

Ending Illiteracy in America The Fifth Workaround and Parent Power

Denese and the If I am Dead Folder

My brothers were concerned about how I would handle being an empty nester when Aaron and Kyle were no longer in school or playing competitive hockey. As it turned out, my nest never emptied. When Aaron and Kyle turned eighteen, their new residence became my townhouse. We lived together until they each, in turn, moved in with their eventual spouses. Even so, we were and are still in near daily contact. In addition to our time living together, they also help me run the Center. They are on the Center's Board of Directors. I'm the President, Aaron serves as Secretary, and Kyle is the Treasurer.

My father decided to retire from the company he had been working for all his married life. Rather than simply enjoy his retirement, he began working in a friend's bank trust department. Trusts can be designed to let the creators of a trust determine where their assets go upon their death and when the trust's beneficiaries have access to them. In addition to making the passing of one's assets to one's heirs as simple as possible, trusts can eliminate the need for wills and their related probate fees. The bank's role is to manage the trusts it sets up for a set fee.

Because Aaron and Kyle are not related to me biologically, my father encouraged me to create a Revocable Living Trust with the boys as my beneficiaries. That way, I could guarantee they would be my undisputed sole heirs. Once I created the Trust, I placed all the information related to it in a folder labeled "If I am Dead, etc" on my computer's desktop. I set up the Trust so that Aaron and Kyle could manage it entirely without having to pay fees to a bank or anyone else. Once the folder was created, I included all kinds of additional instructions for how to manage things when I am no longer here. Readyng my house for sale, transferring my stock holdings to their accounts, running the Center, including operating the Center's website, and so on. There are now nearly forty documents in that folder.

In 2010, one of my students from my first and second years of teaching sent me an email. (See the [Denese](#) section of [The Book of IFs Chapter 7 - My Classroom - Years One and Two.](#)) That [Denese](#) section includes our complete exchange of emails. Denese's first paragraph is below:

Hello Mr. Lorton!!!!!!

I was a student of yours many years ago when you taught at Cortez Elementary School in Richmond, CA. I am now 54 years old, and I happened to be on Amazon and saw some of your books.... and I

wondered to myself if this could possibly be the same innovative, water-polo playing teacher I had in the 5th and 6th grades. I saw your picture and I smiled. It is certainly you :)

I was quite pleased to have heard from Denese after so many years. I was even more pleased to hear how much being a student in my class had meant to her. For my Godsons' entire lives, I had been the person in charge of the Center. I wanted to share Denese's email with them to give them a feeling of what I was like during my time as a classroom teacher. Rather than share Denese's and my correspondence with them at that time, I decided that I would put it in my If I am Dead folder for them to read after my passing. That way, it could serve as something to remember me by.

Once Aaron and Kyle were no longer living with me, one of the things I began doing in my free time was creating a list of all the many IFs in my life. We all have IFs in our lives that are not apparent as we are first experiencing them. When I was kneed in the ribs while playing football in my Junior year in high school, there was no way for me to know at that time the effect that one event would have on the direction of my life. (See the [High School Junior Year](#) section of [The Book of Ifs Chapter 2 - My Path to Becoming a Teacher](#).) Whenever I thought of a new IF, I would add it to my Excel spreadsheet IF List. There were eighty-five IFs on my IF List at the time I received Denese's email.

Since Denese's and my email exchange was now in the folder, I decided to add my favorite IF stories to the folder for Aaron and Kyle to remember me by, as well. The IF stories I was writing were also not meant to be read by Aaron and Kyle until after my passing. However, in December of 2022, Anam Zaidi, one of my friends with whom I had been sharing my IF stories, asked me why I hadn't thought of publishing all of my stories in a book?" My response to her was, "But, who would want to read it? Who would be its audience?" I then answered my own question.

That is when what I now call "Workaround Number Five" occurred to me. The stories I was writing would become a Book of IFs. All of our lives are filled with IF stories, and almost all of our IF stories are fun to share with our friends. Even so, there was no obvious reason for anyone besides my friends to care about any of my IF stories. However, adding "Ending Illiteracy in America" to the book's title could reach an audience much wider than just my friends. Adding the ending of illiteracy to the book's purpose would add an audience for this book of anyone who knew anyone who was having or had experienced difficulty in learning to read. The audience would also be anyone at all, wondering if illiteracy in America really could come to an end.

