

Twenty IFs - The Yearly History of a Change in Plans 1970-1971 - Two Teachers of Teachers and No New IFs

From Kindergarten to First Grade

Since there were no kindergarten openings at the school, Mary's Mayfair hiring moved her from teaching kindergarten to teaching first grade. For me, with his consent, Richard was switched from his fifth grade teaching position to second grade and I took over his fifth grade teaching spot.

Eddie Number 1

About a month after the start of our first year of teaching at Mayfair, Mary and I learned that in advance of our arrival, Jerry had told his staff he had hired "two teachers of teachers" (Mary and me). This had caused almost all of the teaching staff to resent us. I made matters even worse on the first day of school with a student named Eddie.

When I asked Eddie to read into a tape-recorder, he simply ran out of the classroom and disappeared for the rest of the day. When class was out, I went to Jerry and basically said "What's up with Eddie?" Jerry immediately convened an "Eddie" meeting with Jerry, me, Eddie's previous year's teacher, the Vice Principal, the School Counselor and the Reading Resource Teacher.

Jerry started by explaining the rather elaborate plan the five of them had worked out for Eddie the previous year, involving clipboards and being sent to various classrooms as a pretend-helper. My response to their plan was an emphatic "No!" I said, "Isn't the point of that plan to get Eddie to stay in the classroom?" Answer, "Yes." Then I said, "Let's start there. If he runs out of my class, I will notify the office to find him and bring him back. If he runs out a second time, send him home."

My plan was not a suggestion for consideration. I wasn't asking for anyone else's opinion. I had simply stated what I wanted done. The plan I imposed was implemented. Eddie ran out one more time, was returned to my class, and he never ran out again.

The people at the meeting who were anxiously waiting for Eddie to show me how wrong my plan was, now had to deal with the reality of the situation. They had wasted a year trying to change Eddie's behavior when a day was all it took. And, I had made four enemies. Four, not five, because Jerry was on the winning side regardless. If Eddie was still a runner, then the plan he originally agreed to was fine. If Eddie stopped running away, then he looked good for having asked the Superintendent to grant a waiver get this special teacher (me) at his school.

The person most upset over what happened with Eddie was the School Counselor. As it turned out, nearly every class at Mayfair had a row of clipboards at the front of the room, for use in routing problem children like Eddie around various classes to keep them occupied. I had just destroyed her whole process of behavior modification. As a result, she decided to NEVER visit my classroom and not to speak to me at all.

From my very first day of teaching in my own classroom, I had viewed effectively managing student behavior as an essential first step in creating an environment where every student is able to learn. Richard (who at this point was, besides Mary, my only friend on the teaching staff) felt quite comfortable asking me for classroom management suggestions as needed. Richard was also a good friend of the School Counselor and tried without success to get her to pay my room a visit.

Eddie Number 2

Then “NEVER” had an end. The School Counselor and Jerry had a fourth grade student also named Eddie who they were about to expel from school. Expel, as in expel, not suspend. He had already been suspended several times. They were now going to kick this Eddie out of school for the remainder of the year. Then the School Counselor told Jerry she had a better idea. They would socially promote Eddie instead.

Since Eddie had already been held back, he was old enough to be moved up a year and rejoin his fifth grade peers. What Eddie needed was a male influence, which meant he would be perfect for my fifth grade class and not one of the other three fifth grades at the school. I think the Counselor’s purpose was either to have me need her help with this new Eddie, or for me to end up requesting his expulsion having failed to control his behavior.

So, in the middle of the school year, the School Counselor sent another Eddie to my class. And that was the end of Eddie as a problem at the school. Eddie even said to the Counselor when he saw her in the school’s office while he was delivering something for me, “You don’t see me here much any more, do you?”

Because Eddie number-two had stopped being a problem, the School Counselor finally paid a visit to my classroom. She later told Richard that she was surprised to see how many of last year’s problem children had ended up in my room. Since none of them had been referred to her this year, she had just assumed they had gone to other schools. All these problem children were now sitting happily in my class.

I later learned that Jerry’s knowing I had successfully taught an EH class in East Palo Alto was the motivating factor in his hiring me and the

justification he used for quite deliberately loading all his problem fifth graders into my class.

While I was running off copies of something in the teachers lounge on the first day of school, a student popped in to say hi to his last year's teacher. She asked him who his teacher was this year and he said my name. He then added, Danny is in there, too. His last year's teacher then said, "I specifically told them NOT to put you two in the same classroom this year!"

Also, a parent told me at parent-teacher conference time that when she called the school office at the start of the year to ask where her daughter was to go to school this year, because the school had kicked her out last year, the office told her it was okay for her to come back because they had a new teacher for her.

The School Counselor was impressed by how calm my students were, particularly because so many of my students did not have reputations for being calm at all. She then asked me for suggestions of what to do about the pandemonium that was the school's cafeterias at lunch time.

I knew first-hand the cafeteria was a disaster area because I ate lunch there with my class every day. The problem was that I was the only teacher there. All the other classes were supervised by classroom teaching aides. Teaching aides were people from the local community who were helpers with zero actual teaching experience. None of them had any control over the kids they were supposedly supervising.

I gave the Counselor a plan. Jerry approved it. It was put in place and the cafeteria became calm and orderly. It was nice. However, the common teacher view now was that Jerry was just my puppet. I don't think I could have been any less popular with most of the teaching staff at that point if I had made unpopularity my goal.

At one point at the beginning of Mary's and my second year at Mayfair, Mary said told me she was concerned that so many teachers didn't like me. My response to her was, "Almost as many teachers don't like you." She knew that was true. One teacher had even said to Mary, "Why did you write *Workjobs* just to make me look bad?"

Two Teachers of Teachers

The Summer after our first year at Mayfair, was Mary's and my first Summer as instructors for the State of California's Mathematics Specialized Teacher Project Mathematics Improvement Program, also known as Miller Math. See [The Miller Math Connection](#) section of [Chapter 8 - The Arithmetic Mistake and A Year Off From Teaching](#). Mary

and I were now instructors for an elite workshop, that if we hadn't been chosen as instructors, we would not even have known of its existence. And, what Jerry had first told the staff at Mayfair School about our being teachers of teachers was now true. We were now both officially teachers of teachers, something many of the staff resented hearing about even before it became true.

A Home Buying Footnote

Just before the start of our second year at Mayfair, we became home owners in Saratoga, an easy commute to and from Alum Rock. We used our Miller Math pay from the two summer workshops as the down payment on that home. The East Palo Alto dream had now officially ended.