

Principal's Desk [22 June 2009]

Mathematics: The 'teaching' time is more important than the time allocated for the lesson.

Teachers are constantly upskilling their knowledge and understanding, particularly in the area of mathematics. How children form mathematical concepts will always be a key focus for our teachers. We all know that children learn more effectively when they discover ideas and find answers for themselves. This does not mean the learning is at a distance from the teacher. The teachers' proximity to the learning is the critical factor here. Without this close instruction and guidance from the teacher, real learning engagement is often lost. Further, for new knowledge to be retained, and then extended, our children need to be given opportunities to discuss ideas with others, given time to refine the ideas, and then have chances to record for themselves their statements (outcomes) of this new knowledge. In many classrooms we expect that a 45-minute lesson each day is the norm. However, we believe that the interactive time spent with the children and their teacher within that timeframe, is where real learning gains happen. Teaching will always involve us all in developing new ideas about how children learn and how this may apply to the essential learning areas we concern ourselves about at school. It is not surprising that there will always be new light thrown on how we can best enhance children's learning. However, our teachers do consider the amount of time given for intense instruction in comparison to time given for mathematical play activity. If the 45-50-minute lesson provides an over-dose of developmental / games activity and limited time for 'teacher guided' instruction, learning gaps will emerge very quickly.

The children are also learning about measurement, shapes and space using a variety of materials including mathematical games that encourage them to see for themselves the order and patterns of numeracy. Parents should not think that the things they learned at school about mathematics are not taught today. They are! Children still need the mastery of the basic knowledge and skills that allow them to successfully add, subtract, multiply and divide numbers. There is always a place for rote learning of those basic facts too. Without the "basic facts" the children are disadvantaged in terms of their ability to advance mental solutions. As it has always been, teaching mathematics requires plenty of experiences with equipment and activities designed to reinforce and consolidate new knowledge and concepts taught. Although there is less emphasis placed on writing things down, children will still be recording learning in order to aid and consolidate knowledge retention. The difference here than, say, what was happening some years back, is that the recording that the children do is based on experiential outcomes and mental solutions. With national standards testing in the forefront of government thinking, the interpreting of mathematical language, instructions and assessment questions needs to be given priority.

Parents, you are always welcome to 'look in' on these programmes and see for yourselves. All you need to do is contact your child's teacher to arrange a suitable time.

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Principal