When the textbook publishers had refused to make our Reading Program available, I gave up on finding a publisher and simply focused on the workarounds. Teachers were our target group, and the publishers of teaching materials were our only access to that teacher market. We were teachers teaching teachers, so all of our efforts to make people aware of the Reading Program had focused on our fellow teachers. Not once had it occurred to me to reach out to my fellow parents, as well.

Textbook publishers and their administrative allies are far more powerful than teachers in determining curriculum. It had not occurred to me before Anam asked me why I hadn't thought of publishing my stories that parents have much more potential power than teachers do. Parents might have influence over foundations, or be venture capitalists, or work for a publisher willing to go head-to-head with the textbook publishers. Parents could be all kinds of things that teachers couldn't. My fifth try at a workaround would be reaching out to parents.

At the beginning of the [Becoming a Parent](#) section, I said my fellow parents and I are the reason this book exists. I had given up trying to find a publisher for the Reading Program. I had also given up on finding any other workarounds. Then, thanks to my being a parent, IFs began to appear. IF I had not had my very special parental relationship with my Godsons, there would never have been an If I am Dead folder. IF Denese had not sent me the email that prompted our exchange, I never would have thought to add that piece of my life to the folder for Aaron and Kyle to read. My adding Denese's and my correspondence to that folder then inspired me to begin writing IF stories to add to that folder for Aaron and Kyle to read, as well. IF I had not decided to share a few of my IF stories with my friend Anam, then it would never have occurred to me to put my stories in a book.

Anam was not the only person with whom I shared my stories. She was just the only one who had read them who suggested turning them into a book. When I was thinking about who the book's audience might be, my years of interacting with my fellow parents made it clear to me who that audience could be. All the books Mary and I had written before had our fellow teachers in mind. The book I would be writing now would have my fellow parents in mind. Reaching out to my fellow parents would be workaround number five.

Parent Power

The first two years of my teaching career were spent at the same school. The school was the same, but the teaching experiences were entirely different. In [The Two Job Interviews](#) section of [The Book of IFs Chapter 5 - The Twenty-Two IFs of The Interns' Years](#), I said that as I walked into the Principal's office for my interview, the Principal stood up behind his

desk, pointed at me and said, "I want you." The Principal then asked me if I could bowl. When I answered in the affirmative, he offered me the job right then. He knew I was part of the Intern Program that selected its teacher interns specifically because we had no prior experience as teachers. Still, he did not ask me anything at all about my teaching philosophy. In my entire first year as a teacher, he only visited my class one time, and that was the visit he was required to make before he wrote his once-a-year evaluation of me as a teacher.

My First Year

Broken Windows

My introduction to the kind of school where I would be teaching was my first visit to my classroom. I had to get my room ready before my students were to arrive the following week. I did not need a key to access my classroom. All I had to do was climb through one of my room's many broken windows. For much of my first year, there were broken windows in a different class or two every Monday morning. The district replaced our broken glass windows with plastic ones. For me, the most annoying part of replacing the glass windows with unbreakable plastic was that, rather than replace the glass with plastic all at once, the district was waiting for each window to be broken before replacing it.

Fighting

Once school began, I learned that fights on the playground during recess were quite common. When a fight broke out between two students, there would be shouts of "Fight! Fight! Fight!" and everyone on the playground would stop whatever else they were doing and rush to watch the battle. When recess was over and my students returned to my classroom, I would have to calm the class down from their fight-generated excitement. I had no control over the school, but I did everything I could to separate my class from it. By the second week of school, I had my class stop going to recess with the other classes. We took our own recess breaks when the playground was empty. We also went out for our P.E. activities only when the playground was empty.

