

3) What were the outcomes of the project, and how do you know? What changes took place in people, institutions, or programs as a result? (Changes in actions? behavior? knowledge base?)

The most obvious and proximate changes/outcomes are mentioned by Marni and Mary in their section of this report, in the student and parent letters we received at the end of the project in the "Just Wanted You to Know" (see no. 8, evaluations)

We have already seen some of the additional differences that this project has made:

- ❖ Teachers, parents and students from the Hindu, Muslim and Jewish traditions were invited to address classes at the Catholic school. The seeds for teacher / student exchanges have been sown.
- ❖ Two of our students (Jewish and Muslim) together attended a storytelling workshop weekend this past summer, financed in part by scholarships from the project.
- ❖ Many of the students, teachers and families have stayed in touch with us and with each other, attending community storytelling programs and interfaith circles. It is a joy to have them with us. They are bringing new life and vibrancy to our mission. They are modeling for us the way to live together in peace.
- ❖ It is the shared stories that are breaking down the barriers and building community among us.

4) How did you, as storyteller or project director, grow with this program?

Most of the growth I have experienced with this program has been in my role as project director. Although I have been the coordinator for our Interfaith Story Circle for many years, my involvement in writing the grant (my first time), working together as a team (of four "storied" people with often differing ideas on the numerous components of the program), arranging publicity and reaching out to individuals/groups for participation and support were all challenges. Each one of the above deepened my knowledge and honed my skills in implementing a new storytelling venture in our broader community.

I must admit, that I sometimes felt a tension between my "storyteller self and my project director self". The storyteller/coach in me wanted to be more involved with the youth and (occasionally) with the pace and with the direction that the coaching would take. The director in me had to

remind myself to trust Mary and Marni whom we had chosen precisely *because* of their “gifts”, to determine what was best. This was a good decision. It was evident, from the comments made by both students and parents, that their coaching style was just what the group needed. This was a good learning experience for me.

Now that we are in the midst of fundraising for our second year of the project, I (along with my *now co-director*, Paula Weiss) am growing in ways I could not have imagined: learning: 1) how to incorporate our interfaith story circle as a non-profit (which we have done) 2) how to seek tax exempt status (which we are in the process of doing) 3) how to approach local and national organizations for funds and, most importantly, 4) how to explain/demonstrate the ways that our storytelling project can promote change in diverse (often conflicting) groups in communities. Every step of the way, I have found, that I have to place the art and the value of storytelling “upfront and center” in presenting what we are about.

5) What are the highlights of the project? What moments stand out?

The following are moments that stand out for me; ones that made all our work worthwhile!

- ❖ Introducing the children at the beginning of the community performance; looking out on their sweet faces and thinking “*We’ve* done it.. We made our dream of youth interfaith storytelling a reality”. Then seeing them “shine” in their telling and thinking “*They’ve* done it; they’re storytellers.”
- ❖ Watching everyone interact and storyshare during the Human Treasure Hunt and potluck supper. We were such a “rainbow” of people, laughing, talking, having a good time. It was such an uplifting sight!
- ❖ Looking around the circle we formed each time an adult visitor (Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Muslim) came to share on the role of story in their tradition. Watching how the students, parents, coaches and staff all became caught up in the stories, eager to learn about religions so different from their own.
- ❖ Noticing, toward the end of the pot luck supper, that the students were actually “autographing” each other’s (One World, Many Religions) books that they had been given at the end of the performance. I realized that this very diverse group of students who were a bit uncomfortable with each other and their traditions at the beginning of the project were expressing what they (now) meant to each other in their customary “teenage” way.

- ❖ Being with the teachers at the interfaith teacher workshops. Seeing them connect with each other so quickly and share so willingly; then overhearing them planning to visit each others' classrooms and stay in touch.
- ❖ Reading the "Just Wanted You to Know...." comments at the end of our community event; many of them moved me deeply.
- ❖ Joining with the parents who gathered and informally shared wisdom tales (prompted by Elisa Davy Pearmain's Doorways to the Soul story collection) while their children were being coached. Many friendships began in this way.

7) What did you learn about storytelling from this project?

This project was, for me, further validation that storytelling has a tremendous power for transformation. Each time students, parents, teachers and friends in the broader community heard each others' stories, it helped them to "walk a mile in each others' shoes". I found this particularly evident when adults from the Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions came to share (on the role of story in their traditions) with the students and parents. The stories they told created a "safe space" in which the students could question and explore beliefs and practices very different from their own. These were always very lively sessions.

