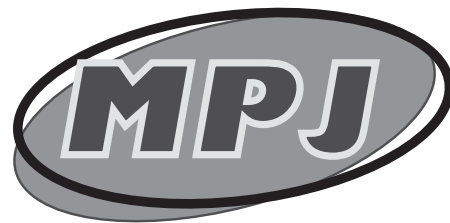


The MPJ Story

It seems like *The Math Projects Journal* was born just yesterday, and yet, it is hard to remember what teaching was like for me before the days of nation-wide collaboration and the myriad of lessons that have been shared from teachers around the world through this publication. For those of you who are new to *The Math Projects Journal*, here is MPJ's story.



Six years ago, I had an idea that would allow me to share math project lessons and philosophies with other math project enthusiasts. I recruited Greg Rhodes as a partner in this endeavor because he was a techno-guru and a very talented young teacher. He was also a former student teacher of mine, so we were kindred spirits when it came to unconventional math lessons. Our school had recently been wired for Internet access, so we thought we would create a simple web page that could reach out into the world of cyberspace and form a network of teachers that could share ideas and lessons. Before that plan was launched, the single web page grew to a multi-page, interactive web site, with an accompanying hardcopy, bimonthly newsletter, *The Math Projects Journal*.

Initially, lesson ideas for this infant newsletter were fueled by a rather unique collaborative experience. At that time, Greg and I, along with some of the other teachers in our math department, were involved in a training program that encouraged teachers to investigate alternate means of mathematics instruction. That training spurred the creation of a department-wide instructional program that led to extraordinary student success on the state achievement tests. The first year of *MPJ*, was, in essence, a documentary of the lessons that we used in that program.

The journal grew quickly. After that first year of publishing, we expanded the newsletter from eight pages to twelve in order to offer student handouts that would augment the teacher lesson plans. The expanded format also allowed us the luxury of displaying cover art, which showcased Greg's talents as a graphic designer, and promoted the fun-loving spirit of *MPJ*.

MPJ matured in substance as well as style. As our readership expanded, we began to receive submissions from teachers outside of our own instructional program. *The Math Projects Journal* was becoming the network of math teachers that it was intended to be. Since the journal was quickly becoming an influential voice for this network, my interest in education research was now stirred by a responsibility to learn more about the art and science of teaching. In my quest for this knowledge, I was amazingly blessed to be associated with many intelligent people who were directly involved in the current research, and their teaching powerfully impacted the content and the philosophy of *MPJ*.

One of those impactful people was Dr. William Schmidt, of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. We heard Dr. Schmidt speak on the need for a more focused curriculum in this country, but we wanted information on how teachers could influence change from within the walls of their own classrooms. By his own graciousness and commitment to the message, Dr. Schmidt granted us an hour-long interview and shared the basic findings of TIMSS. I later dubbed these findings "The Four and Half Principles of Quality Math Instruction." Those basic principles (standards, concepts, substance, accountability, and rapport) became the overarching philosophy that, since then, shaped my teaching and the lessons within *MPJ*. You will see that *MPJ*'s lessons and articles are focused more on student understanding and learning, and less on just offering something fun and different in the classroom.

As *MPJ* began to pick up steam, my family and I moved to another part of the state. I left a math department that had achieved so much, and began anew at another high school. I was blessed again with a very enthusiastic group of teachers who were willing to experiment. We began a Lesson Study Program in which teachers collaborated to create, implement and observe innovative math lessons. Many of the lessons developed in that program were published in *MPJ*. This collaborative effort also involved other teachers from our district including

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many of its middle school teachers. Concurrently, I was asked to share the research findings with our district's elementary school teachers. Working with math teachers from across the grade levels gave me invaluable new insights into the broader issues challenging math educators, which further influenced the content of the journal.

Due to the reputation of the newsletter, I started to receive invitations to speak at conferences and other events. Eventually, through Prime Presentations, I began conducting training workshops around the country, while maintaining my position as a high school math teacher. The message of teaching for the conceptual understanding of a limited number of topics by holding students accountable to rigorous mathematical substance was very well received. Sharing with teachers both locally and nationally further extended the *MPJ* network and established many collaborative relationships. Interestingly, these three aspects of my career - teaching, training, writing - so mutually influenced each other that the lines between them blurred, to the point at which they have all, some how, left their mark on the pages of *MPJ*.

That is how *The Math Projects Journal* got to this point, ready to move into a new phase of its life. Currently, *MPJ* is going through several big changes. First of all, Greg will be leaving to focus on his new career as a programmer and web developer; his influence on the journal will be sorely missed. Also, *MPJ* will no longer be publishing the newsletter in hardcopy form. Instead, it will now offer new lesson plans and student handouts online. These lesson pages will be accessible on our web site to anyone who purchases this book (see back page). With the new flexible format, we can now post some of the elementary school lessons that we have developed as well. With the creation of this book, *MPJ* will now have access to catalogs, bookstores and other avenues that are closed to periodicals. In its new form, *MPJ* will be able to reach more people with more material, and thus, have a greater impact.

While its function has changed, the initial intent of *The Math Projects Journal* still remains. *MPJ* will continue to create innovative lessons, challenge teachers' perceptions of effective mathematics instruction, and foster its network of committed math educators.