I could not control how my students interacted with other children. However, to end the fighting between my own students, my rule for my students was that if any of my students fought with a classmate, either at home or at school, I would no longer teach the fighters. School was a place for learning. If any students were not learning, that was my fault, because I was the teacher, and it was up to me to find a better way to teach them. However, fighting with a classmate destroyed the learning atmosphere. If you fought with a classmate, that told me you were not in my room to learn, and I would not teach you. In all my years of teaching after that first year, I never had any of my students fight with a classmate before, during, or after school.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

I had little contact with the parents of my students until parent-teacher conference time. At that time, the Principal told me that most of the parents of the children in our school were not that involved in their children's lives and that they might not bother showing up for their conference times. He said my responsibility was to set conference appointment times, send each parent's time home with that parent's child, and if the parent did not show up, not to bother scheduling another meeting. I had no reason to doubt the principal's words, since I already knew that our school's PTA only had three active members.

Even though I had no reason to doubt the Principal, I did not follow his advice in setting up my parent-teacher meetings. I sent home a note to all my students' parents asking them to tell me the best times for them to come to school to meet me. I added that if they preferred, they could pick a time for me to come to their home for a visit. I also said that home visits in the evenings were okay with me if their work schedules didn't allow for daytime visits. The result was that every single parent scheduled a meeting time, either at school or for a home visit. What I found after having met every child's parent was that, at least for my class's parents, every parent cared very much about how his or her child was doing. For me, the visits were quite beneficial, since each visit enhanced my understanding of each child.

Social Promotions

In [The Principal's visit](#) section of [The Book of IFs Chapter 8 - The Arithmetic Mistake](#), I said that after his one visit to my classroom, my Principle was so concerned about what my students would be like for a different teacher the next school year that he changed my teaching assignment for that next year from fifth-grade to sixth. While that was true with respect to my fifth-graders who would be in sixth-grade that next year, my next year's class was actually a fifth and sixth-grade combination.

Near the end of that school year, the Principal looked through the school records for all the boys in his school's two fifth-grade classes who had caused any discipline problems at all that year. He was looking specifically for anyone who had been held back for a school year at any time in the past. He then "socially promoted" the ten boys whose names he found to the seventh and not the sixth-grade for the next year. Two of the boys in his group of ten came from my class. They had caused problems at the start of the year when my students and I were just getting to know one another. However, they were no longer causing any problems, and I was looking forward to another year as their teacher.

Over my objection, the Principal socially promoted them to seventh-grade at the junior high school instead of letting them become sixth-graders in my class. Since there were now ten children missing from the two classes that were to become sixth-graders, the empty spaces in the other class were filled by moving all my better students to it. The empty spaces in my class were filled with fifth-graders.

School Community Workers and a New Principal

In the [Keith's Mother](#) sub-section of the [1969-1970 Special Education](#) section of [The Book of IFs Chapter 9—The Yearly History of a Change in Plans](#), I mentioned that Federal funding had provided for school-community workers in inner-city areas like mine. The workers were to serve as liaisons between parents and teachers.

During our staff's first meeting with our two newly assigned workers, they went over ways they thought school-community relations could be improved through a series of activities we teachers could undertake. Once they left the meeting, our Principal said to the staff, "We are not doing any of that!" My response inside my own head was, "Yes, we are!" I decided right then that I was going to report what my Principal had said to the District Superintendent. I announced my plan to a group of my fellow teachers. One of our school's two sixth-grade teachers said I definitely should not be the one doing the reporting. I would still be a teacher at the school next year, and reporting our Principal to the Superintendent would make that next year a little awkward. He was already scheduled to be gone. It was his sixth-grade position I had been assigned to. So, he said he would be the one doing the reporting.

What I had expected was that the Superintendent would inform the Principal that "Not doing that!" was not an option. What happened was quite different. The Principal was notified of his transfer to another school in the district for the next school year, and we were assigned a new Principal. Our new Principal was picked specifically because he was good at working with the community.

Irony

The Teacher Intern Program I was part of was in its second year. In the Program's first year, interns were picked because of their interest in working in the inner-city to help right the wrongs that were the civil rights movement's focus. The problem with that group of interns was that they were more interested in marching for justice and getting the principals of their schools fired for not being in tune with the needs of their school communities. The principals from that year were not interested in finding openings for the next group of interns. The criteria for selecting the second group of interns had participation in the civil rights movement as an unspoken disqualifier. The irony was that it was

an intern who was picked because he would not be looking to get his principal fired, who was the one responsible for the principal's losing his job at that intern's school.

