

Credibility

Bob Lorton was a would-be age-group swimming coach whose reason for becoming a fifth-grade teacher was to occupy his time and earn a little money while his young swimmers were in school. Mary Baratta was an almost librarian who happened to be at home the day a supervisor from the teacher training program that had already rejected her, called looking for anyone who could fill a suddenly vacant trainee spot.

Two teachers picked to participate in an inner-city teacher training program that had no prior educational training as its prerequisite. These two were encouraged to abandon all the teaching materials currently in use and simply start from scratch. Together, they created a kindergarten through sixth-grade elementary school curriculum in both reading and mathematics that spread to every single state and to many other countries around the world.

Mary and Bob's unique curriculum teaches EVERY child without exception while leaving NO child behind. Their curriculum is equally successful in teaching math and reading. In our society, reading success is much more valued than success in math. In America, it is perfectly acceptable for an adult to say, "I'm terrible at math!" while an illiterate person does not think to boast about not being able to read.

A program that teaches every child without exception while leaving no child behind is, of course, highly beneficial in math, but mathematical illiteracy is not at a crisis level in our society. On the other hand, a program that teaches every child to read and to write with no exception while leaving no child behind has the potential to eradicate illiteracy in America. Truly ending illiteracy in America is one of the many things this book is about.

The Ten No's

The start-from-scratch curricula that Bob and Mary created for reading and math have The Ten No's at their core.

Nine No's

No textbooks

No workbooks

No worksheets

No homework

No grades or scores

No tests

No teacher-provided answers to problems

No student grouping by ability

No raising hands to answer teacher questions

Everyone in class answers on individual chalkboards instead.

Tenth No

No child left behind

Guiding Philosophy

None of us is as smart as all of us. With 30 children in a class, each child has 30 teachers - the classroom teacher and the other 29 children.

Credibility

Does a curriculum based on these Ten No's actually achieve results in the real world? In the 1971-1972 school year, an inner-city school principal accidentally tested the mathematics component of this curriculum in his school's four fifth-grade classes. "Accidentally" because testing the Ten No's was not his purpose.

The story of this testing is told in [The Accidental Testing of the Ten No's](#) sub-section in the [1971-1972](#) section of [Chapter 9](#). The test results for the four fifth-grade classes are posted here:

	Number of Students			Bob's Top 7 on Pre-Test	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Missing	Pre-Test	Post-Test
T***	27	17	10	4.0	6.1
Bob	29	27	2	4.0	6.3
K*****	31	19	12	4.0	5.7
B***	30	14	16	4.3	7.2
	117	77	40	4.4	6.0
				5.0	6.2
Bob %	25%	35%		5.1	6.5

	October	April	7 Months	Bob's 27 all gained a year or better	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain	Greatest gains by bottom students	
T***	3.6	4.9	1.3	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Bob	3.5	5.7	2.2		
K*****	3.6	4.7	1.1	2.9	4.5
B****	3.4	4.5	1.1	3.2	5.2

Bob's fifth-grade class went from an average pre-test score of third-grade fifth month to a post-test average of fifth-grade seventh month. No textbooks or workbooks were used, no grades were given, no homework was assigned, and all the other Ten No's were in full effect. In this inner-city school, where a high student turnover rate was the norm, the other three fifth-grade classes lost ten, twelve, and sixteen students, respectively, from the pre-test to the post-test. Bob lost just two students that year.

About Reading

In 1975, Bob and Mary co-founded the non-profit Center for Innovation in Education (www.center.edu) to provide training and support for teachers wishing to implement Mary and Bob's mathematics curriculum in their classrooms.

In the 1984-1985 school year, the Center began a ten-year study of the effectiveness of Bob and Mary's Reading Program. Details of the study, including teacher reviews of the Program, are provided in the [2048 Kits](#) section of [Curriculum Chapter 12 - Don't Take our Word for It](#). Over that ten-year period, the Center distributed 2,048 Reading Program kits to teachers across the United States and Canada. The kit was non-consumable and highly durable, with replacement parts available as free downloads from the Center's website. More than 300,000 children were involved in the Center's ten-year study.

Teachers using the kits were asked to evaluate the Program's effectiveness using any measure their school or district selected and report their results to the Center. During those ten years, and to this day, there has never been a report of any child failing to learn to read or write using the Center's Program, regardless of any child's supposed reading readiness. Every child learned. No child was ever left behind.

Because the kits were and are so durable, the 2,048 kits from the study have been passed from teacher to teacher as teachers have retired. The Center has often served as the go-between for kit relocation, with kits being sent to the Center to be passed on to the next teacher. Redistributed kits have found new homes in places as far away as India.

You Might Wonder

You might wonder why no more kits were made after that first 2,048. Wouldn't any textbook publisher want to make a reading program that teaches every child available to everyone? That "why" and what can be done about it is one of the reasons for this book. That same "why" is also the reason why Mary and Bob's math workshops, after reaching a peak of over 700 week-long sessions conducted in all fifty states, with more than 21,000 teachers in attendance, are now so rarely offered to teachers in the USA. And why the teacher's guide for implementing the math curriculum became the first anti-textbook adopted as a textbook by the State of California and ended up out of print.

Ending illiteracy in America is already possible, so why hasn't it happened? *The Book of IFs* is the story of the many IFs in the lives of two teachers that led them to create their reading and math curricula. Each IF, in its turn, is a building block in their story. The IFs in all our lives are not apparent to us as they are happening. When Bob was kneed in

the ribs during football practice his Junior year in high school, he had no way of knowing that one IF would be the first of the many IFs to follow that would mark the path of his becoming a teacher.

