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Excellence Program Supports Partnership with St. Louis Zoo!



Michelle Alimagno (left) and Andrea Jamison deduce the physics of a pendulum.

In partnership, The Excellence Program, Wilson teachers, and the St. Louis Zoo set out to expand understanding of inquiry as a method of teaching and learning. Modeled in light of the sciences, but applicable to all core-content, inquiry-based learning is

an active process in which students work together to solve problems. It is the teacher's responsibility to facilitate this process of discovery, rather than solely deliver direct instruction.

Instructors Jim Jordan and Sharon Kassing led Wilson's teachers through a five-day workshop involving a skills circus, investigable questions, inquiry starters, inquiry activities, uncovering rules, lesson shifting, and applying lessons according to various levels of teacher direction. A total of four follow-up meetings took place during the 2009-2010 school year. These meetings covered recent application of inquiry in Wilson classrooms, citizen science- the contribution to national databases via bird watching, flowering schedules, weather data, and wildlife migration- and other uses of inquiry outdoors. In the follow academic year, inquiry meetings will recommence to introduce new, exciting forms of inquiry-based learning.

The partnership with the St. Louis Zoo will continue for the next three to five years and support Wilson in establishing cross-curricular connections, vertical planning, use of our space and neighborhood as an extension of the classroom, and developing models for writing science curriculum.

Excellence Program Helps Establish Inaugural LEGO Robotics Teams

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) and The LEGO Group joined forces to create The FIRST LEGO League (FLL)– a global program established to inspire a fun, contemporary use of science and technology. Wilson students have joined over 140,000 motivated minds in 56 countries as members of both the Jr. FIRST Lego League (grades 1–3) and the FIRST Lego League (grades 4–6).

Using elements of basic computer programming, machinery (gears, motors, pulleys, etc.), sensors, and LEGO, the Jr. FLL has created dancing birds, drumming monkeys, chomping alligators, and self-spinning tops. Students have used a series of basic commands (spin motor left/right) and complex commands (wait for, random, loop) to complete challenges and create original programs.



Working out the kinks of their NXT programming.

With use of LEGO Mindstorms NXT, the FLL (grades 4–6) has advanced from simple motor commands to various turns based on wheel rotation, time and degree, and recently to the use of sound, light, and ultrasonic sensors. By understanding the characteristics of thresholds, the group has discovered how to turn their robot on and off by clapping, use ultrasonic waves to navigate objects, and program their robot to follow a random line based on its color. In the future, the group will begin to research the application of robots in a real world context, culminating with the FLL's "Body Forward Challenge," which explores the concept of biomedical engineering.

The Excellence Program (2009-2010) also contributed to the following professional development opportunities:

- CASE: New Teacher Institute
- *What's New in Children's Literature, 2010* - Peggy Sharp
- *Writing Workshop: Adapting Writing Center Pedagogy to an Elementary School Setting* - WUSTL, Doreen Salli
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Conference
- Annual ISACS Conference
- *Write To Learn* - Georgia Heard
- Midwest Regional Technology Conference



“Our favorite word is ‘excellence’...”

said Hal & Catherine Faught, grandparents of two Wilson alums and the founders of The Wilson School's Excellence Program. In the fall of 2006, Hal & Catherine established the Excellence Program, a dollar-for-dollar matching fund that supports: professional development for our faculty, additions to our library, and innovative programming for our students — including an exclusive writing partnership with Washington University. Through the generosity of the Faughts, Wilson parents, grandparents, alums, and friends, the Excellence Program sets The Wilson School apart from all other independent elementary schools in Saint Louis.