I also learned that storycoaching and performing can be done with students of varying age ranges (this past year 6th-9th grade and next year 6th to 10th) I was not sure that this was possible. I realized that all of the youth tellers on the program need not be of equal ability, nor their stories of equal length. I was concerned as to how the students who had shorter, less polished stories, would be received by the audience. However, as each one of them told, they were embraced by the audience for their enthusiasm and willingness to try. The differences in their delivery simply highlighted their uniqueness and added variety to the program; they turned out to be a plus rather than a negative.

Finally, I learned that Mary and Marni's coaching style, especially in regard to *believing in each student's potential, putting them in charge and offering suggestions with a light touch*, were extremely effective.* Not only did the performance go well, but the students walked away with a very positive view of storytelling and a true sense of accomplishment. One student told me that Mary and Marni took "very good care" of them all. I believe that was of great importance in working with such a diverse group of students, some of whom had never been with people of religious traditions that were radically different from their own.

*For further information, see storycoaching guidelines in the Children at the Well pdf file.

8) Describe all the ways you evaluated and/or measured the success of your project. If you used written evaluation forms as part of this process, please append sample forms and a summary of the responses.

To evaluate our project we used teacher and student pre and post surveys, completion statements at the end of the coaching sessions, “Just Wanted You to Know” handouts at the end of the community event and potluck supper, and letters from students and parents at the completion of the project. Samples of all of these have been appended to this report.

An analysis of the pre and post surveys of the teachers who were involved in all three interfaith teacher workshops indicates that their participation in the project *did* bring about an increase in their interfaith/storytelling knowledge, interests and skills. Questions number 1, 2, 5 and 8 on the survey are the ones that showed the most gains. That is, “Knowledge of religious traditions other than your own”, “Personal experience with people of other traditions”, “Knowledge and use of stories from other traditions” and “Familiarity with interfaith story”. Many teachers also increased their understanding of storytelling skills and came to view themselves, as storytellers, in a more positive light.

An analysis of the pre and post student surveys reminded us of a story that one of our students, Nimi, created to tell at the performance last April, “The chaos of life will always come “, she said. “It’s how you meet it - how you **go on doing** that counts”. (She pointed out that the first letters of each word in the phrase “Go On Doing” spells God!)

With this in mind, we must report that we found some “chaos” when we went to sort out the results from comparing the students’ pre and post surveys. Specifically, the numbers reported by many of the students in their self-analysis of storytelling skills, etc., were confusing in their arbitrariness. Was this due to hasty filling-in of the forms? Was this either undue self-recriminations or self-aggrandizement? (These **are** adolescents, after all!).

Also, we had not thought to provide students with their “pre-survey” answers when they were filling out the “post-surveys”, and sometimes the numbers they reported the second time around actually went down! We chose to meet this challenge, to **go on doing**, by forgoing a statistical analysis of the data, and by using an informal case-study approach instead.

For example, Dan was one of those students who rated himself quite low in the initial survey, particularly in regard to knowing about other traditions and their stories. In item 1, he went from a '3' to an '8', in item 5, he went from a '2' to a '9'. In fact, in his post-survey, '8' was the lowest answer he gave! (He went from a total of 48 to 90)

Adah, as one of the few students who entered the program with considerable interfaith storytelling experience, still initially rated herself on the low end for several items. For example, she gave a '1' on item '5', and a '2' on item 6. She gave herself 2 '7's' on the post-survey (her lowest score there) but instead of only 2 '10's', she reported 5 in the later survey. (She went from a total of 61 to 88).

Nimi, our philosopher, initially rated herself high ('8' being her lowest score), but then went to a perfect row of '10's' for the post-survey. (She went from 89 to 100).

Comments offered by the students at the bottom of the post-survey page, and in the letters they were asked to write in April, uniformly indicated warm appreciation for what was learned and shared during the course of the program.

The completer statements that students filled in after the coaching sessions were not as useful as we had hoped. Marni makes some good comments on this in her evaluation section of the report. We need to rethink how to elicit student progress, questions and concerns in a more "user friendly" way. In the end, the e-mail notes that were written between coaches and students were often the most revealing measure of "where they were" with the storytelling process.

