

Ending Illiteracy in America Creation of the Reading Program

I Didn't Know

My reason for deciding to become a fifth-grade teacher instead of a lawyer was because I wanted to change how children felt about themselves. My deciding to become a teacher was only meant to fill my working hours while the children whose feelings about themselves I wanted to change were in school. The age-group swimmers on the team I was going to coach were my target group. I could still work on changing how the children in my fifth-grade class felt about themselves, but I preferred to work with a broader range of children than were present in a fifth-grade class.

I gave no thought to curriculum at all. I expected to teach my fifth-graders using the same textbook-workbook approach to learning that was used when I was in school. The bad feelings I had about myself when I was in elementary school had started in my fifth-grade year, but my feelings had nothing to do with the curriculum I was taught.

Fate set me on a different path. The training program where I was to earn my teaching credential placed me in a low-achieving inner-city school and told me that the ways my students had been taught before had not worked for them, so I was to try something different. What I understood from this was that if I wanted to change how my low-achieving fifth-grade students felt about themselves, I would have to start with the curriculum. I ended up so focused on creating a curriculum that would let my students feel good about themselves that I gave up on the idea of coaching.

For my first year of teaching, I focused my attention on ensuring that all of my students would become good at reading. Before I became an inner-city teacher, I had no idea that there were children in the upper grades in any school who were non-readers. I knew what illiteracy was, but I had never known anyone who was illiterate. In my years as an elementary school student, there had always been three reading groups in each new grade, one group each for the three levels of reading proficiency. Even though we were always separated by reading ability, there were never any non-readers. I spent that first year in my fifth-grade class coming up with ways to improve everybody's reading. By the end of that school year, everyone in my class was reading well except Anthony.

Anthony

Anthony was my failure. Nothing that I tried worked for him. My Principal was so concerned about how differently I was teaching my fifth-graders and the problem he envisioned their sixth-grade teacher would

have in getting my students to return to what he regarded as normal ways of learning that he decided I should be my fifth-grade class's sixth-grade teacher, as well. Even though many of my fifth-graders became my sixth-graders for my second year of teaching, Anthony was not among them. I was disappointed that Anthony was no longer in my class. I wanted that second chance at turning Anthony into a reader.

For my third year as a teacher, I decided to become a teacher of Educationally Handicapped (EH) students. EH students were children who were substantially below grade level in academic achievement, most notably in reading. My EH class size was ten students. I would now be teaching a class of ten Anthonys.

My reason for becoming an EH teacher was so that I could focus all my attention on finding a way to teach reading to Anthony and all the other students like him. I did not believe children like Anthony should be separated out and placed in special classes. My goal in becoming an EH teacher was to find a way to teach children like Anthony to read while keeping them in their regular classrooms. My year of teaching my ten Anthonys was quite rewarding. By the end of that school year, I had come up with a way to teach Anthony, and everyone like him, to read. It would be a while before I could convert that "way" into a program for use in a regular classroom, but it was definitely going to happen.

Sam

During the 1972-73 school year, I was finally able to begin implementing my idea for a way to teach Anthony and others like him to read when a Learning Disabled (LD) position became available at the school where Mary and I were teaching. EH classes place students in a classroom setting for the entire day. LD teachers teach the same kind of students, but on a pullout basis, one hour a day, five days a week. The students remain in their regular classrooms for the remainder of the school day.

In [The What I Learned from Sam](#) sub-section of the [1972-1973](#) section of [The Book of IFs Chapter 9 - The Yearly History of a Change in Plans](#), I describe at length everything my fifth-grade LD student Sam taught me about what should be included in a reading program that would turn a dyslexic non-reader like Sam into a reader. Sam was directly responsible for nearly every change I made to the program to accommodate children like him and like Anthony.

Sharing and The First Eight Kits

With Sam as my daily inspiration, I began creating a reading program for students like Sam and Anthony. At the same time, Mary was adapting our program for use with her first-grade students. Mary and I hired an assistant to work in Mary's classroom, making the materials we were

devising for use with our students. Our assistant also made copies of the materials we were creating that we shared with all four kindergarten classes and one other first-grade class at our school. These five teachers wanted to try for themselves the different approach to teaching reading that Mary and I were creating. The feedback from the teachers and the parents of children using our program was quite encouraging.

