Ending Illiteracy in America
Overcoming Obstacles - Three Workarounds

The First Two Workarounds

At the beginning of this chapter I said that it really is possible to end illiteracy in America. However, before illiteracy can be ended, the "whys" that have stood in the way of the Reading Program's universal distribution must be overcome. Overcoming the last of these obstacles is the reason for this book

The reasons why not a single textbook publisher cared that there existed a program that would end illiteracy in America were provided beginning with the Rejection by The Textbook Publishers sub-section of the Acceptance and Rejection section of this chapter. However, the publishers not caring was no reason for the Center to hide its Reading Program away. There were still the 2,048 teachers who knew of the Program's success and so did all their many teacher friends.

The Center was definitely not a publisher. We had only managed to produce kits at the rate of 500 every two years. Since no publisher would publish it and we did not have a publisher's capability of mass producing kits, we simply decided to make the Reading Program available as a free download from our website. Two scanners running side-by side for several months was all it took to make our Reading Program available to anyone with a computer, a printer and a lot of making-time on his or her hands.

Clicking on the Dekodiphukan book cover on the Center's Home page leads to the Reading Program's page. Clicking on the Classroom Kit Download link in The Classroom Program box leads to the kit download page. The *Dekodiphukan* book's pages can be downloaded from the download page. A complete pdf copy of the book can also be downloaded by clicking on the tiny *Dekodiphukan* book cover to the left of the Center for Innovation in Education, Inc. logo on the Home page Clicking on the Dekodiphukan Font Download link in the iPad box leads to the instructions for making the sound-stamps and for adding the 44 sound images as a font to anyone's computer. There is also a Reading Program Video Presentation link to a video made to a group of Center instructors when the first of the 2,048 kits were being placed in classrooms.

We added the Reading Program download page to the Center's website once it was clear that we were not going to find a publisher for it. Since the download was free for anyone to use without asking, we had no way of knowing how many people were actually downloading the kit. No one who may have downloaded it ever emailed the Center with questions about its use. However, none of the 2,048 teacher in our ten-year study

had ever asked the Center any questions either. The teacher in India assigned to use the Reading Program kit I took with me on one of my visits, read the entire teacher's manual during the days I was there. All she said to me was that she enjoyed reading it. She did not ask me a single question about using the Program. So, not being asked any questions was not a measure of whether anyone was downloading it.

It was not until May of 2021 that we received our first measure of the extent of the downloads. Below is an example of the emails we began receiving that May. Note: ELL stands for English Language Learners. In California it would be ESL – English as a Second Language.

From: Monisha Mxxxxx <Mxxxxx@xxxxxx.com>
Subject: Dekodiphukan
Date: May 10, 2021
To: reading@center.edu

Hello!

I am a third grade teacher in Alabama. When I taught kindergarten years ago, our system used Dekodiphukan. My daughter learned to read using the program and I am convinced that it (the program) could be beneficial to students, especially ELL students who could connect with the pictures.

I have found this a website (center.edu) and tried to download the components to use with students but I keeping getting a system error code. I know there is an iPad component but I love when the students spread out on their own and manually put the picture packets together, write on the worksheets, etc. Is there another link that I could use to download the components? Or could I purchase the components? Thank you in advance for your assistance!

Best,
Monisha

My boiler plate response to the many emails we began receiving.

From: Bob Baratta-Lorton <reading@center.edu>
Subject: Re: Dekodiphukan
Date: May 11, 2021
To: Monisha Mxxxxx <Mxxxxx@xxxxxx.com>

Monisha,

The Reading Program downloads are run by a software known as PHP. Recently the PHP software stopped working, much to my great frustration. The remainder of the Center's website uses HTTP software, which I am quite comfortable programming. Coding in PHP is not yet something I can do. I have now contacted a PHP programmer who can get the downloads working again.

In the meantime, if your goal is to create a classroom version of the program, then while you are waiting for the downloads to be fixed, I can simply send you every component via email. Tell me what you need and I will send it to you in as many emails as it takes.

