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Here, There, and Everywhere: Tale-ing Liz Weir; Uses of Storytelling in Northern Ireland Today

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***Here, There, and Everywhere: Tale-ing Liz Weir;
Uses of Storytelling in Northern Ireland Today***

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SIT Ireland, Spring 2006
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Part I: The Beginning

Dedication

In Memory Of:

Mrs. Nell Martin, who gave Liz her love of stories

Acknowledgments

My overwhelming feeling having conducted this research is **gratitude** for everyone who helped me, especially to those who took the time to talk to me and gave me readings and further contacts. I talked to fifty-nine different people while researching; admittedly, many of these conversations were quite short. Still, if the number seems surprising, that it is a testament to how generous people were with their time. I was able to have so many conversations because so many people were willing to talk to me. I am especially grateful to Liz Weir, who took me in and gave me a chance to “keep up”. I am not sure if I succeeded in keeping up with Liz’s whirlwind schedule or her incredibly fast-paced mind, but I certainly tried. Thank you, Liz. My project would not have been possible without you.

I am grateful for Maureen Smyth and Heather Poole of Newbuildings Primary School, who let me come into their school and went out of their way to line up student, parent, and teacher interviews. Similarly, I am grateful for Vera Hart, Sally Thompson, and Geraldine Kelly of St. Columba’s School, who welcomed me and arranged interviews, too. The staff at Ligoniel Primary School—Claire Hilman, Barbara Coates, Lynne Gillis, and Lindsay Anderson—and the staff at St. Vincent de Paul’s Primary School—Brian McParland, Barbara Bradshaw, and Claire McGrogan—were also very generous, letting me visit their schools and talk to their students.

I am grateful to all of the students that I talked to, especially to those who retold Liz's stories to me. They were all very good tellers! I am indebted to the parents and grandparent that I spoke to. They took time out of their day to come into their children's and grandchild's schools to talk to me. The community workers, museum employees, particularly Anthony Buckley and Madeleine McGreevy, other educators, such as Arthur Webb—who spared his lunch hour to talk to me—and everyone else in between were extremely helpful and generous. I am indebted to my interviewees for much of my research and for making my time in Northern Ireland extremely enjoyable and memorable.

I am especially grateful to the other storytellers who talked to me. As always, I found their stories inspiring and beautiful. Their experiences helped me think about what I was seeing with Liz and what I was not able to see because it was not on her schedule. Liz Gough helped me formulate my research questions and introduced me to Northern Ireland's letter-writing customs. Frances Quinn gave me insights into work with people with disabilities, which helped me think about storytelling as a tool in special education. Sheila Quigley, who was a primary school teacher before she was a storyteller, told me about her experiences getting little children to think about moral issues through stories. Kate Murphy has an overwhelming love of stories, which is truly inspiring to witness. She got so excited explaining the meanings of place names in and around Portrush that she decided to give me a tour! Finally, Dr. Pat Ryan took time out of his insanely busy schedule to answer my questions via email, and his response was truly astonishing. He wrote twenty pages single-spaced! To say that I could not begin to explain all that I

learned during this experience is an understatement, but even though I do not have the time to relate it all, I am very happy that I learned it.

Finally, I need to thank Aeveen Kerrisk for everything, but particularly, for organizing and administering such an inspiring program, Dr. Kate Chadbourne for giving me the best contact I have ever gotten in my life—the lovely Liz Weir, Fionnuala Brennan for being a very flexible and knowledgeable advisor, and the Hunts—Malcolm, Catherine, Daniel, Lauren, and Emily—for being my family and for being my friends. Most especially, I want to thank my parents for being brave enough to let me come to Ireland and for encouraging me every step of the way. It has been a remarkable journey because I met all of you. Thank you so much.

A Note on Terms

“Storytelling in Ireland”¹ according to Dr. Pat Ryan refers to:

yarns, anecdotes, jokes, riddles, proverbs, folk tales, wonder tales, ghost stories, legends, epics and myth; [...] monologues, recitations, and some forms of performance poetry. Equally important in any inventory are picture-book storytelling and ‘read-aloud’ sessions for children, oral history and reminiscence work, community drama and ritual folk drama, and applications of oral narrative with special interests groups in any educational, social, cultural, or community aspects. (“Storytelling in Ireland: a Re-Awakening”, 2).

“Professional storytelling in Ireland” refers to all the types of storytelling listed above that is performed by someone who makes their living telling stories, either part-time or full-time. In other words, this is storytelling done by people who are paid to do it.

“Cross-community” refers to work that is intended to bring people together from different traditions in a meaningful way so that each community better understands and appreciates

¹ Among the storytelling community of Ireland and Northern Ireland, storytelling is considered to be an all-island activity. Therefore, when “Irish storytelling” is being considered, one can assume that one is talking about storytelling in Ireland and Northern Ireland (Irish Storytelling Handbook, 5). When I talk about storytelling in Ireland then, I am talking about storytelling in both countries. If types or traits of storytelling are country-specific, I will specify which Ireland I am talking about.

the other. It is often used to describe work with Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, but as the society becomes more diverse, its meaning is opening up to include people from many other backgrounds (Good Relations: A Brief Guide).

“Education for Mutual Understanding” or “EMU” is a curriculum that was started in 1983 and officially adopted by all schools in Northern Ireland in 1983. The purpose of EMU is to get school children who are educated separately to learn about the other tradition, whether Catholic or Protestant. The curriculum was a response to the “Troubles” (Interview 38).

“Single-identity” refers to work that is intended to build up the confidence of one particular tradition. It is usually used to talk about work with either Catholics or Protestants and aims to make the particular group understand themselves better so that they can later engage in meaningful cross-community work (Single-Identity Work: A Brief Guide).

“One-off” refers to a storytelling session that happens one time only. The session is usually one to three hours long (Interview 7).

“Long term” refers to a storytelling project that involves a storyteller coming to one place to work with the same group of people at least once a week over an extended period of time. The project usually lasts between four to eight weeks (Interview 7).

“Controlled school” refers to a state school in Northern Ireland, which has a de facto Protestant majority. (Interview 38)

“Maintained school” refers to a school run by the Catholic Church, though it receives funds from the state. It has a Catholic majority. (Interview 38)

“Integrated school” refers to a school which has a significant representation of the minority tradition (in the particular area where the school is located) among its students, teachers, and members of the Board of Governors. The integrated sector represents five percent of school-going children in Northern Ireland. (Interview 39)

“School “children” or “student” are the American-English ways of talking about children who are in their first years of school.

One More Thing

Throughout this paper, I have used American terminology because I am more comfortable with it; for example, I did not say “pupils”, which is customary in Northern Ireland. Also, I used American-English spelling unless I was directly quoting something or someone.

Preface

My Thoughts on Storytelling Before I Came to Ireland

Before starting this project, my understanding of professional storytelling was limited to my interaction with one professional storyteller from Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dr. Hugh Morgan Hill, or Brother Blue, believes that storytelling is a divine experience. A former preacher, Brother Blue believes that storytelling is the way to make other people see the divinity in human beings. It is a very spiritual medium for him and his performance, way of speaking, and entire presentation—from his blue boots to his blue hat with his blue butterfly pin—are very otherworldly. I respect Brother Blue, but I found it difficult to relate to him and therefore, to understand the aim of his storytelling and how, if at all, it helps people see the divinity in other human beings. Having talked to Brother Blue I expected storytelling to be something very artsy which, though enjoyable, was not meant to have any tangible results.

My Thoughts on Storytelling Now

My experiences with Liz Weir could not have been more different. Liz is a professional who takes her job seriously and is committed to using storytelling for the greater good, whether her aim is anti-bullying, promoting positive self-images, good community relations, or improving children's oracy and literacy in education. I have only scraped the surface of storytelling's uses, and what I saw was largely dependent on what Liz was doing while I was with her. One day in the life of Liz Weir is never the same, and no story is ever told exactly the same way or interpreted in the same manner by different people. The variety of stories, methods of telling, and audience experience make it very difficult to quantify the uses of storytelling. As Frances Quinn, a storyteller,

put it, “the potential of storytelling is unlimited” (Interview 55); I could not limit the unlimited in a mere four weeks. I did not have the time or the expertise to do justice to storytelling’s centrality to life and all of its uses, but I hope that what I found at least affirms the findings of others, such as those of Tony Aylwin reported in “Storytelling and Education” or possibly, even adds something new to the ever-growing research on storytelling.

Why I Wanted to do this Project

I wanted to study storytelling in Ireland because I have grown up hearing my father talk about how great it was when the old men started telling a story. A native of Leitrim and the youngest of thirteen children, my father was not actually allowed to be in the presence of his father, my grandfather, and the elders when they were playing cards. However, he was small enough, and the house was dark enough, that, as a very young boy, he could sneak into the kitchen and curl up in a corner and listen. No one paid too much attention to “the wee fella”, and so he heard many a story. My grandfather was the local matchmaker so everyone wanted to see him; there was always a visitor in the house; when a visitor came so did a song, a dance, or a story. Having grown up in a ceili house my father loves a good story. My mother’s father hailed from Leitrim, too, and my mother’s mother was from Mayo. My mother’s parents had a way with words, and so does my mother. I hoped that in coming to Ireland I could learn a thing or two about turning a phrase and telling a story.

Why I Focused on Liz Weir

My freshman year of college I had to take the standard introduction to college writing class. I thought that if I had to take a course about expository writing, I might as

well take one that is fun. Happily, I was able to take Dr. Kate Chadbourne's "Storytelling" expository writing class. Last summer, knowing that I had to write a thesis in my senior year to graduate in my concentration (major) from Harvard, I thought back on all the classes that I had taken to see which I had enjoyed most. Dr. Chadbourne's class was my favorite for a variety of reasons, mostly to do with the fact that Dr. Chadbourne is a great teacher, but also because I genuinely loved the stories that we read, analyzed, and wrote about. I realized that I could spend a year or more thinking about storytelling without getting bored, and so I asked Dr. Chadbourne if she knew anyone I could talk to about it. Dr. Chadbourne gave me Liz's name and email. In October, via email, I told Liz that I wanted to study storytelling and would be coming to Ireland in the spring to study abroad. I was hoping that she could give me some people to talk to about it. Not knowing me at all, she immediately invited me to stay with her, which I found out is typical of Liz's generosity and openness.

Liz Weir, the Storyteller

Liz Weir is an internationally famous storyteller from Ballymena, Antrim, Northern Ireland. Liz started telling stories in public in 1973 as a local children's librarian. Eventually, she found out about the storytelling scene in America—how people made a living telling stories there and how popular it was among adults. Liz decided to start the Belfast Yarnspinners, an adult storytelling group, in 1985, and from there became one of the leaders of the storytelling revival in Ireland. In 1990, she resigned from the Belfast Education and Library Board and became a full-time, professional storyteller (Interview 33). She knows traditional tales from all over the world, but usually tells the Irish versions. As a Protestant whose mother was English and father was

from Northern Ireland, she did not grow up on these stories, but she discovered them as an adult. She resented the fact that she had been deprived of them for so long and wanted to share them with as many people as possible (Interview 7). She has traveled to many parts of the world, including, England, Scotland, Australia, Canada, the United States, Israel, Russia, Germany, and France, telling stories. Her purpose is not mere entertainment, but positive change for the society she lives in and the wider world. She believes that stories can bring peace and understanding, and she hopes that her epitaph reads, “provoker of stories” (Interview 33). Liz does not want you to sit and listen to her, but to leave empowered to tell a story yourself.