My Second Year

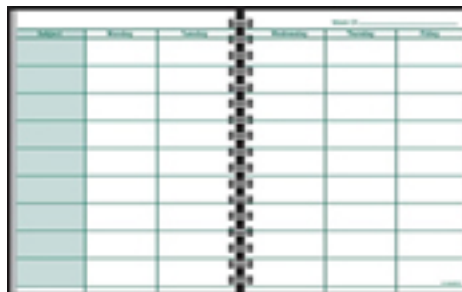
A World of Difference

There was a world of difference between my first and second years of teaching. To begin with, when I showed up at my school to get my room ready before my students were to arrive, I actually needed a key to access my classroom. None of my windows were broken. It was not just my classroom. There were no broken windows anywhere. No, it was not because all the windows were now plastic. The district's policy of only installing plastic for windows once broken meant that there were still plenty of windows for the breaking. We did not have broken windows for any classroom that entire school year.

Recess was also entirely different. There were no fights on the playground. The playground was so normal that I felt comfortable letting my class have its recesses at the same time as the rest of the school. There was also an active PTA with far more than three members. The PTA's first function was a very well-attended potluck at the school for all the parents and children.

What had prompted these, and even more changes? Our two school-community workers and our new Principal had spent the summer working on improving our school-community relationships. The three of them had been meeting with parents to listen to grievances and come up with solutions. Our new Principal was making a very big difference.

When the school year started, our Principal let it be known that he wanted to know exactly what we were teaching in each subject each day. We were all instructed to fill out our Teacher Lesson Planner books. For non-teachers who might not be familiar with them, this is what a Lesson Planner Book looks like:



The column on the left is for the subject being taught: For my sixth-grade class, I wrote Reading, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and P.E. I

left the remaining four spaces blank. The five columns on the right are for the week's five school days. There are thirty-six double pages in the book. Each set of pages is filled out in advance as the teacher makes plans for what is to be taught in each subject each day that week. What is recorded in the spaces for each subject are the lessons to be taught from each course's textbook and the lesson's page numbers. The Lesson Planners are usually kept on the teacher's desk for reference as needed.

The problem for me was that I was not using any textbooks, so I had never used a Lesson Planner. For reading the year before, my students had been working either individually or in small groups, doing a wide variety of activities. This year, I would be teaching math and science, as well. However, the math would be taught with manipulative materials, and the science would be experiment-based. I would not be using any textbooks for either subject. I had taught Black History in my first year and would continue to do so this year, as well. Once again, though, the lessons would not be coming from any textbook. There were no page numbers I could write in my Lesson Planner.

Since I was required to turn in my Lesson Planner, I simply wrote the names of my subjects in the left-hand column's boxes and then drew a straight line from each subject through all the days of the week, like this:

Subject	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Reading					

I turned in my Lesson Planner. My new Principal initialed it as acceptable and returned it to me without a single comment or a single question asked. I never had to turn it in again.

In the [Keith's Mother](#) sub-section, I mentioned above, I said that our school's school community workers had paid frequent visits to my classroom. They told me they really appreciated how much my students loved being in my room. They also liked the curriculum I was teaching and, more specifically, that my class was the only class at the school where Black History was being taught.

Apparently, over the summer months, when the workers and the Principal were working on improving school-community relations, the workers had been telling the Principal the kinds of things I was doing in my class. His acceptance of my Lesson Planner was because he already knew the lessons I was teaching could not be summarized in all those rectangles.

As I said, there was a world of difference between my first and second years of teaching. The best example of this difference is how my school

handled the major event that happened in the Spring of my second year. In Memphis, Tennessee, on Thursday afternoon, April 4th at 6:05 PM (4:05 PM in California), Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, sparking riots all across the country.