I have been sending out the components to everyone in your same situation. For a person who requested the entire program at one go, it took ten separate emails, since most email servers have size limits for messages.

Bob Baratta-Lorton
reading@center.edu

On May 11, 2021, Monisha Mxxxxx wrote:

Thank you so much for your response! I would like the entire program if possible and at your convenience. It doesn't matter how many emails it takes. I can download and go from there.

I must tell you that I began using Dekodiphukan when I began working as a K teacher 19 years ago. I taught my daughter that year and she learned it as I did. She is now a law school student. I am still working as a teacher and I will be branching out to tutor struggling readers and younger ELL students so they don't fall behind. I will share some of the results with you in the future!

Thank you again. You and your work are much appreciated!

Best,
Monisha

The malfunction in the PHP coding of the Center's Reading Program download page showed us something of which we had been completely unaware. The first of our two workarounds had been working and was still working quite well in the year 2021, a full twenty-seven years after the textbook publishers had rejected our Program.

Monisha's email also showed us that our second workaround was still working. The second workaround was to keep the kits already in

existence generally available. This workaround took advantage of the fact that the 2,048 kits in the study were built to last. Because the kits were so durable, teachers who were no longer using their kits because of grade level changes, or retirement, or for any other reason could pass them onto other teachers. Teachers who were no longer using their kits either returned them to the Center for redistribution or simply passed their kits on to teachers in their own communities.

Monisha said she started using her kit nineteen years ago. That meant she received her kit in 2002. The Fall of 1992 was when the last of the Center's 2,048 kits were placed in classrooms. Monisha's kit had been in someone else's possession from ten to eighteen years before it was passed on to her. A testament to the kit's durability, and proof that workaround number-two was working.

A further testament to the kit's durability is in the Credibility section of the Book of IFs. Donna J's letter, written in April of 2023, said that she acquired her kit in 1989. The thirty-four year old kit that she sent to the Center for redistribution was still in excellent condition and ready for the next teacher to use.

A footnote to the first workaround. In 2023, Naomi R. from Chicago sent us her kit for redistribution. However, her kit was not one of the original 2,048. Naomi had assembled her kit entirely from the Center website's downloadable components. The included stamp set had been made by following the website's stamp-making instructions. Naomi's kit was built to last just like the original 2,048 had been. Naomi's kit has now found its new home.

Workaround Number Three – The 14 iPad Apps
In Monisha's first email she said: "I know there is an iPad component but I love when the students spread out on their own and manually put the picture packets together, write on the worksheets, etc." The iPad component is workaround number three.

On January 27, 2010, Apple introduced its soon to be released iPad. The iPad was described as a touch screen tablet computer. When I saw the iPad demonstrated, I felt that its touch screen could be used to make the Center's Reading Program available to anyone who wished to use it, parents and teachers alike. As soon as the first iPads were available that April, I purchased one and confirmed for myself that the touch screen could be used to turn the Reading Program into apps for the iPad.

I had frequently taken computer-related classes at West Valley Community College, which was just a mile and a half from my home. My courses had included Dreamweaver, Photoshop, PowerPoint, PageMaker

and its replacement InDesign. All of those classes related directly to the work I was doing for the Center. Classes can also be taken just for the fun of it. In the Fall of 2001, I took a class that I had no use for at all at work. That class was for learning how to write computer programs using the Java programming language. It turned out that I ended up having a use for that class after all. While the iPad's programming language was Objective-C, Java was quite close to C in both format and style. My Java class training let me be as comfortable programming with Objective-C as I had been with Java.

Once I had my iPad, I began purchasing books on iPad programming. My requirement for each book was that it came with access to downloadable examples of working code. As one of many such examples, I downloaded the code for a blank page on which any person's finger could be used to draw lines of varied widths and colors. My Java class had taught me enough about coding, that I didn't even need to know Objective-C to be able to chance this page's C coding to make only one line-width possible and just one color. I then used this one blank page to create all the pages in the Writing Worksheets app where students use their Decoding Charts to write letters for the sounds.

