
which way is forward?
FEWER LISTS,
MORE STORIES

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This monograph is about the uses of narrative in careers work - why it is important and how we can best use it. It shows where and how using narrative can improve our work - in all sectors.

But we need to understand how learning-through-narrative works. One key feature is the way narrative sequences events – bringing to life how one thing can lead to another. Another is how narrative counterpoises different points-of-view - showing how different people have their say in what happens. Both features are important, for when it comes to career management, ‘how can this work out?’ and ‘who else has a say’ are two of the most pressing questions.

Stories lead active minds in all kinds of unanticipated directions. And so using narrative makes it harder to say in advance what the outcomes of learning will be. Some will see this as a downside – and the issues are faced and examined in this monograph.

Nonetheless story-telling is the most basic way in which we, as a species, think and learn. Careers work cannot afford to ignore it. But it calls for some serious re-thinking. We have barely begun to unlock its potential – in face-to-face work, in the careers-work curriculum or in the whole of the personal-and-social-development curriculum.

This monograph will help you to:

- > be alert to the useful features of biographical narrative;
- > recognise and work with what it can and can't do;
- > engage the elements which especially help your learners;
- > enable your learners to become effective autobiographers;
- > expand your own thinking for practice and research;
- > use published narrative and material gathered from local experience;
- > integrate all of this with your existing programme.

We need the same kind of thoroughness here as in the earlier DOTS analysis of aims. Like the DOTS analysis, this monograph is a think-piece with useful practice in mind.

There are links between these ideas and others set out at [www.hihohiho.com/...](http://www.hihohiho.com/)

DOTS	analysis of careers work coverage	../memory/cafdots.pdf
CPI	extended to processes & influences	../movingon/CPITxt&Map/cafcpiprjcttxt.html
experience	calling on both expertise & experience	../underpinning/caffutures.pdf
narrative	experience can only be told as stories	../underpinning/cafbilog.pdf

All are set out to be useful in what we do in response to the green paper *Youth Matters*.

This monograph is a revision and update of ‘Too many lists and not enough stories’, a draft of which was available at www.hihohiho.com until January 2006. The finished original is still available in Edwards, 2003.

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learning from stories

moving on in careers work

People learn from experience as well from expertise, and they find experience a compelling teacher. We must find as many ways as we can for working with that reality. The best way of setting out experience is in narrative form. This monograph makes an analysis of the narrative form for use in careers work

We need analyses because they sort ideas for our work into useful order. Over three decades the dominant example of this has been DOTS (see CLN, 2004). It clusters coverage into four categories: people need to know about 'O - opportunity', 'S - self', 'D - decision' and 'T - transition'. DOTS has usefully suggested design features for the development of a good many careers-education-and-guidance programmes. Our worksheets, checklists, computer programs, psychometrics, data bases, inventories and frameworks are frequently based on DOTS – or some derivative. It would be an exaggeration to say that DOTS has only generated lists; but its four categories have set out what our learners need to take on board and these often-enough compromise lists of work-life activities, personal characteristics, consideration in decision making and ways of dealing with coming transitions.

But things have not stood still since the first publication of DOTS: we know more about how careers develop; the working world has itself radically changed; and people go about managing their working lives in different ways. The design of DOTS has not allowed it fully to stay in touch with all of these changes.

We are reaching a critical point. In part this is because we are increasingly finding ourselves out of kilter with the policy agenda: both changes in work and changing attitudes to work are important parts of the starting points for the proposals in the government green paper *Youth Matters* (DfES, 2005).

And DOTS-like categories are not the only ways of organising our ideas. There is also narrative. While categories tend to produce lists, narratives can't help but set out sequences. And narrative sequences point to development in our work which DOTS would never properly have found (for more on why this so see CLN, 2005e).

Not that the use of sequence is entirely new to career theory. Seminal career-development thinker Donald Super used a sequential account of what happens - 'growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline' - in narrative order. (All theories mentioned here are briefly described and fully referenced in Law, 2001.)

This monograph tests the case for narrative by making use of published biography. A biography is, of course, a story; and all biographies portray elements of career development. But biographical narrative is bigger than published biography. Case studies and research ethnographies are also stories; and some are used in this monograph.

There are other variations: stories come in the form of diary and memoir; in journalism, humour and gossip; in song-lyric and poetry. People tell their stories face-to-face, in writing and texting, on radio, tv and stage, in videos and in blogs. So we are looking at the possibility of using not only published biography, but stories told informally by local people – and, especially, at ways of helping our learners tell their own stories.

If this monograph is right about the usefulness of biographical narrative we are looking at a huge, accessible and growing resource for careers work.

panel one
recent thinking on narrative

The link between story and learning is ageless: sagas, myths, legends, fables and parables are among the earliest teaching-and-learning methods. And recent thinking suggests why such narrative forms are so powerful.

The distinction between lists and stories is one between different ways of setting things out - format. But educationist Jerome Bruner (1986) is more interested in the basis for knowing – credibility. His distinction is between 'paradigmatic' and 'narrative' ways of knowing. Paradigmatic ways are, he says, validated by verification, logic and falsifiable truth. Narrative is credible in a different and more diffuse way: narrative appeals to what Jerome calls 'believability and meaning'.

More recent thinking can take us farther. Much of that thinking is based on a growing understanding of how we have evolved as a learning species.

Antonio Damasio (1999) contributes to that thinking. Drawing on neurological evidence, he finds a number of levels at which an organism can know what is going on. The most-basic is what he calls 'core consciousness'. This is where that story is driven wholly by emotion, and where its usefulness is for seeking safety and comfort. All living organisms – including me and you - do it: other things being equal, we avoid what disturbs and approach what feels good.

On the basis of a survey of the literature and thinking of western cultures, academic Philip Fisher (2002) argues that we have ostracised such 'vehement passions' – he means such sudden compulsions as fear, rage, shame and grief. And, in doing that, we have relinquished a link to too much of the dynamism in our humanity.

Antonio Damasio seeks not to do that, but he argues that we can do more than live by such compulsions. Our brains have evolved to enable us to incorporate the basic core-consciousness into a bigger picture. For us consciousness can be a multi-layered but unified account of what is going on – both in and around us. We develop overlapping and more-or-less fuzzy accounts of what we experience. Conveniently for this monograph, Antonio call this 'biographical consciousness'. It takes us, he argues, beyond compulsion and towards an imperfect but useful appreciation of how things are and how they work. It is he says, like 'a movie in the brain - a sequence of scenes or episodes in which both thoughts and feelings feature.

But he argues more. As a species we have the additional ability of being able to locate ourselves in that story. We are each the heroes in our own movie. That means that we not only see, we also see ourselves seeing - each a witness to our own life. This is more than 'self awareness' separately listed from 'opportunity awareness'; it is a single coherent story of self-in-the-world. That is why 'biographical consciousness' is such a useful term. When you say 'that's for me!', you speak of self and opportunity in one breath. That is what experience requires, not two lists set out separately, but one story unifying them. It sets out a thought- and feeling-based account, as a basis for managing our lives. That, says Antonio, is what the movie is for.

Evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker (1997) agrees. We have these abilities, he argues, because they have survival value. To have a chance of making it, there are, he reports, five things we need to know about what is going on. They refer to place ('where is it?'), path ('going where?'), motion ('how?'), causation ('why?'), and agency ('controlled by what?'). Actually, these are not-bad careers-work questions. continued/...

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But they are, of course, also much-like journalistic questions - 'where?', 'what?', 'when?', 'who?', 'how?', and 'why?' (and journalism is another form of narrative). On this basis, medical commentator Jerome Burne (2001) surveys evidence to indicate that stories we tell are as basic to our survival as the tools we use. That is why, he says, gossip is so prevalent; because gossip seeks a useable understanding of what is going on ('he didn't!...', '...Oh yes he did!...', '...so what did she say?...'), '...and what on earth will he do now?...'. '...well, what *can* he do?...'). As you know, looking for that kind of understanding is pleasurable. For our species - you and me again - finding any kind of understanding is satisfying. There are, it seems, deeper and more subtle satisfaction to be found in biographical consciousness than in the simple safety and comfort sought by core consciousness. More of us should give it a go.

Literary academic H Abbott Porter (2002) also acknowledges the usefulness of narrative to action. He points to a small number of recurring master plots in human story telling. Each has a special significance to the survival of the species ('girl-meets-boy...' is among the most common). More recently, Christopher Booker's (2005) pains-taking and wide-ranging survey of literature speaks of seven basic plots, all of which express our need to understand ourselves in the world.

There is here a strong pragmatic point: we learn for action (which will come as a bit of surprise to some of the young men and women in our classrooms). But the sharp end of that point is this: assembling learning into narrative gives us our most useable bases for action.

finding useful narrative

A publisher's test for a good story is called the 'water-cooler effect': it offers but one criterion - 'do people talk about it?'. Of course, talking about it and 'finding a useful basis for action' are not necessarily the same thing. But, still, the idea of 'a test' assumes that some stories can be better than others. Is that possible? And, if it is, are there other tests? If we mean to go anywhere with narrative in careers work, then we would need to know.