Introduction

What I did for my Project

My research question is: what are some of the ways that Liz Weir, a storyteller from Northern Ireland, uses storytelling? Essentially, I conducted a case study of Liz Weir’s storytelling which was limited by her schedule for the particular time I was with her. To learn about the broader uses of storytelling and aspects of the art, I conducted background reading before observing Liz tell stories. I also talked to other storytellers and people outside the storytelling community in Northern Ireland to discover how they use stories and how they think stories can be used. I have to reiterate, however, that storytelling has many more uses than those that I was able to observe while with Liz. Storytelling began when humans starting talking and there are records of Irish storytelling since at least the 600’s A.D. (Interview 55). The oral tradition in Ireland is particularly rich because the Romans never reached Ireland, and the written word was not imposed upon the country until much later than other European states (Brennan, 9 May 2006). I

could not begin to know everything about storytelling or storytelling in Ireland, specifically, but I did manage to learn a little about Liz's storytelling. To do this project, I lived with Liz Weir in her home and shadowed her for about two weeks. After this, I moved to Queens University Belfast housing to remove myself from Liz's world and gain other perspectives on storytelling.

In the end, I talked to fifty-nine people; twenty-four were school children, whose interviews were no more than ten minutes, and usually less than five minutes long. One interview of a storyteller was conducted via email. Of the remaining forty adults that I talked to, thirteen were educators (typically fifteen-minute interviews), six were parents (usually ten-minute interviews), five were storytellers (usually one to two-hour interviews), and ten were community workers (typically one-hour interviews). Given the varying lengths of these conversations, "interviews" may not be the best word to use to describe them. I am using "interview", however, because of the formality involved in organizing, scheduling, and conducting these interviews. All participants had to be contacted, parental permission had to be obtained for the school children, and thank-you letters were written afterwards.

Factors that Influenced my Research

The main thing that must be stressed about my research is that it depended highly upon Liz Weir. For example, when Liz's mother died less than a week before I was to go live with Liz, I did not know if this project would happen. Liz, being as generous as she is, let me come stay with her despite the unfortunate timing. However, she could have easily excused herself from my project, and I could not have done a case study of how Liz Weir uses stories. What I observed was dependent upon Liz's schedule; therefore,

my analysis of the uses of storytelling by Liz Weir is essentially limited to a two-week period. I contacted two schools where Liz had worked previously, Newbuildings and St. Columba's Primary Schools, to gain a better understanding of her long-term work, but my study was largely dictated by the work that Liz happened to be doing while I was with her.

Secondly, I found that people were very willing to help me because I was a student. Many of the people I talked to commented that they understand how difficult making research contacts can be and looked at talking to me as giving back in some way. They seemed to want to help me because they had been in similar positions before.

Thirdly, the fact that I was an American helped me to learn more about single-identity work and cross-community work than perhaps a student in Northern Ireland could because people generally accepted that I was neutral. Some people felt that, since I was an outsider, I could not understand their point of view no matter what it was so they pitied me and took the time to explain their positions. This was particularly true of Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and the education system generally. People knew that I was not educated here and therefore, took the time to explain the purposes and structures of specific curriculums and schools to me. Some of the time I already knew what they were telling me, but I felt like they let their guard down a bit because they had benign feelings that I did not know any better.

Issues of Acceptance and Distance

I found that some of my conversations would be general and rather uninteresting until I told people that my father was from Leitrim and that my mother's parents were from Mayo and Leitrim. Almost immediately I became an "insider". It was as if I went

from being “some American” to an “Irishman’s daughter”—as if I felt the Irish storytelling connection personally. The fact that my father is Irish was a real advantage because it gave me a way to connect to my interviewees more personally. The fact that I am an American, though, also helped because I was far enough away from the situation in Northern Ireland to be neutral. Being Irish-American seemed to be the perfect combination of closeness and distance to the Irish way of life to conduct this research.

To ensure that my interviewees were comfortable, I only recorded them if they seemed not to mind it. I guided the conversation, but gave them plenty of opportunity to say what they wanted when they wanted. Also, I always ended the interviews by asking if my interviewees wanted to add anything. I always gave them the last word. To ensure that I was comfortable, I always met people in public settings or in their homes if I knew that other people would be there. When doing my mapping project, I had learned that being alone with someone in their house or a private location can be intimidating so I did not conduct interviews in such a situation during this project.

Finally, I should note that being a participant-observer requires a delicate balance. From the outset, I told Liz that I was researching and so anything that she said or did that she did not want the wider world to know about she should mark as “off the record”. I let all of my interviewees have this option. Some of them did say things “off the record”, and I respected that. There was always a risk that I would become too friendly with Liz or a “convert” (Brennan, “Fieldwork”, 13) as they warn in sociological research. I did become Liz’s friend, and I did become a believer in storytelling, but I think that I was objective in my research. I became Liz’s friend because she is an exceptionally good and generous person. I believe in storytelling because of what I found and what I

experienced. I think that I was lucky to be attached enough to my research to have a thoroughly good time doing it, but removed enough to ask questions and be critical. I leave it to the reader to judge the objectivity of my research, but I am pleased with it because I feel that I succeeded in balancing the roles of participant and observer.

Problems that I Encountered

The main problem that I had was finding my place in Liz's life. Liz has a very busy schedule, and I was going to live with her at a difficult time. I needed to learn how to be present, but not a nuisance. Happily, I found a good balance within a few days. As far as keeping up with Liz's busy schedule, I did my best. At first I was overwhelmed by all that Liz has done and was doing. I was unsure how I could learn about it all and get all my facts and figures straight. Eventually, I realized that I did not have to know everything about Liz or her work, which is why I decided to stick to what I saw and what I experienced to make up the bulk of the research of this paper. The only way that I could be honest and successful in the amount of time I had was to focus on what I knew which is what I experienced. Having set my limit, I tried to find out everything I could about the things that I experienced and felt assured that my project was indeed doable.

A Summary of What I Learned about Liz's Uses of Storytelling

While I was with Liz I discovered that she uses storytelling in at least four areas—anti-bullying, single-identity work, cross-community work, and education. I found that storytelling was successful in the particular anti-bullying and cross-community work sessions that I observed. When conducting such sessions, it is important that the storyteller tell a story, question the participants about it so that they reflect upon the story's meaning, and then have the participants make the story their own by retelling it,

acting it out, or creating a new story (either in prose or poetry) modeled on the original story. By making the story their own, the participants incorporate the story into their thinking and hopefully, their way of life. I had no way of measuring how long these positive effects last for, however.

In the single-identity session that I observed at the Shankill Library hosted by the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council, I found that the storytelling did not create meaningful identity formation, largely because the atmosphere of the day was too festive for the children involved to take Liz's stories seriously and especially because Liz did not engage the children in questioning the stories' meanings. Also, Liz did not give the children an opportunity to make the stories their own. Without actively taking part in the stories, their morals and the meaning of being an "Ulster-Scot" were largely missed by the children. For this event, Liz was only asked to entertain the audience, not to work with them. The organizers did not ask Liz to do storytelling activities with the children probably because of time constraints. I think that storytelling in single-identity work did not succeed in this particular case, but that it probably could in others where people have the time and desire to engage in storytelling activities, rather than just listening to stories.

Finally, I found that storytelling can be used in education very successfully—that student's oracy, literacy, and self-confidence can all be improved through storytelling and other creative arts. In examining the "Early Years Project" at Newbuildings and St. Columba's Primary Schools, I found that even when the main intention of a storytelling project at a school is not cross-community work, storytelling and other art forms can bring communities together. Also, I concluded that long-term work no matter what its purpose is more likely to have a lasting impact on the participants than one-off sessions.

Finally, I recommended that the “Early Years Project” be continued and that parental involvement be increased so that the community-relations aspect of the project can be even more effective.

Methodology

Phase I of My Research

My research process can be broken down into three phases—background research, participant-observation, and gaining outside perspectives. For the first twelve days, April 20 to May 1, 2006, I was living with Liz Weir, an internationally renowned storyteller from Ballymena, Antrim. During the first stage of my research, April 20 to April 23, 2006, Liz was supposed to be working. I had intended to follow her along and observe her storytelling sessions. Just before I left Dublin to go live with Liz and start my research, her mother died. So, when I arrived in the Glens of Antrim, where Liz now lives, she was still on a leave of absence from work, mourning her mother. I used these four days to read through some of the materials in Liz’s extensive storytelling library. Some of things I read were recommended to me by Liz; some were of personal interest. I made an effort to read previous reports done on Liz specifically and storytelling in Ireland generally. While I did a majority of my readings in this phase, I continued reading throughout.

The unfortunate death of Mrs. Nell Martin, Liz’s mother, made me realize how dependent my research was on Liz. For a time, I was not sure if I would be able to do my project. Once I arrived at Liz’s, I felt like I was an imposition. It is normally awkward to adjust to a home stay; in the situation, it was more awkward. Happily, after a few days, I

felt more comfortable in Liz's home. In the end, my living with Liz was a very positive experience, and I hope that she got something out of it, too.

Phase II of My Research

In the second stage of my research from April 24 to May 1, 2006, I literally shadowed Liz Weir. I attended, observed, and took notes on seven of her storytelling sessions at two schools, two libraries, and the Ulster American Folk Park festival. I also observed Liz give a three-hour teacher training workshop in which she encouraged teachers to tell stories in their classrooms. On April 28, 2006, I went to Derry to research a cross community arts project. For this project, Liz worked with Newbuildings and St. Columba's Primary Schools in conjunction with a dancer, artist, and musician. The aim of the project was to bring the two schools together to promote better relations between them and to provide the children with a unique educational experience. The project ran from October 2005 to February 8, 2006 and ended in a performance. Nearly two months after the project ended, I asked teachers, parents, and students what they remembered about it and what, if anything, they gained from it.

On April 28, 2006, while in Derry visiting Newbuildings and St. Columba's Primary Schools, I took advantage of my location and visited the Verbal Arts Centre. I talked with three employees about their use of stories in community work. These employees had not worked with Liz before and Liz is not currently working for the Verbal Arts Centre so I considered these interviews to be part of my gaining outside perspectives research phase, or the third part of my research, the rest of which was conducted between May 2 and May 6, 2006.