In the Summer of 1973, Mary and I made eight Reading Program kits for use in classrooms other than our own. We found homes for these kits with teachers in several different schools. Since there was no actual written guide to using the materials, Mary and I visited four classes each on a weekly basis, both to answer teacher questions and elicit suggestions for improving our Program.

Mathematics To the Fore and A Reading Hiatus

Once the eight kits were distributed and the teachers had learned how to use them, the Reading Program quietly faded into the background. In 1971, Mary and I, along with fifty-four mathematics specialists, had become instructors for the State of California's Specialized Teacher Project Mathematics Improvement Program, also known as Miller Math. There were fifty-seven instructors in total. Mary and I and an instructor with a PhD in something were the only classroom teachers serving as Miller Math instructors. The other instructors were the math specialists.

Each summer of its existence, Miller Math taught, or at least tried to teach, the 2,000 teachers hand-picked by their school districts for participation in the Project, how to teach mathematics more effectively to their students. We were Miller Math instructors again in 1972, the last year of the program's funding. That same summer, the Center for the Improvement of Mathematics Education (CIME) was formed by the people who had been running Miller Math to carry on that program's efforts to improve mathematics education in California. We served as instructors for CIME as well.

Both Mary and I were very much aware that neither Miller Math nor CIME were making much difference in how teachers actually taught mathematics to their students. Mary and I felt the reason for this was because there was no real support provided teachers who had taken the workshops. Once the workshops were over, the teachers were on their own. In the Summer of 1973, Mary and I began writing what we regarded as curriculum guides for both the Miller Math and CIME teaching experiences. The purpose of our guides was to give the workshop participants concrete examples of lessons they could use to implement the Miller Math and CIME teachings in their own classrooms.

During the Summer of 1974, we ventured out on our own to see if teachers would come to workshops we offered independent of any connection to CIME. Teachers came. So, in December of 1974, we declared ourselves to be the Center for Innovation in Education, with our goal being really changing how teachers taught mathematics to their students. The Center gave its first math workshops in the Summer of 1975, and the Reading Program was now just a fond memory.

Reading To the Fore

Although Mary's and my math books had not yet been published when we gave our first Center workshops, their completed manuscripts had already been submitted to our publisher. Mary's book was far enough along that she could provide her workshop participants with actual galley proofs of her book. My workshop participants each received Xeroxed copies of my manuscript.

Mary's *Mathematics Their Way* was published in January 1976. Before its publication, Mary had assumed as much control of its design as she had for her earlier *Workjobs*. Once she was finally free of that responsibility, she came to realize just how much she missed her time as a classroom teacher. Although Mary missed being in the classroom, she had simply accepted that her role now was to run the Center with me.

During one of her late-Fall follow-up sessions for teachers who had taken her Summer of 1975 Mountain View workshop, a participant happened to mention to the other teachers in attendance that a first-grade teaching position had just opened up at her school. She had mentioned the opening just in case anyone there knew of any available teacher who could fill a vacancy on such short notice. Mary surprised everyone in the class by saying, "I would love to take that class." So, for the balance of the 1975-1976 school year, Mary left the running of the Center to me as she once again became a first-grade teacher.

Even though Mary and I had made eight Reading Program kits in the Summer of 1973, neither of us had ever used any of those kits in our own classrooms. Why neither of us had ever used any of the kits is explained in the [Promises Made – Promises Broken](#) sub-section of the [1973-1974](#) section of [The Book of IFs Chapter 9 – The Yearly History of a Change in Plans](#). The 1975-1976 school year was Mary's first opportunity to use one of the kits we made in the Summer of 1973.

To say Mary enjoyed using the kit would be too mild an expression to capture how she felt about it. She loved that the Program was turning every child in her class into a very good reader and writer. Any potential Anthonys or Sams in her room learned as easily as did every other child. The feeling Mary expressed to me repeatedly was that the Reading

Program was the very best thing she and I had ever done. While Mary had enjoyed being back in the classroom, that return to the classroom only lasted one year. Mary's focus during the Summer of 1976 was on giving math workshops. From the Fall of 1976 forward, Mary's main focus became preparing our Reading Program for publication.

