



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on February 28, 2012

Dyslexia and the Rockefellers

One of the great ironies of the Progressive Education Movement is that its leaders were able to convince John D. Rockefeller, Jr. that he ought to give his sons a good progressive education and donate \$3 million to the Lincoln School, a new experiment in social education in accordance with John Dewey's radical new ideas. So he put Nelson, Laurence, Winthrop, and David in the school, which turned them all into dyslexics, proving that progressive reading programs can cause dyslexia.



According to *Education Encyclopedia*, StateUniversity.com:

The Lincoln School (1917–1940) of Teachers College, Columbia University, was a university laboratory school set up to test and develop and ultimately to promulgate nationwide curriculum materials reflecting the most progressive teaching methods and ideas of the time. Originally located at 646 Park Avenue in New York, one of the most expensive pieces of real estate in the city, the Lincoln School was also a training ground for New York City's elite, including the sons of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who provided the funding for the school. Among the school's chief architects were Charles W. Eliot, a former president of Harvard University and an influential member of the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools; his protégé Abraham Flexner, a member of the controversial Rockefeller philanthropy, the General Education Board; Otis W. Caldwell, a professor of science education at Teachers College and the school's first director; and the dean of Teachers College, James E. Russell.

Unfortunately, Rockefeller's four sons were some of the earliest victims of school-induced dyslexia, a condition they had to deal with for the rest of their lives.

Jules Abel, in his 1965 book, *The Rockefeller Billions*, wrote:

The influence of the Lincoln School, which, as a progressive school, encouraged students to explore their own interests and taught them to live in society has been a dominant one in their lives. ... Yet Lawrence gives startling confirmation as to "Why Johnny Can't Read." He says that the Lincoln School did not teach him to read and write as he wishes he now could. Nelson, today, admits that reading for him is a "slow and tortuous process" that he does not enjoy doing but compels himself to do it. This is significant evidence in the debate that has raged about modern educational techniques.

David Rockefeller writes of his experience at the Lincoln School in his *Memoirs*, published in 2002:

It was Lincoln's experimental curriculum and method of instruction that distinguished it from all other New York schools of the time. Father was an ardent and generous supporter of John Dewey's educational methods and school reform efforts. ... Teacher's College of Columbia University operated Lincoln, with considerable financial assistance in the early years from the General Education Board, as an experimental school designed to put Dewey's philosophy into



practice.

Dewey's educational methods were conceived and calculated to dumb down the nation, and he started out by dumbing down the four Rockefeller boys. Nelson, of course, was in later years able to hire Henry Kissinger to do his reading for him.

David Rockefeller writes further:

Lincoln stressed freedom for children to learn and to play an active role in their own education. ... But there were some drawbacks. In my case, I had trouble with reading and spelling, which my teachers, drawing upon "progressive" educational theory, did not consider significant. They believed I was simply a slow reader and that I would develop at my own pace. In reality I have dyslexia, which was never diagnosed, and I never received remedial attention. As a result my reading ability, as well as my proficiency in spelling, improved only marginally as I grew older. All my siblings, except Babs and John, had dyslexia to a degree.

Apparently, David Rockefeller still doesn't understand that he was made dyslexic by the teaching methods at the Lincoln School. He says, "I have dyslexia," as if he were born with it, and that is why he had such a difficult time learning to read.

The reason why David's older brother, John D. Rockefeller III, did not become dyslexic is because he attended the traditional Browning School in New York and the Loomis Institute in Windsor, Connecticut. He then went on to Princeton, where he received high honors in economics.

Winthrop Rockefeller, born in 1912, attended the Lincoln School. He later found formal education difficult, suffering from dyslexia. He entered Yale in 1931 but was expelled in 1934 for misbehavior. He had a successful military career, after which he moved to Arkansas and became its first Republican Governor. What is most significant in all this is that the experience of the four Rockefeller boys provides confirmation that the sight method of teaching reading, used at the Lincoln School, caused dyslexia. Of course, we were not able to know this until years later when their memoirs and biographies were published.

Yet, the progressive educators were well aware of this harmful phenomenon as early as February 1929, when Dr. Samuel T. Orton — a neuropathologist who had made a survey in the 1920s of children with reading problems in Iowa, where the sight method was being used — wrote an article for the *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Its title was quite explicit: "The 'Sight Reading' Method of Teaching Reading as a Source of Reading Disability." He wrote, as diplomatically as possible:

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 educational importance both because of its 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.

Orton's article was written for the very educators who were in the process of launching their sight-reading programs in all the public schools of America. And of course they rejected his warning. But it wasn't until 1955 that American parents became aware of what was being done to their children in the schools. It was that year in which Rudolf Flesch's famous book, *Why Johnny Can't Read*, was published, and it created quite a storm among educators and parents. The educators rejected Flesch's assertion



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that it was the sight or look-say method that was causing the problem, but parents read the book and many started to teach their children to read with phonics at home.

My own book on the reading problem, *The New Illiterates*, was published in 1973, some 18 years after *Why Johnny Can't Read*. Indeed, in 1973 Johnny still couldn't read! In *The New Illiterates* I revealed that the sight method had been invented by the Rev. Thomas Gallaudet, the teacher of the deaf and dumb at his asylum in Hartford, Connecticut, as a means of teaching the deaf both language and reading. He thought the method could also be used to teach normal children to read. So he wrote *The Mother's Primer*, which was published in 1836 and adopted by the Boston primary schools as a new, easier way to teach reading. Instead, it produced a literacy disaster. In 1844, the Boston School Masters wrote a devastating critique of this new way of teaching reading. The schools then quickly went back to the phonetic method.

In my book, I also did a line-by-line analysis of the [Dick and Jane](#) reading program and came to the conclusion that anyone taught to read by this method could become dyslexic. But nothing I've written on the subject has had the slightest influence on the professors in America's colleges of education or changed the prevailing sight methods of teaching reading in the public schools.

And that is why I then developed the *Alpha-Phonics* reading program, so that parents could easily teach their children to read at home in the proper phonetic manner. Since its first publication in 1983, thousands of homeschooling parents have used the program to teach their children to read. Of course, I have tried to get the public schools to adopt the program, but with no success. However, one high school teacher in Florida, who heard about my work and has actually used *Alpha-Phonics* to help potential dropouts learn to read, claims that it works miracles. He wrote in a letter to me:

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% 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.

So if America wants to reclaim its preeminence as the most literate nation on earth, they can do so by simply using *Alpha-Phonics* in all the schools across the country. Not very difficult to do, and not at all expensive. In other words, we don't need No Child Left Behind or Race to the Top to pretend that we are helping the kids. But a dysfunctional federal government is simply incapable of doing what can be done easily and cheaply. There is neither the will, nor the intelligence, nor the open-mindedness to make it happen. And so if you, a parent, want true education reform, you can have it instantly — at home.



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