Storytelling Uses Begin to Become Apparent

During the second part of my research, the themes which Liz's sessions touched upon were varied. At Ballykeel Primary School, during two sessions on April 24, 2006, Liz focused on anti-bullying. On April 25 and 27, 2006, she conducted Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) storytelling sessions, or cross-community work sessions, at Ligoniel Primary School for Ligoniel and St. Vincent de Paul's Primary Schools. On April 27, 2006, I asked the principal of Ligoniel and teachers and students from both schools what they thought of the sessions and what impressions, if any, they made upon them.

At the library sessions, I experienced "single-identity" storytelling. At Oldpark Library on April 24, 2006, Liz performed for parents, grandparents, and children of the Shankill, a Protestant loyalist area of Belfast. This event was sponsored by the library and the Upper North Belfast Community Empowerment Partnership (UNBCEP). At the Shankill Library on April 25, 2006, Liz performed for three controlled (de facto Protestant) primary schools from the Shankill area for the opening of the *Weans Exhibition* created by the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council (USHC). During my stay with Liz, I saw storytelling used as a vehicle for anti-bullying, cross community and single-identity work, and education.

Phase III of My Research

During the third phase of my research from May 2 to 6, 2006, I left Liz and went to Belfast to gain perspectives on storytelling from professionals and other storytellers. Not everyone whom I contacted got back to me, and others were too busy during the three days I was in Belfast (May 2 to May 4, 2006) to see me. However, I was able to

visit some organizations which support storytelling such as the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum in Cultra. I visited the Community Relations Council in Belfast, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education in Belfast, and the Verbal Arts Centre in Derry. I talked to three storytellers—Sheila Quigley in Derry, Frances Quinn in Belfast, and Kate Murphy in Portrush. (I had already interviewed Liz Gough, another storyteller at Liz’s house during the first part of my research.)

Finally, on May 5, 2006, I went back to Derry to conduct more research on the Newbuildings and St. Columba’s Primary Schools creative arts project. When I first visited the schools on April 28, 2006, I was not able to talk to St. Columba’s students or parents from either school. I wanted my understanding of the project to be as balanced as possible so I went back to Derry to gain their insights.

Background Reading

Prior research on Liz’s storytelling was a very useful way for me to quickly view some of Liz’s past experiences. In particular, Balé’s “The Professionalization of Storytelling in the XXIst Century” (2003), his interview with Liz (2003), and Liljequist’s “People Say we Monkey Around! Storytellers of Ireland and Northern Ireland” (1994) helped me to see how Liz used storytelling and what she thought about it years ago. I was able to compare her thoughts and experience then to the ones I heard and saw now, which was very helpful in giving me a better idea of who Liz Weir is as a person and as a storyteller.

Paul Connolly’s research on children and sectarianism was also very useful. Reading “Too Young to Notice?”, I was shocked to discover that children in Northern Ireland who are as young as three years old can determine whether someone is a Catholic

or a Protestant (Connolly, 50)! By six, some children have sectarian attitudes (Connolly, 46). This research gave me context for the EMU movement and cross-community work, generally. Similarly, the “Education for the Diversity Handbook” which I found at the Linen Hall Library gave me a concise history of EMU, which was very helpful.

Clodagh Brennan Harvey’s “External Evaluation: 4th Northwest International Storytelling Festival 27-30 March 1996” gave me a flavor for storytelling festivals, which I did not get to experience; this flavor helped me think about other uses of storytelling. Also, I was encouraged by Harvey’s method which was basically participant-observation, too. When I saw that she reported on storytelling sessions by taking notes and making observations and that her research was based on this, I was more confident in my methodology.

Tony Alywin’s “Storytelling in Education” and Pat Ryan’s “Word in Action” were very useful reports which explained how storytelling is used in education in England and Northern Ireland, respectively. Similarly, Sheila Quigley’s “Appendix 1: Story: The Skills and the Flavor” helped me see the particular importance of telling stories to very young children.

Pat Ryan’s “Storytelling in Ireland-a Reawakening” and Kate Murphy’s “Storytelling in Ireland, Today and Yesterday” were great resources for both the history of Irish storytelling and how it has changed in the last twenty or so years.

Finally, seeing the texts of some of the stories that Liz tells was very helpful because I could look for differences between the original and the telling. Margaret MacDonald’s “Little Boy Frog and Little Boy Snake”, “The Other Side of the River”²,

² I do not know who wrote “The Other Side of the River”.

and Liz's own books, *Here, There, and Everywhere* and *Boom Chicka Boom*, were very useful. They were also fun reads!

The above are the readings that most influenced my research. Many of the topics that my background research touched upon I did not have the time or room to discuss in this paper, but I am very glad that I read them because they informed my thinking about storytelling. I must stress, though, that I choose not to emphasize readings in my research paper because I thought that the only way that I could possibly add something new to the field was by focusing on the experiences unique to me, which were Liz's storytelling sessions and my interviews. Thus, the bulk of the main body of this paper discusses my interviews and my observations of sessions.

Interviews

In total, I interviewed³ fifty-nine people in person and conducted one interview via email. As I stressed in the "Introduction", I only using the term "interview" to describe these conversations because of their formality; most of them were quite short length-wise because they were conducted during school days when students and teachers and parents could only spare a few minutes. I interviewed Dr. Pat Ryan, an American storyteller who lives in England, via email because I could not meet him in person; I felt it important that I obtain Dr. Ryan's thoughts because he has written extensively on storytelling and played an integral role in promoting storytelling in education in Northern Ireland (Ryan, 6).

I taped interviews when the interviewee was comfortable and the environment where the interview took place was quiet enough and still enough. (Some of my

³ I am using "interview" in the sense that I formally set up times to meet with fifty-eight people for specifics on how long these interviews, or conversations, were please see the "Introduction" page 13.

interviews were done en route to places! These I did not tape.) Most of the adults I interviewed were recommended to me either by Liz Weir or by someone I had previously interviewed. The children I interviewed were selected randomly and then limited to those whose parents gave their written consent⁴. (See Appendix 2 to view the parental permission forms.) Whenever I interviewed students, I made sure that another adult was present so that I could not be accused of any inappropriate behavior. All of my interview questions can be found in Appendix 3. Two storytellers, Liz Weir and Liz Gough, helped me with my questions, telling me which words would be most understandable to my interviewees, particularly, to children.

Types of Information that I got from my Interviewees

The Storytellers

Of the fifty-nine⁵ people that I interviewed, six were storytellers. I interviewed Liz twice so that I could get more information about her background and work. I then asked five other storytellers about their experiences. They told me about how they use storytelling. I asked them to share their thoughts on storytelling in anti-bullying, single-identity and cross-community work, and education. I was able to compare Liz's storytelling experiences with theirs. I discovered that other storytellers use their stories in similar ways, but that Liz's emphasis on anti-bullying, though not unheard of, is unique. The storytellers affirmed Liz's experiences of storytelling's success use in education; I also found that the conclusions I drew about the effectiveness of using storytelling for

⁴ I did not have parental permission to interview two students from St. Vincent de Paul's Primary School because their teacher had forgotten to send the permission forms home. I interviewed two St. Vincent de Paul students and then stopped because I felt uncomfortable that I did not have parental permission for these interviews.

⁵ My bibliography lists fifty-seven interviews, not fifty-nine, because I interviewed Liz Weir on two occasions and some interviews were group interviews.

these purposes largely matched those of the other storytellers. Also, they all agreed that long-term projects are much more successful than one-off sessions.

The Parents

Six of my interviews were of parents or of a grandparent whose children or grandchild had been involved in a creative arts project with a school from the opposite tradition. The parents were able to share specific anecdotes with me about how their children changed over the course of the project. I was able to get the personal side of the story from them, not just numbers. Given that it is very difficult to quantify storytelling, these interviews were particularly useful.

The Educators

I talked to thirteen educators, all of whom had only positive things to say about storytelling in education. Some of the educators shared their thoughts on EMU, and the general consensus was that contact is not enough. The students can not just be together; they need to do something together. In this sense, the teachers did not think that just listening to a story together was as effective as doing tasks together for EMU purposes. However, they were all glad that Liz had come to their schools because they believed that the students genuinely responded to her, and they hoped to use some of her techniques in their own classes. Having seen Liz in action, they realized how well spoken stories can keep children's attention and stimulate their imaginations, especially as a precursor to creative writing.

The Students

I interviewed twenty-four school children. This was the most interesting part of my research because I was able to ask students what they remembered about the

storytelling, if they knew any of Liz's stories, what they thought of the other students (at cross-community sessions), and what they thought the stories were all about. Talking to the children really let me gauge how much they learned from storytelling and how much it was just "good fun" (Interview 13). (While I was interested in learning, I value storytelling's fun aspect, too.) I found that the older students were capable of determining morals from the stories. I also discovered that the children can remember quite a bit of the stories, which shows that they do value them and that storytelling is a good way for children to remember things.

The Community Workers

I talked to ten community workers, or perhaps, more accurately, people in non-profit organizations which may or may not have direct connections to storytelling. I talked to two employees at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Dr. Buckley is a museum administrator who has been helping Liz Weir organize the Ulster Storytelling Festival, the longest running, continuous storytelling festival in Ireland, for 18 years. Dr. Buckley shared his thoughts on the changes in the society and storytelling of Northern Ireland over the last fifty years. Madeleine McGreevy is the education director at the museum; she told me how storytelling is used in the museum's programming for school visitors. It was very helpful for me to see that storytelling's uses in education are not limited to school settings.

In Belfast, I interviewed Maurna Crozier at the Community Relations Council; she gave me her thoughts on storytelling's applications in cross-community work. Realizing that I had been in controlled (de facto Protestant) and maintained (Catholic) schools, but not integrated schools, I thought I should gain the perspective of people in

the integrated education sector on storytelling. Happily, Philip O'Sullivan of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) agreed to talk to me. He told me about how cross-community curriculums are taught at integrated schools.

In general, the community workers helped me broaden my understanding of the uses of storytelling and see how else and where else it can be applied. Many of the people I spoke to emphasized the importance of personal storytelling. I did not have the time to explore this type of storytelling, but I found it interesting that to community workers, personal storytelling seemed most useful and important.

Part II: The Middle

An Introduction to the Main Body of this Paper

In the main body of the paper, I will discuss three storytelling sessions that I observed and my interpretations of those sessions. The sessions are themed according to their purpose; these themes are anti-bullying, single-identity work, and cross-community work. The anti-bullying session took place at Ballykeel Primary School in Antrim with children aged seven to nine. The single-identity session took place at the Shankill Library in Belfast. It was at the opening of the Ulster Scots Heritage Council's *Weans Exhibition*, and the participants were students from the Edenbrooke, Glenwood, and Malvern Primary Schools aged six to ten. The cross-community work session took place at Ligoniel Primary School, was funded through Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU), and was for Ligoniel (de facto Protestant) and St. Vincent de Paul (Catholic) students aged seven to nine. In the final section of the main body of the paper, I will discuss a project conducted for Newbuildings (Protestant) and St. Columba's (Catholic) Primary Schools by Liz Weir as storyteller and other artists. The purpose of the project was education-driven, rather than cross-community-driven, but there was some overlap.

