

A TEACHER REFLECTS



Using Technology in the Classroom

I was more nervous about doing this unit than *any* of my students!

Spreadsheets?... I knew how to find one on my computer. That's about it! So I began the journey that so many teachers take of keeping one step ahead of the kids. One of my students asked one of the questions that I, too, wanted to know: Why use a big old computer to do this work when a calculator would do just as well, and it's smaller and fits in my purse? Well, she didn't ask the question in *exactly* the same way, but the meaning was the same! I've learned a lot, along with the students: how to set up a spreadsheet, how to enter a formula, how to identify parts of a spreadsheet, and, most importantly, why I would use a spreadsheet!

The use of so many computers is a challenge that faces all teachers. We need to use technology in our classrooms, but how many of us have continual access to a classroom full of computers? My school has two computer labs that each contain 32 computers. Still, other teachers from departments other than math needed to use them also.

So it was virtually impossible to take my class there for two to three weeks of continual spreadsheet work. I had two computers already in my classroom. I was able to borrow two more from two other math teachers in my school. (They still have techno-phobia and seldom used them anyway!) The computer lab technician loaned me a mobile computer that hooks up to a large monitor. Finally, I happened to mention to the director of the Northern California Math Project at UC Davis that I had a problem getting enough computers for this project, and she loaned me three more computers for the duration of the unit! I found that a classroom with eight computers is manageable and actually a better situation than going to a lab. Students didn't have to wait for a schedule to use them and could ask to go to the computer any time they wanted. The only thing better would be to have a computer at every desk, but I suppose that's somewhere in the future. In the meantime, I'll look for a grant to have eight computers in my classroom all the time!