

These progressive principles have never been the predominant philosophy in American education. From their inception in the 1830s, state systems of common or public schooling have primarily attempted to achieve cultural uniformity, not diversity, and to educate dutiful, not critical citizens.

Furthermore, schooling has been under constant pressure to support the ever-expanding industrial economy by establishing a competitive meritocracy and preparing workers for their vocational roles. The term "progressive" arose from a period (roughly 1890-1920) during which many Americans took a more careful look at the political and social effects of vast concentrations of corporate power and private wealth. Dewey, in particular, saw that with the decline of local community life and small-scale enterprise, young people were losing valuable opportunities to learn the arts of democratic participation, and he concluded that education would need to make up for this loss.

In his Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, where he worked between 1896 and 1904, Dewey tested ideas he shared with leading school reformers such as Francis W. Parker and Ella Flagg Young. Between 1899 and 1916 he circulated his ideas in works such as *The School and Society*, *The Child and the Curriculum*, *Schools of Tomorrow*, and *Democracy and Education*, and through numerous lectures and articles. During these years other experimental schools were established around the country, and in 1919 the Progressive Education Association was founded, aiming at "reforming the entire school system of America." Led by Dewey, progressive educators opposed a growing national movement that sought to separate academic education for the few and narrow vocational training for the masses. During the 1920s, when education turned increasingly to "scientific" techniques such as intelligence testing and cost-benefit management, progressive educators insisted on the importance of the emotional, artistic, and creative aspects of human development--"the most living and essential parts of our natures," as Margaret Naumburg put it in *The Child and the World*. After the Depression began, a group of politically oriented progressive educators, led by George Counts, dared schools to "build a new social order" and published a provocative journal called "The Social Frontier" to advance their "reconstructionist" critique of laissez faire capitalism.

At Teachers College, Columbia University, William H. Kilpatrick and other students of Dewey taught the principles of progressive education to thousands of teachers and school leaders, and in the middle part of the century, books such as Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1938) Boyd Bode's *Progressive Education at the Crossroads* (1938), Caroline Pratt's *I Learn from Children* (1948), and Carlton Washburne's *What is Progressive Education?* (1952) among others.



[These] continued to provide a progressive critique of conventional assumptions about teaching, learning, and schooling. A major research endeavor, the "eight-year study," demonstrated that students from progressive high schools were capable, adaptable learners and excelled even in the finest universities.

Nevertheless, in the 1950s, during a time of cold war anxiety and cultural conservatism, progressive education was widely repudiated, and it disintegrated as an identifiable movement. However, in the years since, various groups of educators have rediscovered the ideas of Dewey and his associates, and revised them to address the changing needs of schools, children, and society in the late twentieth century.

Open classrooms, schools without walls, cooperative learning, multiage approaches, whole language, the social curriculum, experiential education, and numerous forms of alternative schools all have important philosophical roots in progressive education. John Goodlad's notion of "nongraded" schools (introduced in the late 1950s), Theodore Sizer's network of "essential" schools, Elliott Wigginton's [Foxfire project](#), and Deborah Meier's student-centered Central Park East schools are some well-known examples of progressive reforms in public education; in the 1960s, critics like Paul Goodman and George Dennison took Dewey's ideas in a more radical direction, helping give rise to the free school movement. In recent years, activist educators in inner cities have advocated greater equity, justice, diversity and other democratic values through the publication *Rethinking Schools* and the National Coalition of Education Activists.

Today, scholars, educators and activists are rediscovering Dewey's work and exploring its relevance to a "postmodern" age, an age of global capitalism and breathtaking cultural change, and an age in which the ecological health of the planet itself is seriously threatened. We are finding that although Dewey wrote a century ago, his insights into democratic culture and meaningful education suggest hopeful alternatives to the regime of standardization and mechanization that more than ever dominate our schools.

The Frankfurt School and Critical Theory.

