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## Editor's Note

### Grace Fernald A Remembrance by a Student

Sometimes we think that encountering reading disabilities by individuals is a recent phenomena. Not so. The stories of people from the past reveal how people over the years struggled with reading problems and were helped to learn to read. The following letter was written by a grateful student whose life was changed by a gracious teacher, Grace Fernald. When she died in 1950 at the age of 70, Grace Fernald had touched the lives of many children and adolescents, whom she had taught to read. She also developed theories and methods of learning that continue today as an education force for future generations (Fernald, 1943/1988). This poignant letter was written by Jack D. Barchas to honor his teacher, Grace Fernald ([http://www.historyliteacy.org/98\\_spring/Fernald\\_stu.html](http://www.historyliteacy.org/98_spring/Fernald_stu.html)), Jack Barchas recalled with amazing clarity and detail his experiences with Grace Fernald and the Fernald school at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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*I was the oldest in a family that came to have eight children. Even when very young, my parents talked with me about the world and the politics of the day—we were in the middle of World War II. I liked learning about things. With my second-grade teacher, my otherwise happy world seemed to come to an end. While I was well behaved in school, everything I did or said from the teacher's perspective was wrong. While only a second-grader, I knew I wanted to be a doctor and a medical researcher and in my heart I believed I would be able to do those things well. She asked to see my parents. Because of all the young children at home, my father came alone. It was after school and I was at one end of the room sitting quietly. I can remember hearing her tell my father I was retarded and, of course, would never be a doctor. I can also remember him patiently, but very firmly, telling her he disagreed about my intelligence and that I would be whatever I wanted.*

*My parents revered education. They called UCLA and were given the name of Grace Fernald, who agreed to see me in her private practice. I remember Dr. Fernald's house from the first visit somewhat differently than does my mother. I thought it was grand. It was to me, a very big Spanish home in a very nice area of Westwood (what is now called Little Holmby Hills). It had a tall vaulted ceiling of wood and big timbers with a huge stone fireplace. I was amazed by the furniture which I thought must be antique and enjoyed looking at the oriental carpets. There were many shelves with books. Everything was very neat and very quiet.*

*Dr. Fernald was friendly, gray haired, with a wonderful smile. After talking to my parents, she took me into her office. It was a small office with a big desk and many books. It seemed quite cozy and comfortable. We talked. She then told me I would be given an IQ test. It was fun. At a couple of points we both laughed at some of the questions: "If you fire two bullets at somebody and the first bullet kills the person, what does the second bullet do?" She also did some other testing. I did not feel at all nervous. At the end she told me that I had done just fine and would be learning to read and spell very quickly. She and I were going to impress Miss Potter (a pseudonym). And, we did!*

*Dr. Fernald's kinesthetic approach involved writing in the air as well as tracing words in large written or scripted format. My mother was very interested in the method and we worked hard on it after school between my visits to Dr. Fernald. In those visits Dr. Fernald was always cheerful and always smiling. As a child, I felt I had a new friend, one who I knew was helping me in very important ways. I wanted to do well.*

*By the summer, Dr. Fernald decided I should enroll in the class being taught at UCLA for children with my type of problem. My parents taught me to take the big blue bus from Pico and Robertson in West Los Angeles directly to the UCLA bus stop and to navigate to the other side of*

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campus across its various little ravines to the wooden school building near Sunset Boulevard that housed Doctor Fernald's program. The building was a simple barracks-style green structure that smelled very much of wood, cheap drawing paper, and the type of paint that children used to use many years ago. In the course of getting back and forth to her building I, of course explored many buildings and many ravines!

The class had fewer than sixteen pupils. We sat two pupils to a table. There was a student teacher, who was a UCLA trainee for every two pupils. Dr. Fernald was in the background circulating among the pupils and the student teachers. She did not run the class but was clearly in charge. The student teachers rotated being in charge of the class. The method of instruction was quite interesting. Every day each pupil had to dictate a story to his or her student teacher. It could be as long as you wanted - mine were quite long. The teacher wrote it all down. The next day she (all the student teachers were, as I remember, young women) would bring the story back, typed up on a special typewriter that made letters that I recall as being about a half-inch in height. We then read our stories to the student teachers from the neatly typed manuscript. I appreciated what a nice job the student teacher had done. We then would practice some of the words of the story, which were written on big cards (in my mind's eye the cards were about two or three inches high and about ten inches long). We would trace the words and learn to spell them. While one of the student teacher's pupils was reciting his (most of the pupils were boys) story, the other pupils were doing the word practice, including softly repeating his story and tracing words. There was some work involving the group as a whole with larger cards.

