



The Miseducation of American Teachers

I received a very interesting comment on my recent article, "The Great Brain Robbery," in which I tried to convey the damage that is being done daily in our elementary schools by teachers who have been so badly miseducated that they have no idea that the teaching methods they are using can cause untold damage to a child's ability to use his or her mind effectively for the rest of his or her life.



The reader wrote:

As an aspiring teacher with a year left in attaining my Master's of Education online at this site: <http://www.cu-portland.edu/> I am extremely averse to the idea of favoring one teaching method over another. Why is phonics-based teaching any better or worse than visual-based learning? Every child is different, and that includes their learning style. You should be careful [not] to endorse a one-size fits all reading curriculum....

Obviously, this aspiring teacher has not yet taught anyone anything, but feels compelled to advise this veteran of the reading wars, that I should be careful not to endorse a "one-size fits all reading curriculum." The amount of ignorance contained in that one sentence is just a sample of how badly teachers are taught these days. She believes that because every child is different, they all have different "learning styles," and therefore must be taught differently from everyone else. But how does a teacher determine the learning style of a child she's never seen before entering her classroom? Does she ask the child, "What is your learning style?" Or does she ask the parent, "What is your child's learning style?" Obviously, this whole business of "learning styles" is the invention of some ambitious progressive educator who wanted to make a name for himself.

When I was going to elementary school back in the 1930s, the teacher knew that all children are different, but she also knew that they all had to learn the same thing, that two plus two are four, that the alphabet has 26 letters, and that rote memorization is the best way for children to learn these elementary facts. When she taught cursive writing, which was the rule in those days, she could see that each child had different handwriting. But they all had to learn how to join the letters, from left to right. In other words, we've known for thousands of years that each child is different, so this modern concept of different "learning styles" is supposed to be some great twentieth century discovery that the ancients knew nothing about. They just hadn't heard of John Dewey.

The aspiring teacher asks: "Why is phonics-based teaching any better or worse than visual-based learning?" Apparently, she needs to do a lot of serious reading, the kind she was never required to do at her college of education. She probably never heard of Dr. Rudolf Flesch and his famous book *Why Johnny Can't Read*, published in 1955. And of course she has never heard of my book, *The New Illiterates*, in which I explained why "visual-based learning" is not only the wrong way to teach a phonetic writing system, but is also extremely harmful because it develops a whole-word reflex in the child's brain, which creates a block against seeing the phonetic structure of our written words. That blockage is also known as "dyslexia," a Latin-Greek-derived word meaning "can't read" (from the Latin



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and Greek words: “bad speech”).

This poor “aspiring teacher” is “extremely averse to the idea of favoring one teaching method over another.” It is obvious that her professors of education have taught her well. She has already acquired a prejudice against certain teaching methods, notably intensive, systematic phonics. And so people like me should be careful not to advocate phonics over whole language.

Poor woman! She has adopted the progressive notions of her professors who, in her eyes, are the undisputed fountainheads of educational knowledge. And when she gets her Master’s Degree, she will make sure that her professors’ ideas will be the ones that she will bring into her classrooms or the classrooms of other teachers whom she may supervise.

The only way for this aspiring teacher to develop her own intellectual independence is to read the books that her professors told her not to read. She should read what Dr. Samuel T. Orton wrote in the February 1929 issue of the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, in which he pointed out the dangers of the new “sight method” of teaching reading. He wrote that this method, “often proves an actual obstacle to reading progress,” and that because the number of students adversely affected by this method was quite large, that “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.”

So Orton actually referred to “faulty teaching methods,” which the aspiring teacher believes don’t exist. And since Orton clearly favors one teaching method over another, he must be wrong-headed and is therefore not to be believed. The title of his article was “The ‘Sight Reading’ Method of Teaching Reading as a source of Reading Disability.” The good doctor was concerned that the professors of education were about to make a great mistake. They actually published his article in their own journal of education and then proceeded to ignore his warning that what they were about to do would cause untold harm to many children.

It’s amazing how concerned our lawmakers have been over the harm that cigarette smoking can do to a person. Yet, the idea that a teaching method could harm children has never entered the minds of our political leaders.

Many years ago I happened to be seated on a panel next to the Surgeon General of the United States, C. Everett Koop. In the course of our conversation, I told him that the sight-method of teaching reading, otherwise known as Whole Language, could cause dyslexia, and that I’d be happy to provide him with as much information as he would need in order to make it a subject of interest. He made no response, as if what I had said was uttered by a mad man who was to be ignored.

My good friend Ed Miller of North Carolina, a retired school administrator, had devised a test that proved that the sight method of teaching reading caused dyslexia. He made every effort, at great expense, to get someone in the government interested in his remarkable invention, but found no takers. The lawmakers, department heads, and bureaucrats could write nice letters thanking him for his interest in children’s education and they wished him well, but nothing further came of it.

I would also advise the aspiring teacher to read Charlotte Iserbyt’s *The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America* and John Taylor Gatto’s *Underground History of American Education*. Gatto spent many years in the classrooms of New York’s public schools and could tell the aspiring teacher a thing or two about education.



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