



PHOTO © ALICE LONGWORTH

Third-graders have fun and learn math in a unique program at the Hamilton Avenue School.

Minds in Motion

Greenwich Arts Council helps kids “see” math

BY ALICE LONGWORTH

HOW MUCH CAN YOU BUY WITH \$20? Third-graders in two classes at the Hamilton Avenue Elementary School in Greenwich are learning to match pocket money to prices in a game of make-believe they love to play. It’s called “Shopping”—one of the activities used by Minds in Motion, a math-enrichment project provided by Greenwich Arts Council (GAC) with funding from Greenwich Alliance for Education.

One recent morning enthusiastic shoppers received their supermarket allowances—play money totaling \$20, two five-dollar bills and a ten. A variety of “groceries,” real but empty boxes of items like sausages, cereal, pasta, soup, dish detergent and trail mix were available on the “shelves”—a long table. Each item was clearly marked with its price.

The GAC instructors are Susan Baum Moyer, an artist and designer who has illustrated over 40 children’s books;

and Michelle Marceau, founder and director of MMM Productions, a musical theater arts school in Greenwich.

Together they have developed a curriculum which supports and amplifies regular classroom instruction. Using non-traditional methods to teach mathematical concepts like estimation, approximation, and measurement, they aim to increase math achievement—especially among students having difficulty.

Susan and Michelle first launched Minds in Motion as an after-school program to help junior high students with math and science at a North Salem school in Westchester County, New York. Subsequently they were invited to bring the program to GAC. At Hamilton Avenue the project provides classroom instruction during regular school hours.

This morning Susan holds open a shopping bag, while Hailey, one of her students, ponders what to buy. As Hailey

makes her selections, classmates José and Valerie also have roles to play. José, holding a pocket calculator, serves as cashier. Valerie, with a marker in hand, records the prices on a large white board for all to see. Hailey's objective is to spend a little under \$20 and leave the store with some change in her pocket—maybe for bus fare home.

“Third-graders struggle with abstract thinking,” explains Dr. Damaris Rau, principal of the school. “The ideas of estimation and approximation are especially difficult for them. This program is helping kids physically see math. We're very happy with the results.”

A SECOND ACTIVITY, “From Here to There,” uses masking tape to mark off distances on the classroom floor. “How many of you standing shoulder to shoulder would fit on this line?” Susan asks. Several students offer their opinions. Then they line up on the tape and count off.

According to Dr. Rau, after they “see what ten feet looks like in non-standard units of measurement,” the children have a “background” or concept on which to build and are ready for the rulers and yardsticks used in standard measurement.

Class ends with a rousing, signature activity, best described as “Thank You and Good-by”—a game of musical call and response with sweeping dance-like gestures. A different language is used each week. “*Grazia*,” everyone calls out mimicking Michelle. “*Arrivederchi, arrivederchi!*”

“It's just really good fun,” says Michelle, “The kids love it.

They often ask as soon as they arrive, ‘How are we going to say good-by today?’ Many hear other languages spoken at home. And children can be afraid to let loose in a classroom situation. This gives them a chance to be expressive and silly.”

NOW IN ITS SECOND YEAR at the Hamilton Avenue School, Minds in Motion provides eight weekly, half-hour sessions per semester for two classes of approximately 20 students each.

It is one of two educational projects (the other is a student docent program) currently provided to local schools by Youth@Art, a committee of the GAC. Janet Clausi chairs Youth@Art and enjoys being an occasional observer at Minds in Motion. “I love watching the kids' faces as they get involved,” she says with a smile.

“We'd like to continue the project and introduce it to other schools,” states GAC board member and documentary filmmaker Neroli McSherry. She has videotaped several classes and plans to edit her footage into a three-minute film for potential donors and educators. ■

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