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Professor teaches kids through cribbage

By *Jeff Samoray, OU Web Writer*

When you think of games elementary school kids play, typical playground activities like kickball, hopscotch and soccer come to mind – not a complicated card game like cribbage. But Dyanne Tracy, professor of education and chair of OU's Department of Teacher Development and Educational Studies, co-developed a **cribbage unit**, which also incorporates mathematics, social studies, English/language arts and social skills, for a local fifth grade class.

"I pride myself on developing an innovative curriculum," said Tracy, who created the unit with OU alumna and fifth grade teacher Gerrie Arnold for her class at Village Elementary in Waterford last year. "I've had a history of developing projects like this over the years and want them to be fun and maintain high academic standards. Gerrie and I incorporated presentations on bats and beekeeping in different elementary classes, but the cribbage unit tops everything we've done together."

Tracy and Arnold created the unit for a class of 26 kids – 14 of whom were special needs students. Both instructors have been passionate players of cribbage for years and combined that enthusiasm with their teaching methods.

"The unit worked beautifully. It's innovative, the students had a high interest level, and the curriculum meets some of the Michigan Curriculum Frameworks (standards and benchmarks developed by the Michigan State Board of Education and the Michigan Department of Education)," Tracy said. "And as a university professor, I need to show my students that I still go to classrooms and work with elementary students. I need to know what the kids of 2002 are like so I can have credibility with my college students."

Tracy attended Arnold's class every third Friday to present a new "layer" of cribbage rules. The students would practice playing in a morning session then the teachers performed some assessments before the students played again during the afternoon.

"Cribbage is a very complicated game on the order of chess," Tracy said. "But we divided the rules up into layers so they could practice it over time. Teaching them through layers and offering rewards that did not encourage rivalry was extremely effective. The students saw it was a game. They knew they were learning math, but surely they weren't aware of all the skills they were building as they played.

"One of the hard things for kids to pick up is a sense of time. So we taught them the history of cribbage and placed it within a timeline to give the students a sense of what was happening in the world at the time the game was invented and afterwards. And through playing the game, the kids were able to practice communications skills and learn math skills."

The special needs students learned to play cribbage just as well as the other students and developed the same set of skills, Tracy said.

"The special needs kids had the rules of cribbage down just like the rest of them. They may have needed a little more time, but they picked it up," Tracy said. "When you have an innovative unit like cribbage, it gives kids who may not shine with traditional paper/pencil skills a chance to show what they can do."

After the students had a thorough grasp of the game, they were able to demonstrate the academic and social skills they acquired at a "Celebration of Learning Cribbage Party." On May 16, the students hosted parents, grandparents and guests from local businesses, the Southeast Michigan Cribbage Club, the Waterford Senior Citizen Center and school staff for an afternoon of cribbage, conversation and refreshments.

"We wanted to bring the community together to show them the innovative things we're doing in school and the skills the kids have learned," Tracy said. "The kids prepared for this event in the same way they would prepare for a science fair. They put their math and language arts skills to use with an authentic audience and practiced conversational skills. Unlike a computer or video game, when you play cribbage you're interacting with others. The kids showed the ability to listen and respond to what others said, and were very proud of what they did."

The students, who wrote their own invitations for the event and greeted their guests as they arrived, also played competitively and had a lot of fun, Tracy said.

"I loved the cribbage party," said student Scott Stoll. "I can't tell you how much I liked it. I liked how we had food, punch and played cribbage with a different generation. If we had the party again, I wouldn't change a thing except make it longer!"

Tracy and Arnold hope that, in the future, a Waterford middle school teacher might help continue the enthusiasm of the students by forming a cribbage club as an extracurricular activity.

"A cribbage club can help the kids who like to play the game by giving them a chance to interact and give them a sense of belonging," Tracy said.

For more information on the cribbage unit, including lesson plans, a list of classroom materials and details on how the unit meets the Michigan Curriculum Frameworks, see Tracy's **cribbage unit** Web page.

SUMMARY

Dyanne Tracy, professor of education and chair of OU's Department of Teacher Development and Educational Studies, co-developed a cribbage unit for a local fifth grade class. The unit incorporates mathematics, social studies, English/language arts and social skills.

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