

Poem about math may solve problem

Teacher uses words to subtract anxiety

By CYNTHIA McCORMICK
STAFF WRITER

WEST BARNSTABLE — If a local Cape Cod Community College professor has his way, math students across the Cape and state will use journals, poetry and opinion pieces to write out math anxiety.

Ted Panitz, who teaches math and engineering, wants to form a task force on how writing can be used to cure math anxiety and generate enthusiasm for the oftendreaded subject.

Panitz already assigns students in his entry-level college math courses to write "math autobiographies" detailing their experiences with and feelings about math.

An entry might read, "In fifth grade, I couldn't get the concepts. I fell behind and I never caught up," he said.

Admitting their anxiety and sharing it with classmates similarly afflicted helps them relax their attitude toward math, Panitz said.

He also has students in his developmental math and pre-calculus courses keep logs of daily math transactions such as making change at the store and has them write opinion pieces about the best method for solving a math problem.

"There's a tremendous amount of anxiety, fear and distaste" surrounding math, he said. "It's very intense."

So Panitz also has students write about math in the most intense language form: poetry. "They get into it and they reveal themselves through poetry," he said.

As revolutionary as linking poetry and math might seem, Panitz said he is not alone in his interest in promoting the marriage of language arts and math.

He said 40 people attended his presentation on "writing across the curriculum" at the annual



TED PANITZ

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meeting of the New England Mathematics Association of Two-Year Colleges.

Seminar attendees expressed an interest in forming a statewide task force to share ideas on writing in math, and Panitz is hoping to start a Capewide task force involving high school and community college teachers.

"There's a difficulty in getting started," he said. "The question is what do you write up?"

Panitz hopes to build local support into a small statewide task force that would plan a fall writing conference.

In addition, Panitz said he will probably write high school math departments asking teachers to attend a preliminary meeting sometime in May.

Carroll County Schools

Algebra - Anxiety = Panitz

by Janet Comes

Why do some students find Algebra so stressful? Ted Panitz's response was "Because it is threatening. If you don't pass Algebra you can't follow your career pattern." Ted Panitz has taught Algebra for twenty-three years at Cape Cod Community College.

Panitz has a Chemical Engineering degree and a Doctorate in Education.

Panitz prefers to be called, Ted. Personal contact with his student's makes them relax and enjoy the challenge of studying Algebra.

"The third time is a charm." Will summarize my Algebra experience, along with many other Algebra students in Ted Panitz's Elementary Algebra class. Somehow the atmosphere is different in this class. Students are actually enjoying this Algebra class.

When I asked Ted "What techniques do you suggest to make Algebra an easier challenge for the students? He answered simply, "Working together helps relieve stress." The group works together as they answer the solutions to various problems. This enables the students to develop a rapport with each other in their journey to conquer Algebra. For example, the class was placed in groups of two according to their birth date. The students were able to exchange their viewpoint on Algebra equations and expressions.

The students seem eager to take on their daily challenge of Algebra assignments with great confidence. As I posed this question, "Why does your Algebra class seem to be real enthusiastic about learning and reaching their goal to conquer and pass this course?" Ted said, "Because they are involved in it. Algebra is an active course. We are teaching

each other. Combination. Yes, it's fun."

How will students accomplish this goal of passing Algebra? Ted's response was "by demonstrating their mastery through an assessment; formally known as a test."

Pam Hur, who is an Intermediate Algebra student in Ted Panitz's class, spoke very highly of Ted. "I like him very much. Working in groups is a very positive method. He lets you work out the problems until you get it right. You may do the test problems as many times as you need to get a hundred. Panitz offers the students a lot of encouragement and is very generous with his time. He will work with you in his office or the Math Lab."

Ted Panitz gets involved with his students before you enter the class. A welcome letter is sent to all his students before they enter his Algebra class. This warm welcome gives the student a positive attitude.



Photo by Gregg Cole
Ted Panitz (center), surrounded by his 11:00 elementary algebra class. He has been noted for his outstanding attention to his students.