

Our Towns»

Online Extra » For more local news and photos, click on your community at DemocratandChronicle.com



JAMIE GERMANO staff photograph

Third-graders Lilly Garnaat, seated, and Bianca Gallina work on a science project during a girls Inquiry class at Victor Primary School.

Thinking outside the box

Third-grade girls hone their science skills at Victor school

JAMES GOODMAN
STAFF WRITER

VICTOR — The five third-graders who recently spent a period in Inquiry teacher Doug Schmidt's classroom at the Victor Primary School got a chance to sharpen their computer skills and apply their creative talents.

Their assignment was to make the PicoCricket, a small device that can be programmed by computer to perform several tasks.

"Today we are going to make the Cricket reprogrammed to do a drawing," Schmidt said.

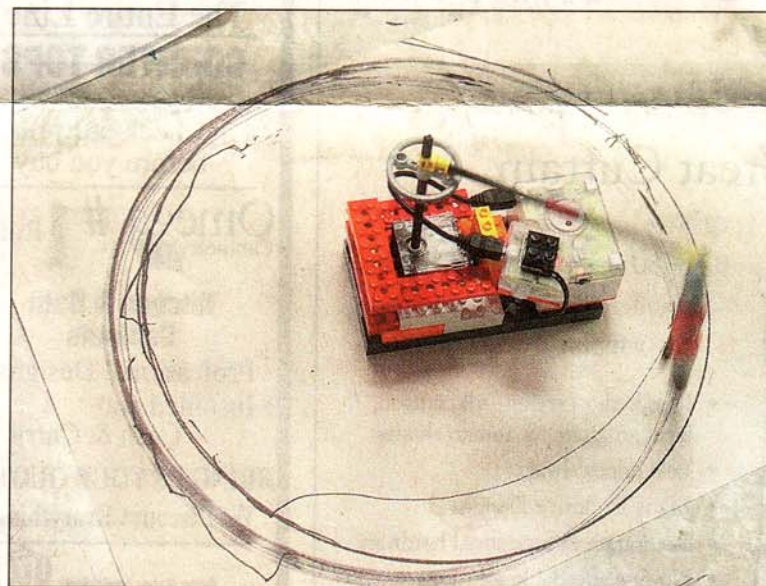
Three of the students — Alexis Badlu, 9, of Farmington, and Lily Garnaat, 8, and Bianca Gallina, 9, both of Victor — worked on Apple computers to program the two Cricket devices.

The other two students — Alli DiGiacamo, 9, and Erin Whipple, 8, also both of Victor — sat at a table, each making a drawing with a graphite pencil.

By the time the period was over, the students had the Crickets programmed so that a pencil held in an armature attached to the Cricket would spin in a circle to make a drawing.

"Still wiggling," said Bianca, who had to figure out how to steady the pencil.

The team of five then worked on another exercise — completed the next time the class met — that entailed programming the Crickets



JAMIE GERMANO staff photographer

Third-graders programmed a device called a PicoCricket to draw a circle on its own. In the science class, students "learn how to work as a team, to think outside the box," says teacher Doug Schmidt.

so that "meow" and chirping sounds were created when the pencil touched the graphite on the paper, completing the circuit.

Over the course of the school year, Schmidt works with about 300 students, almost all from first through third grade.

"They learn how to work as a team, to think outside the box," said Schmidt, who has run the program for the past six years.

"He gives us a chance to figure it

out," said Lily.

The Cricket, developed with the help of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is especially geared toward getting girls interested in careers in engineering.

The 14 students in this Inquiry program are girls.

Schmidt, 48, brings a broad background to his teaching career. He spent six years in the Navy, was a Chuck E Cheese manager and a Wegmans Food Markets' bakery

Online Extra

[DEMOCRATANDCHRONICLE.COM](http://DemocratandChronicle.com)

Click on Victor for more news about the town.



Alexis Badlu



Doug Schmidt

manager before getting his degree at St. John Fisher College.

The desire to do things a bit differently helps explain why he has had students experiment with hydroponics — growing plants in liquid with nutrients rather than in soil.

Another group of third-graders is creating short movies. With the help of a Camcorder, they take video stills of objects. Some of the projects are expected to be entered into the Rod Serling Film Festival in Binghamton.

Schmidt likes to use the term "troubleshooting," in describing how the students learn the art of problem-solving in his class.

"It's what scientists do. They set out an idea and how to prove it," Schmidt said. □

JGOODMAN@DemocratandChronicle.com