The fact that I had already taken a class on programming was now combined with the fact that, years before I had already scanned the entire Reading Program into my computer to make its components downloadable from the Center's website. This meant that the hundreds of images needed for the app-creation were already available. All I needed was a little programming help, which was conveniently available that Fall through a West Valley College's iPad Programming class.

By February of 2012, I had completed converting the Center's Reading Program into 14 iPad apps. All 14 apps were then made available for free through the Apple App Store using the search word "dekodiphukan". The apps were and are truly free, with no advertising for any other product showing up at any time.

From 2012 to 2016, more than ninety-nine thousand of the Center's apps were downloaded worldwide. All the apps remained usable through every iPad operating system upgrade through iOS-10. Then in 2017, Apple introduced iOS-11 and every person who upgraded their iPad from iOS-10 to iOS-11 lost every one of the 14 apps with no way to get them back.

It took me two more years to remake the 14 apps to work with iOS-11 and beyond. In December of 2019, all 14 revised and still free apps were reintroduced to the Apple App Store. However, since the more than ninety-nine thousand iOS-10 apps had been completely erased from

their iPads, there was no way to let all the past users know the Dekodiphukan apps were again available.

In 2023, as the number of app users was slowly but surely increasing, Apple sent the Center the note below for an increasing number of the 14 apps:

From: App Store Connect
Subject: Your app, (Name of App), has been removed from the App Store.
Date: March 16, 2023
To: reading@center.edu

Hello,

On September 1, 2016, we announced that we're implementing an ongoing process of evaluating and removing apps from the App Store that no longer function as intended, don't follow current review guidelines, or are outdated.

You were asked to submit an updated version of your app, (Name of App), for review within 30 days. We noticed that either you did not submit an updated version of your app or the updated version of your app was not approved. As a result, your app has been removed from the App Store.

Best regards, The App Store Team

The year 2016 was the year we were notified of the pending changes that iOS-11 would bring with it. The year 2017 was the year all 14 apps disappeared from the App Store. December of 2019 was when all apps were resubmitted and reapproved for listing in the Apple App Store. From 2019 through the current time, with one exception, every app has continued to operate perfectly through every new iOS upgrade. That one exception is the *Dekodiphukan* app. Under the current iOS, its fourteen double pages (two pages on the same screen) do not rotate to the wide screen mode correctly.

The 2023 notices I received came as I was writing this book. When this book's writing is completed, I will once again devote my time to making all 14 apps fully and freely available through the Apple App Store.

The Failed Workaround - A Lesson Learned
In 2016, the MacArthur Foundation announced a competition for a $100 million grant to fund a single proposal that promised real and measurable progress in solving a critical problem of our time. This

competition was called 100&Change. The Center saw this competition as its potential fourth workaround. The submission deadline was October 3, 2016. On June 3rd, we registered for the competition.

The Application was an interesting one. There were twenty-one different pieces of information that required written discriptions. Each description had a word-count limit imposed. The form itself was completed online and automatically rejected answers that exceded its word count. There were also documents to upload and a ninty-second video to create and add via a YouTube link. The Center application's Excecutive Summart is included below.

Executive Summary (150 words)
Provide a brief summary of the problem and the solution you are proposing. A single paragraph, delivering a compelling overview so that the Evaluation Panel will want to read more. The paragraph should not require any other context to explain clearly the problem and the proposed solution.

The Problem: Illiteracy in America. According to a study conducted in 2014 by the U.S. Department of Education, 32 million adults in the United States cannot read. That is nearly 15% of our population. One in four children in America grow up without learning how to read. According to the Department of Justice, "The link between academic failure and delinquency, violence, and crime is welded to reading failure." Nearly 85% of the juveniles who face trial in the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate. **Our Proposed Solution:** Provide at no cost to every kindergarten and first grade classroom in America a reading and writing program with a 30 year proven track record of teaching every child in every classroom to read and to write. Every child means EVERY child, including educationally disadvantaged, ESL, autistic, dyslexic and special needs students. We propose to end illiteracy in America. **(146 words)**

Acceptance
Our application was accepted on October 3rd:

Thank you for your submission; it will now move into the Administrative Review process. If your application is considered invalid, you will receive a message by end of November letting you know.