The Frankfurt School, known more appropriately as Critical Theory, is a philosophical and sociological movement spread across many universities around the world. It was originally located at the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*), an attached institute at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. The Institute was founded in 1923 thanks to a donation by Felix Weil with the aim of developing Marxist studies in Germany.



The Whole Language Fraud

A simple way to prepare a nation for a Godless world system is to remove religious faith and values from its children's education. A hallmark of the ongoing effort to accomplish this in America's public schools is the "whole language" concept of teaching reading. The whole-language model is based on the philosophy of deconstruction, which *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines as a method of literary analysis originating in mid 20th-century France, and "based on a theory that, by the very nature of language and usage, no text can have a fixed, coherent meaning." The authors of *Whole Language: What's the Difference?*, arguing for this model of teaching reading, declare that "reading is not a matter of 'getting the meaning' from the text, as if that meaning were in the text waiting to be decoded by the reader," but is rather "a matter of readers using the cues print provide and knowledge they bring with them ... to construct a unique interpretation."

In other words, whole language theory holds that the reading process is totally subjective and the reader is free to interpret the text any way he or she wants. Obviously, this is a recipe for the destruction of literacy, not for its improvement. The authors of *Whole Language: What's the Difference?* explain:

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* print, in the sense that the *reader-created* meanings are a fusion of what the reader brings and what the text offers.

... In a transactional model, words do not have static meanings. Rather, they have meaning *poten-*

tials and the capacity to communicate multiple meanings.

In the whole-language model, children are expected to "read for meaning," but are encouraged also to interject their own meanings into the text. After all, when whole-language advocates speak of "reader-created meanings," what limits do they place on the reader's creativity?

Absolute Truth

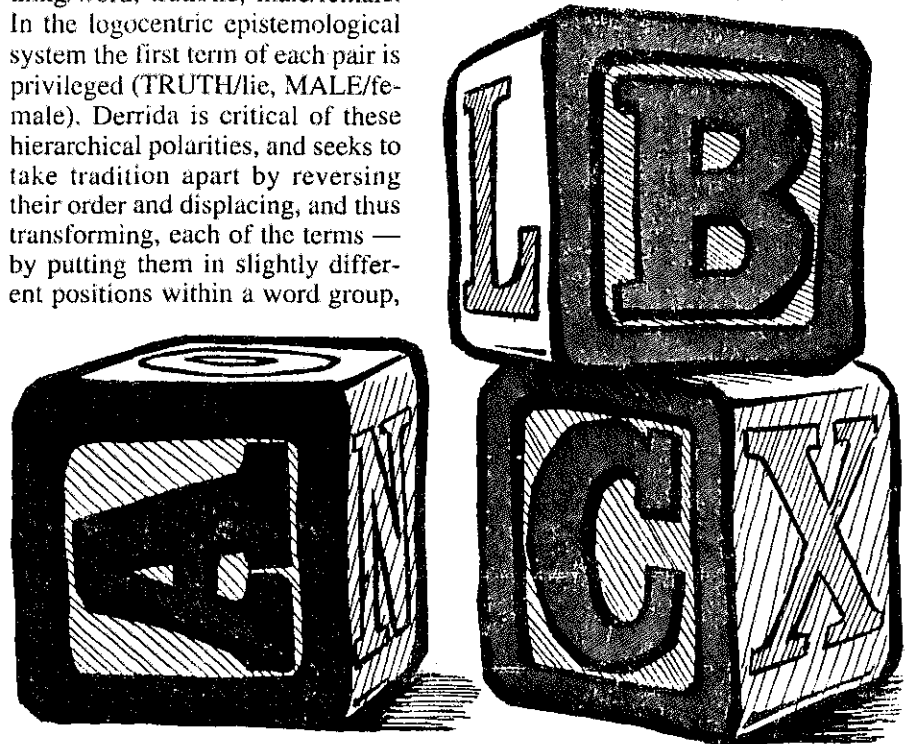
The initial premises for deconstructionist theory — the basis for the whole-language model — were formulated by French philosopher Jacques Derrida. According to the *Academic American Encyclopedia*, Derrida attacked what he called "'logocentrism,' the human habit of assigning truth to *logos* — to spoken language, the voice of reason, the word of God." *The Academic American Encyclopedia* continues:

