

A TEACHER REFLECTS



When students came to my class to begin Lesson 8, The Mysterious Footprint, they were greeted by a very distraught teacher asking if anyone had seen someone walking around with a warm batch of brownies. Students hadn't, but assured me that if they had they would have grabbed one or two on the way past. In the front of the room was a table on which there was a package of flour, half empty, sugar, chocolate, etc. Also on the table was a wrist watch. I had covered the floor around the table with newspaper and spilled lots of flour on the floor. In the middle of the spill, however, was a footprint and in a ball next to it was a shirt splotted with brownie dough and flour. I asked the students to help me solve the mystery. They were excited, watching me in my new role and looking at the mess on the floor. Students got into groups and looked at the scatterplot. In the previous lesson they had practiced enough so that they had little difficulty answering the questions estimating height. I put a pair of students in charge of measuring each clue, emphasizing accuracy and having them double check each other. From that data, each pair chose one clue and proceeded with the lesson.

Setting this up in the classroom made quite an impression on students and they enthusiastically began their work. I noticed I had made a special impression on two types of students. I had three students who were easily bored and whose attention frequently wandered. I noticed that they were very much involved on this day. The other two students I noticed were normally very quiet and withdrawn. They were smiling today, and seemed to be participating more in the group discussions.

The major difficulty students had was that they did not want to name a correlation unless every single point was in agreement. In the previous lesson, they had continually brought up examples of exceptions to the correlations, such as overweight or starving animals. I had ascribed this at the time to simply wanting to have their say, but actually I think teenagers just like having everything work out neatly. In this lesson, therefore, I had them actually count the number of points which were within the pattern and those that didn't seem to follow the pattern. Seeing the high percentage of points that fell within the pattern, students agreed that there must be a correlation.