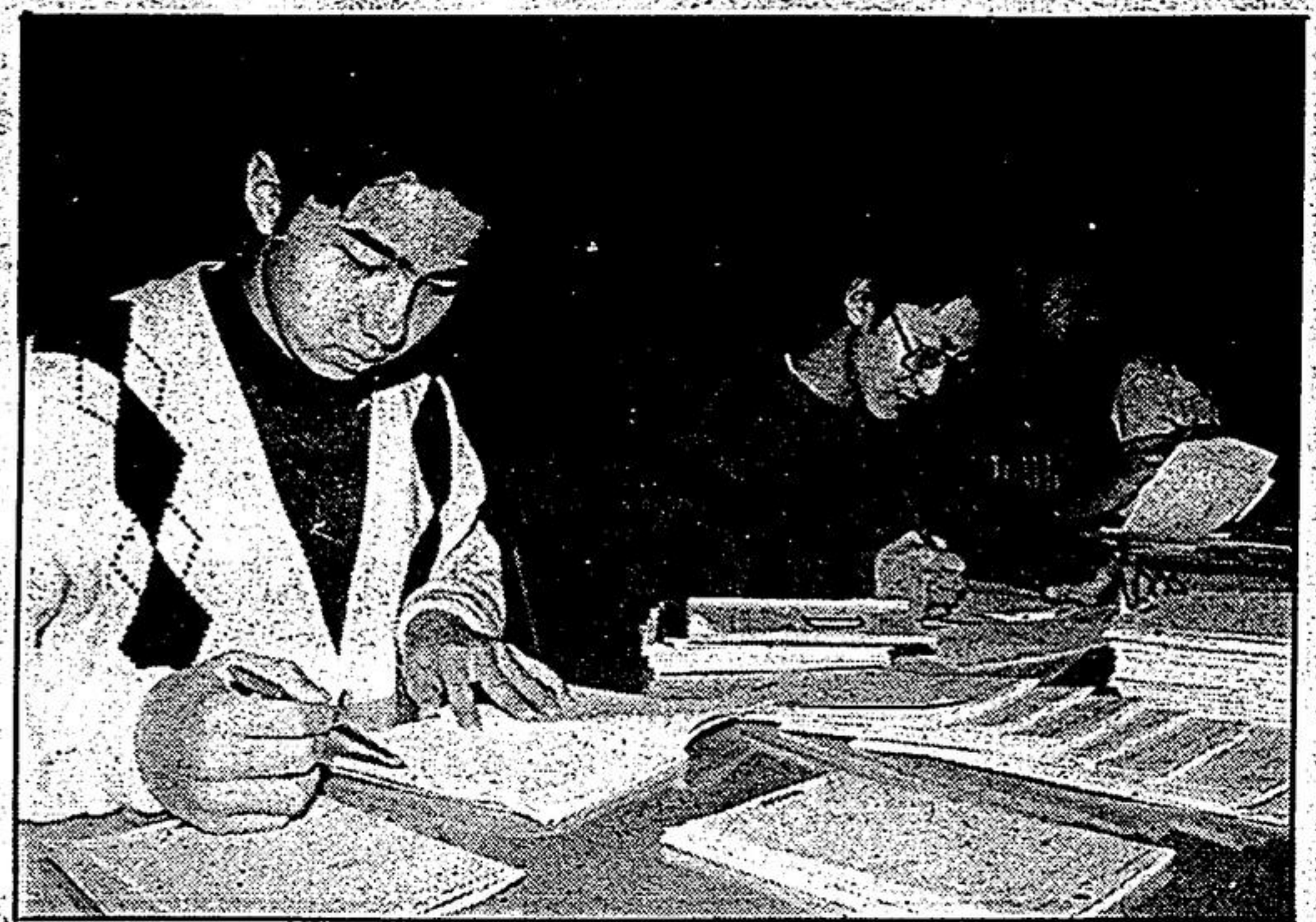


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 The Management



PHOTO/KAREN HAUSCH

From left, Simeon Tse, Greg Lo, Bruce Chau and Minna Cheung mark Kumon assignments at a math class in Unionville.

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**Verdict out on success of extracurricular math class**

**KAREN HAUSCH**  
 Correspondent

School's out for the day. Homework is done, but not for the almost 600 Markham-area students who still have their daily Kumon math exercises to complete. They even work on holidays.

"They commit themselves for half an hour or an hour a day," said Salamia Cortez, who runs the program at Markham library. "It's just like playing hockey."

Most Kumon work is done independently, at home, but two days a week students come to class to hand in work, get any needed help, be introduced to new concepts, and receive their assignments for the next few days. It all takes 10 to 30 minutes. The program costs \$55 a month per student.

Local Kumon programs are also available in Milliken and Unionville. Each class has between 150 and 220 students who range from three to 35 years old.

Kumon math has 21 levels, each covered by 200 worksheets. Every student is assessed, then started at a level where he or she can succeed easily, said Florence Volling, instructor for the Milliken group.

"The first thing we want to do is build solid concentration," said Volling, "because we want the students to go fast and be as close to perfect as possible."

"Usually an average child will take about a year to come up to grade level and go beyond. Usually after that they're getting perfect scores on math work."

Jane Wei, instructor for the Unionville group, said she works with students referred by teachers, and sons and daughters of teachers. But, she added, some educators are strongly opposed to it because of its focus on drill work.

Barry Scully is a math consultant for the York Region Board of Education. Scully said he has known students helped by Kumon, but in many cases parents could see the same results by doing daily drill work with their children.

Some teachers, Scully explained, object to the Kumon method because there is no interaction between students and because there is no emphasis on creative problem solving.

"My feeling," he said, "is that whatever you can do to help your child is what you should do and if Kumon is the way you can help your child then by all means spend the \$55 a month."

David Watson, director of the Omson Centre for Learning Skills in Markham, said Kumon can be helpful but has limitations. It can be a big help for young children learning numbers and basic math, he said, but once students tackle word problems and more abstract concepts the program "falls apart."

Kumon was developed in the 1950s by a Japanese math teacher named Toru Kumon. He designed it for his son and then distributed worksheets to his neighbors' children. Today, his method is used to teach several subjects in Asia, Europe, North and South America.

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