Derrida finds that logocentrism generates and depends upon a framework of two-term oppositions that are basic to Western thinking, such as being/nonbeing, thing/word, truth/lie, male/female. In the logocentric epistemological system the first term of each pair is privileged (TRUTH/lie, MALE/female). Derrida is critical of these hierarchical polarities, and seeks to take tradition apart by reversing their order and displacing, and thus transforming, each of the terms — by putting them in slightly different positions within a word group,

or by pursuing their etymology to extreme lengths, or by substituting words in other languages that look and sound alike....

Thus, deconstruction is an attack on the notion of absolute truth and literal comprehension of a written text. Typically, Western thinking is "logocentric" in that it relies on words as the means of conveying truth. Critics of traditional teaching methods are keenly aware of the difference between the logocentric and the whole-language approach. In an article entitled "Political Philosophy and Reading Make a Dangerous Mix," published in *Education Week* for February 27, 1985, the authors write:

After spending six years observing the efforts of the self-styled "New Right" to influence education throughout the country, we have found a pattern of activities that could, if some members of the New Right are successful, cause a very limited model for teaching reading to prevail in both public and private schools. The model is based on the belief that literal com-



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prehension is the only goal of reading instruction. Because it trains children to reason in a very limited manner, it is a model that we believe could have serious political consequences in a country where the ability of the citizenry to read and think critically is an essential determinant of democratic governance....

The common enemy, in the eyes of "progressive" educators, is clearly "literal comprehension" because of the implications that words may represent absolute truth. An article on Derrida in *Contemporary Authors* states that "deconstructionism emphasizes the reader's role in extracting meaning from texts and the impossibility of determining absolute meaning."

Controlling the Language

A key to changing America into an amoral, Godless society is controlling how children learn language. Michael Halliday, professor of linguistics at Australia's Sydney University and a leader in the development of whole-language philosophy, writes that "language comes to occupy the central role in the processes of social learning." He explains:

A child who is learning his mother tongue is learning how to mean. As he builds up his own meaning potential in language, he is constructing for himself a social semiotic [a system of signs and symbols]. Since language develops

as the expression of the social semiotic, it serves at the same time as the means of transmitting it, and also of constantly modifying and reshaping it, as the child takes over the culture, the received system of meanings in which he is learning to share.

... In this way a child, in the act of learning language, is also learning the culture through language. The semantic system which he is constructing becomes the primary mode of transmission of the culture.

Thus, those who control the teaching of language to children can control the

ism and superstition prevail as the means of knowing.

Classroom Practice

How does whole-language deconstructionism translate itself into classroom practice? First, the educators deconstruct the English alphabetic system. That is, the nature of our alphabetic system is ridiculed and its benefits kept from the students. And so the teaching of phonics is strongly discouraged. Frank Smith, a leading whole-language proponent, writes in *Reading Without Nonsense*:

Children do not need a mastery of phonics in order to identify words that they have not met in print before. The very complexity and unreliability of the 166 rules and scores of exceptions make it remarkable that anyone should think that the inability to use phonics explains "Why Johnny still can't read." Once

a child discovers that a word is in a meaningful context, learning to recognize it on another occasion is as simple as learning to recognize a face on a second occasion, and does not need phonics. Discovering what a word is in the first place is usually most efficiently accomplished by asking someone, listening to someone else read the word, or using context to provide a substantial clue.

In the same book, Smith writes:

The spelling-to-sound correspondences of English are so confusing that in my judgment children who believe they can read unfamiliar words just by "blending" or "sounding" them out are likely to develop into disabled readers, the type of secondary students who are condemned for being "functionally illiterate" because they do exactly what they have been taught and try to read by putting together the sounds of letters.

