

Kids Teaching Kids, an Active Education

by Leah J. Matuson

Loretta Fahey has been teaching Health Education in Medfield since 1980, helping kids navigate their way through a variety of social issues that come up in the world they live in, day to day and year to year.

“The face of health education has changed,” says Ms. Fahey. “We’re being asked to handle issues that family and religious institutions used to deal with. But now these issues have been brought into the schools because of our expertise.”

Among the issues with which Medfield Health Ed. deals are diversity, discrimination and prejudice. Though we’ve taught our kids about diversity and acceptance, Ms. Fahey wanted to find a way to put those teachings into practice.

“I thought ‘what a great teaching vehicle the theater would be’...and this (the play) happened to turn into my Master’s thesis.” And that’s just how Ms. Fahey arrived at the idea of writing and producing “Pieces of 8,” a 45-minute performance that illustrates snippets of middle school life, set in the school hallways. The title refers to the number of cast members – four girls and four boys – all eighth graders; there are two sets of cast members who perform the play.

Speaking to the issues of prejudice, diversity and discrimination, Ms. Fahey’s 7th and 8th graders provided her with the material for the play -- their thoughts, comments and feedback, and their terminology. “They started out auditioning for a part in a play, but ended up becoming the part,” says Ms. Fahey.

Medfield High School senior, Kaitlin Soligan, took on the many responsibilities of the play’s Assistant Director as part of her Community Service project, and absolutely loves it! Among her responsibilities is conducting an audience question and answer session after the play. Says Kaitlin, “Working with Ms. Fahey is incredible, the kids in the cast are amazing...it was like a metamorphosis watching the play develop into what it is now.”

Cast members spoke about their experiences acting in this production. Pat says that being in the play made him realize that racism, prejudice and put-downs really do cause harm and hurt people. Briana was surprised at the things going on around her at school because they weren’t happening directly to her – like name-calling. “It taught me how bigotry and discrimination can tear a school apart and destroys friendships,” says Sam. Cathy, Josh and Tim all agree that the play showed them what discrimination was all about, and Giovanni believes that it made him more aware of what’s really going on at school. The other cast members all seemed to reinforce these sentiments.

MORE

“Students in our school have learned from this play – kids teaching kids, an active education,” remarks Ms. Fahey. “Right after our performance, one student told me that ‘this is the first time someone wasn’t preaching to us – it was all about us, how we talk, who we really are.’”

Dana, another cast member, echoes that opinion affirming that “everything in the play is something that one of us might actually say or do, so kids can really relate to this – it’s a good teaching tool.”

Recently, Pieces of 8 premiered for 7th and 8th graders in Medfield’s Blake Middle School. Since then, the cast has been invited to perform at a number of middle schools around Massachusetts.

Says Ms. Fahey “Our parents and teachers really work well together. Peg Mongiello, Principal at the Blake Middle School, and Bob Maguire, Superintendent of Medfield Public Schools, are great proponents of the arts and theater in the Medfield schools. Medfield is very lucky because without their support this might not have been possible.”

In parting, Ms. Fahey comments that teaching is all about giving back to the community and learning about the kids. “Before you can teach them, you have to know their makeup, only then can you *really* teach.”

So what do the kids say about their teacher, their coach, their director *and* their friend. It was unanimous. “Ms. Fahey is awesome, she’s the best.”

To see this remarkable production in your own home, tune in to Medfield Cable 8 Community Channel to find out when Pieces of 8 will be airing.

###