All valid submissions will be reviewed by our evaluation panel judges and after the review process is completed, you will receive your comments and scores. We expect to announce the Semi-Finalists in mid-December.

View the Judges (with a link provided to the list)

And Rejection
Our application was rejected on December 6th before even one judge was allowed to see it.

The stated reason: You have not provided rigorous evidence that your solution will address the problem that you've identified. We expected to see one or more of the following types of evidence cited in your application: data or findings from external evaluation of a pilot project or experimental study, citations to peer-reviewed research indicating a strong scientific consensus, a strong logic model, and documentation of a detailed pathway from the proposed actions to specific outcomes.

My response:
Cecilia,

I appreciate your providing me with more detailed information on why the Center's application was rejected before even one judge was allowed to review it. I am responding to your message, not to appeal your decision, since no appeals are allowed, but to suggest to you and the MacArthur Foundation that, among other things, your concept of "rigorous evidence" is too narrow.

Rigorous Evidence:

In 1976, the Center published through Addison-Wesley a non-textbook curriculum for the teaching of mathematics to primary grade children in a book titled "Mathematics Their Way". By "non-textbook" I mean that the curriculum presented used neither student textbooks nor student workbooks. The only persons making use of any books at all were the teachers themselves using the curriculum outlined in the Math Their Way book.

Even though Addison-Wesley was a textbook publisher, the company published our anti-textbook for two reasons. First reason: Our first book "Workjobs" had sold 100,000 copies into a teacher market where Addison-Wesley said the sale of 15,000 copies constituted a best seller. The sales of this first 100,000 took place before Addison-Wesley had even advertised the book's existence. Second reason: Even though our book had the potential of moving teachers away from textbooks and Addison-Wesley was a textbook publisher, our publisher said "You would have to bomb teachers to get them to stop using textbooks."

Our goal was, obviously, to replace textbooks and workbooks with a child-centered curriculum based on teaching for understanding. To do this, we would have to demonstrate the effectiveness of our approach as compared to that of the textbook publishers.

Our research on the effectiveness of our approach would be based on the teacher as the researcher and the classroom students as the research subjects. Since every state and many districts within each state have their own separate standards for what is to be taught, we would let each teacher-researcher set his or her own standard for determining the success of our curriculum.

Teachers using our program would communicate directly with us - a prepaid postcard was included in each copy of Mathematics Their Way. Teachers would also communicate with one another on the successes or failures of our curriculum. While our research may not fit the traditional mold of what constitutes "rigorous research," our opinion is that the very best judge of the effectiveness of a curriculum is the classroom teacher.

We knew from personal experience that, while the book presented a curriculum, not all teachers would feel comfortable discontinuing use of their textbooks with only a single book as a guide. So, to support teachers who wished assistance in implementing our curriculum, we offered week long workshops with the option of follow-up classes. We currently have a database of over 300,000 teachers who asked for our assistance in either workshop sessions or in obtaining manipulative materials for use in their classrooms.

Our "research" may not seem acceptable to the MacArthur Foundation, but it was acceptable to the teaching nation as a whole. When touring nationally to promote the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) 1989 Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics (Standards), an NCTM board member said to each of his audiences, "If you want to see how best to implement the Standards in a primary classroom, look at Math Their Way. For the NCTM our "research" was deemed quite good enough.

In the 1980's the State of California adopted Mathematics Their Way for use statewide as a primary grade textbook, making Math Their Way the first non-textbook ever accepted for State adoption. So our "research" was good enough for the State of California.

The magazine of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) printed an article by a teacher-professor who had traveled the word looking for the best elementary school math curriculum. (A nice way to write off the expenses of world travel.) She reported finding it in Australia, which she said was odd because it was from California. It was our Math Their Way curriculum. Nice recognition for a curriculum the MacArthur Foundation would not have considered due to the absence of "rigorous research".

The book is known and used world-wide, with teachers in Chile even translating it into Spanish (with Center permission) for use throughout Latin America. Yet, again, the MacArthur Foundation definition of rigorous research would not have allowed this curriculum any consideration.

