

## **HERITAGE IS SHARED WITH HIGH-TECH HELP**

**With aid of MediaWorks, students create in-depth projects describing backgrounds**

12/01/2002

By **KRISTINE HUGHES / The Dallas Morning News**

Sixth-grader Ibad Aziz doesn't like speaking Urdu in front of his classmates.

Like a number of immigrant students, he doesn't want to seem different in any way.

So when his teacher suggested a project that would merge pictures from his early childhood with a recording in his native tongue, he told her he didn't have any photos to use.

That certainly wasn't inconceivable.

"Many of these students [are refugees who] escaped and don't have any pictures," said Debbie Stallings, instructional technology specialist at Richland Elementary School. Most, though, just don't want to stand out in the crowd, she added.

But Ibad changed his mind after the class watched an example of the scrapbook-type home movies that were put together by a Russian girl and declared cool by the other students.

Now, he and six other Richland sixth-graders – another from Pakistan and one each from Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Vietnam and the Korean Peninsula – are learning to be proud of their heritage while improving their vocabularies, writing abilities, grammar and other skills.

That integration of technology and core curriculum is just what Mrs. Stallings intended when she began using the Interactive Solutions software called MediaWorks.

"They had to write a story and then a script, and it has to be grammatically correct in two languages," she said. The programming allows students to combine video, photos, music, voiceovers and text to create a kind of next-generation PowerPoint presentation. The software was purchased during Richland's technology upgrade, which was funded by last year's school bond program.

"It has gotten good enough and easy enough – and the equipment cheap enough – to make it possible for students of all ages to use it," Mrs. Stallings said.

She has watched such programs quickly evolve. This is her fourth year as an instructional technology specialist in the Richardson school district. She had been a Richland physical education instructor with a real knack for computers when she was asked to be part of an RISD instructional technology pilot program.

Until then, district technology specialists were technicians, not teachers, who could not work on curriculum. The new job combined both fields.



For three years, Mrs. Stallings split her time between Terrace Elementary School and Richland, working with teachers to find ways to use technology in their lessons that was more than just typing or doing Internet research.

“Technology can be a production tool as well as a learning tool,” Richland principal Beverly Millican said. “And when you add it to the regular curriculum, kids are so whipped up to do the project that they don’t realize they’re learning content, too.”

Mrs. Millican said technology inspires, engages and equalizes the students in ways they never were before, and when the students get excited so do the teachers.

It has worked so well at her school that when the pilot program ended she decided to find a way to make the instructional specialist full time.

Mrs. Stallings’ salary is paid with federal and local funds. The bond program and PTA purchased the materials used in the multimedia productivity classroom, including digital and video cameras, computers and a variety of specialized programs. The MediaWorks project has so much potential and been so popular that Mrs. Stallings is teaching it to as many teachers and students as she can so they can teach their co-workers and classmates and so on.

She also took two students to a weekend conference in the Dallas-Fort Worth area where they put the software to use making public service announcements. Mrs. Stallings and Gayla Wilson, a Richardson school district technology trainer, also will present the completed heritage movies at the Texas Computer Education Association’s state convention in February in Austin.

Then the pieces will be entered in a national competition and featured on the MediaWorks Web site.

But first they will have their Richardson premiere at what the teachers hope will be a red-carpet event in April.

The movies will include pictures from before the students moved to America with voiceovers in their native language and subtitles in English and pictures from after their move narrated in English with subtitles in their native tongues.

The movies also will depict traditions – old and new.

“It’s giving them pride in their backgrounds, their culture, their families,” said Diane Wollert, who teaches English as a second language at Richland. “You can see them growing.”

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#### Web Site References:

<http://www.dallasnews.com/localnews/city/richardson/stories/110402ricstudentmovies.66829.html>

<http://www.mediaworkssoftware.com>

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