

Math, science symposium helps teachers stay up to date

By Carl Kieke Sunday, February 1, 2009

Some elementary school teachers in the Big Country are using a new piece of technology and interviews with children to improve the way they teach math.

Melinda Maurer, a teacher at Reagan Elementary School in Abilene, presented samples of interviews done with students while they were working math problems Saturday. She used a small, cordless Flip camera with a flash drive that can be plugged into a computer and played back.

“What were they thinking? What strategies did they use to solve the problem?” she said. “We listen to the kids as they are working, hear their thoughts as they explain.”

The camera is small and unobtrusive, so to the child, they are just talking privately to the teacher. In fact, students eagerly ask when their turn will come.

This was one teaching technique presented during the Big Country Math/Science Symposium held at Region XIV Saturday. More than 200 teachers registered and had their choice of science or math breakout sessions throughout the day, many designed for specific grade levels.

“We’ve been doing interviews, but there was never a vehicle to record it efficiently,” said Leslie Koske, elementary math consultant for Region XIV. “Setting up a tripod and a movie camera, the whole thing is too much trouble. This new technology, the teacher can pop it out of her pocket and take a two-minute clip of a student explaining their thinking.

“You can begin to coax students to discuss what their thinking is.

You can understand where their mistakes are and where their strengths are.

“Children have a great deal to say about their learning — when asked. We only ask what the answer is; we don’t ask them their thinking. They turn out to be great communicators.”

John Lineweaver, science consultant for Region XIV, said: “We facilitate our master teachers of math and science to present ideas they are using in their classrooms.

“The intent is to build leadership in the school districts. They serve as mentors to other teachers.”

Shawna Pinkerton, science teacher at Snyder High School, said: “I learn new things every time I go. We bring it back to teachers who may not have the opportunity to go.”

Pinkerton sees the symposium as a big help with the 4-by-4 plan, requiring high school students beginning with this year’s sophomore class to take four years of science.

“We have to increase the variety of classes offered,” she said. “Not all of them like science, so you have to play it up, make sure they are engaged and learning.”

The symposium also helps teachers keep up with today’s students.

“It gives you new ways to present things,” said Karen Jiminez, of Breckenridge Junior High. “I’ve taught for 26 years, and you can’t use the teaching styles of 26 years ago with kids today. They’re computer kids, cell phone kids, text messaging. They’re totally different kids.”

Valiene Bullinger, of Paint Creek, said: “I’m always looking for new and exciting ways that I can experiment with or something that will get the attention of and intrigue my students.

“They can see that science isn’t always a textbook. It’s getting your

hands on things, doing things. (The symposium) is an excellent way to learn from your peers, to learn tricks from other teachers and hopefully get something I can take back to my students.” **Math, science symposium helps teachers stay up to date**

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