Measuring Effectiveness

Both Mary's *Workjobs* and Mary's and my having been selected as instructors for the State of California's Miller Math Project gave us the credibility we needed to entice teachers who knew of us to take our workshops. That credibility got the first teachers through the door. What kept new teachers coming to our workshops year after year was that the curriculum we shared had proven its effectiveness in the classrooms of the teachers who had taken our workshops, and these teachers shared stories of their own successes with their teacher friends.

The measure of the effectiveness of the Reading Program was to be its use in the Learning Tree Mini School, which was to be a part of a voucher experiment in the Alum Rock School District, where Mary and I were both teachers. The reason the Learning Tree Mini-School had so many students enrolled in it was because parents of the children who had used the Program in its first year had testified to its effectiveness to other parents in the school community. If the Learning Tree Mini-School had been allowed to continue its existence, then the Program's success would have had the potential to be known nationally. Since Learning Tree had not been allowed to exist, a new way would have to be found to demonstrate the Reading Program's effectiveness.

First Step – Creating a Kit

Workjobs had been the reason Mary and I became Miller Math instructors. The success of *Workjobs* is what led to the publication of *Mathematics Their Way* and *Mathematics a Way of Thinking*, both of which were a direct result of our having been Miller Math instructors. What all three books had in common was demonstrated effectiveness. What they also had in common was that the materials they used for teaching were commonly available.

Our math books were accepted for publication because *Workjobs* had been so well received by teachers. The Reading Program was not at all like that. First, with the exception of stamp pads and vis-à-vis pens, none of the materials that comprised a Reading Program kit were commercially available anywhere. Second, very few people even knew of the Reading Program's existence, let alone its effectiveness.

The first thing Mary had to do to prepare our Reading Program for publication was to create a publishable version of the Program. We had

spent most of the Summer of 1973 making the eight kits of the program for use in our Learning Tree Mini-School. Proving our Program's effectiveness to publishers would take more than the successes achieved in eight classrooms. Proof would require success in hundreds of classrooms from all across the country.

During the 1976-1977 school year, Mary began the process of preparing the camera-ready art for our Reading Program kit. "Camera-ready" is the final stage of readying text and illustrations for publication. What is submitted as camera-ready is printed as it is with no revisions.

Dale Seymour Publications was a company based quite near where we lived. This company was also a provider of some of teaching materials used by the Miller Math Project. Dale Seymour told Mary that he would love to have had his company publish *Workjobs* if he had been given the opportunity. He also said he that he wanted to help us with any future projects. We told Dale about the Reading Program we were in the process of creating. Dale then kindly loaned us Bob Larson, his company's resident artist. In the Spring of 1973, Bob had drawn all the artwork we needed for our first eight kits.

In 1976, when Mary began planning the needed artwork for what was to be the published version of the Reading Program, Bob was no longer working for Dale Seymour Publications. He had struck out on his own as a free-lance artist. Perfect timing for the Center. Working with Mary, Bob created all the illustrations for the published version of the Center's Reading Program.

The royalties from *Workjobs* had given Mary and me the financial freedom to use our time as unemployed school teachers to found the Center. The royalties from *Mathematics Their Way* and *Mathematics a Way of Thinking* were now used to fund the Center's preparing its Reading Program for publication.

Design Element

The following statement appears in the [Credibility](#) section of the [Book of IFs](#): "Because the kits were and are so durable, over the years since the kit's introduction, the kits... have been passed from teacher to teacher as teachers have retired."

When Mary and I were deciding what to include in the Reading Program's kit of materials, we both agreed that the many components of our kits should be virtually indestructible. A kit with this many pieces, all printed in full color, was going to be expensive for schools to buy. Traditional workbooks were replaced every year. Traditional textbooks were replaced every few years in pre-scheduled adoption cycles. We

wanted our kit's cost to be a one-time expense that would be perhaps less than what would have been spent on workbooks and textbooks over the years our kit was meant to last.

Old and New - Reading Program Kit - Final Version

[Chapter 13 - The Reading Program](#) describes the kit's various components. The link below leads to a 21-second YouTube video that shows the contents of an entire kit.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e37O3tJd_bo&list=FLb4k09LEJk02HnWTCDPWPEQ

The two images below show the *Dekodiphukan* book cover from the first eight kits along side the *Dekodiphukan* book cover from the published version:



The two images below show the hand-made stamp trays from the first eight kits next to the stamp trays from the published version:



A Ten-Year Study

Under Mary's supervision, preparing the Reading Program for publication began in 1976. The process was a slow one. The final prototype was not

ready to be placed into local classrooms for testing until the 1983-1984 school year. In March of 1984, after months of observing the final version in local classrooms, I wrote the Program's teacher's manual. The Program's effectiveness was now ready to be tested.