Dr. Fernald always seemed to be in a good mood and as I look back on it, seemed to have an individual relationship and concern for each of the pupils and student teachers. Nevertheless, some of the students also had trouble behaving themselves. She was stern about the class being a place to learn. Students who could not behave in the class had to leave and go outside. I remember one or two of those students had to leave the class permanently.

The sessions lasted a half-day. They included recess breaks as well as some time for painting. Much of that was finger painting, dipping our hands into chalky paints which had a rather nice smell.

Once I got the notion of reading I became quite avid. I tried to explain to Miss Potter what I was learning from Dr. Fernald. But Miss Potter made it quite clear that she was not interested.

Forty-five years after the experiences in this story, I was again at UCLA. Having spent twenty-five years on the Stanford faculty and holding an endowed chair there, I was invited to become Dean for Neuroscience and Research at the UCLA Medical School. I spent four years there before coming to New York. The ravines at UCLA have been filled in. There are far more buildings, and Grace Fernald's simple wood classrooms have recently been torn down for a new business school. But UCLA still has a Grace Fernald School, and it is considered one of the crown jewels of the institution.

In my current positions as Chair of Psychiatry at the New York Hospital Cornell Medical Center with responsibility for its Payne Whitney Clinic, and editor of one of the major scientific journals of psychiatry, I have sometimes wondered what Grace Fernald would have thought. How did life change for some of the other boys as a result of her help and ministrations? I still use aspects of the Fernald method to this day. It thus is a great pleasure to be able to pay homage to her here. I did not know her as a leader in her field - though I came to recognize that. Rather, I knew Dr. Fernald as a teacher who clearly loved helping children who had problems and who - with my two remarkable parents - made possible for me the future I dreamed of.

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This remarkable remembrance of Grace Fernald and her methods shows that much what of what our current reading research is uncovering has been used effectively for a long time. What are some of the key lessons of this remembrance?

- Students with serious reading problems have tremendous potential if they receive appropri-

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ate instruction.

- These students need intensive, small group instruction.
- The regular classroom setting (inclusion) often does not meet the needs of pupils with serious reading problems.
- Multisensory methods are effective.
- The language experience approach is useful.
- Repeated reading methods are effective.
- Integrating oral language, reading, and writing enhances all language components.
- Rapport, a healthy teacher-pupil relationship, is an essential ingredient.

### Reference

Fernald, G. (1988). Remedial techniques in basic school subjects. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed. (Original work published in 1943).

### The Articles in This Issue.

The articles in this issue of *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal* present important topics in the field of learning disabilities

***Challenges in Evaluating Eligibility Criteria and Accommodations Needs for Postsecondary Success*** by Carol A. Layton and Robin H. Lock examines the relationship between the eligibility report developed through individual state education agency (SEA) rules to meet IDEA criteria and the Association for Higher Education and Disabilities (AHEAD) standards for the documentation of a learning disability at the postsecondary level. For students with disabilities in the public schools, schools are required to meet the standards mandated by federal law in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In contrast, when students enter college programs, their institutions of higher education are challenged to interpret information for students with disabilities to determine eligibility according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

***The Effects of Child Maltreatment on Learning Disabilities and Intervention*** by Barbara Lowenthal describes the types of maltreatment, their possible effects on learning, and school interventions that can assist children with a learning disability. Unfortunately, the rate and intensity of child maltreatment is increasing. Special educators should consider the possible effects of maltreatments of children with learning disabilities.

***Giving Students with Learning Disabilities the POWER to Write: Improving the Quality and Quantity of Written Products*** by Jeffrey Bakken and Craig Whedon report on a study conducted to determine if students with learning disabilities could be taught a cognitive strategy with self-instruction to improve the quantity and quality of their writing. The studies show that strategy instruction has a significant impact on students' writing performance with an increase in quantity and the quality (number of words and sentences) of written products.

***Social Skills Training Research with Minority Students with Learning Disabilities*** by Rosa E. Olmeda and Stanley C. Trout demonstrate in a recent study how sociocultural contexts influence social behaviors in ways that may not always be reflective of majority-culture norms. To better understand culturally sensitive and effective social skills training (SST) for students with learning disabilities, it is important for SST researchers to include a sociocultural perspective in their research.

Janet W. Lerner  
Editor-in-Chief