Use One: Storytelling in Anti-Bullying Work

Bullying: A Life and Death Issue

When twelve year-old Aaron Armstrong of Broughshane, Antrim was found dead on May 31, 2004, hanging from a rafter in the hayshed of his family farm, his parents and community were shocked and devastated (Murphy, S.). The reason for his suicide was just as shocking as the boy's untimely death: Aaron had been being bullied (Murphy, S.). It seems that he could not take the attacks anymore so he committed suicide. In an article for the *Belfast News Letter* written on June 5, 2004, Sandra Murphy reported that the

local Presbyterian minister, Reverend William Dickey, said that on one occasion, “Aaron had come home from school with his jacket ripped open and had also come back with his face marked with crayons or chalk. I think he had been held down on the bus and things had been done.” According to the Childline Confidential Hotline’s Cordula Bellin, whom Sandra Murphy quoted in the article, the anonymous hotline for children “dealt with several hundred calls a year about bullying” (Murphy, S.), which suggests that bullying is not an uncommon problem. Aaron Armstrong’s death nearly two years ago alerted his society that bullying is a serious issue which needs to be dealt with.

Liz’s Connection to Anti-Bullying Work

One person who has championed anti-bullying in the wake of Aaron Armstrong’s death is Liz Weir, who grew up just a few miles from Broughshane. Liz uses storytelling to combat bullying. Liz was affected by Aaron Armstrong’s death, but she also has a personal interest in preventing bullying, since she was bullied as a child. Having a lazy eye, Liz had to wear a patch over her eye for long periods of time throughout her childhood; she was ridiculed and harassed because of it (Interview 7). When her now twenty-five year-old daughter, Claire Weir, was eighteen, Liz learned that her daughter had been bullied for years in school, too, but Claire had never told her (Interview 7). This made Liz realize just how scared children can be of bullies. Even though Liz’s daughter was normally very honest with her, she never told Liz that she was being bullied over a period of several years! Liz does not want any other children to experience bullying and she wants children to know that it is okay to tell an adult if someone is being bullied. She uses her storytelling sessions in schools to teach children not to bully and to alert adults to bullying, if it occurs to them or someone else. Some schools in Northern

Ireland such as Ballykeel Primary School in Antrim and Ligoniel Primary School in North Belfast now have anti-bullying policies in place. In the past, the principal of Ballykeel Primary School, Mrs. Barbara Sheeran, has asked Liz to tell stories and do storytelling activities around the theme of anti-bullying.

A Storytelling Anti-Bullying Session

Liz was invited back to Ballykeel Primary School on April 24, 2006 to do an anti-bullying storytelling session for P3 and P4 students, aged seven to nine, and then for P1 students, aged five to six. When Liz asked the seven and eight year-olds, “Why am I here?”, one little boy said, “You’re gonna tell us how to stop anti-bullying”; of course, he meant that Liz was going to tell them how to stop bullying. Though the boy misspoke, he clearly recognized Liz and understood that she had discouraged bullying at the school before. Moreover, the fact that he actually used the term “anti-bullying” shows that he picked up on the language of Liz’s message. The big question is: do the boy and his classmates understand what “anti-bullying” means—will they put Liz’s words into practice?

A Story to Start

To illustrate how bullies operate Liz told the children a tale from her book, *Here, There, and Everywhere: Stories from Many Lands* called “The Lion and the Rabbit.” In the story, a lion hunts and kills animals for his food. When he gets old and tired, he calls all the animals together and tells them that he cannot be bothered hunting anymore so they must decide who among them will be eaten and come to his den immediately. “In the end, the animals all picked on the oldest, smelliest, plumpest rabbit they could find.” (Weir, 19-21). En route to his death, the rabbit goes to the wishing well hoping he can

wish his way to safety. When he looks down in the well and sees himself, he gets an idea. He goes to the lion's den and tells the lion he was late because a big, bad lion tried to eat him. The lion becomes very jealous and demands that the rabbit take him to the lion. The rabbit leads the lion to the wishing well and the lion roars into the well. An echo returns the roar. The lion demands, "Who are you?" (Weir, 24), and the echo repeats the lion's question. This goes on until the lion is so furious that he jumps into the well—never to bother anyone again. When the rabbit goes back to the rest of the animals they cannot believe he is alive. "Then all the animals realized something very important, something that people should also remember. Never pick on anyone else, because sometimes you can get a really big surprise!" (Weir, 25-26).

Reflecting upon the Story

After Liz told the story, she asked the children, "What did you think? Did you like it?" They all nodded their heads and yelled, "Yeah". Then she asked them, "Why did you like it?" One little boy said, "'cause they're friends with each other". The boy realized that the story is about being inclusive. The outcast becomes the hero, and everyone is his friend in the end. I do not know how lasting this story's impression will be on the children, but I think I understand why the little boy determined that the story was about friendship. While the story is moral-heavy at the end, the message is playfully delivered. Throughout the story, every time the lion roars, Liz has the children roar. Whenever the lion talks to the well, the children repeat back what he says, playing the role of "echo". The children are a part of the story; it only works because they choose to participate in it. The storytelling itself then is an example of the very inclusiveness which the story advises. Everyone at the session—students, teachers, visitors, like myself—is

invited to join in. The students are told a story about a bully, the lion, whose selfish actions encourages the other animals to become bullies and exclude the bunny. While the message is effective, the way the message is suggested is perhaps more influential than the moral itself. Through partaking in the storytelling the children learn that it is more fun when everyone is involved. The roar would not be half as exciting or scary if everyone did not do it!

I noted earlier that a little boy used the term “anti-bullying” to describe Liz’s storytelling session. “The Lion and the Rabbit” demonstrated how bullies act and why they ought not to. The children were taught about bullies through the story’s content, and more importantly, through the story’s inclusive telling. The question remains, however, whether the little boy and his fellow classmates understand the connection between the word “anti-bullying” and its meaning, or how and why they should practice this concept. I think that the children did understand what bullying is and why they should not bully others because they were able to create a poem about anti-bullying with Liz’s guidance.

Making the Story their own through Poetry

To keep the children’s attention, Liz intersperses her stories with riddles, rhymes, songs, segments where the children are asked to retell or act out the stories, and creative writing exercises. In these creative writing exercises, Liz asks the students to describe how they feel in particular situations and what typically happens in these situations; she then uses their words to write poems for them. The following is one of the poems that Liz created with the seven and eight year olds at Ballykeel Primary School after they heard “The Lion and the Rabbit”⁶:

Sometimes I feel like crying,

⁶ The words in italics are the children’s.

When they all leave me out.
Sometimes I feel like crying.
When *they kick me*, I scream and *shout*.

Why can't they be *kind* to me?
Why can't they let me play?
We could be *friends* together.
We'd be *happy everyday*.

Liz started the poem-making by asking the students to think about being the person left out. Immediately, a little boy shouted, “Sometimes I feel like crying,” and Liz had her first refrain. When Liz asked the students what happened when someone bullies them, a boy yelled out “they kick me”. To finish off the first verse, Liz asked for a work that rhymed with “out”, and a little girl offered, “shout”. Next, Liz asked the students what they wanted to happen when they were being bullied. One student wanted the bullies to be “kind”; another wanted to be “friends” because then everyone would be “happy everyday”. The children can clearly give direct examples of bullying, such as being left out or kicked, they can describe how this makes them feel, and they realize that if everyone was kind and played together no one would be bullied and no one would feel sad. Through Liz’s storytelling session the children have heard about bullies (the lion and the other animals), practiced anti-bullying by adopting Liz’s model of inclusiveness by joining in her storytelling, and created their own bullying scenario in their poem in which the protagonist is being left out and kicked, feels sad, and is ultimately included to everyone’s greater happiness.

Use Two: Storytelling in Single-Identity Work

Why Single-Identity Work is Needed

Many people in Northern Ireland believe that single-identity work is a key part of resolving the conflict. In particular, John Laughran of INTERCOMM, a reconciliation

group in North Belfast, Mary Bradley of Survivors of Trauma, a victims' group in Ardoyne, a Catholic, nationalist area in North Belfast where many killings have occurred, and Jackie McDonald of the John McMichael Centre, a community resource centre in Sandy Row, a Protestant, loyalist area which is the stronghold of the Ulster Defense Association, a paramilitary group, believe that there should be more funding made available for single-identity work (20 and 23 March 2006). They think that the government is putting too much emphasis on cross-community work and bringing people together before they are ready to meet. Madeleine McGreevy of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum who has been a volunteer-community worker in East Belfast for twenty years agrees with these sentiments and believes that Protestants in Northern Ireland, in particular, need to be more confident of who they are (Interview 36).

Speaking as a Protestant who grew up in the Seymour Hill housing estate, a loyalist area in East Belfast where there has been severe conflict, Mrs. McGreevy said, "Protestant culture has been diluted in many ways. Everyone knows about the Orange Order and the 12th of July, but there is more to it than that and Protestants don't realize this" (Interview 36). In her experience, when Protestant teenagers from her area are brought together with Catholic teenagers to discuss their cultures, Protestant teenagers "sit there with nothing to say" (Interview 36). Mrs. McGreevy realizes that the Protestant teenagers could just be shy and/or uncomfortable in front of the Catholics, rather than being ignorant of their own culture, but she believes that their silence is caused by a combination of discomfort and ignorance. Regardless, Mrs. McGreevy thinks that "Protestants need to feel and own their culture. They need to build up their confidence" (Interview 36).

Madeleine McGreevy's feeling that part of the problem in Northern Ireland is a lack of confidence in Protestant identity, in particular, as expressed through a diminished culture can be understood in terms of conflict transformation theory. According to John Mulligan of Breakthrough Collaborative, a conflict resolution company which specializes in work-place disagreements, when we are in conflict, our identity is at issue (17 February 2006). All conflict can be boiled down to "three core threats—competence, good nature, and worthiness of love" (Mulligan). In other words, when we are in conflict someone is making us feel like we are not capable, we are not good, and/or we are not worthy of love. Mr. Mulligan says that "If we can make our identity more resilient, we will not be as prone to conflict" (17 February 2006). The more confidence we have in who we are, the more capable we will be of avoiding conflict. If Protestants and Catholics are not confident in their identities, they will continue to fight. Clearly, there is a need to affirm each group's sense of identity and strengthen it. When conducting my project, I wondered: can storytelling be used successfully in self-identity work?

Affirming Identity: The Ulster-Scots Heritage Council

One group whose members are particularly interested in affirming and expanding Protestant culture in Northern Ireland is the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council (USHC). Ulster-Scots describe the people who came from Scotland to Ireland during the Ulster plantation. In the plantation, Queen Elizabeth, the then nominal ruler of Ireland, gave Protestant Scots land in Ireland in exchange for their loyalty so that she could tighten her grip on Ireland. Ulster-Scots is an ethnicity and a language, which has recently been established as an official minority language of the European Union (Interview 6). Diane Hoy, the Development Officer of the USHC, told me that now that Ulster-Scots is a

recognized language, her organization is receiving more funding to promote Ulster-Scots heritage (Interview 6).

