

A Real Board Of Education Series: MY YEAR AS A TEACHER.

Sidebar

Sachar, Emily. Newsday [Long Island, N.Y] 01 Dec 1989: 32.

This series is reporter Emily Sachar's account of her year as a teacher at IS 246, the Walt Whitman Intermediate School, based on her journal and interviews conducted after her return to New York Newsday in September. The students profiled in the series appear with the permission of their parents. Their names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of their school records.

Budget is a board game for four that teaches its players about real-life economics. Players buy homes, pay insurance costs and make investments. The point is to accumulate as much money as possible.

The game, designed by a former college instructor, is one of 400 games manufactured by Creative Teaching Associates, an 18-year-old privately held Fresno, Calif., company that believes kids learn more with hands-on tools and games.

Through the Board of Education's supply purchasing program, New York City teachers could buy Budget last year for \$10.48. Teachers were allotted \$227 for supplies last year, and eight copies of the game - the number needed for a 30-student class - used up \$83.84 of the allotment. The board sold 963 copies of Budget.

Players quickly learn that, if they don't take advantage of the many "Option" spots on the Budget board, they miss out on chances to make and save money. For instance, if a player doesn't buy medical and dental insurance for \$370, he or she may have to pay \$95 for a dental bill or \$530 for a medical bill.

Similarly, if the player fails to take out car insurance for \$275, he or she will have to hand over \$390 when the player lands on the "Auto Accident" spot.

Meanwhile, if a player makes the \$700 down-payment on a home, he or she has responsibilities, including property tax payments. But, the player also has the chance to earn a huge return by selling the home for \$95,000, tantamount to winning the game.

The game's alternative to home ownership is renting, but players quickly find rent expenses cumbersome. There are three apartment-rent spots on the 36-spot board, and each costs at least \$225.

Players who buy stock and savings certificates also can accrue cash. Two spaces on the board pay interest on savings certificates and one pays dividends to stockholders.

The game gets its name because players must estimate, each time they hit "Pay Day," how much money they will use on the next trip around the board. Those who make good estimations are rewarded with a bonus.

Board of Education officials acknowledge that games such as Budget are useful teaching tools, mainly because they force kids to apply textbook concepts to lifelike situations. Kids have a much longer attention span when they are making change with play money than when they are calculating the amount of change on a chalkboard or in a notebook, officials and teachers say.

But many officials acknowledge that games are not widely used by city teachers, partly because it requires so much planning. To teach the entire eighth-grade math curriculum, educators say at least two dozen different games would be needed, and a teacher would need many copies of each game so a whole class could play. Although teachers in a school could plan their supply orders jointly, to get a variety of games and to avoid duplication, most teachers do not order together. And most schools do not have a stockpile of games on hand.

But the main reason games are not used more widely, educators say, is that teachers are more comfortable with conventional approaches to teaching, such as lecturing. "To use hands-on materials takes a great deal of training," says Bruce Vogeli, professor of mathematics instruction at Columbia University's Teachers College. "Many teachers are not good at this sort of approach."

A teacher who wants to use games gets little guidance from the Board of Education. The board has virtually no information on the subject and disseminates what it does have only to teachers who ask for it. One board publication, "Exploring Mathematics Through Games," offers instructions for only six games, and a teacher has to know the publication exists to ask for it. This publication does not mention the games teachers can order through the board's own supply purchasing program, and it ignores some obvious games teachers might find in their own toy closets at home, such as Monopoly, Battleship or Checkers.

For junior high kids alone, the board last year offered three other games to teach math skills with real-life problems: Bank Account, Menu Math and Stock Exchange. New Board of Education curriculums for the sixth and seventh grades include suggestions for games. But the board has not written an updated curriculum for the eighth grade. The old curriculum does not give any tips for teaching with games or other hands-on materials.

Photo-Playing board for Budget, a game that teaches its players about real-life economics.