High school, middle school teachers learning to make videos

Seminar features live teleconference with instructor in Canada

by CARY GRIFFIN

Fifteen school district employees representing Forney High School and Forney Middle School, including two administrators, attended a seminar on video production for the classroom Monday, February 24, in the Forney ISD Technology Center across from the school district's administration building.

During the four-hour seminar, the school employees received instruction via a real-time teleconference link to British Columbia, Canada. The instructor in British Columbia was Nikos Theodosakis, who created the video-making seminar, "Director in the Classroom".

Acting as general spokesperson for the Forney group was Suzanne Smith, FISD Instructional Technology Coordinator.

The teleconference was a "first" both for Mr. Theodosakis and for Forney ISD's technology center.

The school district personnel who were present included Gail Bradshaw, FMS science teacher; Linda Kelley, FMS theater arts teacher; Randy Lawhon, FMS technology instructor; Nancy Townsend, FMS art teacher; FHS nurse Inez Williams; Dr. Nancy Shaw, assistant principal at FMS; Linda Lumpkin, FHS math teacher; Diana Greer, teacher of technology applications and desktop publishing at FMS; Lisa Rogers, a member of the FHS technology team; Tamara Eaton, theater arts and English teacher, FHS; Deann Smith, BCIS/multimedia teacher at FHS; Scott Star, Life Skills teacher at Forney High School; Cindy Mosby, art teacher, FHS; Debra Beam, sixth grade science and technology teacher at Claybon Elementary; and Grace Johnson, assistant principal at Forney High School. Roger Geiger, FISD technology coordinator, was also present for part of the seminar.

Purpose of Monday's session was to orient the FISD personnel to the concept of producing videos as visual aids to teaching and to give them the fundamentals of video production and editing. Those taking the introductory seminar will produce sample videos, a process that will take them about a month.

Each person attending the seminar had different reasons for wanting to learn to make videos—some of them personal, some of them professional. Nancy Townsend, for example, said that her daughter, now a senior at Forney High School, wants to find a career in technology and she wants to keep up with her daughter; Mrs. Townsend also wants to apply video production to her art curriculum. Scott Starr said he could use his skills in video production to help his students, many of whom are hearing-impaired, master American Sign Language and other communication skills.

The seminar consisted of two general sections: "Why Consider Movies In The Classroom?" and "The Process of Making Movies In The Classroom From Start To Finish."

At the outset, Nikos, who has taught video making to all ages from kindergarten through high school, noted that making movies is "lots of fun" as one develops a concept from an idea to the screen. Videos, he said, tend to redefine work, communication and learning; in fact, the visual image itself is shorthand for other kinds of learning.

He added that, with digital video technology now financially within reach, teachers can use video production to get students to produce documentaries, dramas, and other forms of visual communication at a relatively low cost. In fact, lay people can now use virtually the same equipment professional filmmakers use!

The benefits of digital video production include

- Its low cost.
- It creates a tool teachers can use to develop creativity in their students.
- It is a tool that can create awareness of social issues.
- It builds bridges to the world outside the classroom.
- It can help young people see that some of the personal image messages in the popular media are not always true—for example, that to be popular and date, girls must be thin and/or dress a certain way.

Perhaps one of the best advantages of video production for the classroom, Nikos said, is that it can integrate multiple curricula into one

project.

The first segment of the seminar ended at approximately 6:30 p. m. and those in attendance were given a 10-minute break.

The remainder of the seminar was filled with basic instruction in how to plan a video for the classroom. About halfway through the final segment, the assembled educators were divided into groups of 2, 3 or 4. During the next 15 minutes, each group "brainstormed" to come up with an idea for a video. The teams will spend the next three to four weeks translating their ideas into four-minute video productions, which may be designed for teachers, for students, or for both, and students may be involved in the video production process, if desired. The finished videos will "premiere" on April 7.

Before signoff, Nikos told the Forney educators that they can corroborate on their videos during the production phase in the "Workshop" area on his Web site.

Staff photo

DIGITALLY IN TOUCH—Nikos Theodosakis of British Columbia, Canada, creator of "The Director in the Classroom' video production curriculum for teachers, is seen in the video display terminal at left. In the video display terminal at right are the assembled Forney ISD teachers who attended Nikos' seminar, which was presented for the first time ever in a video conference situation. The seminar, with a real-time digital video/sound link between British Columbia and Forney, took place Monday evening, February 24, in the technology center near the FISD administration building.

Staff photo

Suzanne Smith, Forney ISD's Instructional Technology Coordinator, prepares to assist several of the educators who attended Monday night's seminar.

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Seminar attendees work in small groups toward the close of the session. The videos each team will produce will "premiere on April 7.