We think that the "Just Wanted You to Know" statements were one of the best measures of evaluating our project. They certainly were a main source of inspiration for us to conduct this program again. They were filled in after the conclusion of the potluck supper. Please see "Reactions and Comments about event".

MARNI'S ANSWERS: STORYCOACH MARNI GILLARD

3) What were the outcomes of the project, and how do you know? What changes took place in people, institutions, or programs as a result? (Changes in actions? behavior? knowledge base?)

I think the outcomes were many. As a teacher I observe a lot. Mostly I know from watching and listening. I saw shy and disconnected kids slowly get to know each other. I marveled at their

INTEREST in each other's religions. They were NOT shy/afraid to ask each other questions and they really seemed grateful to have the adult spokespeople from the different religions speak with them. They paid close attention and I think would have asked many questions if we'd had more time for that aspect of the program. (That part was always near the end and they were weary, yet still very attentive.)

I think the Islamic school as an institution must have been the most affected, having the teachers "invade" their space. They were always friendly and very generous. I sensed their welcome, but I have a feeling it was stretch for them too – we adult women appearing in shorts on a hot afternoon to coach young girls covered from head to toe. I was glad the project coincided with one Muslim woman's presentation about the Haaj experience – showing us a made-for-tv documentary as well as two women telling us of their experiences at the Holy Places in the Arabia. While that wasn't part of the Children of the Well per se, it certainly was inspired by it, a result of our work with the children, or at least connected. I liked getting to know the parents we did (some better than others) and certainly they were affected by watching their children learn stories.

I think the Catholics who showed up for our rehearsal (another rehearsal took place at a Jewish synagogue) were surprised and delighted to have children of different faiths telling them tales. These were older people who my guess is have limited contact with Muslims, Jews or Indians. Whether or not that's true, the young tellers affected them. That was clear.

4) How did you, as storyteller or project director, grow with this program?

I too grew in my curiosity and my own ability to ask questions, feeling less embarrassed and afraid to show my own "religious" side, which, as a public school teacher I tend to hide. I also let go some of my worry that my questions and curiosity would bother or challenge others whose faith tradition is different from my own. My own growth has been gradual over years of being part of the adult interfaith group – feeling freer to share stories from my own Catholic tradition.(I still have gallons of uneasiness around talk of religion, in general, even with people from my OWN tradition. I believe that is somehow a residue of the past, but the feeling is lessening, and this project helped a lot.) I doubt that my own struggle was clear to the children, but it certainly helps me empathize with whatever uneasiness they may exhibit.

I noticed that the Muslim children whose stories honor Allah were not quite as at ease to emphasize those parts in their final performances for a wide adult audience. That was informing to me. In rehearsal, within our small group, they had been more bold in speaking of their faith and in showing their devotion through their storytelling. So these observations affected me. I think spiritual beliefs and devotional practices are so private regardless of how many community

worship experiences one attends, so to put that devotion inside a story for the public is quite a new thing. I was especially touched by all four of the adult presenters who had a wonderful way of talking about religion/faith tales with us. The project director also has that ease. I feel so grateful for her persistence in keep this project focused on “faith traditions” when I admit feeling the pull to slide into “folk” tales related to culture but not particularly expressive of faith traditions or beliefs. I feel like I learned a lot from both the children’s and the adults’ modeling.

AS a storytelling teacher I am always stretched when I work with kids. We saw especially the importance of getting connected to the kids and their tales quickly. We did lots of warm up activities but those didn’t get us working on stories fast. Choosing the right story always takes time. We do plan to have a few more sessions when we repeat the project. One thing I normally do when I teach storytelling is learn a new story, push myself to work with a tale just as the children are. That didn’t happen mostly because of my own busy schedule, but I think it would have helped.

5) What are the highlights of the project? What moments stand out?

Certain kids’ tales – or even moments in those tales. One boy had a hard time actually entering his story in a dramatic way, but when I conversed with him I saw his great love of Allah and his belief in the Qur’an’s equivalent of King Solomon (Sulamein), I was very moved. Another Muslim girl, as we rehearsed, also truly entered the character of Nasrudin being hit on the head with a walnut. She looked up at Allah, laughing, and admitting her foolishness for thinking “she” knew better, that walnuts should grow where pumpkins grow and majestic trees should have pumpkins as their fruit. I’ll never forget that.