Our story-guru, H Abbott Porter, says 'yes! - there are good and bad stories. But he points to the very characteristics that might lose the interest of some policy wonks, quantitative researchers and business gurus: H Abbott likes ambiguity. What sort of ambiguities? He points to inner conflicts, human flaws, confusions and uncertainties. Stories portray both inner and outer turmoil. And all of this means that there is uncertainty about how the story can be resolved - too many different and conflicting ways of bringing things to a head. The Greek word is *agon* (cognate with agony!) a feature of the stories portrayed in classical theatre - where protagonist meets antagonist. The effect? As literary critic James Wood remarks: 'there is something about narrative that puts things in doubt'.

Celeb-biogs may not qualify on this count. But a useful story leaves room for different interpretations - that is what makes it real and interesting. (J K Rowling affectionately mentions a letter from a boy who hadn't read much before, but who likes her books - because, he says, Harry Potter doesn't always know what's going on. 'And', he adds, 'for a lot of the time, neither do I!'.) Allowing that kind of vulnerability may trouble and even frighten the reader - may even leave them still uneasy. But it is the feature of narrative which lets the audience in - offering each a chance to make sense of it in his or her own way. This is not celeb-biog self-serving stuff, like *Me Triumphant Over Adversity* or *How I Made My First Million*. Titles like *It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time!* and *Is That It?* are better (both have been used). They promise troublesome ambiguity - which supports learning but does not try to compel it.

In these terms the writers used in this monograph qualify as useful story-tellers. They range from formal biographers, through academics to journalists. But each writes with a distinctive authority. It is a special kind of writing – although, as Paul Willis illustrates, it is not new to our field. This monograph offers a number of different takes on the H Abbott Porter test of good narrative. It is built around one critical episode in each of the stories.

panel two
the trouble with stories

Jerome Bruner's notion of 'believability and meaning' is a pretty fuzzy concept. The hard-headed won't be impressed. H Abbott-Porter's test – 'ambiguity' - will disturb even more people. Where orderliness is valued the preference will be for pure categories with tightly-controlled boundaries.

have we got a problem before we start? There is no disguising the reality here: narratives work in looser ways than categories – they are infused with feelings and diffused in relationships. There are also questions about veracity. It is true that they sequentially portray events, and – therefore - can indicate how one thing might lead to another. But good stories are also layered and ambiguous; which means that they cannot always neatly show how any specific cause leads to any clearly identifiable effect. And even where they can, they can only do so in one particular case.

That means that it is harder to find a predictable learning outcome in a story than from a well-defined list. The issue has wide relevance:

1. Some researchers argue that acceptable evidence is replicable – but that this requirement is not met by anecdote.
2. Treasury interests require well-recognised outcomes, clearly identifying value-for-money – but what people learn from narratives is divergent rather than convergent.
3. Business, as represented by the management-consultancy McKinsey and Company, argues 'if it matters, it can be measured' – but stories offer little that can be meaningfully quantified.

To tell a story is not to provide hard evidence - replicable, listable, quantifiable. Stories are unique, discursive and fuzzy.

Is there an answer? If we mean to use stories we need to show that they can credibly support what we do. This monograph argues that we can do that when the story is itself good enough. Not all anecdotes and case-studies qualify. And the qualities that characterise a good story are not necessarily found in manuals of research methodology. (Though they are in *Up-close and Personal* – Ruthellen Josselson and others, 2003 – which characterises narrative-base research as more akin to history than to scientific psychology).

There is a broader argument for biography. Biography is a practically limitless. It is accessible to all. We can share it with our partners – especially our learners. And it can enable them to speak on their own behalf – become their own career theorists. We can open up the field to the people it serves. And by becoming interpreters of other people stories and they can become more effective producers off their own.

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Stories may be troublesome but they may bring the kind of trouble we now most need. Academic Greg Philo (Philo and Miller, 2001) is among the academics who point to a developing alliance between policy, commerce and academia. It shapes research questions so that they attend to policy and business interests. Other interests can easily get neglected. The argument therefore looks to other forms of enquiry – Greg mentions journalism – to correct this growing imbalance.

We need to show whether and how biography can be useful to new thinking. Veracity and hard evidence are means to that end. Narrative offers other means. And it opens the field to a wider range of possibilities - for more people. Sounds to me like something we would welcome.

probing biographical narrative

There are some things that narrative can't do for careers work; but there are some increasingly important things that it can do. But how does that work? This monograph points to five key elements in what narrative sets out:

- > **people** characters...
- > **setting** are located in a situation...
- > **talk** where dialogue or soliloquy speaks of what they think and feel...
- > **events** and, on the basis of all this, the plot unfolds...
- > **meaning** leading to some kind of resolution.

twenty signposts

If an analysis of this kind is to prove useful. it will – like DOTS – help you to organise your thinking about what is going on in your work; and it will suggest what more you can do. But, if narrative can add nothing useful to what DOTS can do then it will not be worth the trouble .

The monograph puts the case to that test by examining four aspects of each of the five elements. Table one sets out the five, and the twenty.

table one
five story elements - with twenty signposts to their usefulness

(a) the people	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. encounter as career catalyst 2. allegiances made and let go 3. feelings and tensions 4. awarenesses and intuitions
(b) the settings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. role expectations 6. roles and cultures 7. role conceptions 8. role expansion
(c) the talk	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. language and learning 10. language and entrapment 11. learning and discomfort 12. learning and intuition
(d) the events	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 13. luck and learning 14. resolving through explanation 15. inner life, thoughts and feelings 16. other stories and meta-narratives
(e) the meanings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. purposes and facts 18. themes and needs 19. crucial questions – helpers' and learners' 20. points-of-view and other people's stories

A first step is to examine what biography narrative can portray. A selection of quotations are set out below. Their most immediate usefulness will be in any post-DOTS thinking we can find there. But, in a broader perspective, usefulness must also mean finding helpful biographical material and knowing how to use it with learners. There is no shortage of clues in what follows.

(a) the people

Biography speaks of a central character. You get to know something about his or her experiences, abilities, allegiances, feelings, assumptions and values – much as you might do in a good careers interview. But, also like a good interview, you get to know something about other people in that life. The first three sections here introduce three different Terry's, each with a career-development story to tell. In all three it proves impossible to talk about the central character without also talking about the other people.

We need to examine some key concepts.

1. catalysts;
2. allegiances;
3. feelings;
4. awareness.

1. catalysts

Terry Eagleton (2002) constructs his memoir as a procession of encounters – all deeply layered and in tension with one another, two in particular catalysing action on his career. Early on we meet his working-class father, whose life had not been easy. Towards the end we meet the élitist tutor – Greenway - who admits him to Cambridge, at about the time his father died...

'It burst on me like a strange kind of forgiveness. The gatekeeper had let me in, though it was my father who had turned the key. Greenway had accepted me as a literary type; had my father ever done as much? Perhaps this was one reason why I kicked so hard against Greenway when I got to Cambridge. His world was The Law which had brought my father to his ruin, but it was a law which my father was asking me to love.'

The episode speaks of the kinds of support and expectation that Terry had first found in his father, and was now finding – but differently - at Cambridge. A well-trained helper would be able to respond at the level of 'community-interaction' theory (see Law, 2001). It is about the importance of our attachments to other people; and it suggests that a helper might reflect what Terry says with, 'your father wanted you to do well'. But look again: it is not just his dad: there are different awarenesses here, and tensions between them.

There is no choice to be made. But there is more than one way of doing academic life. And we catch a glimpse of how, not only Greenaway, but Terry's lost dad will continue to have a say in how his son will do it.

Terry has the language to express all of this – 'love', 'ruin', 'forgiveness', 'burst'. The articulate can speak of such dynamics. But we all experience them. An alert helper will see them expressed in other ways. But she or he would need to know that they might be there. This memoir alerts us to the possibility.

2. allegiances

Another Terry: Terence Stamp (1989) hales from London's East End. He is speaking of a new friend: David Baxter is showing him a world of possibilities that he had never before considered. But they are not in the East End – they are 'up west'...

'There are certain moments when you know that if you hadn't been there, or met that person, you would never have taken a particular road. Meeting David Baxter was one of those milestones... A psychological tug-of-war complicated my life... Those trips up-west with him were invariably followed by an uneasiness which left me clinging for days like a limpet to my old mates and haunts.'

That inner tension again. But this Terence feels there is a choice to be made – hold on to his former mates or let go. He let go, and made the move up-west, with career consequences which - it turned out - David had anticipated better than he. This is one of the those career decisions which are made without thinking much about career. And that decision seems here to be made on the basis, at some level of awareness, that this seems like the thing to do.

Researcher Paul Willis tells of a similar tension. A working-class and seriously under-achieving lad, 'Joey' somehow knows better than his mates that he could have a different life. Paul's account shows us why Joey will not go for it (for Joey's story see Career-Learning Network, CLN 2002). It is about allegiance.

Terry, Terence and Joey are all working-class lads. Terry moved on but remained loyal to his father, Terence moved on from an allegiance to his former mates. Joey held onto that early allegiance. And for both of these it was not just a matter of loyalty to an individual it was a matter of allegiance to a group. Community interaction theory can express some of the goings-on of personal loyalty, but in order to grasp the dynamics of allegiance you need social-reproduction and cultural-capital theories (both in Law, 2001).

We have a third Terry who will not hold onto the group, nor will he leave the group he'll try to change the group.

3. *feeling*

In his account of our third Terry's experience, journalist Nick Davies (1998) speaks largely in terms of feelings - other people's and Terence's own.