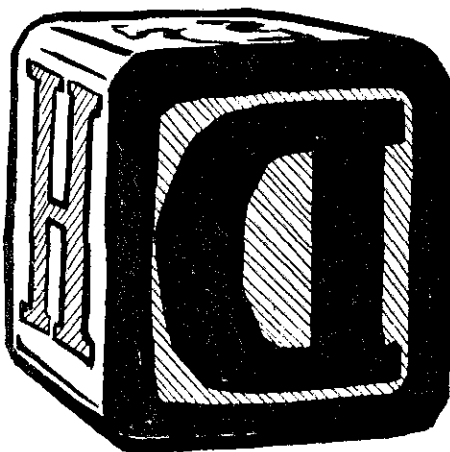
Besides, I think it would be difficult to exaggerate the complexity and unreliability of phonics. To

For all intents and purposes, whole language is a way of preventing children from becoming fluent, accurate phonetic readers. It is a new way of creating academic confusion and learning frustration.

future of our culture. It is the height of folly for parents concerned about moral, religious values to put their children in schools controlled by humanists, where 12 years of Godless indoctrination will lead many of these children to forsake their religious roots for the destructive life-style of the Western pagan.

The full implications of the whole-language movement cannot be appreciated or understood until we recognize that the cultural war we are in is being waged with an intensity never before seen in this country. That its philosophical roots can be traced to the nihilist depths of deconstructionist philosophy should not surprise us, since the academic world has become the spawning ground of every anti-religious idea of which the human mind can conceive.

But not only do the whole-language deconstructionists reject the concept of absolute truth as applied to the written word, they reject the very system of logical thinking that made Western civilization possible. They not only reject the Bible, they reject Aristotle's A is A. Their new formula is A can be anything you want it to be, which can only be the basis of a pre-literate or non-literate culture in which subjectiv-



take just one very simple example, how are the letters *ho* pronounced? Not in a trick situation, as in the middle of a word like *shop*, but when *ho* are the first two letters of a word? Here are eleven common words in each of which the initial *ho* has a different pronunciation — *hot*, *hope*, *hook*, *hoot*, *house*, *hoist*, *horse*, *horizon*, *honey*, *hour*, *honest*. Can anyone really believe that a child could learn to identify these words by sounding out the letters?

Obviously, Smith doesn't know how "intensive phonics" is taught. Children are taught the letter sounds in their spelling families. Thus, the child knows how to pronounce *hot* because it rhymes with *cot*, *dot*, *pot*. He knows how to pronounce *hope* because it rhymes with *cope*, *mope*, *rope*. He knows how to pronounce *hook* because it is in the same spelling family as *book*, *cook*, *look*. He knows how to pronounce all of these words not because they begin with *ho* but because he knows their spelling families. As for *shop*, after the child has been taught the sound the consonant digraph *sh* stands for, he can decode any number of words beginning with *sh*: *ship*, *sham*, *shell*, *shut*, etc. If Smith had ever taught intensive phonics, he'd know that there are millions of children who have no problem learning how to read these words on the basis of their letters.