The companion *Curriculum* volume describes the two curricula, gives the specific reasons why illiteracy in America has not ended yet, and offers a plan for how it might be ended now.

Current Reading Credibility

Included below is a recent email exchange between Bob Baratta-Lorton and a retiring teacher wishing to find a new home for the Reading Program kit she has been using since 1989.

Note: The name given to the Center's Reading Program by the Center is the Baratta-Lorton Reading Program. The name given to the Program by the many teachers using it is the intentionally hard to read name of the book that introduces the Program to children - *Dekodiphukan*.

From: Donna J.

Subject: Baratta-Lorton Reading Program

Date: April 15, 2023

To: reading@center.edu

Hi,

I am a retired teacher and I have used the Baratta-Lorton Reading Program for many years. I still have all the materials and would like to pass them on to someone else to use. Do you have any suggestions as to how I can find someone?

Thank you,

Donna J.

To: Donna J.

Subject: Baratta-Lorton Reading Program

Date: April 18, 2023

Donna,

Send your kit to me. I will find a new home for it. Box it up and ship it to the address below. On the day you ship it, email me the cost of shipping. I will on that same day either Zelle or Venmo you the full cost of shipping. Or, if you prefer, I will mail you a check.

Kit mailing address:
Bob Baratta-Lorton
xxxxxx-xxxxx-xxxxx
Saratoga, CA 95070

I am curious. What did you think of the kit? And, how long have you had it?

Bob Baratta-Lorton

From: Donna J.
Subject: Baratta-Lorton Reading Program
Date: April 19, 2023
To: Bob Baratta-Lorton

That sounds good to me. I don't have Zelle or Venmo. A check will be fine. To answer your question, I believe I acquired the kit in 1989.

We had been using Mathematics A Way of Thinking, and Math Their Way in our district. I heard about Dekodiphukan. Went down to Utah to see it in action. Loved the concept of it.

I was teaching third-grade at the time, so I put in a transfer to teach first-grade just so I could use it. My transfer got delayed a year, so I decided to let my third-graders use it. I tested all my students before and after. It was amazing how many holes filled in for my students. They all became better readers. The most amazing thing that happened was how much more confident my students became. Parents were telling me that for the first time their son or daughter was in the same reading group as the top readers.

Taught first-grade for seven years after that. It was the most amazing reading program I had ever used. They never pulled my Special Education students out of my room, and every year more of them were placed into my room. I was the only teacher using the program in our district. My students were thriving, parents would often tell me that their student just all of a sudden could read.

I had one seasoned teacher that taught first-grade in my building that was skeptical. I remember when we put our children together in one

room and we all just took turns reading books. She was impressed. She said my students would pick up any book and read, where her students wanted to know what book they were supposed to read next.

In 1996, I took my husband's job as Media Director at another school when he retired. I was over-seeing the Library and Computer Labs. At that time, all certified staff were to help teach reading in the mornings. I teamed up with a Special Education teacher and we took all of the "at risk" first-graders. We used Dekodiphukan. It was awesome!

Later we used the program with a large group of ESL students in an after-school program. It is the best reading program ever! I did have a couple of experiences where I was attacked for doing something different from everyone else, but luckily the students tested so well that they couldn't stop us from using it.

Back then we were able to do things that benefited our students. Lately our district wants lock-step, everyone does the same thing, same page and say the same thing. If students don't get it in the time allotted, move on. So sad.

I thought I had a home for the program. One of my former students looked me up. She told me that later in life she was diagnosed with a rare kind of dyslexia. She was asked by the people who diagnosed her how she was able to learn to read. She told them about the program her first-grade teacher used. They told her that she was lucky, because she probably would have struggled her whole life otherwise.

She was going to use it with preschool kids, but ended up getting a different job with our school district.

As you can see, I could write a book about how much I love your reading program. It is important to me to have someone else have those same wonderful experiences with children.

Thank you,

Donna

The IFs

One of the goals of this book is to end illiteracy in America. However, ending illiteracy would be its full title if that were its only purpose. This book is also about the IFs that determined the directions of two teachers' lives. The IFs that made them teachers and then decided what kind of teachers they would become.

Mary Baratta-Lorton

This book is filled with the stories of two teachers—some long, some short. The nine *Book of IFs* chapters recount the many IFs in both of their lives that led a would-be age-group swimming coach and an almost librarian to become teachers who created new ways to teach every child everywhere.

While the chapters tell both Bob's and Mary's stories, Bob is the only storyteller. Mary is no longer with us.

The Tribute to Mary Baratta-Lorton that Bob wrote for and about Mary after her passing was a sixteen-page newsletter sent in the Fall of 1978 to teachers who were subscribers to Mary's quarterly *Mathematics Their Way Newsletter*. The Tribute was then included at the beginning of the Center's *Mathematics Their Way Summary Newsletter*, which compiled the newsletters into one book.

You may choose to read that tribute now, or you can wait, as you learn even more about Mary than what Bob's tribute contains as you pick and choose which of Bob's and Mary's stories to read in the pages that follow.

One Last Note

Every book authored by Mary or Bob Baratta-Lorton mentioned in this book, including the *Summary Newsletter*, is available in downloadable PDF format free of charge through the Center's website: www.center.edu. Clicking on any book's cover on the Home page will take you to that book's pdf download.

And now for Two Teachers' Stories