

January 4, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

I was very fortunate to be chosen to participate in the very first class of the Massachusetts Mathematics Institute presented by Herb Gross and Tom Fortmann. Using the Vermont Mathematics Initiative as a model, these gentlemen put together three graduate level courses for teachers of elementary math. The intent of the courses was to raise the level of math content knowledge for those of us who teach young children.

Like most elementary teachers, I was not required to take more than three credits of undergraduate mathematics for content (methodology was considerably more). Math was of interest to me however it was not my strength. When this opportunity arose, I was excited to proceed.

Initially, I have to admit that I was overwhelmed with the content. I hadn't had a math course in over 25 years! The program was very rigorous and I learned a substantial amount of math. Herb's style of teaching made it easy for me to motivate myself to work hard. His idea of the noun/adjective theory made so much sense of what we try to teach children. Along with a tremendous amount of algebra, geometry, and number theory, Herb nurtured all of us with his time after class for one-on-one assistance. His wonderful sense of humor as well as his unending supply of stories made the classes most enjoyable.

After over 24 years of teaching third and fourth grade, I feel that I am a far better teacher of mathematics because of this experience. I can finally see how arithmetic, algebra, and geometry fit together. I now know where my students are headed after they leave me and how important it is for me to lay the proper groundwork for what they will learn in the future. I am now challenging my students more than I ever have before and they are meeting those elevated levels of expectation.

If we anticipate higher achievement for our students, we must see to it that teachers have the necessary tools to do the job. At the elementary level, this means being better prepared with content knowledge. That is what the Massachusetts Mathematics Institute and Herb Gross did for me. I sincerely hope that there will be more courses to follow, as I will be the first to sign up!

Very truly yours,
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