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Being Ambitious Professional Learning

by Sam Dashwood (Year 2 Teacher)

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'สวัสดีฉันหวังว่าคุณสนุกกับการอ่านบทความนี้'. If you know how to read Thai you will have just understood the last bit of text just like only someone who understands Nepalese will understand these next set of symbols 'नमस्कार म तपाईं यस लेखमा आनन्द आशा'. They are essentially a set of abstract images with little or no meaning until you have an understanding of them. This is just what reading and understanding numerical symbols is like for young children. They then have to put them together with other symbols for example +, - and = to name but a few and come up with answers to questions. The English language does not really help its audience with words such as twelve and thirteen either, particularly when compared to the Chinese language for example where twelve and thirteen are literally translated into 'ten and two' or 'ten and three'.

Numicon is a resource that makes abstract concepts real and visual and in doing so helps build the foundation of mathematical understanding. It allows children to see patterns and make connections more easily. Using Numicon children can investigate ideas, extend their thinking and learn by self-discovery. As research has suggested this is when deeper level thinking and learning occurs and curiosity is ignited. Numicon is so versatile in that it can be used simply for teaching children the quantity a number represents or how to work out percentages and fractions. Its use as a mathematical resource is endless and is definitely useful as a teaching resource throughout primary and beyond.

As teachers we are not here to bestow our knowledge onto our pupils but instead create opportunities for discovery and exploration. Numicon is so powerful in allowing us to do just that. The children in my class spent half an hour freely and independently exploring with Numicon. One child created the 7 times table, another came up with eight different number bonds to make the number 24, another made an elaborate symmetrical pattern and counted its total and all of the children would have been happy to continue even though it was break time next!

So above all and in the words of Andrew Jeffery who delivered the course in Bangkok it 'makes maths fun' and what could be more important than that?