



DEANNE CAMERON/TORONTO STAR

PROCESSING, PROCESSING: Rochelle Champion, 4, figures out a math problem with the aid of her fingers and helpful hints from an instructor at a math and sports camp held at Hodgson Senior Public School in north Toronto.

Math and sports camp keeps everything nimble

The folks at an unusual math and sports camp think kids don't realize how much they're learning, but 7-year-old Robert Joy isn't fooled.

He's well aware those math-based games and relay races and contests — no matter how wild the pace or how loud the background music — are driving home concepts he will use in Grade 2.

"We're learning 'plusses' and 'take-aways' while we exercise and it's really fun," he said one recent morning as he played "scooter math" at SMART CAMP, an acronym for Sports, Math and Recreational Training.

"They're my two favourite things: sports and math. I like to work on math because it's challenging, and it's fun to have high marks in school."

Founded nine years ago by Toronto math and gym teacher Colin Strange, the two-week day camp for elementary students, held at three public schools in North Toronto, is designed to make math more fun and understandable through sports and play.

It's the sort curriculum cocktail more teachers are considering as they try to make a rigorous new program more child-friendly.

"If you try doing these math skills at a table, the kids are good for a

‘Kids don't even know they're learning geometry,’

Cool Schools

LOUISE BROWN



A WEEKLY LOOK AT INNOVATIONS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

moment. But if you add a game and some action to the exercise, they're good for 20 minutes," said Strange.

When these campers play tag, they must answer a math problem first before being allowed to tag an opponent.

In a game aimed at honing estimation skills, children hurl soccer balls, then estimate how many metres the ball travelled and measure their accuracy.

In scooter math, they push them-

selves on "scooter boards" (oversized skateboards) to a line where they must answer an arithmetic flash card before carrying on.

"How many fingers am I holding up?" teacher Diane Montemurro asks 4-year-old camper Rochelle Champion. Montemurro is one of several teachers who work at the camp each year. Rochelle balances the scooter board, counts the teacher's fingers and pronounces the right answer.

"Now, let's take away six fingers — there they go," says Montemurro. "How many are left?"

After an intense pause of silent calculation, Rochelle brightens and answers: "Two."

She pushes off on four wheels to play another round.

Strange says he got the notion of melding math and gym several years ago when he had a Grade 3/4 class with a short attention span for math, and also had to teach half the physical education program.

The hybrid proved such a hit

with the students and such an effective teaching tool, parents asked him to stretch it into a summer program.

Education assistant Tracey Greer, who works at Jesse Ketchum Public School, says the key to multi-disciplinary teaching is that "kids don't even know they're learning. They learn basic adding and subtraction and geometry and estimation without realizing it. They love it, and that's fantastic."

Student teacher Bruce Currie works at the camp and says children don't recognize they are learning.

"When their parents come to pick them up, they ask them what they learned and they just shrug and say 'Nothing,'" said Currie, who is in the faculty of education at York University.

"But then their parents ask us, and we explain they spent 50 minutes doing geometry-based tag games, or outdoor estimation, or co-operative games based on geometry, and they can't believe it."

If you have an idea for Cool Schools, you can reach Louise Brown at 416-869-4306 or Tess Kalinowski at 416-869-4852 or by e-mail at lbrown@thestar.ca or tess@thestar.ca