Terence left school at 16, and has - so far - resisted the enticements of criminality. But...

'The younger people were angrier, less respectful, willing to take more risks and to organise themselves. They had grown up without the solid certainties of life in Jamaica, rejected by the society around them, feeling insulted and disrespected. Now they advertised their hostility... But ever since he had been a child in Spanish Town, Terrence had dreamed of becoming a lawyer... The reality was that he was living in a ghetto, where he was far more likely to become a pimp.'

He has plans and signs up to study law. The plan is driven by disappointment and fear for his people and beckoned by hope and purposes for something better for them. He doesn't like what he finds among his own people and he wants to help.

Narrative thinking set out by H Porter Abbott insists on the importance of such feelings and the conflicts they evoke. He calls up the ancient Greek theatrical term for this kind of conflict - '*agon*'. There are protagonists and antagonists in Terence's story and they are in conflict - as they have been since the dawn of drama.

It relates to what Daniel Goleman (1986) calls 'emotional intelligence': immediate emotions well up driving Terence to do something. But, as it turns out, Terence might have been better served by Antonio Damasio's concept of thought-about feelings. (For Terence's full story see CLN, 2002.)

4. *awareness*

In narrative thinking to write *agon* out of the story is to 'flatten' character. As H Porter Abbott observes, flat characters are for formulaic writing - 'restricted to a narrow range of predictable behaviours... a reduction of the human to the mechanical'. Good narrative introduces us to rounded characters. All four of these episodes do that. Flat characters are for celeb-biogs. Joey and the three Terry's rate better.

Are there any new post-DOTS signposts here? After all, doesn't DOTS portray character - with skills and interests indicating the possibility of action? Well, yes. But these biographers speak of more-rounded characters, with personal loyalties and group allegiances, resulting in confusion and conflictedness, which disturb their search-for-understanding. This is self as protagonist. There's not much *agon* in DOTS. There is in career.

And more: because we are working with conflicted awareness we find in each story more than one way of seeing things - points-of-view. More even than that: we see that tension repeated in the person. It drives narrative - the internal tension between different points-of-view at different levels-of-awareness. There is always a will-he-won't-he doubt. Because learning is not an on-off switch - it glows, flickers, fades and recovers. It means that other big DOTS concept 'awareness' must be appreciated in layered terms - people are always aware 'at some level'.

If there is any support here for earlier career-development thinking it is for community interaction and cultural-capital theories. But both are post-DOTS formulations. These episodes move us beyond even those later bits of thinking. (You'll find accounts of how this thinking is being developed in CLN 2005a.)

If post-DOTS claims for narrative theory hold, then – by learning how a well-told story shows a rounded character driving events - learners can be enabled better to probe their own awareness and to tell their own stories.

(b) the settings

Career management cannot occur in a vacuum - there is always a setting. We set up some – face-to-face, curriculum, work-experience and so on. But career-management mainly unfolds in direct-and-personal experience - at home, on the street, at work and in many more locations. What people say and do in those other settings need not correspond with what they say do with us. (For more on learning-from-experience see Law, 2006.)

An important way of understanding how and why this is so in the idea of role - which is a narrative term. A role locates a person in a setting; when we use role terms - like 'student', 'daughter', 'mate' or 'worker' - we visualise the person in a setting; whether 'in school' 'at home', 'on the street' or 'at work'. For this and other reasons people think and act differently in different roles. (For more on how and why this is so see CLN, 2005b).

Yet it is our roles which link us to our lives – 'worker' does that, but so do other roles. In thinking about settings for career biography it is useful to think about role.

5. expectations;
6. culture;
7. conceptions;
8. expansion.

5. expectations

There can be tensions between what a person feels is good in one role and what seems right in another. In journalist Peter Lennon's (1998) interview with him, Jonathan Miller is acutely aware of this. His roles in medicine and the theatre are in tension, and connect to his roles as friend, as the child of a tradition and with his wife Rachel...

"Everything that has happened to me in the theatre, including my exit from medicine, has always been the result of my being pathetically susceptible to someone knocking on my door with a frisbee in their hand saying 'Do you want to come and play?'... There was [before that] a whole series of people who I looked up to, admired and who set standards for me and expected much... [The conflict] is suddenly realising at the age of 65 that what I have done in the theatre world is simply not worth what I left." "It was unintentional," Rachel put in sympathetically, "and you never did anything cynically". "I know Rachel thinks I exaggerate these things".'

He won't, it seems, be easily consoled. And in talking about career-management questions - 'what can I do?', 'what might I have done', 'what might I do about it now?'- he is acutely aware of other people's expectations. Jonathan is well linked to life: he occupies a wide range of positions in medical, artistic and domestic settings. None of them is easy to set on one side. But there are conflicts: by heeding them Jonathan seems painfully aware of a price he has paid for the choices he has made.

Both Jonathan and Paul Willis's Joey are dealing with a background - the one middle-class and dedicated to medicine the other working-class and out for 'a laff'. As it happens, Jonathan is also good for a laugh. The difference is in how what they each believe and value about life roles is shaped by their backgrounds. Different cultures communicate different expectations about what sons, friends and workers are supposed to do.

Jonathan's is a version of the struggle to achieve work-life balance: 'how do I reconcile what I do in my work role with what I feel is important in my other roles?'. All our stories pose the question. And, as Jonathan might particularly attest, careers work that leaves out the importance of that struggle leaves out too much.

More than that: the uses of narrative are as applicable to managing all other life roles as they are to work roles. If any useful case for new thinking and learning is argued here it can be applied to the whole of the personal-and-social-development curriculum.

6. culture

The tensions become more noticeable when you cross a cultural boundary. In a sense Jonathan did – from medicine to theatre. So did Jeanette Winterson (1991), but between two quite-other cultures. She is later to become a novelist; but here she is speak as a child. And there is *agon*. The setting is a classroom reading of a primary-school essay: the child is from a religious background - with charismatic leanings.

"This holiday I went to Colwyn Bay with our church camp". The teacher nodded and smiled. "It was very hot, and Auntie Betty, whose leg was loose anyway, got sunstroke and we thought she might die". The teacher began to look a bit worried, but the class perked up. "But she got better, thanks to my mother who stayed up all night struggling mightily". "Is your mother a nurse?" asked the teacher, with quiet sympathy. No, she just heals the sick. "Very good, but I don't think we'll have time today. Put your work back in your tidy box and do some colouring till playtime". The class giggled. Slowly I sat down, not sure what was going on, but sure that something was. When I got home I told my mother I didn't want to go again. "You've got to", she said. "Here, have an orange".'

Nothing is clear to little Jeanette – if that is who we are reading about. All there is, is an unfocused unease that something is not tidy enough for the teacher, and the certainty that an orange won't help. The *agon* is roles-in-tension: learner and believer, believer and daughter, daughter and learner – it's the sort of thing that might lead a person to take up writing.

For some a classroom setting is a home from home – what they are expected to do and say seems natural. It's not like that for Joey or Jeanette. Joey laughs it off. Jeanette is showing signs of wanting to face it. For both it makes a difference to career.

7. conceptions

Role expectation is pressure, and there is no escape. John Mortimer's (2000) mother is under pressure concerning her wifely role. That role is a seriously considered career choice. But her husband also has clear ideas about what it means. She doesn't cave in.

'What was it that made my mother stay with my blind... and, in many ways, impossible father?... She had been an art student, had read Bernard Shaw's The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism. She shipped herself out to South Africa before the 1914 war... So why do they do it?... Is staying on to put on other people's socks the mark of a truly heroic character?... Of course, my mother did have her temptations. I can remember times when she would steal away in the middle of dressing my father and leave him with his braces dangling ... to make herself a cup of tea and waiting till he had learned not to class her among the cretins.'

Freedom from role expectation is never an option. But people also have their own ideas about how to fulfil a role. If they did not do that then no role would ever change. People

find new ways of doing things. This mother had her own ideas about how to be a good wife. When ideas about role are not rooted in the group, then people are said to be acting on the basis of their own role conception, rather than consensual expectation.

Moving on in life always means letting go of some of the expectations of upbringing. Joey didn't, Jeanette looks as though she might, East-end Terence did, Jonathan testifies to a cost, and this mother has her own ideas for dealing with it. Career development always involves this kind of moving-on. But it is not a one-off decision, and is certainly not in a social vacuum.

8. expansion

Life roles map the social and cultural settings for the management of career. For East-end Terence it was on the street, for Jonathan in the family, for Jeanette in a classroom. The more roles a person occupies the more settings she or he can find to shape that thinking – in a way, that is what makes Jonathan's situation the-more-challenging.

None of the stories we have examined allows us to think of any role in isolation from any other. Becoming an academic, an actor, a lawyer, a theatre-director, a writer and a wife flow from being a son, a friend, a daughter and a partner. All of this inter-connectedness of life roles means that a single coherent personal-and-social-development curriculum is a more useful idea than separate sets of ideas for more-or-less free-standing programmes - on careers, citizenship, religion, finance and so on.

But there is a back-and-forth movement between life roles which makes narrative divergent. John Mortimer's mother is now a citizen, now an explorer, now a wife, now a mother, now a carer: with plenty to go in re-conceptualising her role as a wife.