The assassination happened after our school day had ended on Thursday. There was only one Black teacher on our staff. All the rest of us were White. Even though coverage of the riots happening all across the country filled our TV screens with racial violence, every one of us showed up for school on Friday. All of us talked about the assassination with our students. My student Brenda even said to me, “One of your kind killed one of my kind.” Brenda’s statement was not said with any kind of malice. It was simply a fact of which we were both aware.

Our school day progressed as calmly as usual until just before our lunch break. That was when our playground became flooded with many junior high school students who had abandoned their own school and were now out looking to cause trouble elsewhere. These junior high kids could not yet interact with our students because our students were all still in class. All of our students went home for lunch each day because our school had no cafeteria. As we released our students at lunchtime, they headed home through their junior high school acquaintances. The junior high kids were still milling about when lunchtime was over; however, not a single one of our students returned to school that afternoon. The playground and the classrooms were completely empty.

What we learned later was that, in anticipation of any potential problems, the parents of our students had decided that if any problems or potential problems arose at school that day, every child would come straight home and stay there for the rest of the day. To make a plan like that workable, arrangements were made for who the children would stay with if their parents were at work and not available to watch over them.

I can only imagine what our school would have been like if that tragic event in Memphis had taken place the previous year, when broken windows at school and fights on the playground were common occurrences, and that year’s Principal had such a low opinion of the parents of his school’s students.

The Power of Parents

I will say again, there was a world of difference between my first and second years of teaching. Why the big difference? Both years had the same teachers, the same kinds of students, and the same parents. What changed was not who the parents were, but how they were treated. In my first year of teaching, the Principal did not simply ignore the power of parents, he denied its very existence. In my second year, the Principal

courted that power and made effective use of it. The parents themselves also used their power to protect their and our school from the effects of the Memphis tragedy.

Parents are more powerful than teachers. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, teachers loved how the Center's math curriculum allowed all their students to learn and to love mathematics. Teachers loved the learning environment they were able to establish for their children. However, when the textbook publishers managed to have the measure of students' success be their score on the publishers' tests, teachers had to abandon the ways they felt were better for their students and go back to the textbook lessons to keep their teaching positions.

Parents don't have to worry about being fired. Being a parent is a lifelong position. Parents have power, but there are not many courses offered on how to use it. In my role as a parent, I could keep Aaron and Kyle from being sent to a special education class instead of kindergarten. I could also keep the boys from being held back in the seventh-grade. And I could take them out of a terrible math class in high school and homeschool them. I was exercising my power as a parent. However, most parents are not aware of their own power. The parents of Aaron and Kyle's friend who was held back in the second-grade did not know there were other options.

What gave me my extra power as a parent was that I was also a teacher of children who had extensive knowledge about education and about teaching every child. However, it was not until Anam's suggestion that I turn Denese's letter and the IF stories I was writing for my Godsons into a book that it occurred to me that Anam's suggestion was a way for me to share what I knew about education with my fellow parents.

I, as a teacher, objected to the social promotion of my two students by my first-year Principal, but I, as a teacher, had no power to stop it. I, as a parent, had vetoed the school's decisions to send Aaron and Kyle to a special education class and to hold them back in seventh-grade because I, as a parent, had that power. I could have prevented the social promotion of my two students if I had gone to their parents and explained to them why their children should remain with me for another year, and had them veto that social promotion. As a second-year teacher, I did not think to solicit parent power. I only learned of the availability of parent power when I became a parent.

Teaching Parents

Teachers can be controlled because their jobs are on the line. Parents cannot be as easily controlled because it's their children who are on the line. The problem for parents is not a lack of power, it is a lack of

information. From the time they were children themselves, parents were taught to believe the school's assessment of a child's learning capabilities was an accurate reflection of that child's abilities. Who are parents to pass judgment on the assessments made by professional educators?

What parents need to understand is that if a child is judged to be a poor learner in school, it is because the child is being poorly taught. Children are little learning machines. A baby, knowing absolutely nothing at birth, will hear the sounds being made around it, sort out differences between these sounds, understand that some of these sounds have meanings, and that the baby itself can make these same meaningful sounds. Soon, starting from not even knowing what language is, the baby will begin talking. The baby goes from knowing nothing to learning to speak the language or languages of the people around it, with no formal schooling.

