

Time Traveling with Cinderella

New program pairs UNH theatre education students with Dover middle schoolers

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DOVER MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS PERFORMING A PLAY WRITTEN BY UNH STUDENTS.

On a Tuesday afternoon in early November at Dover Middle School (DMS), dinosaurs roamed the auditorium. Meanwhile, Cinderella, Rapunzel and other characters tried to fix a broken time machine and make it back home for a dance party.

The dinosaurs and the fairy tale characters in peril were student actors, part of a new unified arts program at DMS. A collaboration with UNH associate professor Raina Ames' community-oriented

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drama class, the program paired UNH theatre education students with special education students at the middle school.

“I’ve learned so much,” said Liz Feinschreiber ’19. “It’s been very rewarding.”

The program began in the fall, when Ames’ seven students began holding twice-weekly workshops at DMS. During the first half of the semester, Feinschreiber and her peers designed lesson plans with a focus on introducing DMS students to the basics of drama. For the second half of the semester, DMS students applied those lessons by creating and staging an original play, which made its debut in December.

“We asked them in our first session what they wanted to see in a play,” said Molly McKay ’18. “The show is theirs as much as it is ours.”

After compiling a list of what the DMS students wanted — including robots, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, and time travel — UNH students wrote a script and began directing the production. For Gloria Snowman, a special education teacher and case manager at DMS, seeing how the students responded to the play was “eye opening.” The fifth through eighth graders taking part in the program have a range of special needs and Snowman said there are few opportunities for students to participate in after-school activities like drama. But when they have a chance, the results are impressive, she added.

“We have one fifth grader who ... just blends in and loves it. Friendships develop (among students), and they’re more open with each other and more willing to do things together,” Snowman said.



DOVER MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

TAKE THE STAGE.

Special education teacher

and case manager Jaclyn Hookway worked with Snowman to bring the program to DMS. Volunteer student mentors from Dover High School also joined the fun.

“Some of my students have never done an after-school activity. Now, they talk about (the unified arts program) all day ... and they can’t wait for it to come,” she said.

The program is driven entirely by UNH students, Ames said. “The lesson plans are written by UNH students, the script was written by them and they’re team directing the show,” she said. It’s a chance for students like McKay and Feinschreiber to get practical, hands-on experience in the classroom, flexing both their theatrical and teaching muscles. According to Ames, community-oriented drama programs like this can help increase verbal, socialization and motor skills in children.

“I learned ... how important it is to have a structured plan — and a great deal of flexibility. You have to be very adaptive,” Feinschreiber said.

For McKay, the program has been especially rewarding. “I believe arts are so important in everyday classrooms, because they encourage confidence and creativity ... and arts integration fosters so many positive qualities and ideals,” she said. Even after a few workshops, McKay noticed how positively DMS students responded to the workshops.

“Seeing that change in them so quickly was one of the most rewarding parts,” she said.

The program has been a hit with students and parents, according to Snowman. She and Hookway want to keep the collaboration going.

“We’re hoping to get more drama programs in the school next

year,” she said.

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