Some people may worry about the divergence of narrative; but another word for divergent is expansive. Recognising new aspects of ourselves in more life-roles gives us new bases for action. The expanded repertoire offers more bases for imagining whom we can be - a greater roundedness-of-character. It is this 'bigness' that makes for any workable concept of a 'boundary-less career' (Arthur and others, 1999). But those boundaries are personally 'with-me-and-mine' as well as economically 'out-in-the-labour-market'. There's a lot going on: no liberation is certain, no entrapment inevitable (Law, 2005, following Dennett, 2003).

It doesn't get mentioned as much as it should, but anti-social and outsider roles are divergent in this sense. From the point-of-view of the criminal they are expansive – offering more possibilities. Crime is work. Is it possible that 'anti-socials' are trying their own versions of what John Mortimer's mother does so well? (His father might think so.) In careers work we need to know more about how culture, expectation and re-conception affect how and why criminal and other outsider-roles develop.

DOTS can help you to visualise some of this in individualised and economic terms. But it has little capacity to help you with social and cultural settings. (Find an account of why in CLN 2005e). This DOTS deficit is significant; because, in contemporary society, life-roles are, themselves, changing: new conceptions of life roles – from lover, through worker to citizen (and criminal roles). All are in constant re-negotiation. The internet has become a setting for the experiments. It is dangerous; but it is dangerous because the expansive potential in narrative is so compelling.

(c) the talk

Some argue that the capacity for language is the most distinctive of human characteristics – largely accounting for our survival. We need language in order to represent reality to ourselves and in order to be able to get others to help us in dealing with it.

But it is the first of these uses of language which is the most basic. If we cannot make our own sense of what is going on then there would be no value in being able to communicate it to others. We are all more-or-less continuously engaged in that process of background questioning – 'what's going on?', 'how did it get this way?' and 'what am I going to do about it?'. Whole novels have been given to monologue - J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is a young outsider's monologue.

Looking at language in this more basic way means that 'talking the talk' is an important forerunner to 'walking the walk'. (Could the chattering classes have a point, after all?). It also means that when learners talk with you about their plans, much of what they are saying is making their own sense of things; they may not even be thinking much about you.

We have not evolved to learn from experts but from experience. And the capacity effectively to reflect on experience still has survival value. Our capacity for that reflection gives us the most quoted fragment of any story - 'To be, or not to be...'. In careers-work terms you might say the prince is engaged in 'action planning'; but the narrative term - 'soliloquy' - does more justice to the human condition.

Soliloquy may be our most sublime use of talk; but gossip is more prevalent. From the sublime to the cor-blimey, there is plenty to think about.

9. learning;
10. entrapment;
11. discomfort;
12. intuition:

9. learning

The distinction between dialogue and monologue is not always easy to find. Journalist Studs Terkel is noted for engaging people in fruitful dialogue. 'On one occasion,' he recalls, 'during playback, my companion murmured in wonder "I never realised I felt that way!"". Saying it to someone else realises it for self. One of the most pressing tasks for careers work is to enable people to say what's going on.

Academic Theodore Zeldin (1998) is an arch-advocate of the value of conversation. And he urges the usefulness of stories in that process. Historian Jonathan Rose (2001) agrees: he argues that this is what published story tellers did for the Victorian working classes. Stories, he says help people to make sense of their own lives. His book contains countless examples. One is of a workhouse laundress struggling to improve her mind by reading novels. It was Catherine Cookson; she comes across a reference to *Letters of Lord Chesterfield to His Son*. And, in her first visit to any library, this working-class girl found his lordship's book, and got started on a life-changing conversation...

I read my first mythology. I learned my first real history... With Lord Chesterfield I went travelling the world. I would fall asleep reading the letters, and awake around three o'clock in the morning my mind deep in the fascination of this new world, where people conversed - nor just talked... Dear, dear, Lord Chesterfield; snob or not, I owe him so much.'

Catherine is finding another route to a life in writing – different from Jeanette's.

Talk appears in DOTS as dialogue only; it is one of the skills required to negotiate career transitions - for example in putting together an effective cv or doing yourself justice in an interview. But talk is more important than that. The way we talk frames what we know, what we can imagine and – therefore – what we will do. Restricted language restricts

conceivable options for action. There is alarm among educationists about how policy pressure constrains classroom discussion (Carnell and Lodge, 2002). The alarm is not overstated. Where restricted language constrains, then people are more vulnerable to emotional, social and cultural pressure and less equipped for change-of-mind. Pressure and change are essential – but neglected – elements in career development thinking. We might wonder whether we can adequately enable either, without the sort of talk that well-managed discussion supports. We might also wonder how narrative-based methods might help.

10. entrapment

Conversation and culture are entwined. So argues Jonathon Rose - the characters, the dialogue, the beliefs, values, feelings and allegiances set out in stories frame the terms in which the culture is expressed. How that is done influences what people do. The more obvious version of that point is that accent and dialect can shape a person's life chances; but Jonathan is arguing a deeper point – it is about the way people think.

Long ago, in *The Uses of Literacy*, Richard Hoggart famously examined the links between how people think-and-talk and what they do; and he was broadly optimistic about the robustness and resilience of working-class cultures. A decade later sociologist Basil Bernstein was less so: he pointed to the 'restricted' way-of-talking that the children of working-class families tend to use, and compared it with the 'extended' language more often used by the children of middle-class families (see Lawton, 1968). If language is primarily a way of working out what is going on then, in an increasingly complex and changing world, a restricted way of thinking about things would be worrying. Bright working-class lad Joey has some grasp of the limitations in his own life, but thinks them not worth worrying about.

As Richard Hoggart makes clear, the uses of literacy are not so much class- but culture-based. And Jeanette's little girl, faced with the difference between the way she talks and the way they talk at school, starts to worry. So does black commentator Lenny James (2002). He is concerned for his people, and their own excluding culture, and the conversation it permits. He finds it hard to challenge from within. He speaks of a young black man – Ashley (aka 'Asher D' of the South-London garage band 'So Solid Crew').

'Ashley has the brains to be anything he chooses. But he put aside his potential, for a life on the street. That should hurt us, anger us, and shame our community. It does me. What hold does "ghetto love" have on our young men, that even the brightest of them can't break free of it?... Our community has been involved in two conversations, running concurrently. The first conversation has had us talking to the wider community about how we want to be treated... Then there is the second conversation. the conversation the black community has been having within itself... To say out loud that we are not happy with the way we do things might sound like betrayal... Our young men need alternative means of self-identification to the street... They are not less black if they educate themselves., or less of a man because they refuse to settle an argument with a bullet.'

Lenny is suggesting cultural self-entrapment. He is hoping that a new way of talking about it will lead to a new of dealing with it – a change-of-mind.

A common short-cut in this kind of thinking is to seek better roles models - heroes for Ashley to honour. I doubt that Lenny is doing that. It is true that biographies were once written to celebrate the heroic. But that kind of writing does not work well in a less deferential society. It is why contemporary audiences look as much for the disclosure of failure as for the parading of success (Evans, 1999). And Ashley has that kind of savvy. Celebratory black success stories would be formulaic; not good enough for him.

Good stories have authenticity. Careers work needs more of them. Legal worker Terence's story could be useful. So could Ekow Eshun's (2005) *Black Gold of the Son* and Hannah Pool's (2005) *My Fathers' Daughter* - each speaking with authentic black voices. Both are successful, but both are capable of being troubled and reflective - more useful to the likes of Ashley than one-dimensional heroes.

11. *discomfort*

We need to be able to express what we believe and what we feel; but not everything is expressed in talk. Here is Mary Karr's (2001) long-remembered account of her maths teacher's - Mr Briggs - attempt at a careers interview. Some non-verbals here. And plenty of things that need to be talked about. Mr Briggs knows that Mary is upset; but what can he say?

He's telling you that you'll need math more than you know. "Actually", you say, "I intend to be a poet, sir."... "How you plan to get folks to pay you for it?" This stumps you a minute. Finally, you say, "I'll sell my books". "How much you think that'll make you?" he says... You want to say he's being unfair. But you can't quite locate the unfairness of it... You peel the bottom of one sweaty thigh up from where it's stuck to the chair and tug down your skirt... Your parents never give that concern the slightest credence. "Shit, you can do whatever you feel like, Pokey", Daddy would say, while your mother would claim, "those idiots wouldn't know poetry from piss ants". Briggs waves his hand saying, "Let's drop the poet thing. It's true you don't need math to write poetry. But any other task you undertake will require a thorough grounding in mathematics". You know better than to invite him into the various lives you've constructed for yourself - an apartment in New York, a beachcomber's hut, a Victorian mansion surrounded by a maze-like garden. Your own silence nudges you to the edge of tears.'

It's easy to knock Mr Briggs; but does he get it all wrong? He tries to say that maths is useful to Mary - in her life. He keeps the pressure on by pointing to the hurdles between where she is and where she wants to be. Most teachers and some advisers might have argued that a maths qualification could lift her over some of those hurdles. Maybe Mr Briggs judged such talk, with a person close to tears, inappropriate.

And Mary remembers him - probably because of that fight with the tears. Emotion is an instinctive response to threat or promise. It is also a spring for action; as Mr Briggs tightens the springs Mary struggles to explain more. This is good. Daddy and mother hadn't got there: they said (maybe they believed) that the journey from here to published poet was going to offer their little girl few challenges. She loves them; but she can't ignore Mr Briggs. He has taken her to where she is more of a witness to her own life. She recognises fear - that she may not make it. To move on she needs to accommodate that fear into a thought-about feeling of what can happen. Mary does move on - from 'raggedy kid', to poet, academic and memoirist.

