

**Capacities Versus Skills**  
**Math Reminders from Else Göttgens – April 2005**

Else likes to remind Class Teachers in the early Grade that they play a huge role in determining if their class will be one that struggles with – and fears – math, or one that enjoys the subject and looks forward to each new “Numbers” Main Lesson Block.

THIS IS A BIG RESPONSIBILITY!

To achieve the latter, one must understand the difference between developing math “skills” and math “capacities” in the students.

One way to illustrate the difference is to write the following two numbers on the board and to ask a group of children (Grade 2) to quickly identify which is the bigger number:

**829**    or    **599?**

Those children with well-developed math “capacities” will immediately answer correctly. Children whose math capacities are weak (but whose math “skills” could be very well trained) will generally go with the higher last numbers... (which is not the correct answer).

The question then is, how do we develop children’s math “capacities”? How do we provide an environment and lessons that teach children about the *qualities* of numbers and processes?

Else’s answer:

“PLAY GAMES! MAKE MATH AN ENGAGING AND SATISFYING ACTIVITY”.

**Other related reminders:**

Children must see numbers as wholes (not as the sum of many smaller parts):

It is a problem when a child cannot instantly grasp a group of five things as “Five”: One whole; one group. (Not 1+1+1+1+1).

Continue to practice “estimating” at all grade levels (in age appropriate ways, of course). See separate page for more on “estimating”.

For additional “Else’s Gems” for teachers, visit [www.waldorfinpractice.com](http://www.waldorfinpractice.com)