Storytelling students speak to ‘at risk’ children

Joe Daniels
Staff Writer

In the week of November 5, students from the Power of Storytelling class, in collaboration with the LCAC program, Partners in Learning (PAL), met with ‘at risk’ children from Long Branch and Asbury Park to perform stories of tolerance and diversity.

The 20 students from Storytelling, a communication class that fulfills the experiential education requirement, each told stories from diverse cultures to small groups of children between the ages of six and twelve.

They paired off to tell stories that lasted up to ten minutes.

Storytelling instructor Kim Cuny said, “The focus of the class is teaching tolerance and diversity, and is designed to help young children accept and appreciate others who are different from them.”

According to Cuny, the stories shared the theme of portraying women in non-traditional roles that differ to the dependent roles of women as depicted in fairy tales and other children’s stories.

Indeed, after one storytelling session, one boy said, “I liked it because the stories were different.”

Maryann Nicks is a student teacher in the Teaching Reading II course (ED317) that requires literacy tutoring and mentoring, such as that offered by the PAL program.

“A risk children are those children from families with socioeconomic problems, or those who are doing poorly in school,” she said. “We sometimes have trouble getting these children, but they enjoyed the stories because it was different and they didn’t know what was going to happen next,” she said. Nicky continued, “This was a good idea because it was a change in the daily routine. It was almost like a class trip for the kids.”

The children were not the only ones to gain from this experience. Senior Sue Nicholl told a story. “It gave me a chance to build storytelling skills I learned in class. I was required to be more lively, and use my voice and body movements in order to keep their attention,” she said.

Nicks confirmed the stories were told effectively. “The delivery of the storytellers, with their gestures and voice variations helped the kids stay interested. We [student-teachers] saw them paying attention, and their facial expressions showed they were listening,” she explained.

Andrew Katz, a history major who also told a story said, “I was impressed with the children. As soon as we finished our stories they asked questions about them, which shows they were interested.”

According to Professor Cuny, the storytelling project utilizes teaching tools from the University’s partners, the National Communication Association and the Southern Law Poverty Center (SPLC) with the aim of teaching tolerance and acceptance.

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Literacy tutor and mentor

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Sue Nicholl
Senior

The storytellers have another chance to tell children stories when they go to the Atlantic Highlands Elementary School on December 14, where they hope to teach tolerance of cultural diversity.

More information on storytelling projects at Monmouth can be found at http://www.monmouth.edu/~story.