Education theorist Jean Piaget's term for a learning experience refers to a form of disturbance. It is, he says, 'disequilibrium' - we are put off balance by having to accommodate new knowledge. We may try to neutralise the feeling by assimilating it with a self-reassuring dismissal - 'I knew that!' or 'nothing new there then!'. But to run to that bolt-hole is to lose the learning. In Antonio Damasio's terms it is a limited and short-term drive for safety and comfort; and it pre-empts the search for a fuller and more useful account of what is going on. Such learning is not a comfort zone.

So did Mr Briggs help? Mary doesn't say; maybe she doesn't know. Maybe he just muddled through? Even if he did the memorability of the interview is no accident. Career learning is for action. And affect will come into that conversation. It is the tensions emotions and

feelings create that drive the action. And it is careers worker's job to enable an accommodating of those feelings into a useful account of what can be done about them.

DOTS can accommodate some affect-laden talk in the category 'self awareness' – with its place for interests, values and preferences. They are in DOTS because of Donald Super's previous work on self-concept, and similar work from the same generation of thinkers.

Uses for narrative? It is certainly the case that a story which conveys no affect is going to be a boring story. We are interested in feelings and remember them. They signify something important is happening. Self-concept thinking needs to be up dated to take account of what we now know – both of how the mind works and the changing experience of working life (for some pointers to this experience see Law, 2006).

12. intuition

Academic historians have dismissed biography for putting personalities above well-argued historical trends, and for locating transient affect above ordered analyses. But historian and biographer Ben Pimlott (1998) defends biography, and positively values its untidiness: 'it is', he says, 'an unpredictable and picaresque adventure... [because] lives themselves are always unexpected'.

In Mary's story a turning point hinged on an instinctive fear of failure. Autobiographer and novelist Tim Lott (1997) also remembers a turning point, and uses the word 'instinct' to characterise it. At the time he is a successful and comfortably-off publisher. He might have written a self-congratulatory book, celebrating his and his girl-friend Kate's life style. It might have sold well. Some might still think that he should be grateful for what he's already got. But not Tim; he focuses on a bad moment and a 'dumb instinct' which...

'...tells me that this secret of life - the secret that someday will be revealed to me - lies, not lodged in the world itself, but in the way I make sense of it all. My thoughts feel cheap, ephemeral, unsatisfying; and I want them fleshed out... And there is something else. Perhaps on some level I feel that there is something in Kate that disdains me. I feel sure that she loves me, but, when we are drinking with my loud friends in a loud bar. I see something in her eyes... University it must be, if I am to be properly reinvented.'

Antonio Damasio might disagree about the use of the term 'instinct'. It is certainly not dumb: Tim wants to make sense of the world. This is more than a core instinct; it has become another kind of affect – much more a part of the autobiographical 'movie' in Tim's brain. But it is not fully worked out, not wholly rational, nor properly analysed – still 'on some level' of awareness. Antonio Damasio acknowledged varying degrees of precision in the way we assemble such accounts of our lives. Tim's sense is different from knowing facts and putting things into defensible order. But it is nonetheless compelling.

The word 'intuition' comes to mind. Careers work needs to be able to process such unfocussed senses of the ways things are. Jonathan, Jeannette, Mary and Tim all express such a sense of how things are. But they are not doing it by working on clear categories based on hard information.

(d) the events

Stories put events in sequence – episode-by-episode. This is probably the biggest difference between DOTS-like classifications and narrative plots. A plot shows one thing leading to another – a train of events, with causes and effects and turning points. But causation is an inference: it needs working out – not just by noticing coincidences, but working out their possible implications. East-end Terence says it was Dave who put him on another career

road, Jonathan attributes his career to a willingness to play, Tim ascribes his determination to reinvent himself to some dumb instinct. Plot is action, but such inferences are head work.

All of this is expressed in verbs. Our narrative person, H Porter Abbott, observes that 'as soon as we follow a subject with a verb, there is good chance we are engaged in a narrative'. Blockbusters are big on action verbs. But good biographical narrative also needs verbs which describe the headwork.

And we have verbs for the headwork. Learning verbs speak of people finding things out, sorting them out, pulling out what is important and working out how things happened and what can be done about them. These verbs speak not of action but of thought and feeling. The events are in the character's head. Action verbs only map the plot, it is learning verbs that drive it (find more about how in CLN, 2005c).

It is through action verbs that audiences also engage with the plot. Careers work has, over the years, developed narrative methods – often role-plays - in which learners engage with a plot. *The Real Game* incorporates some. ICT now equips us to develop more sensitive interactive methods. But all of this is no more than childminding unless it engages the headwork. Learning verbs describe thinking skills. How we highlight and engage them is crucial to the effective use of narrative.

13. luck;
14. resolution;
15. inner life;
16. other stories.

13. luck

Signpost number 13 is about luck; is this merely a coincidence? (Actually, yes). Luck is an often unforeseen arbitrary coincidence that makes some difference. Suspense is wound into stories where a character fails to notice the approach of bad luck. We want to cry out 'look behind you!' - especially in pantomimes and career interviews.

In career development the most telling bit of luck occurs very early in any story. Joey is a bright kid, but his chances of a becoming a doctor would seem as remote as winning a ride into outer space; while to Jonathan the expectation of entering medicine is as natural as the sun's rising. And creative Tim can manage the cost of going to university, but imaginative Mary is in a family that would need a lottery win. Political philosopher John Rawls argues that if we had any sense of the unfairness of such different start-in-life luck, we would feel compelled to minimise its impact.

Most of us have enough of that kind of imagination that we don't like our stories to hinge on luck. Charles Dickens would have cheated if Pip's life-chances depended only on a 'big-win' from Magwitch. We want to know that Pip is a thinking kid who knows what to do with his luck. Two things about luck: (1) know when you're being lucky (it's not always that obvious); and (2) know what to do about it.

That's where the learning verbs come in. The stories told here repeatedly illustrate how much of career-development is influenced by the culture of origin. Almost all of the stories show that – and how they move on from that.

But not for Joey. Careers work should show Joey that, whatever he plans to do, he could do something else. Headwork is the key. Joey is certainly up to it; but, where the culture-of-origin is that strong, it's not easy. The critical uses of narrative could enable him to ask 'if things can work out like that in other peoples' stories, then how else might they work out in mine?'. If Joey's origin then predicts his destination, that will be Joey's doing - with his eyes

open to the fact that he could have done something else. Our biggest challenge is to help Joey get to where he can see that nothing is inevitable.

14. resolution

Ready for a challenge? Listen to investigative journalist Nick Davies (2000) tell of Karen...

'...Karen, sitting with her back to the lift-shaft wall, listless, aimless, hopeless... She has not been to school regularly since she was 11, and she is now 14. When she was seven her father started using heroin and crack cocaine and he got her mother on to it... Her dad used to take her out thieving... She got arrested when she was 11, and spent 36 hours in a cell. By that time she had lost sight of normal life. She says there was no food in the house, and to feed her sisters as well as herself she would go and borrow money off friends or eat at someone else's house or steal things from shops or scavenge in rubbish bins. They had no light or heat in the house. Her mum and dad just did drugs and watched time go by... So why does she not want to sit in school? Because she is too sure there is no point...'

Can we help? And would narrative be useful? Two theorists hold out some hope – but they both point to headwork. Narrative guru H Porter Abbott argues that the essential quality of a story is that it helps us to see events as order rather than chaos. Literary critic Andrew Rissik's (1999a) parallel point comes closer to Karen: good biography, he says, is able to 'instruct us how to alter the future by showing us the havoc and damage wreaked by the past.' Are you ready to think like this, Karen?

We can try to help Karen by listing her achievements and analysing them. Might help to make some sense of the chaos. And there is something to go on: she been formidable in looking after her family. But enabling Karen to get her life into story form adds something: it shows how past things have led to today; and it therefore shows how today's things can be made to lead to something else. In narrative terms that end point is called 'resolution'.

Psychologist Angela Patmore (2006) speaks of resolution in a broader, but nonetheless useful, way. She argues that the experience of resolution manifests the way our brains re-organise themselves under stress. She also argues that stress is healthy, proof that our brains are working properly. As long as we don't damp it down, it will give us our resolution. One form is, she says, a sort of epiphany – bringing into order what had been the stress-inducing and chaotic untidiness of life. Cambridge-candidate Terry describes what might be such a moment: 'it burst on me like a strange kind of forgiveness!'. 'Aha!', 'eureka!', 'wow!' Or, as one of Studs Terkel's interviewees says it - 'I never realised I felt that way!'

We work through stories expecting them to resolve in that kind of way. We are disappointed when they don't – or when we can't see why and how they wind up as they do. But some commentators value the order at the expense of the credibility: Christopher Booker, mentioned earlier, frequently uses the words 'balance' and 'perfection' to characterise the resolution of one or other of his seven basic plots. Stories do bring order to chaos, but no life is that tidy. And, anyway, how on earth can we expect the likes-of-Karen to take seriously the idea that things can be brought to a perfect and balanced resolution. At fourteen, she's older and wiser than that. But if what Karen needs is to be able to make enough sense of her life, that she can move towards a possible self in an imaginable future, then a story could help to lay out that stage-by-stage moving-on. Worth a try, Karen?