Background Information on the USHC Event I Attended

With the increased funding, the USHC employees decided to launch their first children's exhibition, which they called the *Weans Exhibition*. ("Weans" is Ulster-Scots for children.) The USHC employees decided to work with three primary schools from the Shankill (predominantly Protestant) area of Belfast on the exhibition. The students of Malvern, Edenbrooke, and Glenwood Primary Schools were asked to make bookmarks for the exhibition which would be judged at the exhibition's opening and prizes would be awarded. The Shankill is an area where many people with an Ulster-Scots background live so the USHC employees thought it appropriate to work with children from the area (Interview 6). Liz Weir was invited to the opening of the exhibition to tell the children stories related to Ulster-Scots heritage.

Opening Remarks

There was a clear intent on the part of the organization for this to be a community outreach opportunity, a chance to widen the children's understanding of their own identity and build up their confidence in themselves and in their community. This became apparent when William Humphrey, who is the High Sheriff of Belfast, or the Queen's representative on the City Council, officially opened the exhibit with a speech, saying, "In Belfast, we need to learn how to respect each other. What I am and what you are can be different. [...] We need to be confident of what we are; so we need to learn what we are." (25 April 2006). The implication, of course, was that citizens in Belfast do not know what they are, which is why they must learn. Councillor Humphrey described

himself as an Ulster-Scot and told the children that many of them are Ulster-Scots, too, and that they should be very proud of that heritage (25 April 2006). Diane Hoy echoed the Councillor's message, inviting the children to explore the exhibit and ask questions during lunch and after the ceremony. Next, Ms. Hoy ran the children through an exercise in translating Ulster-Scots words. One of them was "yarnspinner", the Ulster-Scots for storyteller.

Liz's Session

When Liz got up to tell stories, she started by asking the children, "What's the difference between a 'yarnspinner' and a TV?" I was surprised because Liz usually says a "storyteller" and a TV. Liz used "yarnspinner" throughout the sessions and included Ulster-Scots words in all the stories that she told. I had heard Liz tell these stories before and have heard her tell them since; on every other occasion, Liz never used Ulster-Scots words. Liz was using the Ulster-Scots language to create an opportunity for the children to hear Ulster-Scots words in context. In hearing Ulster-Scots spoken, perhaps the children would take more interest in this heritage since it might become more real to them. Liz did her best throwing in as many Ulster-Scots words as she could, since she is not a native speaker; but did Liz's storytelling session or the exhibit or any of the things that the adults told the children affirm their Ulster-Scots identity? Obviously, this is a very difficult question to answer from mere observation. I cannot know anything about how, if at all, the children's psychological conceptions of their identities changed on account of the day's event. I can only determine whether the children's reactions to the event imply any interest in their Ulster-Scots identity.

My Interpretation

Unfortunately, it did not seem to me that the *Weans Exhibition* or the storytelling encouraged the children to think about what it means to be an Ulster-Scot or why it matters. First of all, there was a great sense of frivolity to the day. The children were out of school for about three hours in total, among children from other schools, ice cream was served at lunch, and prizes were awarded. My interpretation of the event was that it was something “special”, out of the ordinary from the children’s everyday school experiences. In such an excited and different atmosphere, it was hard for some of the children to focus. Indeed, Liz had to stop the session four times to get the children’s attention, which is not typical. Normally, children, even those as young as four, are nearly spellbound when Liz is performing. In the end, two boys had to be removed from the session for “messaging”. Even if these boys were the only two people not paying attention to Liz, their presence clearly distracted the other children there, making it hard for them to listen to Liz and the other presenters; several of the children kept looking at the boys to see what they were doing.

Next, in the three hours that I observed the children, I only saw about ten of the 60-70 children present go up to look at the bookmarks, which were beside the exhibit. I did not actually see any of the children look at the exhibit which had been made for them. It is quite possible that the children had looked at it before I arrived as a group or that individual children looked at it at some point when I did not notice, but this second possibility is unlikely as I was keenly interested in knowing whether any of them so much as glanced at it. Finally, when Liz discussed some of the Ulster-Scots words she knew in between telling stories she seemed to lose the children’s attention. Heads started

to wander and the children started to talk. My impression of the event was that the children had a good time, but that they did not gain a deeper understanding of their Ulster-Scots heritage.

My conclusion is not that storytelling cannot be used effectively in single-identity work; instead, I think that storytelling was not effective in this situation because the children were out of their normal environments and too caught up in their location, the other students, the prizes, and the special lunch to pay attention to Liz's use of Ulster-Scots in her storytelling or the exhibit. To be fair to Liz, the children did not ignore her; they interacted with her through the stories, doing gestures and joining in choruses, but they seemed to enjoy the storytelling, rather than the Ulster-Scots words in the telling. She lost their attention when she stopped telling stories to talk about being an Ulster-Scot and what that might mean.

The part of the program that seemed to most interest the children was the bookmarks. The theme of the bookmarks was Ulster-Scots. I looked at the bookmarks and saw American flags (Many American Presidents were from Ulster-Scots descent.), the red hand of Ulster, and other symbols connected to Ulster-Scots. The children seemed to embrace their Ulster-Scots heritage most through their bookmarks. This suggests that single-identity work needs to be done actively by the participants. I think that single-identity storytelling which allows for the children to listen to stories and then make them their own in some way would be a more effective approach. The USHC employees only asked Liz to tell stories. The children had fun, but they did not get a chance to do any identity-building work around the stories.

Use Three: Storytelling in Cross-Community Work

Why Cross-Community Work is Needed

Education in Northern Ireland is largely segregated, with only five percent of students attending schools with significant representation of both Protestants and Catholics (Interview 39). Ninety-five percent of the student-aged population never interacts until they reach college at age eighteen (Interview 39). By 1983, it was clear to educators that students needed an opportunity to learn about their own culture and those of other communities; thus, Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) was conceived (“Education for Diversity Handbook”, 9). EMU became a statutory cross-curriculum requirement for all state-funded schools in 1989 (“Education for Diversity Handbook”, 9). EMU is an educational theme which is supposed to encourage students “to tackle some of the more difficult and divisive issues which arise from cultural difference in Northern Ireland” (“Education for Diversity Handbook”, 9).

In the past, EMU has been seen as a contact program, in which controlled and maintained school students came together to do activities. Arthur Webb of the Belfast Education and Library Board admits that by the early 1990’s it was obvious that EMU funding was being used for “cosmetics” (Interview 38), for example, to go on fieldtrips in which there would be no interaction between the school groups. Since EMU activities were not as issue-driven as intended, EMU is being phased out and replaced by Citizenship education under the Revised Curriculum which is being developed by the Curriculum Council for Education and Assessment of Northern Ireland (Interview 38). The Citizenship education curriculum will stress diversity and focus on meaningful interaction between communities rather than mere contact (Interview 38). Funding for

EMU events still exists, though, under a new name, Schools in the Community (Interview 38); EMU is still more widely recognized than Schools in the Community, however.

Background Information on the Neighborhood of Ligoniel

On April 25 and 27, 2006, Liz conducted EMU sessions at Ligoniel Primary School for Ligoniel and St. Vincent de Paul's Primary Schools. These schools are located in Ligoniel, an area of North Belfast in BT14, a postal code area where over eight percent of the 3500 deaths related to the Troubles occurred (Farrington, 7), which is part of the reason why Ligoniel and St. Vincent de Paul students participate in EMU programming. Lynne Gillis, who teaches six to eight year olds at Ligoniel Primary School, whose class Liz worked with on April 27, 2006, said of parents whose children she teaches, "These people have grown up in conflict areas. They have been exposed to trauma or violence, and they put that onto the children. Some parents would not allow their children to go up to St. Vincent de Paul's because they do not associate with Catholics. These parents are the minority, though" (Interview 17). Ms. Gillis pointed out that only one or two students' parents of a class of thirty would object to their children going to St. Vincent de Paul's Primary School (Interview 17), but the fact that even a few parents feel this way suggests the extent of division in the community. Even parents who are willing to reconcile with people from the other community have baggage from past experiences, which undoubtedly affect their children's world views.

My Observations

When students from the two schools came together on April 27, 2006 for a two-hour storytelling session, Liz asked the teachers to have the children sit in mixed groups on mats on the ground. Each mat had boys and girls from each school, but the children

sat in rows on the mats beside children from their own school. During the break, the children sat separately on opposite sides of the room so that each the children could eat the snacks provided by their own schools. After the first break, the students sat in three rows. Two of the three rows had students from the same school sitting together. The front row had students from each school, but they were separated by about a foot of space. After the second break, Liz changed the room set-up so that she was at the side of the room instead of the front. The children came in from the schoolyard and sat in mixed bunches around Liz.

I took careful note of the children's seating position because I was curious how comfortable they were being around one another. In the beginning, the children were told where to sit. The second time they sat they could sit where they wanted; I think that it is telling that they chose to sit with their classmates rather than children from the other school. Obviously, the children know their classmates better than the other children, are more likely to be friends with their classmates, and therefore, feel more comfortable sitting beside them. The fact that the children reverted back to sitting with their classmates after snack time is not surprising, particularly since they had been separated from the other school children for at least fifteen minutes while they ate their snacks. What is interesting, though, is that the children from both schools sat together after they played in the school yard for about ten minutes. According to Mrs. McGrogan, who teaches seven to eight year olds at St. Vincent de Paul Primary School, the children were playing together out in the school yard (Interview 19). I think that the children's seating arrangements demonstrate that there is potential for children from the two communities to live together peacefully. These children have been doing EMU sessions together five

times a year for three years now (Interview 17); they have obviously established some rapport because when they were left on their own they played together in harmony.

My Interpretation of What I Observed

The children can interact positively with one another, but it seems that they are extremely influenced by the authorities and structures which surround them. When their teachers (the authorities) told them to sit next to the other students in the beginning, they sat together. Similarly, when the schools provided different snacks for the children at break so that they could not sit next to each other (the structures), they sat apart. The main authorities in these children's lives are their parents. Some of these children are fortunate in that their parents, like Lindsay Anderson, encourage them to meet children from the other community (Interview 16). Other children are brought up by people who avoid cross-community contact as Lynne Gillis described (Interview 17). The main structures which dominate these children's society are separate housing and separate education. The factors against cross-community work from authoritarian and structural points of view are many.

Educators' Feelings on EMU

Claire Hilman, the principal at Ligoniel Primary School, believes that EMU activities can integrate these children in meaningful ways despite structural obstacles. Ms. Hilman told me about an EMU environmental project held at Ligoniel Primary School on April 26, 2006 in which the children had to complete tasks together in order to win points (Interview 20). Doing activities together or playing educational games during EMU sessions were also described as successful cross-community building methods by Ms. Anderson, Ms. Gillis, and Mrs. McGrogan (Interviews 16, 17, and 19). None of the

educators thought that storytelling was as effective for cross-community work as physically doing something together (Interviews 16, 17, 19, and 20). But, just what was the effect of Liz's storytelling session? Did her session promote good community relations between the two groups of school children?