Children are born ready to learn. The baby's mind is a pattern-seeking device, automatically set up to make sense of its environment. Learning language is just one small part of all the things the newborn child will have learned before he or she enters school. Children are natural learners. However, when children enter school, natural learning comes to an end.

One purpose of this book is to teach parents that it is possible for every child in school to learn with no exceptions and without ever leaving any child behind. It is possible for children to learn to read and to write as naturally as they learned to talk, but that is not how schools are currently teaching them. All children can learn arithmetic and mathematics equally easily. What keeps this learning from taking place is not any child's capability as a learner. It is the unnatural way that learning is presented to the child that causes so many natural learners to do so poorly in a school setting. The textbooks and workbooks used in the elementary grades have nothing to do with how children learn and everything to do with how publishers choose to package education with a focus on yearly profits and not on children.

Workaround Number Five

Ending illiteracy in America is not a matter of discovering a way to do it. The way to do it has existed for the past forty years. Ending illiteracy in America is a matter of finding a way around the obstacles that keep that way from being used in schools across the country.

The mathematics program that taught every child while leaving no child behind and allowed teachers to be teachers was forced into the shadows, at least in America, by textbook publishers interested more in selling books than in teaching every child. The same publishers declined to

publish a Reading Program proven to be 100% effective, both because the Center would not agree to fit its program into a textbook-workbook format and because to publish it would give credibility to a company the publishers had worked so hard to obsolete.

To end illiteracy, we must find a way around the obstacles in its path. The first four workarounds failed to overcome the obstacles. There is a potential workaround number five. The power of parents could be that workaround.

The successful marketing of the Center's math program was described earlier in this chapter. Teachers, teaching teachers, and teachers sharing their successes with each other was so effective as a marketing method that it succeeded in cutting into the nationwide sales of textbooks. The problem with the teachers-teaching-teachers strategy was that textbook publishers and the publishers' connections to people with more power than teachers possessed made the measure of success not how well children understood mathematics, but how well they did on the textbook publishers' tests.

How can parents be a workaround? What do parents offer that teachers do not? A parent's focus is on what is best for his or her own child. The purpose of the first four [Curriculum Chapters](#) was to present to the readers of this book the mathematics and reading curricula that teach every single child while leaving no child behind. While the chapters are meant for anyone to read, parents who have a child or children who is or are struggling in school will read them differently. Parents of the many children who are struggling in school will see that their child's struggles are not their child's fault. Learning is possible for every single child when every child is allowed to learn naturally at his or her own pace, and when all the help any child needs is everywhere around.

How Might Parents Use Their Power?

How a parent's power might be used depends upon the power each individual parent has. I, as a parent, could use my knowledge as a teacher to directly affect my Godsons' lives at school. The parents of Aaron and Kyle's friend who was held back in second-grade did not feel they had the power to reverse the school's decision for their son. I, as a teacher, did not have the power to reverse the MacArthur Foundation's decision to deny our grant application a review. I, as a parent, would not have had that power either. However, a parent connected to a similar foundation might have the power to direct a foundation review of our MacArthur grant and fund the plan we set forth for ending illiteracy in America. A parent may also have a connection with some other foundation that is willing to provide funds toward ending illiteracy.

Neither I as a teacher nor I as a parent had the power to counteract the measures taken by textbook publishers to suppress the use of the Center's curricula. There may be a parent affiliated with a publishing company willing to distribute our Reading Program, or a parent with connections to a venture capitalist group willing to fund the Center's publishing of its own program or fund a start-up company as the Program's publisher. The possibilities are as endless as the number of parents who focus on what is best for their own child.

The first use of parental power would be making the Reading Program available. That would be the same first step Addison-Wesley took in making Mary's and my math books available to teachers everywhere. Step two for the math programs was teachers teaching teachers and teachers sharing with each other their successes. Step two for the Reading Program would be parent-based. If this book becomes well enough known that there are parents who cause the Reading Program to be published, then what will also be as well known by every other parent is that it is possible to end Illiteracy in America.