15. inner-life

None of the stories told here allow us to believe that career moves are made on the basis of a wholly rational inner life. Antonio Damasio entitled his book *The Feeling of What Happens*. Its main idea is that life survives on the basis of a core sense that things are

comfortable or uncomfortable, safe or unsafe. This is experienced as immediate emotion - instinctive and compelling. He contrasts these transient emotions with sustained feelings - more settled sentiments concerning how things are, assembled into an on-going biographical account of what happens.

Our stories suggest that there is some fine shading between immediate emotion and thought-about feelings - a spectrum. We have found...

- | | |
|---|--|
| > here-and-now emotion | in Mary's tears with Mr Briggs; |
| > emerging sense of how-things-are | in Karen's rejection of school; |
| > unfocussed awareness | in Jeanette's talk with her mother |
| > intuited intention | in Tim's reflection on his friends |
| > on-going feeling | in Jonathan's reflection on his career |
| > worked-out plan | in Terry's attitude to the selection tutor |

This needs more work. But there is enough to show how good careers work can usefully evoke more learning than a fully worked-out plan. It is another way of saying that learning is not an on-off switch; there are layers of awareness - each clear enough to enable another step in a stage-by-stage moving on.

But underlying everything is this: emotions and feelings are among the most pragmatic reactions that our brains have evolved. Immediate emotions by-pass cerebral rationality by signalling that we'd better do something and do it now - act or be still. approach or avoid, fight or run, help or hide. Such impulses save lives, while the slower cerebral cortex is losing the chance. Some such emotion welled up in Mary's fear for her future as poet; but she couldn't find anything she could say or do about it. She remembered that.

Feelings are pragmatic in another way: they progressively become a part of a more settled account of how things are and - again by stages - what can be done about them. Mr Briggs may well have provoked the beginnings of such a driving sentiment in Mary; it certainly seems to have become such a force in Jeanette's career; and Jonathan seems still to be nagged by it.

There is nothing more pragmatic than your affective life. It is a driver - ranging from sharp and compelling emotions to sustained and worked-out feelings. At one end our brain urges 'he who hesitates is lost' at, the other 'look before you leap'. We need to know how to work with both.

It is not easy. Emotionally driven impulse urges a lived life; the movie-in-the-brain is part of an examined life. Great-grand-daddy-of-western-philosophy Socrates is said to have remarked that 'an unexamined life is not worth living'; but some of today's children would retort 'Yeah! but an un-lived life is not worth examining!'. In our society 'just-do-it' impulse and 'new-age' intuition are looked on as serious bases for significant action. There are dangers: impulse can be destructive, and the boundary between intuition and superstition is not always easy to find.

And so, in pointing us beyond decision-making rationality, narrative is leaving us with a problem: are we looking for emotional intelligence or intelligent emotions? Narrative suggests a subtly shaded, stage-by-stage process of moving on. But the idea, and the strategies that can come from it, need a lot more work.

16. other stories

The events at the centre of biography are in the hero's experience. But no experience stands alone. This is particularly so when you try to trace any chain of causes and effects. The chain is endless - causes of causes, and causes of causes of causes. What happens in

any life is linked historically to other times and geographically to other places. Ben Pimlott's historians are right to remind biographers that their hero's stories are set in wider-ranging structures and trends. And so, one of the decisions that every story teller must make is the scale on which the story is to be told: Jane Austen sees herself as a miniaturist; Dan Brown doesn't.

Learning programmes use large-scale narratives - history and science cannot be understood in any other way. They are the meta-narratives which so entranced the young Catherine Cookson. Meta-narratives are the stories which contain our stories. Some are crucial to any understanding of career development: you can't really get to grips with contemporary career unless you understand how technological and economic structures and trends shape working life; and contemporary careers work is beginning more-fully to understand how social structures and cultural trends impact working lives.

Meta-narratives lie behind all the stories set out in this monograph: social history is woven into Mary's moments of conversation with Mr Briggs; Tim's months of wondering are set in an inter-generational cultural shift; generations of discrimination fuel Joey's years of cocky self justification; Jonathan is the child of a tradition; legal and illegal global trading have put Karen's back against that lift-shaft wall; and the exploitation of centuries drive Terence's struggle.

Conventional careers education and guidance is in no position to set out the events which inform these big-picture stories. And other pressures on mainstream curriculum do not leave teachers much room to work on how scientific, technological, economic, cultural and social events directly affect learner's lives. But, being the species we are, it's up-close-and-personal experience which attracts our attention.

Visualising concentric circles helps sort out what to do here. At the tight centre of every biography is experience. At the wide-ranging edge are the big-picture events - discovered by so-called 'academic' subjects. And - between the centre and the edge - there are other people's stories. They are part of the dynamics of my own, yet they are wider than my own, locating my story in a bigger context. We need other people's stories to help us each to make sense of our own. And other people's stories are the sphere which links my experience to big-picture events. Indeed, it is all those other stories that agglomerate into the structures and trends that make up the big picture. (For an account of the relationship between experience and information see Law, 2006.)

The implications are for learners to work on other people's stories. Work experience is an (often wasted) opportunity to do that; even more useful is well-managed mentoring. Other people's stories are way of making recognisable sense of the structures and trends that surround us all. And who knows their own story if their own story is all they know?

(e) the meanings

Stories have meanings - the sense that each story seems to make. Meanings are more than events, they rely on explanation of why things have come about this way. We seek meanings, and we feel at-a-loss when we can't find them. That is because the meaning of a story suggests a response on the part of the audience - something that can be done: 'if this is how past causes have given rise to present events, what present causes will help us bring about a better future?'. At their worst such meanings are 'the moral of the story' that some people think should be 'a lesson to us all!'. But there are more subtle and more useful ways of interpreting stories. And they are satisfying when we feel that we can see why things went as they did, what somebody might have done differently, and even what we might do about a situation like that.

Sometimes the author's inference is made explicit: the interpretation is spelled out – as it is in Cambridge-candidate Terry's and in Ashley's stories. More subtly, the interpretation can be implicit: with clues left for you to find – as they are in Jeanette's and Mary's. But, most usefully, the inference is left to you and me – Peter Lennon does that with Jonathan's.

Sometimes such interpretations requires no more than logical headwork on hard facts – 'if that is what she said, and that is what he did, and that happened after you talked to her, then it doesn't look as though it's going to work out - does it?'. You get parallel versions of this in whodunits; but none of our stories work wholly like that – we know who done it, what we need to know is why. So career stories are also told on the basis of point-of-view – 'if this is how it seems to you, and what he really wants is that, it doesn't seem to me as though you're going to be able to live with it – are you?'. We are speaking of inner lives. And such meanings must be worked out by imaginative empathy as much as by hard-headed logic. Mind you, it's still headwork.

All of these features in the search for meaning – explicitness, implication, inference, explanation, anticipation, point-of-view, logic and empathy – feature also in careers-work help. That is why it is so intriguing. Part of the fascination is that there is always room for disagreement. Post-modern philosopher Jacques Derrida, speaking of authorship in general, famously challenges any idea that the author's meanings must be respected. All stories contain clues as to author's blind spots, and elements which contradict the author's line. So there is the story teller's voice, and there is the sense that her or his audiences make of it; and they need not correspond. You see what this means: your learners can find their own meanings in other people's stories. Indeed every time we retell some stories – whether our own or other people's - we sharpen a little more the meaning that we ascribe to it. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

Plenty to think about here.

17. purposes;
18. themes;
19. crucial questions;
20. points of view.

17. purposes

For jazz-musician Dave Brubeck his music had meaning – he speaks of it here. It takes him back to his days as a second-world-war GI – and then to his boyhood...

He was picked to lead a band entertaining the men In the field. The United States Army may have been segregated, but Dave Brubeck's Wolf Pack Band was not... The men ate, slept, and lived together, and shared adventures they would never forget... But when they eventually got home the following year, nothing in America seemed to have changed. "When we landed in Texas we all went to the dining room to eat, and they wouldn't serve the black guys," Brubeck remembered. "They had to go around and stand at the kitchen door, and this one guy said he wouldn't eat any of their food and he started to cry and he said, 'What I've been through and the first day I'm back in the United States, I can't even eat with you guys'. He said, 'I wonder why I went through all of this?'. "... As the leader of his own quartet, Brubeck would eventually become one of the best-known musicians in jazz. He refused ever to play anywhere audiences were segregated, and once walked off a network television show when he saw that the director planned to shoot his group so that his bassist Gene Wright, who happened to be black, would never appear on screen. To him, jazz would always represent "the music of freedom!". His wartime experiences had something to do with that. So did an experience from his boyhood: "The first black man that I saw," he remembered, "my dad took me to see a friend of his and

asked him to 'open your shirt for Dave'." More than half a century later, Brubeck's eyes filled with tears at the memory. "There was a brand on his chest. And my dad said, 'These things can't happen!' That's why I fought for what I fought for!"...

One of the problems with such writing is that it is not subject to rigorous historical method, so that it can be shown to be consistent with what else is known, and can be verified. In biography there may be no way of checking out such long-ago and personal recollections. But does that matter?