What the Children Said and My Interpretation of their Words

I did not have any way of measuring the children's attitude towards each other before and after the session for comparison. Instead, I decided to observe the children and to ask some of them a few questions (See appendix three for interview questions.) in an attempt to gauge what, if anything, the children got from the storytelling session in terms of good community relations. All seven children that I talked to (two from St. Vincent de Paul's Primary School⁷ and five from Ligoniel Primary School) said that they enjoyed hearing stories with the other school children (Interviews 9-15). One of the children was able to draw a moral from one of Liz's stories.

"Little Boy Frog and Little Boy Snake"

One of Liz's favorite cross-community stories is "Little Boy Frog and Little Boy Snake" which she adapted from Margaret Read McDonald's version. In the story, a frog and a snake meet at the top of a mountain and play together. They teach each other how they move. The frog teaches the snake how to hop and the snake teaches the frog how to slide. At the end of the day, the frog slides down the mountain, and the snake hops down. When the animals get home their mothers reprimand them for playing with their enemies and tell them that they cannot play anymore. When the frog and the snake meet the next

⁷ I did not talk to more St. Vincent de Paul students because I felt uncomfortable that the teacher had not received parental permission like I had asked. To make up for this, I went and observed the St. Vincent de Paul children in their classroom after the storytelling session and heard them retell some of Liz's stories. I did not ask them questions at that time, though.

day, they do not play together, but they decide to stay friends anyway. In this story, the authorities, the animal's parents impose their will upon them, but the children frog and snake stay friends anyway.

Lauryn Smith of Ligoniel Primary School told me that this was her favorite story because "It was about two wee boys who became friends, but could still be friends though they couldn't play" (Interview 11). Whether or not Lauryn liked this story because it reminded her of her own situation I could not say; the important thing is that Lauryn realized the value of friendship for friendship's sake despite the disapproval of other characters in the story (the mother frog and the mother snake). One could argue that "Little Boy Frog and Little Boy Snake" is a stupid story because the frog and snake are friends, but cannot play with one another. What good is a friend with whom you cannot hang out? Lauren, for one, disagrees with this sentiment and thinks that friendship is valuable for its own sake and not just because of what it offers, for examples, companionship or fun. The fact that one child, Lauryn, out of seven interpreted one of Liz's story in a positive community relations light does not prove that Liz's storytelling is an effective cross-community tool, but it suggests that it has the potential to be.

Use Four: Storytelling in Education

Everyone I talked to believed that storytelling is a very effective educational tool. Jonathan Fisher, the Vice Principal of Ballykeel Primary School was the only person who had a reservation about storytelling in schools. He felt that it only worked if it was "done well" (Interview 3). There are many anecdotes that I heard from educators, storytellers, and parents or grandparents about individual children responding positively to

storytelling in their schools. For the sake of concision and clarity, I am going to focus my discussion of storytelling in education around one creative arts project, which was conducted at two primary schools, Newbuildings and St. Columba's in Newbuildings, a suburb of Derry. I was able to study storytelling in these two schools more in-depth than the others because I visited each school twice and was able to speak to students, parents, and teachers at both schools.

Background Information on the "Early Years Project"

The creative project, known as the "Early Years Project", took place over several months from October 2005 to February 2006. Storytelling's educational effects, as a result of this project, cannot be pinpointed because three other art forms, creative arts, music, and dance, were incorporated into the project. Over eight weeks, Liz and the other artists—an artist, a dancer, and a musician—came into the school and worked with classes of students from nursery school, or reception, to P4 (ages 3 to 9). On February 8, 2006, the project ended in a performance that was about an hour and one-half long, in which the children told stories, acted out stories, sang songs, and danced on a stage where they had created the set, props, and background curtain. Changes in the children's abilities probably reflect lessons learned from all of the creative arts in which they participated, rather than from storytelling alone as it was not the exclusive aim of the project. However, I believe that looking at the "Early Years Project" can give meaningful insights into arts education in general, and storytelling, specifically, since I asked the students to tell me both about their experience overall and the stories, particularly.

Education First, Cross-Community Second

The “Early Years Project” was the brainchild of Maureen Smyth, the reading recovery teacher at Newbuildings Primary School, who applied for a grant from the Early Years department of the Arts Council for Northern Ireland. Mrs. Smyth developed and administered the project as part of her training to become a principal (Interview 30). The funding was for arts education, not for cross-community work, but Mrs. Smyth “felt it very necessary” (Interview 30) to include the local Catholic school since the suburb of Newbuildings, located outside of Derry city, has a reputation for sectarianism. Many of the parents and teachers whom I spoke to about this reputation said something similar to Joseph Davis, a parent whose child goes to Newbuildings Primary School: “Newbuildings is no more sectarian than anywhere else, and probably a lot less so than other places” (Interview 43). Still, the *Irish News* labeled Newbuildings “the most sectarian place in the North” (Newbuildings resident, letter to the *Irish News*) in May 2005, upsetting the community. Mrs. Smyth told me that the cross-community aspect of the project was not a reaction to the bad press, however; the project had been planned and agreed upon before the headlines (Interview 30).

What I Learned

To determine, what if anything, the students got from storytelling in terms of increasing their learning and appreciation of the other community, I asked Maureen Smyth of Newbuildings Primary School and Vera Hart of St. Columba’s Primary School, the two contact teachers for the project, to randomly select students to be interviewed. The teachers sent home ten permission slips to the parents of the students selected. If the

parents agreed (not all parents agreed), I interviewed the children in the presence of Mrs. Smyth or Mrs. Hart respectively. I asked the children what their favorite story was, if they could tell me the story, and what they thought the story meant. Of the nine children I interviewed at Newbuildings Primary School, eight of the children could name a story, two children could name two stories, and one child could name three stories. All eight of those children who could name a story could tell me something about it, and three of the children could repeat Liz's stories in great length and detail (Interviews 21-22, 24-29). Primary school teacher-turned-storyteller, Kate Murphy, told me that in her experience, "kids remember whatever they hear through a story" (Interview 56); Kate Murphy believes increasing children's ability to remember things is one of storytelling's many educational values. My experience at Newbuildings Primary School affirms Kate Murphy's experience.

I was very impressed by how much the children remembered about stories that they last heard two months ago, which is quite a long time from the perspective of a seven or eight year-old. One of the children even remembered Liz's exact words, using "nosy" in her retelling of "Mr. and Mrs. Haytack" (Interview 29). Even more significantly, this child was able to determine the meaning of one of the stories she had learned. In "The Other Side of the River", the villagers of a town are separated by a river as are the residents of Derry city, and people from one side hate the other side. When a storm breaks the bridge that connects them, the villagers realize they need each other and work to rebuild the bridge and stop hating one another. The little girl said that "The Other Side of the River" was about "being friends" (Interview 29).

After I conducted the child interviews, Mrs. Smyth gave me some information about the learning abilities of the children to give my research findings context. One of the children has behavioral problems, and Mrs. Smyth noted that his concentration and processing skills have greatly improved this year. She says that the fact that the child was able to retell a story shows a definite increase in the child's attention (Interview 30). Another child whom I interviewed is much more of an oral learner than a written learner. The child really engaged in the storytelling aspect of the project; throughout the eight-week project, the mother and grandmother of the child listened to the child tell Liz's stories at home in detail. Mrs. Smyth has noted that the child's increased oracy has translated into the child's written work, which has greatly improved this year (Interview 30).

I was surprised to find out from Mrs. Smyth that one of the children who retold one of Liz's stories in detail had severe speech difficulties last school-year and still has some speech problems. When I interviewed this child, I thought that the child was really focusing in order to retell me a story. I also thought that the child had a slightly peculiar pacing when speaking; however, I would not have known that the child had significant speech problems in the past. In general, Mrs. Smyth noted that the children who have difficulties with language in speaking, reading, or writing gained the most from the project. Similarly, children with behavioral or concentration problems responded really well to the project. Storytelling and arts education seems to really help children with learning disabilities. Mrs. Smyth noticed that most children's self-esteem and confidence improved (Interview 30).

Two of the parents that I spoke to agreed that their children's confidence greatly increased, and all the parents noted some positive change in their child. Mrs. Campbell said, "My child is more forward⁸ now. Before she would not have acted much, but now she will dance in front of my mother. Maybe there is too much chatting now!" (Interview 40). Mrs. Walker, whose granddaughter participated in the project, said something similar about her grandchild, "This year she has really come forward; before she was very backward⁹. Last year, she was scared of everything. She is coming on¹⁰ great now. She has more confidence" (Interview 41).

Janet McFaul has seen a difference in her boys' abilities to listen to stories at home. She said, "Now when I'm reading to them, they will wait until the end. Before they wanted to jump to the end of the story; now they know that it will resolve and they wait for the end" (Interview 42). Mrs. McFaul's children understand the layout and structure of stories now; this understanding may suggest the way in which listening to stories can improve writing skills in addition to verbal skills. If a child understands the format of a story, he or she can apply it when they write their own stories.

I asked the students from St. Columba's Primary School similar questions, but I was more disappointed with my research there because the children who had been selected were very young; three of the eight children were under five and the rest were six or seven. At Newbuildings Primary School, the students who I talked to were seven to nine years old and had more things to say about the project. However, five of the children at St. Columba's could name a story that Liz had told, and three could tell me the story in some detail (Interviews 44, 46-48, and 50 and Interviews 46-47 and 50).

⁸ "Forward" means outgoing in Northern Ireland.

⁹ "Backward" means shy in Northern Ireland.

¹⁰ "Coming on" means developing in Northern Ireland.

The older children at St. Columba's also seemed to understand the meanings of some of the stories. One of the children told me that "The Other Side of the River" was about "being bad and good" (Interview 47); she did not explicitly say that being good was better than being bad. However, I think it is fair to assume that she understood that being good is better than being bad because the villagers were punished for being bad when the bridge was broken in the storm and were happy in the end when they stopped fighting. The fact that the child liked the story probably means that she agreed with how the story ended, that is, she agreed with the villagers learning how to get along. Another child really seemed to get at the heart of the story when he said that "The Other Side of the River" was about times "when you don't like 'em, but you need 'em. People have things that they can do and everybody needs them" (Interview 50). I understood this to mean that the boy realized that every single person has a purpose in life and all people and their purposes are valuable.

Despite the fact that storytelling was not the only art form used in the "Early Years Project" conducted by Newbuildings and St. Columba's Primary Schools, I still think that the experiences of teachers, parents, and students that I talked to shows that storytelling as well as other art forms can serve many purposes in education. Being given the chance to perform allows children to build up their self-esteem and confidence. Hearing stories and retelling those stories for others develops listening and speaking skills, which can translate into written work. Storytelling seems to be particularly useful for teaching children who have learning disabilities and are in most need of help.

