had been in juvenile detention was sent there because he had set fire to the junior high school.

The following year I had firmly established my regular ten-minute routine in my class, and every year after that I would have students who would participate. One year I was in a staffing meeting for a boy who was labeled as a special education student with learning disabilities. The special education staffer, whom I had never met before, asked me what I was doing with the boy. The reason she asked is that she was with the boy’s science teacher when the science teacher had reported that the boy began volunteering to read aloud. The science teacher was astonished. We live in a small community and the teacher had known the boy ever since kindergarten and had known that he could not read, thus the placement in the special education program: Here he was volunteering to read aloud in her class. I told them what it was I was doing.

There is one case that haunts me. I had a big strapping youth who was seventeen years old. He had failed ninth and tenth grade English because he could not read. He was in my ninth grade
English class. I had given him the BORAT test, and he was at about the 1-2 grade level: A typical case. We began working ten minutes a day. After a month I gave him the book Sounder, and he told me he was reading it at home. We were about halfway through the book when he no longer showed up in my class. I learned that he had moved away. I do not know if he ever completely learned how to read. He was a decent well-mannered youth who would show up every day, was polite and carried a big stack of books with him. He was waiting for someone to teach him to read.

My daughter was born in 1996. I remember seeing the little girl read in the Hooked on Phonics commercials and wished my daughter could read like her. When she was two, I began to teach her how to read during my summer vacation. She would take naps then, and I followed the advice in the teacher’s manual. I set up a routine. Everyday, before she took her nap, we would sit together. Following Sam’s advice, I appealed to her intellect. I said, “It is time for our lessons.” I began by following the alphabet pre-reading exercise in the back of the book. Again, following Mr. Blumenfeld’s advice, I did not pressure her or scold her, regardless of her behavior. Some days, she would kick at the book and giggle. I would say, “You did a good job today!” And I put the book away. We would continue tomorrow. It went on like this for several months.

When school started again she would do the lessons with me before we went to bed. She enjoyed the routine and the lessons. One evening, while my wife was in the room, she took out the book on her own and began reading from lesson two: “Am, Sam, Hear the S sound,” she said. Then, “Sam sat.” - etc. My wife could not believe it. “Did she memorize those words?” She asked.
"No," I replied, and then explained the method.

When she was three, we were driving down the road when she said, "Look Momma," pointing to a sign, "Marshal's, there is your store!" My wife could not believe it. When she was three, there was one occasion when our daughter was at Sunday school. Her teachers were arguing over whether or not she was reading the colors on the crayons. "She's memorized them," said one. "No, she is reading them," said the other. The colors she was reading were purple, fuchsia and magenta. Magenta was her favorite.

The spring before my daughter began kindergarten she could read fluently any word in front of her. We were at a spring festival when my daughter and her friend bought soft drinks. My daughter read the inside of the cap, which told whether or not you had won a prize advertised on the side of the can. My daughter read the label effortlessly, which included the words vacation and discovery. "She is a genius!" exclaimed the father.

My daughter's friend asked her dad to read the soft drink label to her. I told the girl's father that his daughter could read as well if he used Alpha-Phonics with her. I said, "Follow the lesson manual and be patient, do not pressure your child, as Mr. Blumenfeld says, and in a year or so she will be like my daughter."

That fall I saw the girl's parents and asked how she was doing. He said his daughter had not really taken to the book yet. (His daughter had just started kindergarten, as mine had.) I said, "Be patient and keep going." Meanwhile, my daughter was reading at 2nd grade level; and during kindergarten reading time, she would go to a second grade class for reading instruction. The
following year I saw the girl’s dad again and asked him how she was doing in first grade. He said
that his daughter was reading at a second grade level and was being tested for gifted and talented.

Meanwhile my daughter entered the first grade and soon afterwards was referred to the gifted
and talented program. She won the spelling bee and Math bash just as she did in
kindergarten. I used Samuel Blumenfeld’s *How-to-Tutor* to instruct her in math. In second grade,
she read at the seventh grade level, won all of the reading, spelling and math prizes and was
elected to the school’s hall of fame. She has had straight A’s in every class. She learned to read
with *Alpha-phonics* and learned math with *How-to-Tutor*.

While my daughter was in first grade, I was asked to sit on a parent teacher committee. While on
the committee, the mayor of our town complained to the principal that he had been on the
committee for three years and that the committee was always talking about doing something
outside of the box when it came to improving the school’s reading scores. Regardless of what the
committee did to improve reading scores, they were always the same. The principal said that he
was open for suggestions outside of the box.

No one had any suggestions so I said that I was familiar with the method of reading instruction in
the public schools and that was what was at fault. I said that I had a method that worked better.
Indeed, I said that I drop my daughter off at school at 7:30, I could walk into any class, give a ten
minute lesson and still arrive at the high school where I teach in time to sign in a 8:00 a.m. I said
that if anyone doubted me, I get a paycheck every two weeks with a comma in it, let’s put it on
the table and keep the tourists out. I wanted to let them know my intentions were serious.
They took me up on the offer, and a first year teacher volunteered her class. I began the first Monday after spring break. I only had six weeks to work with the children. I made transparencies of the Alpha-Phonics lessons and followed the teacher’s manual. I only did a ten-minute lesson. The teacher combined her bottom 1/2 students with the reading teacher’s bottom 1/2 students. After two weeks, the mother of one of the children approached me. She said, “I am glad you are working with my daughter. A while back the school called me up to their office and told me there was something wrong with my daughter. She had a learning disability.” “I cried for two days,” she said. I told her not to listen to anything the schools told her, to be patient and to watch what happens.

A week after school was over, I saw the mother again and I asked her how her daughter was doing. She said that the school had called her up again and told her that they had given her daughter an end of the year reading test showing that she had a 40% improvement in her reading: and they were going to put her into an advanced class.

The following year, I was asked to do the project again with a first grade class. I worked ten minutes each morning. I was only able to complete three-fourths of the book. The school’s diagnostic test revealed that of the children who were able to complete the project successfully, not one had a reading disability. The makers of the diagnostic test said that you could expect 20% of the children to have reading disabilities.

I once was explaining to a student why children have reading problems. When I finished, a girl
from the other side of the class, who I thought was not listening, said, “This is what happened to my brother. He is in the fourth grade, hates to read and gets stomach aches and headaches.” I told her that his troubles were over and gave her a copy of Alpha-Phonics. Four months later, I asked how was her brother doing. She said he completed the book and reads just fine.

I had the same success with students in special education, who were labeled as learning disabled or educatably mentally retarded. I have 100% per cent success with every student. The only variable is the speed at which students progress. You must follow Dr. Blumenfeld’s advice and be patient. Do not pressure the child.

I have many other heartbreaking stories about children who have quit school because they did not know how to read, and no one will teach them. I have had children take a copy of Alpha-Phonics and keep it to teach friends they know, how to read. I encouraged everyone to try Alpha-Phonics. The results you see in the child are truly miraculous. It must be seen to be believed.