Academic Mary Evans (1999) implies 'not really': she argues that it is meaning rather than fact, that is important in biography. Indeed, she maintains that taking the audience into a scholarly pursuit of verifiability may actually be a distraction. Andrew Rissik (1999b) agrees: doing no more than gathering information is '...like searching a dead author's pockets and finding only keys, credit cards, cheque book and driving licence: they tell us something of the life, but not what we really want to know'.

The search of meaning is deep in the species. We are pattern-seeking: it helps us to notice what we need to understand, and it gives us frameworks for agreeing with others what to do about them. Both uses of pattern have survival value. So looking for meaning in a story is to import into literature what first served us well on the pampas. You don't stop doing that, neither do your learners.

So why worry about it? It is that finding meaning is so reassuring to us that we will find it where there is none. We'll even maintain belief in an implausible story. We can be quite gullible about this, especially if the meaning points to what we think is important to well-being. (A biography that starts with victim-hood but leads to triumph, money, sex and fame could get you a six-figure advance.) All of this helps to explain Allison Utley's (1999) claim concerning best-selling but formulaic biography: 'there are too many, they all sound the same, they are too shrill, they cannot all be true'.

But let's not throw out our baby with that bathwater. Veracity can be sterile. Authentic credibility is more useful. Which is where we need Jacques Derrida: in order to establish authenticity we need critically to scrutinise the story. As Alison demonstrates, some so-called factual autobiographies come spectacularly badly out of that. Jeanette's story does significantly better – she is believable. But her story is not in a biography, it is in a novel.

And, anyway, Jacques is not arguing against the attribution of meaning; he just challenges Dave's and Jeanette's right to have exclusive control. Which brings in your learners. They need to find an authentic and credible way of attributing meaning to their own story – facing up to their own contradictions and being honest with themselves about their blind spots. Learning how to do it with other people's stories is a route to knowing how to do it in their own. It could transform how we do progress-file work.

18. themes

Meanings suggest why things happen and what might happen next. But they become more when the interpretation reaches beyond the episode in which things happened, and become a pervasive and persistent way of interpreting other episodes. That's what happened with Dave.

The idea here is that there may be an episode which helps us to find the meaning in a life. It is close to what constructivist psychologist Mark Savickas (1995) means by the term 'life theme'. In career-development thinking Mark has done more than anyone to develop the usefulness of the idea. He urges us to look for clues - in persistent memories, recurring dreams, favourite stories, repeated phrases. But beyond a certain level of practice you don't

have assiduously to search, you start spontaneously to recognise authentic disclosure of a person trying to make sense of a life.

Try it yourself: you have here read an episode from each of a dozen different stories (don't look!). Which now come readily to mind? If there is anything in the life-theme hypothesis then the stories that you most recall can say something about you. You may well be able to tell yourself why this is so. It could well tell something of a theme in your own life.

The first four elements of narrative offer a search-tool for finding the fifth:

- > **characters** that will live in me forever;
- > **talk** I'll never forget;
- > **settings** that when I close my eyes I can still see;
- > **events** I still re-live.

Stories, dreams, songs and memories carry such impressions - as they do for Dave, Jeanette and Mary. They can open a window on a life.

Narrative theory agrees. H Porter Abbott offers simple advice on finding meaning in stories: 'Look', he says, 'for what repeats itself'. Biographer Ulrick O'Connor (1991) is aware of how easy-to-miss such clues can be - no more than a word, a gesture, an intonation, a posture... often-enough some transient but compelling moment. 'No matter', he says, 'how a biographer has submerged himself in archive or interview, he should keep such incidents before the mind's eye.'

We have people who can do it. It is how Paul Willis keeps us interested, And it is how Abraham Maslow (1970) developed his much-used hierarchy of human needs. By re-examining the biographies of public figures he identified needs for an accumulation of satisfactions - 'material', 'safety', 'attachment', 'esteem', 'influence', 'discovery', 'aesthetic', 'self-actualising'. Both 'themes' and 'needs' are ways of giving an account of the human condition. Theme may be the more useful term: it suggests less a person trying to compensate for something, more a protagonist pursuing what is positively valued. All our stories speak in such terms.

If they can call up some provocative thoughts in you, so they can for your learners.

19. crucial questions

At the heart of careers-work is the ability to ask useful questions – in face-to-face work and in classroom exchanges. Both you and your learners need to do that. You will work better together if you can both find their crucial question.

There is in narrative thinking a concept of 'the crux of the matter' – the issue at the heart of the story. The crucial question probes what has for too long been ignored, that demands attention and that promises to show how things can be best be interpreted and resolved. Much of detective fiction works towards such moments. But those moments are more important in careers work than they can ever be in fiction.

Mr Briggs tries: he asks Mary 'how you plan to get folks to pay you [for you poems]...?' Another interviewer might have asked about qualifications in literature or training costs in extended education. All important question; but not yet crucial to Mary. And she didn't yet know how to pose her crucial question. Right now she badly needs to know '...who can I turn to, to help me find out how to make my story come true?...'.

Staying in touch with the learner means that you share a sense an interpretation of the story. Dave, Jeanette and Mary have a good sense of what is going on. Karen has no idea,

Joey has his own idea. But interpreting a story on behalf of the learner is high risk. Psychiatrist Adam Phillips sounds a dramatic warning to opinionated biographers, 'the subject of a biography', he says, 'always dies in the biographer's way'. Can you imagine any circumstance in which it would be appropriate to wonder whether 'a careers worker's learners always die in the careers worker's way?'. Think about it.

The guard against that danger? Learners whom we've enabled to ask their own crucial questions.

20. points of view

We have, for some pages now, been comparing the value of verifiable fact with attributed meaning. This is not to deny the possibility of objective truth. But it is to assert that whatever truth is 'out there', it can only be perceived, that perception is invariably from a point-of-view, and there is always more than one. That is not to assert that there is no independent truth, it is only to be sceptical about anybody who claims wholly to hold it. The idea that we are working with impartial information is not as straightforward as it might, at first sight, appear. Every statement is from a point-of-view (including this one).

In biographical narrative points-of-view are at heart of the story – they are where much of interest lies. There is, accordingly, a growing willingness to experiment with the form; so that what we have thought of as 'fact' is increasingly supplemented with what we think of as 'fiction'. Turn-of-the-century biographies of Michelangelo Caravaggio, Charles Dickens, Marilyn Monroe, Pontius Pilate, Ronald Reagan and Alfred Wainwright all include acknowledged invention. The idea is to 'round out' characters and to make meaning more accessible. It is not done irresponsibly: the invention has to be credible and based on what is known.

Fiction also looks to fact. There are autobiographical novels: Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch* Julian Barnes' *Metroland* and Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* are said to be examples. All authentically speak of career development. Biographer Michael Holroyd (2002) acknowledges that early biography and fiction are genres with a shared early history, read by the same audience for much the same purposes. Some of those purposes were for learning. And for such a purpose it doesn't matter whether Jeanette's child is wholly fact or partly fiction. It is more important to appreciate what such a train of events could mean from her point-of view. That is what authenticates Jeanette's story – not fact but insight.

Journalist Terence Cave (1993) is untroubled by the fact-fiction crossover: 'a lot of readers know how to commute between fiction and reality ...the play between reality and fiction, or truth and fiction, is clearly meant to be comprehensible to a relatively wide public'.

But we should journey with care. The need to attribute acceptable meaning will sometimes provoke people to distort what has happened with what they would rather have happened - preferred fiction coming to the aid of unpalatable fact. Sometimes elements are imported from other people's stories. And the telling and re-telling embeds the fiction deeply enough that the story-teller starts to believe it. You may have noticed this as an educationist; students also sometimes do it.

There are also deliberate lies; but just smoothing the story out is more common. That is what Adam Phillips worries about. The readiness with which it is done is illustrated in a study, reported by Elizabeth Loftus and Maryanne Gray (2002). People were shown phoney ads featuring Bugs Bunny at Disneyland. They subsequently came up with stories of having met him there. But they couldn't have - Bugs belongs to Warner Brothers. Sometimes the drive to make sense of the story runs away with biographers, sometimes with learners and sometimes with us.

But H Porter Abbott is not fazed by this. We do justice to biography, he argues, not by rejecting the unreliable author but by educating the perceptive reader. And what is the most difficult thing a reader has to do? - it is 'to remain in a state of uncertainty'. That means not smoothing things out. The implication is that your learners need to be able to work with a range of inventions for attributing meaning:

- > **imaginative extension** e.g. elaborating what might have happened;
- > **authentic importation** e.g. using a fiction to round out a fact;
- > **self deception** e.g. mis-remembering an invention as a fact;
- > **impressionability** e.g. reporting other people's experience as one's own;
- > **over-interpretation** e.g. making more sense of the facts than they can bare;
- > **lying** e.g. setting out to mislead.

Not all of this is necessarily harmful, indeed it may help: the fiction can help you understand the point-of-view.

Journalist Decca Altkenhead is unworried even by the lies. Because, she says, they are so easily detectable. Like Terence Cave and H Porter Abbot, Decca places her trust in the sceptical reader's ability to recognise the difference between a fact and a point-of-view.

