



SAN GABRIEL UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

PRESS RELEASE

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San Gabriel Unified Educators Explore Design-Based Learning during Summer Institute

SAN GABRIEL, CA – Nearly 40 San Gabriel Unified educators returned to the classroom – as students – to exercise their creativity and explore instructional methods during the Doreen Nelson method of Design-Based Learning (DBL) Summer Institute, held July 25-31 at Art Center in Pasadena.

The five-day training introduced teachers, staff and administrators to DBL instruction, developed by Cal Poly Pomona professor Doreen Nelson in 1969 so that students learn to acquire, retain and synthesize classroom lessons through kinesthetic problem-solving.

“Through traditional ‘frontward’ teaching, students are supposed to learn to analyze, synthesize and evaluate facts and ideas, and to develop original ideas,” Nelson said. “In that model, teaching begins with basic facts and gets stuck there. However, DBL teaches using Backward Thinking™ methodology, which begins with the highest level of reasoning. Students create unique objects through design challenges and use those objects to conceptualize the subject matter and textbook lessons.”

The institute was led by K-12 educators who have earned master’s degrees in DBL from Cal Poly Pomona and have successfully put the methodology to work in their own classrooms. Among this year’s teacher trainers was Daphne Chase, a second-grade teacher at Wilson Elementary School, who is working on her doctorate in DBL.

“Design-Based Learning is best understood when it’s seen and experienced for yourself, so it’s wonderful that so many of our administrators joined us for the institute this year,” Chase said. “It’s exciting to see the support from our District as we seek to introduce DBL to other schools.”

General and special education teachers and administrators from seven SGUSD sites learned how to apply simplified design techniques to teach problem solving, experienced hands-on activities to engage students and applied national standards to curriculum, instruction and assessment.

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Educators were asked to design a creature or avatar using “happy trash,” or cardboard and recycled materials. They assigned them character traits, wants and needs. The teams then had to build a shelter – and ultimately a city – to house their creatures; the city had to fulfill a criteria list using “Never- Before-Seen” features.

In the classroom, the creatures and cities serve as reference points for students to be taught guided lessons that connect concrete ideas to abstract academic concepts and core curriculum, such as characterization in language arts and primary and secondary sources in social studies.

During the final days of training, attendees were challenged to establish criteria for evaluating DBL across the curriculum and developing and action plan for the classroom.

District administrators also met with Nelson and teacher trainers for their own sessions, in which they discussed challenges to implementing DBL at their schools, ways to support teachers who use DBL instruction and how to embrace DBL concepts at the administrative level.

San Gabriel Unified plans to introduce DBL instruction at the elementary, middle and high school levels over the next few years.

Deputy Director, Educational Services Yolanda Mendoza said the District plans to establish its own group of teacher trainers who can support other SGUSD educators in implementing DBL in their classrooms. The long-term goal, Mendoza said, is to transform one SGUSD site into a DBL demonstration school for other schools and districts.

“We are proud to provide our teachers and administrators with the opportunity to learn from renowned educators and explore ways to improve the educational experience for our students,” SGUSD Superintendent Dr. John Pappalardo said. “We look forward to expanding DBL instruction throughout San Gabriel Unified with continued support from ArtCenter and Doreen Nelson.”

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PHOTO CAPTIONS:

080618_SANGAB_DBL_INSTITUTE1: San Gabriel Unified educators evaluate a city built by their colleagues during the Design-Based Learning Summer Institute at ArtCenter on July 27. The cities, built using recycled materials, serve as reference points that help students conceptualize their lessons.

080618_SANGAB_DBL_INSTITUTE2: San Gabriel Unified teachers and administrators perform an original song and dance as part of their simulated Design-Based Learning lesson during the DBL Summer Institute, held July 25-31 at ArtCenter in Pasadena.

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