

## **Narratives of Success: Teaching Origami in Low-Income/Urban Communities**

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This paper documents the experiences of multiple teachers, including the author's, in teaching origami; art, math, and community origami instructors' narratives are included. The focus is on teaching origami in the classroom or in a low-income or high crime neighborhood. The circumstances vary from origami being used within the boundaries of a prescribed curriculum to a community instructor who only sees students once, in a community location with no specific curriculum. It includes narratives about specific teacher-student interactions in which students had a positive experience, either academically, socially, or emotionally.

One example is an experience with a student with severe special needs, Jose\*. In my Inclusion Geometry class Jose was very unwilling to even write down a problem and was disruptive during instruction. At the high-school level the ability to do algebraic manipulation is a required and significant focus of the curriculum. Before school break, I included an activity that used building Tom Hull's dodecahedrons with finding area for supplies and a simulated small business experience where you had to figure out what you would charge for time and materials if you made them to sell. Since I started teaching, the one constant with origami has been that the student with the strongest spatial skills in the class has always been a student with special needs. Jose not only did not need me to explain construction, he figured it out by looking at the model; he was able to talk through the math needed to solve the equations, he then was allowed to go to each group and help them construct their dodecahedron. I first taught Jose 3 years ago and every single school day for the rest of the school year, he asked to do origami. One day I asked him why we should do origami every day. Jose said because it was the first time he had been smarter than anybody in anything. Now, I am not saying origami is a magic tool, Jose still struggled, but he was more willing to try in class and he still had a reference that he was good at something. I do not use as much origami in the classroom, now that I teach Algebra II, but I still use it on X-days and Field days and similar results still emerge. Jose for the last three school years has consistently come after school and learned new origami and been thrilled to discover his abilities. He is willing and able to learn and teach others, even receiving service-learning hours for his teaching.

While not research that shows causation, this paper focuses on anecdotal evidence that origami aids all students, but can be especially valuable for students who fail to thrive in the traditional school format.

\*Different name used to preserve student confidentiality.