

Students use Legos to build math skills

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HIGH POINT — The little plastic bricks that were a staple of childhood playrooms for many are now just as likely to be found in math classrooms.

Shirley Disseler, an associate professor of education at High Point University, has developed Lego-based curricula to help K-8 students better understand math.

“Research shows that one of the greatest ways to enhance problem-solving skills is through the use of creative play,” she said.

Disseler turned the Stout School of Education in a Lego playland Monday morning in honor of International Lego Day. The day was set aside to honor the patent application for the first Lego brick system on January 28, 1958.

HPU students were invited to stop in the lobby of Stout and create a Lego figure of something they are passionate about.

Junior Carly Crisafulli, who is majoring in elementary education, immediately began searching for bricks to build a soccer field.

“I’ve played soccer my entire life and it’s become a huge passion of mine,” she said.

Using Legos, which people of all ages associate with play, to teach math is becoming increasingly common in classrooms around the country, Disseler said.

Certified as a master educator by Lego Education, Disseler is the creator of the Brick Math Series, which help students conceptualize everything from basic counting to algebra using the colorful bricks.

Historically, students have been expected to sit in a classroom and memorize what is being taught.

But real-life jobs often call for improvising and coming up with innovative solutions. Disseler said this disconnect has led to a “creativity crisis.”

“Our future generations need to be problem solvers, not regurgitators of information,” she said. “They struggle how to creatively solve problems. By using their imagination to build purposeful things through play, it enhances that part of the brain.”

Brick Math has been adopted by most schools in the Davidson County, Rowan County and Thomasville City Schools districts. A few Guilford County Schools are also using it.

Local students have the opportunity to work with HPU students on Lego math each Friday at the Stout School of Education and the High Point Community Center.

As an education major, Crisafulli has been involved in many of the workshops. After seeing how well students take to Brick Math, she’s planning to use it in her future classroom.

“It’s more hands-on. Instead of trying to visualize the numbers, they actually get to set them out,” she said. “If we’re talking about fractions, they can set out the fractions and see how they could bring the fractions together.”

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