

## Sum lesson: Girls show 1-2 punch in numbers battle

By Sherry Kahan  
staff writer

Time-honored tradition says girls aren't as good at math as boys, and that they lose interest easily in numbers and formulas.

A three-year study of Livonia schools by the University of Michigan indicates that girls are not exposed enough to math to realize their own potential.

Because of these survey results, a modest effort to alter this situation was tried last semester at Washington School. Picked as the person to interest girls in math was a most unusual 14-year-old named Jody Ingram, who began to turn things around with a most unusual class. Her fifth-grade students responded readily to her efforts.

For these fifth-graders, the 14-year-old Churchill student was able to make fun games out of all that math stuff that had seemed so boring and difficult. She gave no grades and let the girls check their own papers for mistakes. Somehow it all came out as fun.

Jody looks at it a little differently. "The class may be special to them because it has only girls," she said. "It makes them feel special. The purpose of it is to get them involved in math so they don't lose their interest before junior high."

With a little laugh she added: "I'm supposed to be a role model so they won't be discouraged about math. The purpose is to show that girls can do just as well in math as boys."

"TO THESE GIRLS Jody is a mathematical Mary Poppins," said Jan Schollenberger, coordinator of Project Action, which arranged the math class and has provided student expertise for tutoring and in enrichment classes.

"They were sincerely excited to see her when she came in," she added. "Jody had high expectations for them. They really looked at her as a role model and wanted to be like her."

The principles Jody stressed fell on receptive ears. Proof came from one of the class members encouraging another who was saying she just couldn't get the problem at hand.

"You've got to keep trying, you've got to keep trying," came the cry.

"One of the findings of the U-M study of our schools was that girls didn't get enough math to realize their potential or become aware of math career possibilities," pointed out Mrs. Schollenberger. "The question then was why. One theory is that girls have less confidence because they are not supposed to be good at math."

"For that reason we offered math enrichment to girls who expressed an interest in being involved," she said. "Our fondest hope is that we can follow them

into the upper grades to see if the class had an impact on them, to see if it changed their concepts regarding their ability in advanced math.

"We'll check them with a control group to see if their scores improve in standardized tests."

"I WAS SITTING in an art class at Churchill when Mrs. Schollenberger came in and asked if any of the girls there were in the advanced math program," recalled Jody. "I was the only one. So I started working here."

However, it was not quite that simple. In between the art class and the math class the already busy future instructor did considerable homework. Karen Winters, elementary coordinator for the gifted and talented, gave her books to read and an invaluable book of math puzzles which she always kept in her folder in case of sudden need.

"I was a little nervous about the class," admitted the youthful teacher. "But when I got there I found I knew most of the girls because they are friends of my sister Jill."

Jody believes in putting newly-learned skills to work in math games. "One thing she did was put a problem on the blackboard and have the girls compete to get the answer up. It meant intense competition as the young mathematicians tried to make their chalk work as fast as their minds."

"In some of my own classes I have been nervous to race on the board," Jody said. So with her charges, she added, she tried to stress that it was only a game and that they were competing for satisfaction and fun.

She didn't give grades, but did correct problems and handed the papers back.

Or sometimes she had the girls correct their own papers so they could "discover their own mistakes and learn the new procedure."

Jody became aware of the advantages of her small sized class when she found she could take the time to spend 15 minutes a week for three weeks to help a student learn about square root.

"Finally she got it," she said. "That's what I wanted them to do, ask me for help if they had a problem." She felt it was her place "to show them until they understood."

THE CHURCHILL student, who delves into algebra problems for fun, is involved in so many activities at school and home, she may have to postpone her return to Washington school until the second semester of the coming school year. She plays clarinet in the varsity, symphonic and marching bands. She would like to play it in an

upcoming school musical.

She enjoys art. Influenced by her mother Phyllis, she keeps her fingers busy at home working on crafts.

"I'm working on a doll house now," she said. "I'm really in to papier mache, quilting, and needlework."

Working with a microscope or tele-

scope makes her day. "Astronomy, I really love it," she exclaimed. "I can stare at the moon for hours." Somewhere in among all this she finds time to practice ice skating.

Her young students' comments should make her want to get back as soon as she can.

"Math is easier to do now because I know more," fifth-grader Kim Taylor observed on one of the last days of school. "The games make it more fun."

"I like math more now," agreed Julie Foster. "Jody is a fun teacher. She makes everything interesting. Algebra

is getting to be my favorite part in all math."

Jody has been planning to concentrate on math and science in high school.

"But this experience made me think of teaching math or science some day," she said.

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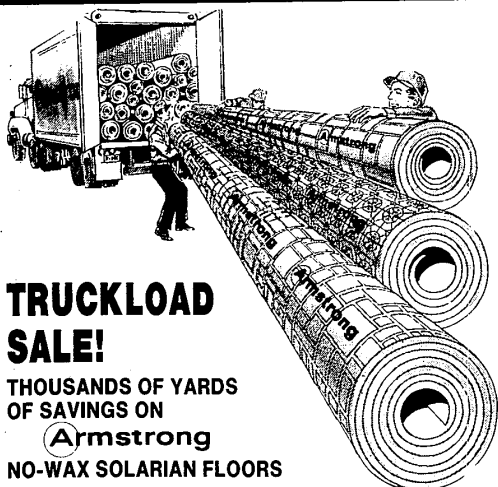
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