



## Teachers march to beat of different drummer at conference

About 1,500 teachers filled the halls of Reagan High School for the Third Annual Differentiated Learning Conference in late July. Teachers attended seminars and listened to speakers to learn some effective approaches to teaching children with diverse learning styles.

Ron Clark, Disney's Teacher of the Year in 2000, kicked-off the conference with an animated keynote address that energized attendees with ideas to take to their classrooms. Clark used stories about his adventures in the classroom to deliver a simple message: with hope and dedication and the will to never let anything stand in the way of your goals and dreams, anything is possible. He has appeared on the *Today Show* with Katie Couric, was featured on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* on two occasions, was named Oprah's first "Phenomenol Man" and is the author of two books.

"My rules (that he wrote about in his books) are just a suggestion," said Clark. "You have the creativity. You have the enthusiasm. You have the experience to come up with your own methods for inspiring these kids and teaching them to respect themselves and to respect other people."

Following Clark's keynote speech, teachers had to choose among several workshops and breakout sessions throughout the two-day conference. Workshops such as "Managing Middle School Minds" and "Learning Centers for Literacy" along with sessions including "The Secrets of the Teenage Brain" and "Nurturing the Creative Spirit" focused on improving student success by understanding how students learn and gave teachers new tools to take to the classroom in the 2005-2006 school year.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the conference on Differentiation," said Joyce Gallegos, a kindergarten teacher at Wetmore Elementary School. "One of the sessions that I went to that was very exciting and well done was 'Differentiated Instruction for Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Classrooms.' It covered ensuring student success through differentiated instruction and gave us strategies that

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Members of the Drum Cafe lead a class of teachers through various beats and rhythms, showing how music relates to working with people of all ages.

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address diverse needs in small group, large group, etc. It was great for teachers of young children."

Another dynamic session that drew large crowds of teachers was the Drum Cafe. The Drum Cafe program is a unique, hands-on approach to teaching teamwork, leadership, diversity and

communication through music. Facilitators lead groups through various beats and rhythms using simple drums. As soon as teachers walked into the room, they were greeted by the rhythmic pounds of drums and hooting and calling of the facilitators. Participants immediately sat down, put the drum between their knees and started pounding to the beat. The Drum Cafe of Texas, located in San Antonio, delivers programs throughout the city.

This is the third year that the Differentiated Learning Conference was held. Its first year had about 100 participants, and last year brought in about 300. The record-setting conference this year was attended by nearly 40 percent of total teachers.

For more information about the Differentiated Learning Conference, contact Jan DeHaven, conference coordinator, at 804-7200.

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