As a species we're pretty good at recognising point-of-view – our nearest rivals are chimpanzees. We can appreciate that two people see the same things from different perspectives, and that a third person is influencing one of them. A chimpanzee (so to speak) loses the plot at about this level; but we can go on. We can pick up that a fourth person knows something that could change everything; but that he got it from a fifth person, who is trying to please a sixth... Jonathan Miller's mind is crowded in that way; so is Dave Brubeck's. Jane Austen's miniatures easily accommodate it all. And getting to grips with a decent soap depends absolutely on this kind of people-mapping ability – not just laying out the characters, but appreciating the dynamics in how they see things. We get satisfaction from being able to trace the narrative tension in the cross-flows between points-of-view. And again, for obvious reasons, the ability has survival value – for us and for our closest evolutionary cousins.

It may be deep in the species, but it can be educated. To recognise point-of-view in what other people say is a step on the way to being able to recognise it in what you say. And to be able to do that opens the door to the possibility of taking another point-of-view - a change-of-mind. We've seen the possibility of change-of-mind in east-end Terence's, Jeanette's, Jonathan's and Catherine's stories. But we haven't thought enough about the dynamics of change-of-mind in contemporary career development.

And there is enough here to suggest the value of enabling people better to map their own crowded minds: to appreciate other points-of-view, and to ask the crucial questions; to know when people are going beyond the facts, and to work out why; to pick up when people are inventing, and to know what to do about it. We can also educate them to find their own point-of-view in their own story, and to resist the imposition of other people's meanings.

I find it hard to imagine a better reason for studying narrative. And it would be careers work.

using narrative

The task posed for this monograph is to see whether the use of narrative can add anything new and useful to our understanding of careers. It's a question that poses more questions.

1. can we trust biographical narrative?
2. does biography mislead?
3. does it matter?
4. what can biography portray?
5. is it new to us?
6. is it useful?
7. how can we best use it?

There is something distinctive and compelling about the way in which narrative speaks. Charles Dickens putting the evidence of nineteenth-century social enquiry into his stories helped to make social reform politically compelling. Closer to our own time, we know that the opportunity to share accounts of experience at neighbourhood level undermines religious prejudice. And Zygmunt Baumann – said to be 'today's world's greatest sociologist' – is reported to draw on narrative in a startling way: he is reported to use selected tv-soap plot-lines for an understanding of contemporary attitudes.

biography and research

Are there any pointers here for our own enquiry work? Panel three assesses the issues raised in this monograph in a research context.

panel three **career biography and research**

can we trust biography? There is no claim here that biographical narrative can replace hard evidence. The argument is that hard evidence cannot replace biographical narrative.

There are meta-narratives surrounding all the episodes here. They are the economic, technological, social and cultural backdrops to the stories – the history and science of working life. Enquiries into such structures and trends need hard evidence.

But the picture is not then complete. We won't know what to do about helping unless we also appreciate the way in which people deal with those structures and trends in their experience. And for that we need biographical narrative.

Greg Philo (2001) argues that there is a wider range of enquiry available to our understanding of contemporary society, and that we would be foolish to rely wholly on conventional sources. He mentions journalism. This monograph is arguing for biography. There is, as we have seen, an overlap.

does biography mislead? Any form of enquiry can mislead. Greg Philo is also among the first, in a growing number of academics and commentators, arguing that formal research is increasingly shaped to suit dominant political and commercial interests.

continued/...

.../continued

Deception can be unintentional. The most critical point in any enquiry is the formulation of the research question. Where questions are based on a limited appreciation of the possibilities the findings will be correspondingly thin. One of the useful things that biography can do - for research as well as practice - is expand the vocabulary with which we formulate our questions.

An unthinking insistence on an evidence-base for every move we make is dangerous. An arbitrarily limited research question will bias the search and distort the findings. Impact studies which accord careers a dominantly economic significance leave out too much. Impact studies which find evidence of learning, but do not show why and how those gains are made, are of limited value.

Studies like these can only be used to argue that there should be more of what we do. Such evidence, however favourable to us it might seem, cannot help us to shape future practice. For that we need evidence on the experience of career learning. Biography can be a source – not of hard evidence, but as a source of ideas for framing more useful research questions.

how much does factual inaccuracy matter? Much of what could be called misleading in biography is a story teller smoothing and shaping the account to suit some meaning that he or she wants to give it. But that deception is part of the evidence; it is, anyway, to a critical reader. The deception portrays a point-of-view. Narrative does portray – and betray - points-of-view. So part of the answer to the question 'can we trust biographical narrative?', will be 'yes, if we read it with enough critical insight'.

ideas it would be foolish to ignore

the ideas

Hard evidence is rightly valued where the sample is well-enough founded that the findings can be applied to the population the sample represents. There is a degree of controlled generalisability. Where anecdote is dismissed it is because it is a one-off event – representative of nothing but itself. But look again: the very least we know about a credible anecdote is that it occurred at least once. And if the anecdote is also authentic it gives us something generalisable. That something is the language we need in order to do justice to the story.

So we come to that central cluster of questions: what can biography portray? is it new? and is it useful? Biography can portray what we need to see in order to develop a vocabulary for career development. That vocabulary is different from what DOTS and its derivatives can portray. And it can usefully expand our way of thinking about career.

Language can limit our thinking, but it can also expand it. It can do that for research as well as practice. Limited language limits conceptions, which limit what we think it worth enquiring into and what we can imagine doing. If we have a language for saying it and thinking it, we may yet be able to realise it.

So, if biographical narrative can bring us a new and useful language, then it can change everything. Panel four points to how.

panel four
a language of biographical narrative

*organised under the five features of narrative
with key concepts for practice and research emphasised*

(a) the people - a person with other people

people understand themselves in **attachments** to other people / **encounters** structure their stories / career is often about **letting go** of past attachments / which can challenge **allegiance** to a group / action can be infused with immediate **emotions** / and also by thought-about on-going **feelings** / these affects drive **protagonists** / and **antagonists** / but there are **levels of awareness** / all of this makes for **rounded** characters

(b) the settings – family, neighbourhood, peer group and community

groups cultivate **beliefs and values** about what people should do / these ideas are **cultural** influence more than personal attachments / though both are **pressures** / and **tensions** between them can be troublesome / managing them is a **quality-of-life** issue / it means taking account of all a person's life **roles** / groups set up **expectations** about life roles / but people also have their own role **conceptions** / and **expanded** experience expands the possibilities / sometimes leading to **outsider** roles

(c) the talk – inner life as communication

talk is a way of **understanding** / we are all engaged in **monologue** seeking to make sense of things / useful **dialogue** relies on effective monologue / much of what is learned is – at least at first - **unfocused** / and may be **intuitive** / **restricted** language restricts conceivable options / **elaborated** language extends options / moving **cross-culturally** can be expansive / but it brings **turning points** / that is why learning is **uncomfortable**

(d) the events – luck, learning and action

stories put lives into **sequence** / set out in **episodes** / and suggest **causes-and-effects** / but **arbitrary events** unfairly favour some / and **meta-narratives** frame every biography / however we learn mostly from **experience** / recognising and knowing through **learning verbs** / which can suggest a **resolution** to the story / and which is not always a rational **decision** / but a stage-by-stage process of **moving on**

(e) the meanings – purposes, themes and points of view

facts need **interpretation** / suggesting a **response** to the story / this is more important than the **facts** / where the story has **authenticity** / in speaking of the **purposes** in what people do / where such meanings pervade the story they become **life themes** / there are **crucial questions** / it is how we ascribe **meaning** / though we may draw on **invention** to do that / but even that helps us better to understand **point-of-view** / which is how we get to **change-of-mind**

their uses

All of this gives starting points for new thinking. It casts learners in the role of researcher and thinker on career development – both on other people's stories and their own. We can enable this in careers work, but there is no part of the personal-development curriculum to which it cannot be applied. It would be foolish to ignore the possibilities it offers.

Taking these concepts seriously requires more role play - with lots of headwork about how and why things play out as they do. It also suggests more thinking and talking before and after any media or enquiry project, or work experience, or mentoring. And it substantially adds to the 'gossip' which must precede and follow any of the activities in programmes like *The Real Game*. And when all of the is said and done, it transforms the way in which we enable learners to set down what they will say and do - in individual-learning-plan and progress-files.

It is hardly surprising that so much of what we do makes such ready links with narrative.

But there's more. To take these concepts seriously persuades us of the value of building a growing local data-base of sources for biographical narrative. This is an unlimited resource: it includes, not only published biography, but cuttings, footage, blogs and memories gathered from local experience: All local, all recognisable, all credible.

people to ask, things to probe, places to examine.

more help

The Career-learning Café features programme-development ideas which use narrative. The material is available free of charge at www.hihohio.com.

useful narratives a menu at www.hihohio.com/magazine/reallives/cafrilvsfrnt.html

programme development *relevance - earning respect for learning*
www.hihohio.com/magazine/mkngtwork/PRApdfs/cafcur1.pdf
progression - stepping stones to learning
www.hihohio.com/magazine/mkngtwork/PRApdfs/cafcur2.pdf

conference material a menu at www.hihohio.com/underpinning/cafnarrtvindex.html

parallel thinking *The DOTS analysis of careers work coverage*
www.hihohio.com/memory/cafdots.pdf
CPI 3: inner life and other people
www.hihohio.com/underpinning/CPIpdfs/cafcpi3.pdf
learning from experience
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interim versions for programme development *planning for progression*
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a menu at www.hihohio.com/magazine/index/cafmngmwknrtv.html

There will be more, including a PowerPoint presentation of this material – early in 2006.

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