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Instructional Success

One instructional success I have had in my classroom is the introduction games and activities that focus on "real life math" for my developmental math students. Two projects immediately come to mind are my math version of Monopoly and my Life Math project.

In my MAT 0012 classes (Beginning Math), the entire class plays a math version of Monopoly. We use a regular version of the Monopoly. The students play the game in groups of three or four using whatever house rules the group agrees upon. The students, however, are required to keep a record of all their monetary transactions (expenses and income) on a record sheet. After the game is finished, each student must balance the record sheet. The exercise is accompanied by a worksheet with calculations based on each student's individual record sheet. I have even had students ask for extra copies so they can use the activity at home with their children.

My Life Math project involves showing the students some of the ways math is incorporated in their everyday lives. I have several different versions of the project. They include discussions about how basic banking systems work including topics like IRAs, saving money and credit cards. Other topics include buying houses, purchasing cars, and generally how borrowing money works. The project starts with discussions that I initiate with just a little bit of introduction of the subject. The students then set the direction of the discussion with their own questions and comments. The discussions are followed up with worksheets or assignments with coordinating mathematics topics. I use my Life Math project at several mathematics levels. I teach just the basics to the developmental classes, and I go into much more technical mathematical detail with the more advanced classes.

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Instructional Challenges

One of the challenges that I face in my developmental math classes is inability for some students to retain some of the fundamentals of math. A couple of specific topics that come to mind are fractions and factoring. Even when students understand the material, it is very difficult for some of them to master it and retain it. My current approach is working with various techniques related to learning styles. However, I have not had any significant results.