The Program's first opportunity to prove itself was to have been its use in our Learning Tree Mini-School. That opportunity disappeared in the Summer of 1973. Its second opportunity was to have been Addison-Wesley's publishing it as a follow-up to Mary's Addison-Wesley books. An Addison-Wesley salesperson who saw one of the original eight kits in use in a classroom was so impressed with the Program's potential that he told Mary she was sitting on a gold mine. That potential opportunity disappeared in the Summer of 1978 with Mary's passing.

Our plan now was to put hundreds of kits into classrooms all across the country and let teachers themselves judge the effectiveness of the Program. Mary was no longer here to lend her personal credibility to the kit's promotion. However, it was reasonable to assume that teachers who found joy in teaching children mathematics Mary's way would be willing to teach reading to their children Mary's way as well. From the Center's very beginning, we had been keeping track of the names and mailing addresses of thousands of these teachers, so this was a group we knew we could reach.

We used the royalties from our books to fund the Program's development. However, the royalties alone were not enough to pay for the kits the teachers would be using. The cost of preparing the kit's camera-ready artwork and other kit components for publication had been more than a million dollars. The Center did not have the additional funds needed to cover the cost of producing hundreds of kits for use in classrooms. To cover this expense, we would have to charge the teachers wishing to use our Reading Program the cost of the kits we would be sending them.

In the Spring and Summer of 1984, we began advertising the Reading Program's availability to teachers on our mailing list. I decided that our first production run would be five hundred kits. I then set the price for each kit at \$831.27. I had only a rough idea of what the actual cost would be. I did know, though, that it would be several hundred dollars. I set \$831.27 as the kit's price because a raggedy number like that gives the impression that it is a calculation of the actual cost of something.

The heading of this section says, "A Ten-Year Study". However, when I first set five hundred kits as our goal, there was no thought of a ten-year study. We did not even know if there would be five hundred teachers willing to pay \$831.27 for a kit of unknown materials for use in their classrooms. The chart on the following page shows the kits made and

sold in batches of 500 from 1984 through 1993

Yearly Kit Sales
September 1st-August 31st Years

\$831.27

Year	Kits		Cumulative	
	Made	Sold	Made	Sold
1984-85	500	280	500	280
1985-86		220		500
1986-87	500	293	1,000	793
1987-88		207		1,000
1988-89		2		1,002
1989-90	500	349	1,500	1,351
1990-91		194		1,545
1991-92	500	236	2,000	1,781
1992-93		267		2,048
	2,000	2,048		

It took two years to sell the first 500, and two more years to sell the next 500. The kit sales, combined with really positive feedback from that first 1,000 teachers, gave us the confidence to set our kit goal at 2,000. Two thousand kits in use all across the country would definitely determine our Program's effectiveness.

It took us nine years to place the 2,000 kits in classrooms. We used the tenth year of the study to make sure we had received reviews from every teacher who had purchased a kit at any time during the first nine years.

No Failures

I mentioned earlier in this chapter that my reason for becoming a teacher was because I wanted to change how children felt about themselves. I had not given any thought at all to curriculum. I expected to teach using the same textbook-workbook approach to learning that had been used when I was a student. I had not known that there were children in the upper grades in any school who were non-readers.

Anthony changed all of that for me. Because I had failed to teach him, my focus had become finding ways to erase that failure. Sam was the person most responsible for showing me the way. The eight kits Mary and I made in the Summer of 1973 were meant to test the effectiveness of the Reading Program in letting children like Anthony and Sam learn to read. In all the years I served as the teacher's guide as I visited the classrooms of the teachers making use of those first eight kits, there was never a child who failed to learn to read.

Although there were no failures, the number of children using the Program was relatively small. The numbers grew exponentially once the published version of the Reading Program was in use in classrooms. The [Ten-Year](#) chart in the [2048 Kits](#) section of [Chapter 12 – Don't Take Our Word For It](#) shows the growth from 7,000 children in the first year to a cumulative ten-year total of over 300,000 children, with an additional 51,200 new students added each year thereafter.

