



Photographs courtesy of Dramatic Results

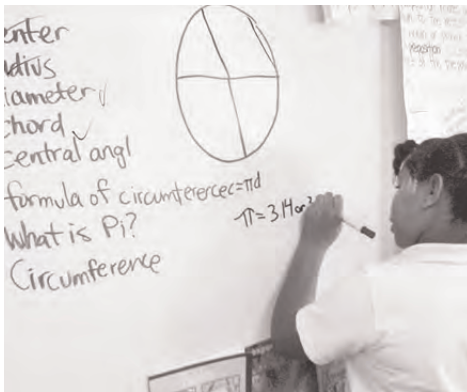
DRAMATIC RESULTS: MATH IN A BASKET PROGRAM

AT FIRST GLANCE, IT LOOKS LIKE AN ART CLASS. About 25 nine-year-olds working in small cohorts are weaving surprisingly complex Native American-inspired baskets. Across the way in another classroom, another group of kids is engaged in the same activity. Their progress is neck and neck. By the end of the semester, meeting just once a week, both classes will have created scores of magnificent and highly detailed pieces, each one more beautiful and intricately-patterned than the other.

To the unknowing eye, these are simply two sets of kids, lucky enough to be in one of those rare schools that somehow provides arts instruction. To those in the know however, these seemingly identical groups, while engaged in the same activity, are quite different. All are enrolled in the same, beleaguered Title I Long Beach public school that serves, according to the 2000 US Census, the most culturally diverse population in the entire country, 78% of which lives at or below the federal poverty level. One of these classes however, is designated as accelerated or “gifted,” while the other is identified as remedial, comprised of kids who are considered low achievers and in some cases, even developmentally challenged. And yet what both classes are doing equally well, with no discernable difference, is using art to learn and in some cases even master the many complicated concepts of advanced geometry, exceeding the expectations of the California Department of Education’s Math Content Standards along the way.

The notion that most kids can learn tough subjects if properly inspired and creatively taught is not new; that in one hour per week, for 28 weeks, a group of kids among which less than 30% initially

performed at grade level would out-perform the math averages of all Long Beach, LAUSD and other public schools statewide, is simply phenomenal. *Math in A Basket* is the program that enabled this tremendous success. It was established by Long Beach resident Christi Wilkins, a woman whose extraordinary personal story of childhood fear, cultural isolation and discrimination imbues her with an inspired empathy for and belief in children who are “written off” by the system. Math in a Basket is a program of the larger Dramatic Results, the organization Ms. Wilkins founded not only to help under-achieving students use creativity as a means to re-approach and boost their academic performance, but likewise to help educators improve their own capacities to recognize and foster the unique talents in students who may neither relate nor measure up to traditional criteria for excellence. Demonstrating that the “under achievers” can pull their



weight right alongside gifted kids is one of the program’s many intended outcomes; it proves to both educators and students alike that teamwork, innovation, creativity and celebration, when combined to enhance traditional pedagogical approaches, can help level the playing field of opportunity, and make the learning process more meaningful and joyful for children of all levels.

Math in a Basket is as basic as it is clever. While it plays to the joy and satisfaction most children gain from simply making something beautiful, the program gently requires of each student a keen and increasingly sophisticated understanding of challenging mathematical concepts like circumference, diameter, fractions and even pi. By traditional methods, these concepts can be burdensome and even frightening; within the Math in a Basket methodology, math is the joyful process by which to correctly execute a magnificent, hand-made object – an object that the student can point and lay claim to as a tangible reference for what under other circumstances would have seemed impossible.

By the end of the course, nearly every one of the now 1,200 kids served annually passes and even exceeds the tested math standards for his or her grade level. Likewise, the teachers learn and grow. With a major grant from the US Department of Education and support from private foundations, Math in a Basket is able to support the classroom teachers with a paid summer intensive program in which they themselves go through the course, learning the specifics of the methodology, and dramatically opening their minds to new approaches to teaching mathematics. Taking the course alongside the teachers is a cohort of professional artists who will then return as support to the teachers during Math in a Basket programming. Additionally, the presence of these artists in the classroom, providing a 1:5 teacher-to-student ratio, demonstrates problem solving skills for the children by modeling teamwork among adults.

Some will view Math in a Basket as an arts program, some will see it as a cleverly disguised math intensive, and still others will see a fascinating socio-educational experiment. Perhaps this is why it works so well; the myriad attributes of this program, coming together to ultimately accomplish the same goal, have shown that there is a way for every person whose life is touched by the effort to have a meaningful, satisfactory, if not life-changing experience. For the teachers, it provides support, invigoration, renewal and energy, and for the students, it provides the previously unimaginable possibility to learn, be really good at and even love the timeless and critical world of mathematics.