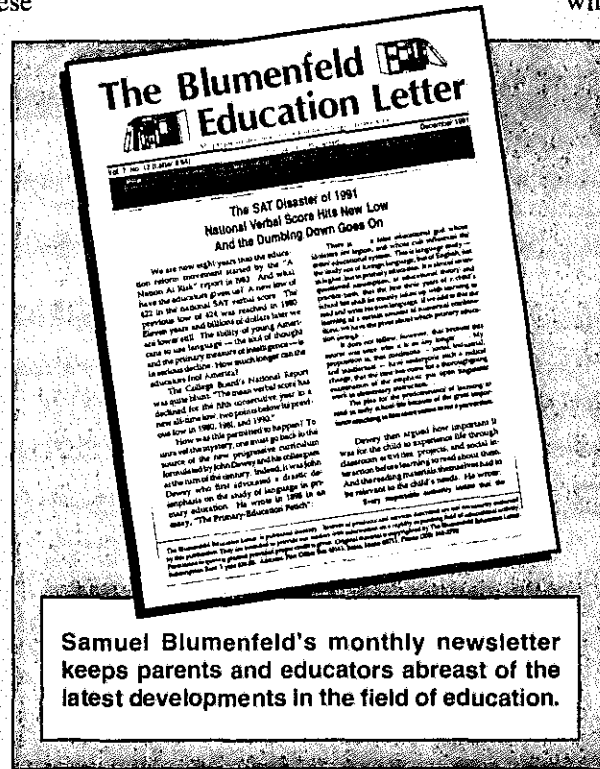
What Smith doesn't say in his book is that an alphabetic writing system is a phonetic system that requires the reader to develop an automatic association between letters and sounds. That automatic association can only be acquired by rote memorization so that the child doesn't have to think about the sounds the letters stand for. Our alphabetic system is 85 percent regular with 95 percent of the irregularities consisting of slight variations in vowel pronunciation.

The reason children have little difficulty in mastering the irregular words is because their pronunciations are obvious. For example, even though the word *was* is in the *as/has* spelling family, a child knows it is pronounced *wuz* simply because *waz* is not a word and

doesn't make sense. The spoken word provides the correct pronunciation. It is the same with the word *have*, which is pronounced *hav*, even though it is in the same spelling family as *cave*, *rave*, *save*. But in a word like *behave*, the pronunciation of the *have* is perfectly regular.

A, B, C Importance

The important characteristic of an alphabetic writing system is that it is a



Samuel Blumenfeld's monthly newsletter keeps parents and educators abreast of the latest developments in the field of education.

phonetic representation of the spoken language. Meaning is derived when the written letters are articulated in speech or internally vocalized or subvocalized by the reader. Alphabeticly written words are not ideographs or hieroglyphics. They are graphic representations of speech. Whole-language theorists reject this simple fact. Smith writes in *Understanding Reading*:

Written language does not require decoding to sound in order to be comprehended; the manner in which we bring meaning to print is just as direct as the manner in which we understand speech. Language comprehension is the same for all surface structures.

In other words, we should all read as if we were deaf and printed words were little pictures conveying meaning di-

rectly. But this is really impossible to do, for if we do not relate the printed word to its spoken equivalent, then we cannot think, for the thought process — as opposed to daydreaming — is carried out through language, not through a series of still pictures. In other words, whole-language educators see no difference between the word man and the little picture of a man that might appear on a rest room door in an airport. To whole-language educators, both are little pictures. The authors of *Whole Language: What's the Difference?* write:

Oral language, written language, sign language — each of these is a system of linguistic conventions for creating meanings. That means none is "the basis" for the other; none is a secondary representation of the other.

Unfortunately, saying it doesn't make it so. Alphabetic writing is a representation of the spoken equivalent. That is what made alphabetic writing superior to ideographic writing. For educators not to know this is tantamount to an architect not knowing how to read blueprints, or a concert pianist not knowing how to read music. In fact, alphabetic writing is the same as musical notation in that both

forms of writing stand for sounds. The written notes stand for musical sounds. The alphabeticly written words stand for their articulated equivalents in speech.

In short, whole-language educators are perpetrating a fraud. They are telling parents that this is a new and better way of teaching children to read when, in reality, it is nothing of the sort. For all intents and purposes, whole language is a way of preventing children from becoming fluent, accurate phonetic readers. It is a new way of creating reading disability, a new way of creating academic confusion and learning frustration, a new way of crippling a child's linguistic development. Whole-language teachers may think they are doing a wonderful job in their first-grade classes. After all, they don't have to pick up the pieces in the grades that come after. ■