

Holiday Happenings

Simple ways to enjoy the holidays, picture-perfect cards, magical parties and more.

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Teachers enter the digital age

By Geoff Moore

Correspondent

The next time you see a child listening to or watching a small handheld media player, they might just be doing their homework.

That was one of the messages about the future of technology in teaching from Professor James Lengel, keynote speaker at the Lincoln School district's annual Institute Day.

Approximately 150 teachers, teaching assistants and other specialists gathered in the Donaldson Auditorium on the Lincoln campus for a day devoted to the subject of the integration of technology as a teaching and learning tool for

grades K-8.

The morning session opened with a welcome from organizer and assistant superintendent, Paul Naso, in which he said that the day was an ambitious plan because it involved coaxing peak performance from aging computers. Although Naso referenced the three-year capital-spending request for technology upgrades now with the Capital Planning Committee, he said that the day was not about purchasing hardware. It was about sparking good thinking on the use of technology and an opportunity to learn new skills.

Lengel, visiting professor at **Technology, Page 15**



Staff photo by Ann Ringwood

In the class 'Intro to Excel,' Scott Burke, athletic director and physical education teacher at the middle school, and Kerry Bronnenkant, fourth-grade special education teacher, had fun making pie charts that reflect the colors of M&Ms in the package they were given.

Teachers take on technology

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Hunter College, the University of Nantes and the South China University of Technology, gave an animated and interactive Web-based tour through the learning world he deals with on a daily basis. This was clearly demonstrated when a student in China, using Internet messenger, inadvertently interrupted the start of Lengel's presentation to pose a question about his homework assignment. Without missing a beat, Lengel provided a quick reply and then went on to describe the information-rich world of today: A world where the use of the Internet facilitates planning for retirement, curing disease by transmission of large amounts of data and simplifying such tasks as booking theatre tickets.

He described the process for the transformation of voice, video, music, text and still pictures and their transmission via wired and wireless means to a variety of devices such as laptops, cell phones and media players, which are getting smaller every day. Lengel told

the audience that 94 percent of students arrive in university with a laptop computer and that with 67 million portable music players sold in the United States, these small devices are fast becoming a medium for learning through teacher-generated pod casts. Students, he said, now come fully wired and talk a digital language that teachers must learn in order to communicate effectively.

Turning to classroom investment and organization, Lengel encouraged teachers to consider the learning environment and their overall strategy for the use of computers before considering what type of equipment to purchase. Lengel's pictures and description of 22 New York City middle schools, where investment has fully equipped all classrooms for learning through technology, brought spontaneous and loud applause from the audience.

However, for Lengel, teacher-generated content, tailored to specific learning needs, is of greater importance than the devices used for accessing and viewing the content. He said that design of hardware is best left to the entertainment industry; teachers must focus on providing content.

The audience dispersed after Lengel's talk to attend a variety of workshop sessions, from hands-on introductions to Microsoft Word, PowerPoint and Excel, to reports from leaders on the technology integration pilots for math and science that have been ongoing since June.

In the Smith gym, where the lighting and acoustics is more suited to the play and shouts of children, Rob Ramsdell, founder of FreshPond Education, presented a workshop entitled, "What's Possible? Teaching with Technology in the Humanities."

Thirty-five educationalists sat in front of 20 shiny Apple G4 laptops, which when not in use are stored in slots in a wheeled cart that serves for both security and battery charging. Naso, visiting the workshop, explained that they are part of the school's latest acquisition of three such laptop pods and provide the maximum

flexibility for class activity, adding that the Hanscom campus has similar equipment.

Wirelessly linked to the school's Internet connection via an access point, the whole configuration can easily be moved to wherever the class is taking place.

Following brief demonstrations, the participants, some clustered in teams of four or five, explored educational links, carried out searches for material relevant to their teaching subject and created simple Web pages containing information that their students could access from school, home or the local library.

Ramsdell, whose 11-year-old company provides educational

consultancy to Lincoln Schools, said that the aim of the humanities session was to help to develop a strategic plan not only for technology, but also for individuals' personal development. He also anticipated that the workshop would generate interest and volunteers for the humanities pilot project that is scheduled to begin early in 2007.

Speech-language therapist, Lisa Falcone, attending from the Hanscom campus, said after attending the humanities session, that she might have found some of the information by searching the Web at home, but referring to Institute Day, she said, "having this time was a gift."