

Thoughts on Math-Haters

You can't hate a subject if your mind is engaged in it. So if a child says "I hate math," I would try to figure out what his mind is doing. For example, at the lower arithmetic levels, curriculums often spend too much time with memorizing math facts. That is mindless and boring. So parents buy games to make memorizing less boring. But that is still mindless, and it omits the understanding that engages the mind. And that understanding is what helps to maintain interest and make higher math easier.

Daily life activities constantly use the math facts. "We need to return 5 library books and only 3 are here." Games are excellent for this too. Not a genre marketed as "educational games," but the real old fashioned kind are best. Counting, keeping score, following directions, and strategizing all contribute to arithmetic thinking. Dominoes and dice provide practice in seeing numbers as groups, or as two groups such as two rows of 3 make 6.

After enough experience like this, children know all the addition and subtraction facts up to totals of 12. From that they can figure out many higher facts. For instance, they know that 6 plus 6 is 12, so 6 plus 7 must be 13. For speed someday they can see the need for memorizing the few facts that still elude them, but at least they understand what's happening because of their understanding of the lower numbers. (See *The Three R's* at www.MottMedia.com)

The same principle of understanding applies to other matters such as why we write a long division problem a certain way. A thorough understanding in early arithmetic pays big dividends for understanding higher math.

A child already brought to the "hate" point can benefit from a recess from math for a few months or even a full school year. With a new start he can tackle it with his mind.

~Ruth Beechick

I'm not a math guy. Whenever I see a bunch of numbers all lined up, my vision clouds and my tongue swells. Now that doesn't mean I'm totally inept. I can count pretty high and get by with your basic math skills. But don't ask me to do any algebra or anything else that involves Pythagorean's Theorem. I can't do it! And I still have flashbacks to my sophomore year in high school, looking up into the depressed face of my battle-weary algebra teacher as I explained why I did what I did to a certain story problem.

So here's my theory on math: people who can do math, can do math. People who can't, can't. Now don't send me mean, nasty, math-loving letters. I just don't believe that most kids will use the higher math that we assume we have to teach them (and a lot of other stuff for that matter).

Children who love math may end up doing something math-related, but those who don't, won't, and that's okay.

Now the issue comes up, what if you're a math-hater but need to teach your children math? What are you to do?

Just do the best you can (or involve your husband or a program that teaches it for you) and then don't sweat what you can't do. Teach them the basics, remember your goals, and see if any math-lovers arise in your students. Then let them go. If they've been created to do math, they will do math.

Now to all you math-lovers, you have no idea what I'm talking about. You love math, after all. But remember this, not all your children will love math. Don't try to make a math-hater into a math-lover; it won't work. You'll only frustrate yourself *and* your child.

So with all that said, enjoy the gifts God has given you, accept the fact that He hasn't given you others, and love your children.

Be Real,
Todd Wilson

Biographical Information

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