



REGINA DOMINICAN

THE COLLEGE PREPARATORY CATHOLIC SCHOOL FOR WOMEN

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Alumna brings drama skills back to Regina

For the past few Friday afternoons, sophomore physical education classes at Regina Dominican took a different turn, with students going on "trust walks," "sculpting" each other into the way they viewed particular issues, and discussing with one another issues of importance to them as adolescent women. All of this came about through the involvement of the school's 1991 Regina Medalist in Forensics.

For four Fridays, ending February 11, Brigid O'Shaughnessy, a member of the Class of 1991, has taught the two afternoon sophomore physical education classes. Beginning with "team-building" and "trust-building" exercises, she created a "safe environment" in which students would feel comfortable enough to discuss deep, personal issues with each other.

Students began with a "trust walk," in which one student kept her eyes closed and relied on her partner to guide her safely and silently through the room. This led to discussions on related issues such as leadership, forgiveness, safety and letting go of control.

Through visual image theater, students listed particular issues that they face – such as drugs, loneliness, peer pressure, school, boyfriends – and were asked to "sculpt" their partner into an image that represented that issue for them. Eventually, they were asked to create less obvious images to capture that issue. The exercise led the students into reflection and a discussion on the various issues.

"Exercises like this help the girls react with their heart and not cognitively," Ms. O'Shaughnessy explained. "When you use the body, you don't have to think – the body remembers the experience." That exercise also helps students to "physically experience" the feeling evoked by the issue. For example, she said, if you remain in a pose that represents your partner's vision of loneliness, you really feel her loneliness. "You literally get to stand in the shoes of somebody else."

Ms. O'Shaughnessy hopes to expand the program at Regina, either by continuing it in the fourth quarter or by offering it after school. Ideally, she said, some of the students would be trained as "peer educators" who could lead other students through the program.

Ms. O'Shaughnessy got involved in this form of education through her long-time work in drama. In recent years, she has worked in a downtown studio, training people ranging in age from 18 to 80 to be professional actors. Over the last five years, she has worked for Redmoon Theater, Thresholds Rehabilitation Center, and the Shanti Foundation for Peace, using theater to address issues of personal and social concern with young people, adults with mental illness, and others served by local non-profits.

Information technology director Karen House, a family friend, wondered if similar programs could benefit Regina Dominican students. Sister Adrienne Piennette, O.P., President of Regina Dominican, viewed videos of her work with adults with mental illness and liked what she saw. Ultimately, Ms. O'Shaughnessy met with physical education teacher Natalie Rysavy and social worker Christina Sprang, who had been searching for ways to enhance the school's physical education program.

Ms. O'Shaughnessy's talent in drama was evident during her years at Regina Dominican. The recipient of the Regina Medal in Forensics, she was on the Catholic



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National Team in forensics. She played the stepmother in *Cinderella* as a senior; Mrs. Mullen in *Carousel* as a junior; and Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice* as a sophomore. A member of the National Honor Society, the Thespian International Honor Society, and the Spanish National Honor Society, she also served as editor-in-chief and photographer for the yearbook and as a lector in school liturgies.