While the number of children using the program each year was a reasonable estimate based on class sizes, the number of teachers using it each year was more precise. First year 280, second year 500, third year 793, fourth year 1,000, and on and on until the final number of 2,048 was reached in year nine. We let the teachers using the Reading Program evaluate its effectiveness in any way they wished. During those first ten years, we kept track of every kit and who had provided feedback and who had not. There were no "nots". We received feedback from everyone of the 2,048 teachers. Results: No failures anywhere. The Reading Program taught every single child to read with no exceptions.

Making Special Education Obsolete

[Chapter 12 - Don't Take Our Word For It](#) contains representative samples of the more than 2,000 evaluations we received over the ten years we conducted our study of the Reading Program's effectiveness. Among other things, what the evaluations showed was that every child learned, regardless of his or her age or prior learning classification. Here are two examples:

Grades – All: "I have had tremendous success on all grade levels and with each type of handicap. I have really been thrilled to see students jump actual grade levels in written language and reading scores. The tests we have to give in Special Ed. are absolute proof that Baratta-Lorton works!"

Grades – K-4 "I've used just about every technique or trick in the book to teach reading to the mildly handicapped population. I've never seen such success, such incentive as this program generates! I conference with parents constantly and they are amazed, shocked at the progress their children make under this program. It's great fun for the children and the true 'letter readers' are now blossoming out like dandelions!"

As I indicated in the [Anthony](#) section above, my reason for becoming a teacher of educationally handicapped students in my third year of teaching was because I didn't believe separate classes for students who had learning difficulties should exist. I wanted to teach a class for students classified as educationally handicapped so that I could work on creating a curriculum that would let these children learn just as well in a

regular classroom. We had marketed the 2,048 kits for our Program to regular classroom teachers, but, of course, the kits ended up in Special Education classes, as well.

My goal had been to eliminate the need for Special Education classes whose students had been separated out because of their reading difficulties. The two evaluations above are examples of the many similar evaluations we received from Special Education teachers that showed students in all Special Education classes were now learning as well as students in regular classrooms. Since the Program that was successfully teaching them to read in their Special Education classrooms was the same Program being used to teach reading in regular classrooms, the need to place Special Education students into separate classes was now gone. All children could now learn to read in the same class, with no exception and with no grouping by ability. Every child helping every other child learn guaranteed that every child, even children classified as educationally handicapped, would learn. For any school or district using the Reading Program in every class where reading was taught, Special Education classes were now obsolete.

Kit Promotion for The Ten-Year Study

The initial focus of our promotion of the Reading Program to the eventual 2,048 teachers was its connection to *Mathematics Their Way*. Mary's mathematics curriculum had made learning mathematics for children more fun and much more meaningful. Mary's and my Reading Program would make learning to read just as fun and just as meaningful. We did not make any claims about its 100% effectiveness because, before the study began, there were too few classes that had used our first eight kits from which to make such a broad generalization.

Once the kits were in use, the chief promoters of the kits to each new generation of teachers were the teachers already using the kits themselves. At the end of year three, we compiled a list of teachers who had used the kit and were willing to share their experiences with others. Pictured on the next page is the cover of the booklet we prepared anew each spring to share with teachers considering purchasing a kit. The booklet page headings for the list of teachers willing to share their experiences were: State/City, Name, School Phone, Position, Year Purchased.

We did not ask any of the teachers on the list to tell us what they thought of the Program. They were free to say anything they wanted to the teachers who called them. What we learned over time, though, was not at all surprising. All the feedback provided to potential new users was quite positive. We could now boast of 100% effectiveness.

BARATTA-LORTON READING PROGRAM

The pages of this booklet contain the names and school phone numbers of teachers who are using the Baratta-Lorton Reading Program. These teachers have given the Center permission to share this information.

The first names listed on the first page are those of teachers in Canada. The key below is used to understand the various codes in the column labeled Position.

Numbers 1 - 9	Indicate specific grade level
A	Administrator
B	Readiness
H	Head Teacher
J	Junior
K	Kindergarten
N	Nursery
P	Pre
R	Resource/Remedial
S	Special Education
T	Transition
?	Position Unknown

If you make a long distance call to contact a teacher on the list, keep mind that the teacher might not be able to return your call as it would run up the school's phone bill. Please keep phoning until you make the contact.