

# STEAM incorporates variety at Altama Elementary

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The fourth-grade girls at Altama Elementary School bopped to the front of the art classroom this week and danced to an impromptu song they called “Vibrations,” generating enthusiasm and laughter from their classmate.

Education majors Aimee Gordy and Zayne Harrelson from College of Coastal Georgia brought the children a lesson on vibrations, which included a short video, and to the delight of the children, a chance to strum Gordy’s guitar and yes, dance and sing.



For the first time, CCGA professor Debby Smith brought some of her practicum students to Altama for a series of three service-learning opportunities in which they introduced STEAM activities to first and fourth-graders. The acronym stands for science, technology, engineering, the arts and math.

“My students are creating the lessons with me,” Smith said, “working on integration and taking the lessons to the school. We had nine small groups who chose music or visual arts and allowed them to decide if they wanted to integrate their lessons with science or math.”

Altama principal Michelle Drew is excited about the chance to see the collaboration between the college students, art teacher Rebecca Cushing and music teacher Isaac Newman.

“We always like to work with the college to give new student teachers a real-life experience in incorporating STEAM activities,” Drew said. “This is building a foundation, sparking interest in our elementary students.”

The study of vibrations has its own standards, and Gordy and Harrelson chose to introduce it through music. As Smith described it, the college students discussed the ukulele and the guitar to demonstrate how they produce sounds through vibrations. Afterward, the children moved into small groups and were given ordinary household items and rubber bands to build their own musical instruments to produce sound waves. The quintet of girls — Deoni Hacker, Lizeth Morting, Yolanda Green, Niya Roberts and Taleya Heck — wrapped large rubber bands around a plastic bottle and strummed them to, this time, “We Will Rock You.”

Another fourth-grader, Sophia Pralta, pointed out how strings on any instrument that are far apart make higher sounds and those closer together make lower sounds. That's just the kind of knowledge that Gordy wants to bring to the children.

“In all the classrooms” she said, “I’ve been working to get my students excited and engaged. If not, they won’t receive the material — wouldn’t listen to a boring class. You have to be interested in what you’re doing.”



During her career as a public school teacher, Smith quickly realized that the visual arts and music classes were at times the first on the chopping block.

“A lot of it is in economic terms,” she said. “I had to show some viability for my arts education program, that this is an integration of the curriculum. It’s not fluff and cuddles.”

In another class on Thursday, CCGA students Latrisha Easey and Carrie Thompson developed a visual arts lesson, “First Grade Forest,” based on a children’s book, “The First Forest,” written by popular author John Giles. The children soon were having a great time as they learned about plants and trees.

Based on two illustrations from the book, the children in two separate groups used provided supplies to create a background and then standing trees that are injured, as one of the illustrations depicts. That led to a single piece of art work.

In another project, students Chelsie Jarman and Nicole Harmon brought a combination of music and earth science to introduce weather patterns through rhythmic body percussions.

The efforts of the college students means a lot, Cushing said, as they got a chance to work with all the music and visual arts students at both grade levels at just the right time.

“It’s very exciting,” Cushing said. “We’ve started a STEAM Club instead of art clubs so we combine all the ideas.”

Smith said her students devoted a lot of time to bring lessons that would entertain the children without realizing how much fun they were having.

“One comment from my students warms my heart,” Smith said. “They found a new respect for the visual arts and music.”