

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My People Are Destroyed For Lack Of Knowledge" HOSEA 4:6

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce these risks.
"Without vision, the people perish."

Debunking Whole-Language Myths About New Zealand

Whenever whole-language advocates are asked where whole language has been used successfully and produced wonderful results among children, they invariably cite New Zealand, that legendary welfare paradise in the South Pacific. For example, Marie Carbo, in her attempt to discredit Prof. Jeanne Chall's pro-phonics book, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, in an article entitled "Debunking the Great Phonics Myth," (*Phi Delta Kappan*, Nov. 1988), wrote:

Currently, the U.S. ranks a dismal 49th in literacy out of 159 members of the United Nations. The country that ranks first, New Zealand, teaches reading through the whole-language approach, which integrates literature, story writing, and the arts—and also incorporates some phonics, when needed.

By contrast, phonics has been emphasized in many American classrooms for the past 20 years. . . . If phonics is so effective and so much of it has been taught for the past 20 years, one might reasonably ask why the U.S. ranks 49th in literacy.

It's amazing how ignorant a professor of education can be when it comes to teaching reading. First, what Ms. Carbo fails to acknowledge is that phonics taught within the context of a look-say or whole-word reading program is practically useless, because chil-

dren who develop a holistic reflex acquire a block against seeing words phonetically. They can only use their phonetic knowledge if they make a conscious effort to do so, and sight readers usually don't. Second, phonics in whole-language is taught as phonetic clues, as one of the many strategies used in whole-word or sight reading, and it is taught only "when needed." Children are encouraged to guess the word rather than sound it out, and a good guess, even if phonetically incorrect, is considered preferable if it relates to the "meaning" of the text. For example, the authors of *Evaluation: Whole Language, Whole Child* (Scholastic, 1988) write (p. 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.

In other words, children are taught that phonics is less useful than guessing in trying

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