Evidence of Cultural Sharing

Also, the morals and content of stories can teach lessons about what it means to be a good person and citizen. These schools are located in an area with a reputation for sectarianism. Everyone I talked to said that this representation was unfair and exaggerated, but ultimately admitted that sectarianism is an issue in Newbuildings as it is throughout Northern Ireland. The project created familiarity between Protestant and Catholic children, which is one way to begin to combat sectarianism. Mr. Davis, whose daughter Elaine attends Newbuildings, told me that Elaine became friendly with a student at St. Columba's with a barred name, for example, Mary-Ann, and that Elaine told her parents about the girl's name because it was "new to her" (Interview 43). Apparently, barred names are much more common in the Catholic tradition than in the Protestant. I thought Elaine's curiosity about the name was very significant because it is a simple example of the kinds of cultural learning and sharing that can happen when people work together to achieve a goal.

Further Thoughts and Recommendations

I think that the "Early Years Project" could be a model for cross-community work because it was intensive and long-term. In order for the program to be recognized as a citizenship curriculum project under the Revised Curriculum, it would have to include discussion sessions in which students talk about cultural issues (Interview 37). This project could easily lend itself to such cultural discussions. The performance could be based around traditions of the students or symbols that define their communities. Everyone liked the project and felt it very worthwhile even with all the logistics involved, so I think that it should be continued perhaps every two or three years. Also students

who participate should meet with the students from the other school at least three times a year every year after they complete their project so that the relationships that they form can be maintained.

As a final suggestion, more parental involvement would be very useful in achieving good community relations through the project. Parents who wanted to be involved could take part in the show in a separate segment which could be rehearsed with the artists after work hours or on weekends. Alternately, some parents who have time during the day could come in and learn stories and create art with their children and perform with the students in the show. I think that this project has great potential to be built upon and used as a model throughout Northern Ireland not only for cross community work and citizenship, but for education as a whole. It is a great example of encouraging creativity in children and fostering their personal growth as well as increasing their learning.

Part III: The End

Conclusion

A Summary

I discovered that Liz uses storytelling in at least four different areas—anti-bullying, single-identity work, cross-community work, and education. I found that storytelling can be quite effective in anti-bullying work. A story about a bully can be told, and then the children can be asked questions which get them to think about what a bully does and how people who are bullied feel. It seems particularly important to have the children consider how *they* would feel if they were bullied. From there, they conclude that they would not like to feel like that, and therefore, they should not bully and make other children feel bad. The children can then be told a story about what to do if they are being bullied (go and tell) so that they do not feel that they must deal with the problem alone. The stories are the bulk of the anti-bullying work, but the questioning and possible poem-making about feelings associated with bullying are very important aspects of making the children relate the stories to themselves.

In the single-identity work that I observed at the Shankill Library for the unveiling of the *Weans Exhibition* of the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council, I felt that the children did not get a clear understanding of their Ulster-Scots background, what it means, or why it matters. Ultimately, I felt that the atmosphere of the event was not conducive to serious identity formation and questioning because the children were out of their normal environment (school), eating ice cream, and waiting to see if they won a prize in the bookmark contest. They paid attention to Liz's stories most of the time, but were distracted occasionally by two ill-behaved boys who had to be removed from the

session. Also, they seemed to lose interest when Liz talked about Ulster-Scots words in between stories; they liked the stories not the Ulster-Scots vocabulary lessons.

Finally, the children seemed to be most interested in the bookmarks they had created. These bookmarks had Ulster-Scots insignia on them, and it is in making these bookmarks that I believe the children most experienced being Ulster-Scots. The coordinators of the event did not ask Liz to have the children do storytelling activities, such as poem-making, retelling stories, or dramatizing stories. I do not think that this specific event succeeded in being a successful single-identity storytelling session because the children did not actively take part in the stories.

When I observed an EMU session at Ligoniel Primary School for students of Ligoniel and St. Vincent de Paul's Primary Schools, I noticed that the children were greatly influenced by the authorities around them, particularly, the teachers and Liz. They tended to do what adults told them and to follow what structures were put in place for them. At the beginning of the session, when they were told to sit together, they did. At snack time, the children sat apart because each school provided their own snacks. In order to ensure that each school child got the snack from their own school, the teachers had the children from each school sit across from each other at opposite ends of the hall. I found that after their recess, when the children were not given any instructions as to where to sit, they sat together because they had been playing together outside. It seems that the children need to engage in activities together to integrate meaningfully.

The children at the single-identity *Weans Exhibition* needed to create bookmarks themselves to recognize their Ulster-Scots identity; similarly, the students of Ligoniel and St. Vincent de Paul's Primary Schools psychically needed to do something together to

feel comfortable with one another. I think that listening to stories that have mutual respect as a theme can promote good community relations, but that having children actively engage in the stories through activities such as poem-making, dramatizing, or retelling would be more effective than passive listening.

One of the students whom I talked to about Liz's EMU storytelling session valued friendship for friendship's sake after hearing "Little Boy Frog and Little Boy Snake"; this was a very valuable lesson. I do not know how many opportunities the little girl will have to make friends with children from the other community, but I think she will seize these opportunities when they are made available to her. The question does not seem to be: can storytelling unite different communities, but rather: how much exposure to stories and each other is necessary before unity occurs?

I saw more evidence of cultural sharing and unity among the students of Newbuildings and St. Columba's Primary Schools, which makes sense considering that they worked with each other almost every day for eight weeks. The long-term nature of their interaction is more likely to have lasting effects on their attitudes toward the other community than those of the children at Ligoniel and St. Vincent de Paul's Primary Schools. Interestingly, the main purpose of the "Early Years Project" was to promote creative arts education; promoting good community relations was a secondary motive. The children formed relationships through art and storytelling, not because of it. When they were together, they formed relationships naturally. Frances Quinn, a storyteller, says that in her experience, "when there is a focus to the storytelling, such as a theme of Halloween, and the people [from different communities] are not thinking about being together; when the session is not specifically designed for people to 'mingle', they are

more relaxed and more likely to actually interact” (Interview 55). In not promoting the “Early Years Project” as a community relations scheme, Newbuildings and St. Columba’s Primary Schools were able to improve community relations. It seems that the most successful cross-community programs are not labeled as such, which, though unobvious, is an important finding for educators and community workers to consider.

The stated purpose of the “Early Years Project”, which was to increase children’s learning, was also very successful. Improvements in oracy and literacy were especially dramatic for students with special needs (Interview 30). It seems that storytelling, in particular, is a good way to teach children with learning disabilities. Also, parents and teachers alike noted that many children’s confidence and self-esteem were improved over the course of the project. Actually performing for other people seems to build up people’s beliefs in their own abilities.

While the “Early Years Project” was a big success, I think that there is room for improvement. It seems essential that the two schools continue to engage in this project and that they provide past participants opportunities to meet with children from the other school on a fairly regular basis, perhaps, once a term, which is three times a year. Also, I believe that there is great potential for more parental involvement. If parents from both communities take part in the project, then they will meet one another and form relationships. The parents could either have their own segment in the performance, rehearsals for which could be organized after work hours or on weekends. Alternatively, parents who can make time during the day to come into the school can work with their children and other parents to stage one part of the show. I think that it would be extremely important for the parents not to interfere with the children’s production, but

having parents participate in one act of the night could be a great opportunity to promote community spirit.

A Critique

I set out to discover how Liz Weir uses storytelling. Liz has been telling stories and doing storytelling projects since 1973. It would be impossible for me to report on all of the ways she has used stories in her work over the last thirty-three years. I think that I was reasonably successful in explaining what I learned from how Liz used stories over the time that I was with her, but it must be noted that it was a very short time indeed. I did not discuss every session that Liz did while I was with her, but tried to convey overall patterns of anti-bullying, single-identity and cross-community work, and education. I also looked at two schools where Liz had participated in a project in the past (Newbuildings and St. Columba's Primary Schools) and researched these projects on my own time so that I could compare Liz's one-off work to her long-term work. Finally, I asked people outside of storytelling and with whom Liz had not worked directly what they thought about the uses of storytelling. I compared Liz's experiences and my experiences with Liz to those of other tellers. I think that I succeeded in getting as full a picture of Liz's uses of storytelling in Northern Ireland as I could in the time allotted. However, if I had had more time to research the uses of storytelling in Northern Ireland, I would have conducted case studies with more than one storyteller in order to get a fuller idea of the uses of storytelling in Northern Ireland. I set out to explore storytelling with Liz, however, and I believe that I did that.

My Most Significant Lessons

In addition to my research findings (See “A Summary”), I learned two valuable life lessons. First, I learned how fulfilling life can be when one is passionate about what one does. Liz wakes up early every day and stays up late every night; she does not seem to begrudge a second of her lost sleep because she absolutely loves her work. Liz told me about the day that she left her position as the Belfast Education and Library Board Senior Librarian. Liz had taken a leave of absence from work to throw herself into the world of storytelling full-time in 1990. When her leave was up, she had to make a big decision: whether to take her job up again or leave it for good. As a single mother with a young daughter to support, leaving her steady income for a dream seemed crazy; but while driving down a country road as the sunlight poked through the clouds and hit the fields below her, causing them to become a brilliant green color, she realized that if she kept her job in Belfast she would be in an office, not out on the open road. More importantly, she realized that if she left her job in Belfast she could do something she loved every day of her life. She walked into her boss’s office and resigned the next morning, and all he said was, “I didn’t think you’d have the guts to do it” (Interview 33). She did, and she and others have benefited from her decision every day since. Watching Liz do her work has made me realize that I want to find work that I love, too, and that some risks are worth taking.

Finally, I have discovered what distinguishes oral tradition, that is, verbal storytelling, from the written word. Storytelling is unique because it relies on a listener, an audience member, and the deep listening that occurs during storytelling teaches people how to love. Micéal Ross, an older man whose age I cannot determine, is a storyteller

who shared his deepest life lesson with me earlier this semester. According to Mr. Ross, “Love is a deep listening to another person—hearing and not saying—without any judgment or agenda” (19 February 2006). Mr. Ross told me this nearly three months ago, but I did not understand it until I had experienced storytelling—until I listened as intensely as Mr. Ross described. Then I remembered my three years worth of experiences as a volunteer on a suicide prevention hotline, and his definition of love made perfect sense to me. Even in dire circumstances, when I listened to someone who wanted to kill themselves—when I just let the person speak and did not judge or interrupt—they felt better. On some days, I think my listening may have saved a life. Storytelling teaches us how to listen—intensely and completely. In this sense, it teaches us how to love one another.

I think that this lesson of love is the divinity of which Brother Blue spoke. If God is love and storytelling teaches how to love; then, storytelling really is a divine act. This semester I learned that storytelling is not something superficial that artsy people do to entertain others, but that it is central to life and a gift that everyone needs to experience. As for myself, I hope to continue experiencing storytelling throughout my life. I want to listen to more tellers so that I can refine my listening skills and learn to love more deeply, and I want to tell others stories so they can learn how to listen and how to love.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviews, or Conversations

22 April 2006

Interview 1. **Liz Gough**. Storyteller and Assistant Advisory Officer in Education for the Belfast Education and Library Board.