Other stories stay in my mind too – a girl’s tale of her mother wanting to (and being forbidden to) study in the Sudan, a 14 year old Indian girl remember her naïve younger self at age 11, a Jewish girl who sang boldly and clearly a song to lead Moses to the buried coffin of Joseph, his ancestor.

The whole project was like watching a garden you’ve planted come to flower.

7) What did you learn about storytelling from this project?

I mostly relearned things that are important – that tellers need time, they need courage to go deeply into their tales and that is no small thing, they need a variety of models, they need individual attention. There is no more intimate art form than storytelling. It asks so much of the heart and the guts, and each person needs support and attention to help them over the hump of entering the tale fully. AND even after a lot of work off stage, telling your tale to a lot of strange faces is terrifying! It’s hard to claim the dept of the tale as you practiced it. You may find many

NEW discoveries that day, but it's hard to replicate what you've worked on and "set" once a lot of new energy is flying toward you and your stomach butterflies begin to flutter.

8) Describe all the ways you evaluated and/or measured the success of your project. If you used written evaluation forms as part of this process, please append sample forms and a summary of the responses.

As a teacher, my best sense of evaluating the project as a whole was meeting with my co-teacher and sharing observations of the kids and reflecting on our plan from the week previously. We were aided by the "completer statements" that we gave the kids. Those always contained surprises about how they felt it was going. Yet, we just didn't have time to help them truly be reflective on those sheets. Next time I think we'll spend more time with them. They got squashed in at the end of class and seemed a nuisance. I do believe in such evaluations but you need to have time. I would also have LIKED an evaluation from the parents. I think we also measured the success of the project in the faces and responses of our two public audiences – the rehearsals where congregants volunteered to watch us and the final audience's verbal and facial responses.

MARY'S ANSWERS: STORYCOACH MARY MURPHY:

3) What were the outcomes of the project and how do you know?

The project made storytellers of our young people. They gained in confidence when faced with a large audience and learned to trust themselves, their stories and the techniques we'd been working hard to teach them. Their performances were polished and executed in a way I never thought possible for brand-new tellers. I learned something about their different faiths, cultures and stories. I was able to see, and I think they were too, where we are fundamentally the same despite differences in language, traditions, dress and story characters. The group members were very isolated at first - it was a very gradual (sometimes invisible) process that finally brought them together. But one of the most important outcomes of our project was that they did come together to become friends and colleagues by the end of our time together. They went back to their schools, churches, synagogues and mosques with a little more knowledge about each other and the feeling of empowerment that doing something well together can bring about.

4) How did you, as storyteller or project director, grow with this program?

As a storyteller and coach, I learned a lot about other faith traditions and their literature. I was born and raised Catholic at a time when we all kept separate and learned nothing about Muslims, Jews, even Protestants. I learned how people use the stories from their unique cultures

to teach and spread their faiths and how the stories are used in rituals and holiday celebrations. I also learned that we all use stories to teach, comfort, heal and celebrate. That's something wonderful we have in common.

I learned during our coaching sessions how to work in partnership with Marni. We complemented each other and thus offered the best of two different styles and storytelling techniques to our students. We all benefited from the partnership. Marni is very generous in offering help when asked and I now have a broader vision of what coaching students can be because of her sharing.

5) What are the highlights of the program? What moments stand out?

The final performance, with students telling before an audience of family and friends, was the highlight of "Children at the Well". All the tellers rose to the occasion and all became friends that day over the dinner that followed. When they began the project several weeks earlier, they were very shy with one another and it was terribly hard to break the ice. These students were from different schools, practiced different faiths and in some cases dressed differently from one another. Also they were all adolescents and very self-conscious. It wasn't until the dress rehearsals when one group of students went to practice tell their stories at a synagogue while another group told at a church, that they finally began to root for each other and have fun being with the group. After the rehearsal we had a pizza party at Marni's house and I really felt we all became friends that day. By the end of "Children at the Well" they'd been transformed from strangers into a group of kids that had been through a transforming adventure together. That was the highlight for me.

7) What did you learn about storytelling from this project?

I think first and foremost I learned what I already knew and had validated again: everybody loves storytelling! That fact is evident in each project, each performance and each workshop I do. Storytelling is used by all traditions to teach beliefs and to pass them on to the next generation. It is an important and effective tool for bringing human beings together - no matter how different they may be in culture and tradition. Everyone has stories and everyone possesses the storyteller's tools