



Teacher workshop trains the brain

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WASECA July 30, 2009 12:10 am

— At first blush, it appeared 90 teachers were simply having a good time. But as those teachers danced to the beat of a boombox blaring “La Bamba” in a crowded conference room, something more profound was taking place.

During a workshop this week, teachers from across the region gathered at Farmamerica to learn how to incorporate brain-based learning into their elementary classrooms. A new spin on long-held perceptions of how to teach young children, brain-based learning is founded on the concept that physical activities and forms of play will stimulate certain parts of the brain, and thus prepare them for learning.

As teachers danced simple movements to “La Bamba,” they were actually learning an easy technique for stimulating their students’ corpus callosums — which connects the two hemispheres of the brain — through physical movements that cross the body’s midline.

“Research is showing that developing these physical skills will help kids gain academic skills more easily,” said Michelle Krell, principal of Hartley Elementary in Waseca. “And kids love it.”

The brain-based teaching strategy already has been implemented in several area schools, including the Cleveland School District, which recently created a specific brain-based classroom. Waseca piloted the program last winter, and Krell said teachers were receptive. She said Hartley will continue the program. She said the school also created their own brain-based classroom this summer.

“We need to meet the needs of all kids and this is one more strategy,” Krell said.

Teachers at the S.M.A.R.T. workshop said such trainings are critical in giving teachers new ideas and opportunities to practice teaching strategies. But that workshop is only one of dozens hosted throughout the region this summer.

From Project Lead the Way’s engineering workshops to state-sponsored teacher academies where teachers learn how to adapt to continually evolving academic standards, the business of teaching teachers is booming. A few weeks ago, the South Central Service Cooperative received a nearly \$1 million grant to develop a staff development program for history and social studies teachers. The program will incorporate several local partners and emphasize the history of southern Minnesota.

Earlier this week, the SCSC received a separate grant of \$51,024 to start a training program for math and science teachers who want to align their class curriculums with new state standards.

Those programs are in addition to a number that SCSC already coordinates, including one in Belle Plaine this week on incorporating technology into the classroom.

“We’re excited to get started,” said Mary Hillman, a program coordinator with SCSC, about the organization’s latest training effort. “It’s so helpful when teachers can come together and collaborate.”

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Photos



Marion Bauman demonstrates a learning tool during a workshop on brain-based learning Wednesday. The tool is designed to help elementary-age students improve their peripheral vision by placing pegs around the compass without moving their heads. The exercise is intended to train young eyes for the movements required to read and interpret visual images. The Free Press