Pilot Program:

You say we offered no date or finding from external evaluation of a pilot program. This is true only under the confines of your very narrow definition of what constitutes "rigorous evidence." Our pilot program of 2,048 kits in 2,048 classrooms used the same teacher as researcher/classroom students as research subjects model as we used for Mathematics Their Way. The same standard for determining the success or failure of the program was used here as well.

2,048 kits distributed over ten years equals 2,048 teacher-researchers. Assuming an average class size of 25, that is 308,700 test subjects over that ten year period. Over the thirty-year life of the kits, several thousand teachers have taught an additional several hundred thousand students. Every one of the original 2,048 teachers and many of the teachers who inherited their kits, communicated with the Center their successes in using the kit. I would say they communicated their failures, as well, but of all the thousands of teachers using the program, with all the hundreds of thousands of students, there were absolutely no failures.

What is your definition of "data or finding from external evaluation of a pilot program"? None of these 2,048 teacher-researchers were employed by the Center. All were allowed to determine their own measures of the program's successes and failures. We received literally thousands of external evaluations, samples of which were included as part of our application. Why does your definition exclude this data?

Our program is more widely and thoroughly tested over a greater length of time than perhaps any other program submitted to the MacArthur Foundation. Our research methods for the Reading Program are the same ones we employed for Mathematics Their Way curriculum. The NCTM, the State of California, and schools and school districts all over the country and all over the word have found our research methods quite acceptable. As I said at the start, this email is not an appeal for the MacArthur Foundation to change its decision. It is a request that the Foundation broaden its too narrow definition of what constitutes acceptable proof of a problem's solution.

The Judging:

We never expected to win the $100,000,000.00 grant, because the MacArthur Board will make the final decision and no standards for the basis of that decision was ever or will ever be posted. So, in essence, it does not make any difference how well we present our case, because the decision will be whatever the Board decides it wants, regardless.

We did, however, expect to be judged by a panel of five, on the criteria included as part of the application. We did not expect that MacArthur Foundation staff would decide on its own whether we met the judging criteria without even letting a single judge see our application.

You discarded our application because we did not meet your narrow definition of "rigorous evidence" yet the evidence we offered was equivalent to what was accepted by the NCTM, the State of California, and countless school districts across the country. Do you think every judge shares your same narrow view of evidence? I think not. But we will never know, because you assumed the role of judge.

You discarded our application because we did not meet your narrow definition of "findings from external evaluation of a pilot project" You did this despite the fact that our pilot project involved thousands of teachers as researchers and hundreds of thousands of classroom students and research subjects, and all of our evaluations conducted by our teacher peers. Do you think every judge shares your same narrow view? I think not. But we will never know, because you assumed the role of judge.

The MacArthur Foundation discarded our application for reasons that I had thought would be left up to the judges themselves to decide. Obviously, that is not the case. So, in essence, in order to reduce the number of applications for which you must assign judges, you have thrown the proverbial baby out with the bath water.

You say, "We plan to include the executive summary of your proposal in materials that we anticipate sharing with other funders, in the hope that you may find support for your work in the future." Realistically, though, who is going to look through more than 1,800 executive summaries from the 1,800 different applications received by 100&Change for funding ideas? Our hope was to reach the judging level, for it is only that group of applications that will form the basis for another funding group's potential interest.

There will be another round of 100&Change in three years. Regardless of how much we would like to have used the 100&Change process to help us find funding for ending illiteracy in America, there would never be a

way for us to re-apply as long as your standards for denying access to the judging process denigrates the viability of teachers as researchers and students as the group researched.

Bob Baratta-Lorton

The Lesson Learned
For the next 100&Change competition, the rules for who could submit an application had been changed and the Center found that it was no longer even eligible to apply.

I had learned why no textbook publishers had a interest in ending illiteracy in America. The failed fourth try at a workaround gave me reason to believe that seeking funding from any other foundation would produce the same result as we had experienced with the MacArthur Foundation. The three workarounds we already had in place were the best we could do for now.