24 April 2006

Interview 2. **Barbara Sheeran**. Principal of Ballykeel Primary School.

Interview 3. **Jonathan Fisher**. Vice principal of Ballykeel Primary School.

Interview 4. **Ruth Moore**. Director of the Upper North Belfast Community Empowerment Partnership.

25 April 2006

Interview 5. **Jenny Clarke**. Principal of Glenbank Nursery School.

Interview 6. **Diane Hoy**. Development Officer of Ulster-Scots Heritage Council.

Interview 7. **Liz Weir**. Storyteller.

26 April 2006

Interview 8. **Finian O'Shea**. Co-director of Learning Support at the Church of Ireland College of Education.

27 April 2006

Interview 9. **Michael Moore**. Student at St. Vincent de Paul Primary School.

Interview 10. **Chloe Light**. Student at St. Vincent de Paul Primary School.

Interview 11. **Lauryn Smith**. Student at Ligoniel Primary School.

Interview 12. **Amy Crawford**. Student at Ligoniel Primary School.

Interview 13. **Courtney**. Student at Ligoniel Primary School.

Interview 14. **Karl**. Student at Ligoniel Primary School.

Interview 15. **Aaron**. Student at Ligoniel Primary School.

Interview 16. **Lindsay Anderson**. Parent of P1¹¹ student at Ligoniel Primary School and Classroom Assistant for P2 and P3 classes at Ligoniel Primary School.

Interview 17. **Lynne Gillis**. P2 and P3 teacher at Ligoniel Primary School.

Interview 18. **Barbara Coates**. P1 teacher at Ligoniel Primary School.

Interview 19. **Claire McGrogan**. P2 and P3 teacher at St. Vincent de Paul Primary School.

Interview 20. **Claire Hilman**. Principal at Ligoniel Primary School.

28 April 2006

Interview 21. **Shelby**. Student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 22. **Charlie**. Student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 23. **Cameron**. Student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 24. **Harry**. Student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 25. **Elaine**. Student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 26. **Lauren**. Student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 27. **Holly**. Student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 28. **Nicola**. Student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 29. **Jillian**. Student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 30. **Maureen Smyth**. Head of P1 to P4, reading recovery teacher, and teacher mentor at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 31. **Vera Hart and Sally Thompson**. Teacher and classroom assistant at St. Columba's Primary School.

Interview 32. **Katie Fitzpatrick, Ciaran Flanagan, and Sarah Lapsley**. Drama facilitator (early years programme), community relations officer, and education services coordinator at the Verbal Arts Centre.

¹¹ To see what ages the P school years correspond to see Appendix 4.

1 May 2006

Interview 33. **Liz Weir**. Storyteller.

Interview 34. **Richard Hurst**. Events Manager at Ulster American Folk Park.

2 May 2006

Interview 35. **Dr. Anthony Buckley**. Administrator at Ulster Folk and Transport Museum.

Interview 36. **Madeleine McGreevy**. Education director at Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and community worker in East Belfast.

Interview 37. **Maurna Crozier**. Community Relations Council.

3 May 2006

Interview 38. **Arthur Webb**. Creative Arts Advisor of the School Support Service at the Belfast Education and Library Board.

4 May 2006

Interview 39. **Philip O'Sullivan**. Public Relations Officer at the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.

5 May 2006

Interview 40. **Flora Campbell**. Parent of P1 student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 41. **Jean Walker**. Grandparent of student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 42. **Janet McFaul**. Parent of P1 and P3 students at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 43. **Joseph Davis**. Parent of P3 student at Newbuildings Primary School and a member of the Board of Governors of Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 44. **Emer**. P2 student at St. Columba's Primary School.

Interview 45. **Niamh Coyle**. Reception student at St. Columba's Primary School.

Interview 46. **Niamh**. P3 student at St. Columba's Primary School.

Interview 47. **Lia**. P2 student at St. Columba's Primary School.

Interview 48. **Shea**. P3 student at St. Columba's Primary School.

Interview 49. **Hollie**. Reception student at St. Columba's Primary School.

Interview 50. **Ethan**. Student at St. Columba's Primary School.

Interview 51. **Cola**. P1 student at St. Columba's Primary School

Interview 52. **Martina Coyle**. Parent of reception student at St. Columba's Primary School.

Interview 53. **Avril McClelland**. Parent of P3 student at Newbuildings Primary School.

Interview 54. **Sheila Quigley**. Storyteller.

Interview 55. **Frances Quinn**. Storyteller.

6 May 2006

Interview 56. **Kate Murphy**. Storyteller.

Email Interviews

28 April 2006

Interview 57. **Dr. Patrick Ryan**. Storyteller.

Informal Meetings

17 February, 10 March, and 4 April 2006

John Mulligan. Breakthrough Collaborative and SIT instructor.

19 February 2006

Micéal Ross. Storyteller.

20 March 2006

Mary Bradley. Survivors of Trauma.

John Laughran. INTERCOMM.

23 March 2006

Jackie McDonald. John McMichael Centre.

25 April 2006

William Humphrey. Belfast City Councillor and High Sheriff. "Opening remarks at the Ulster-Scots Heritage Council *Weans Exhibit*". Shankill Library. 25 April 2006.

9 May 2006

Fionnuala Brennan. SIT ISP Advisor

Appendix 2: Parental Permission Form

Parental Permission Form for Children to Participate in Research

Purpose of the research:

The purpose of this research is to find out what effects storytelling has had in furthering primary school children's education and understanding of self and other. Specifically, the researcher wants to discover whether storytelling in schools has promoted or discouraged respect and diversity in any way.

What your child will do in this study:

Your child will be interviewed for a maximum of fifteen minutes and observed during a storytelling session at his/her school for approximately one hour. With your and your child's permission, interviews will be recorded.

Some sample questions that your child will be asked:

1. What happened when Liz Weir, the storyteller, came to school?
2. Do you have a favorite story that Liz told? What is it? Can you tell me the part of the story that you remember?
3. Did you like hearing the stories with the students from (the other school)?
4. Did you get to know any of the students? Do you know their names?
5. Does your teacher tell you stories in school?
6. Do you find listening to stories hard?

Risks:

No risks are anticipated. If, during the interview, your child is uncomfortable, the researcher will end the interview.

Benefits:

No benefits are anticipated.

Participation and withdrawal:

Your child's participation is completely voluntary, and your child may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your child may withdraw by informing the interviewer that he/she no longer wishes to participate. No questions will be asked.

Contact:

If you or your child have any questions about this study, please contact:

Leanne Gaffney, Researcher
00 44 (028) 21 758 451
Leanne.Gaffney@gmail.com

Agreement:

The purpose and nature of this research have been sufficiently explained, and I agree that my child can participate in this study. I understand that my child is free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name (print): _____

Additional Request:

If you would be willing to be interviewed, please contact the researcher. The researcher would like to hear parents' perspectives on storytelling in schools, too. Thank you very much.

Appendix 3: Interview Guides¹²

Storytellers

1. How long have you been telling stories in schools in Northern Ireland?
2. Tell me about how you became a storyteller.
3. Why did you become as a storyteller?
4. Can you describe the range of students you work with (their ages, geographies, and socioeconomic backgrounds)?
5. Are most of your storytelling sessions and projects one-off or longer term?
6. Can you describe what you do at storytelling sessions in schools?

¹² These were the questions that I took with me to interviews. In the course of the interview, some questions were omitted and others were spontaneously added.

7. Can you describe what storytelling activities you do?
8. What other ways do you work with stories in classrooms (story building, collecting, etc)?
9. What age group do you prefer to work with?
10. Is most of your work single-identity or cross-community?
11. What if anything do you do differently when conducting a single-identity session as opposed to a cross-community session (repertoire, children's reactions)?
12. What do you see as the value of both types of work?
13. What, if anything, is not good about each type of work?
14. How does storytelling fit within the curriculum and education, in general?
15. Can you give me any examples of how attitudes and/or behaviors of children have changed in response to a story, session, or storytelling activity?
16. What types of stories are in your repertoire?
17. What is an example of a story you would tell to promote understanding or respect for self (single identity story)?
18. What is an example of a story you tell to promote understanding of others (cross community or diversity story)?
19. What factors do you consider when matching stories to audiences or what do schools require/request of you?
20. What do you hope to achieve through storytelling in schools?
21. What is the educational value of storytelling?
22. How do you feel experiencing storytelling in schools benefit children?
23. What is your perceived religious background?
24. How, if at all, do you think this affects you as a storyteller?
25. Have you ever done long-term storytelling projects with schools? Could you describe them for me? How effective were these projects in terms of student growth and community development?

Teachers

1. How long have professional storytelling sessions been happening in your classroom?
2. What first motivated you to bring storytellers into your class, and how, if at all, has this motivation changed?
3. What, if anything, have you learned from the storytelling sessions?
4. Do you enjoy having the storytellers come into your classroom? Why or why not?
5. What is the educational value of storytelling?
6. How do you feel experiencing storytelling in schools benefit children?
7. How have your students reacted to the storytellers?
8. How have your students reacted to each other through storytelling?
9. Can you give me any examples of how attitudes and/or behaviors of children have changed in response to a story, session, or storytelling activity?
10. Do you think that children are having positive experiences with storytelling?
11. What are the positives and negatives of using storytelling as an educational tool?
12. Having experienced the oral tradition of storytelling in your classroom, would you feel comfortable telling stories to your class without a book?
13. How do you think storytelling fits within the context of EMU?
14. Do you think the EMU curriculum is effective?
15. Over the past ten years, how has the intake of your class differed, if at all?

Parents:

1. Are you aware that storytelling sessions happen at your child's school?
2. What is the educational value of storytelling?
3. How do you think experiencing storytelling in schools has benefited your child?
4. How has your child reacted to the storytellers?

5. Does your child talk about the teller or the stories? What does he or she say?
6. Can you say something about your child's response to storytelling at school?
7. Have you noticed any changes in the way your child talks about him or herself since the storytelling sessions began?
8. Have you noticed any changes in the way your child talks to you since the storytelling sessions began?
9. Have you noticed any changes in how your child talks about the other school children since the storytelling sessions began?
10. Can you give me any examples of how your child's attitudes and/or behaviors have changed in response to a story, session, or storytelling activity?
11. Do you tell/read stories at home to your child? What kind of stories do you read/tell?

Community Workers

1. Do you use stories in your work? If so, can you tell me how?
2. What is the educational value of storytelling?
3. What do you think the uses of storytelling are?
4. What have your experiences with storytelling been like?

Students:

See Appendix 2.

Appendix 4: Northern Ireland Primary School Years and Ages

Reception and nursery school: 3-4 years

P1: 5-6 years

P2: 6-7 years

P3: 7-8 years

P4: 8-9 years

P5: 9-10 years

P6: 10-11 years

P7: 11-12 years