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Teaching teachers technology

Instructors in Lowell and Chelmsford show UMass Lowell grad students how to use interactive technology in the classroom

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LOWELL Graphing calculators in hand, a group of teachers punched in X's and Y's, numbers and letters, producing sums and graphs.

They were imitating the exact exercises performed by a seventh-grade Butler School class, determining quadratic equations and compounded interest.

Teacher Susan Lamontagne, a teacher at the Butler Middle School in Lowell, brought the graphing calculators into her math classroom, integrating the technology into the students' lessons.

It's all part of a project initiated by UMass Lowell called "Ready to Teach." The program aims to integrate technology into classrooms through partnerships with classroom teachers and hands-on training of graduate students in education.

For Lamontagne, the program allowed her to purchase the graphing calculators for her class and use them to show children advanced math concepts while keeping the teaching at their level.

"Anything that can make a math class more interesting is good, but will it improve learning?" she told the audience of fellow "Ready to Teach" participants. "Are they just learning the key-punching steps, or are they investigating?"

Lamontagne's project was one of three presented yesterday as teachers shared their work and successes.

While Butler School seventh-graders learned about graphing calculators in their classroom, a group from the Byam School in Chelmsford used software and the Internet in the classroom to study the weather, and the Westlands School used interactive discussions with UMass Lowell professors and created a Web page to study industrialization and immigration.

The programs were all funded through a three-year, \$1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Three schools from Methuen also took part.

When completed, UMass professors will take the lesson designs developed by the school-based teams and use them to teach their graduate students about the best ways to institute technology in class.

"When they go out in the schools, they'll be prepared to teach technology," said Marjorie Dennis, project coordinator for Ready to Teach.

The ultimate goal is to bring a new generation of teachers into the school system, teachers who are used to the challenges and opportunities afforded by technology.

"What we want to do is change the way teachers are taught, so they will be integrating technology into the classroom," Dennis said.

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