The [Kit Promotion for The Ten-Year Study](#) sub-section of the [Creation of the Reading Program](#) section of this chapter says that during the Center's ten-year study of the Reading Program's effectiveness, the chief promoters of the kits to each new generation of teachers were the teachers already using the kits. We compiled a list of teachers who had used the kit and who were willing to share their experiences with others. The method used to connect kit users with prospective users was providing teachers' school phone numbers. Now, thanks to the internet, every teacher who has a kit would be able to share his or her experience with anyone who might be interested. Anyone, including parents everywhere, and not just their fellow teachers.

As always, the power of teachers is limited. This time, however, parents will also be sharing with parents, and parents have much more power than teachers. The success of the 2,048 kits was shared by teachers with teachers. This time, the success of the Reading Program will be shared by parents with parents. Now, the question parents will be asking schools not using the Reading Program will be, "Why aren't you using it?" Phrased a different way, "Since illiteracy in America can be ended, why are you not ending it?" An unacceptable answer to that question would be, "Because it is not in textbook-workbook format."

The Razor and the Razor Blades

Stewart Brewster explained to me the importance of the textbook-workbook model to educational publishers like Addison-Wesley. Stewart said the textbook is like selling someone a razor. The real profit from the sale of the razor comes not from the razor, but from selling the blades for

the razor. The workbooks are the razor blades. Once a textbook series is adopted, its consumable workbooks are purchased by the schools every year thereafter until the next textbook series is adopted. That is why workbooks are such an essential part of the textbook-workbook model.

Even if there had been no Center math books eating into their textbook sales, the textbook publishers would still have declined to publish the Center's Reading Program because we would not convert it to their desired textbook-workbook format. The kit itself was a problem because it was built to last with no revisions needed in later years. Textbooks were replaced periodically with new adoptions. The kit was designed to outlast the teacher using it. The one consumable kit component was the activities sent home with children to share with their parents. However, all these homework activities were in the form of blackline masters used to make copies to send home with the children. Nothing needed to be purchased in any year after the kit's initial purchase.

Even though the kit is meant to last for years with no parts that need replacing, there are "razor blades" with more profit potential than workbooks. The Reading Program's weak spot was and is the absence of an abundance of books whose words are written in sounds. The [Books Station](#) section of [Chapter 13 - The Reading Program](#) lists the two-sound, three-sound, phrase, and transition level books that are included in the Program's kit. That section also says that once the students know all 44 sounds, they begin stamping out and illustrating their own words at the Stamping and Creative Writing Station. Eventually, the students' writings are formed into books for other students to read.

This [Books Station](#) section also says teachers add their own books to the Books Station. The 2,048 kits distributed from 1984 through 1993 contained a tiny set of stamps that teachers used to add the sounds to any of their own libraries of children's books. The 44 sound-pictures were also made into a computer font, downloadable from the Center's website, that teachers could use to type out sound-words to add to their books. Examples of teacher-made books are included in that section.

The razor blades with even more profit potential are books with the 44 sounds included above or below the books' traditional letters. At the time my classroom burned to the ground (see the sub-section [The February Fire](#) in the [1971-1972](#) section of [The Book of IFs Chapter 9 - The Yearly History of a Change in Plans](#)), I had over 600 Scholastic Arrow books in my classroom library. There are other companies that publish a wide selection of inexpensive paper-back books for children at all levels. Scholastic was the one my students and I used.

If a company like Scholastic made its books for the pre-school and primary grades available in sounds and letters, the potential market for such books would be every teacher using the Reading Program and all the parents of the children using the Program. A teacher would only purchase a finite number of books for use in his or her own classroom. However, every year would produce a whole new group of parents ready to purchase books for their own children. Imagine the benefit of having books at home that five- and six-year-olds could read to themselves and to their younger siblings. This could turn those younger siblings into readers even before they enter kindergarten.

Will Illiteracy in America Come to an End?

Whether illiteracy in America finally comes to an end is something that parents themselves have the power to decide. IF this book's fifth workaround achieves its purpose, then the answer to the question asked above will be YES!