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Young Scientists

Elementary school students use equipment to learn science

BY KENDRA BOOME
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The NT physics department opens the heavens for Metroplex elementary school students with programs that teach astronomy with hands-on methods and the new planetarium. **"It's a magic thing for kids," said Dr. James Roberts of the physics faculty. "My grandkids are studying things that only college kids used to study." Roberts works with The University of North Texas Regional Collaborative for Excellence in Science Teaching, a program that works with area science teachers.** The program shows public school teachers how to guide their students in astronomy and physics experiments, such as measuring distance with triangulation and constructing a telescope. The teachers also learn how to work with complex machines and computers. **Roberts said he holds the philosophy that children are innate scientists and that somehow they lose their interest after they sit through uninspiring classes with uninspired teachers.** By giving children projects they can build with household items, Roberts said they can learn basic scientific principles. "You can help them discover what they already know," he said. Teachers sometimes invite Roberts to come to their classroom and show his experiments. One of his experiments uses an economy planetarium made from a metal coffee can with holes that represent stars. Roberts puts the can over a projector and as the light shines through, he shows the classroom different elements of the night sky.

"We just try to teach them to look at the world around them and remember what they see," Roberts said. The teacher group Roberts works with will meet again at NT on April 17. At the planetarium, which is in the Environmental Education, Science Technology Building, about 2,000 elementary children pass through the exhibits and visit the planetarium each month, said Ronald Diulio, planetarium manager. "We have programs for every kid from page I related to their school program," he said. Diulio said the program for children is advantageous because it introduces children to NT and eventually they might come back as NT students. The program is also a good opportunity for NT students in education to work with the children, he said. "We have something to offer here that is offered nowhere else," he said. "If you have two teachers apply for a job and one has hands-on experience, the one with more experience will get the job."

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