STORYTELLING AND CYCLES OF DEVELOPMENT

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'If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am' McAdams (1993:11)

Introduction

This chapter describes an inter-professional learning workshop that I used when teaching a Masters programme in Leading Integrated Children's Services. The workshop is creative in its use of storytelling and the cycle of development. When used together, and structured around the experiential learning cycle, the stories promoted reflection and metaphors for change, and the cycle of development offered self-awareness and clear developmental tasks to complete. This chapter will explain some of the context and go on to explain theoretical choices for each tool before going on to describe the pedagogical approach.

My Story – part one.

> "There was once a girl who loved exploring the woodlands around her home. She would stray further and further away seeking some treasure, wonderment or love. Each weekly foray took her further and further away, deeper and deeper into the woodland. One day she came across a huge stone house. Its walls were roughly hewn and the garden thick with brier. On entering the house she found cool and damp air and a number of doors. Pushing each heavy door open in turn revealed lush rooms draped with thick brocade, carpeted with plush rugs and adorned with gilt ornament. Kitchen, drawing room, bathroom, bedrooms, dining room all fantastic, all empty, all pristine. One door however was locked. The girl was perplexed and returned for another wander around the rooms. She entertained herself with a return visit to all the other rooms, but she kept finding herself outside that door again. Curiosity finally overcame her – if that room was that nice then what would be behind this door? She searched the house for the key to the door and finally found it in an inlay box on the hearth. She stood in front of the locked oak door with a cool heavy key in her hand. The lock turned heavily and gave onto a flight of stairs leading down into a dark cellar. With trepidation she stepped down onto the first stair. Each step was colder than the last, the walls

> increasingly damp and wet – yet at the bottom she could see a dim glow of some kind. It pulled her on. At the bottom there was almost complete gloom, the doorway above a small slot of light. The glow came from a golden ball that reflected the light coming from the doorway. It was perfectly formed, smooth and shiny, she could not resist picking it up. As soon as she touched the ball it darkened, her fingers leaving brown tarnished finger prints. The ball was exquisite, dense, cool, perfect metal…until she had picked it up. Now it was dull and tarnished, finger marks dulling it as she turned it in her hands. She tried to clean the ball with her skirt, but the marks would not come off….."

This is my story – a metaphorical story that I have constructed as it reflects aspects of how I experience myself in the world – it speaks to me about my professional identity. I have used a three part developmental story process in my work as a leadership consultant in the children's workforce and as an MA tutor.

The Context

From 2007 to 2010 I validated and taught a Masters pathway called Leading Integrated Children's Services at the University of Cumbria in the UK. The MA was designed in direct response to the new requirements in the 2004 Children Act for professionals who work with children (the children's workforce) to work together across professional boundaries. One of the main obligations laid down in the Children Act (2004), in England, was a clear requirement for all services to work together. I also worked for the University of Cumbria as a leadership consultant, going into newly integrated teams in the children's workforce and facilitating their collaborative practice. The reconfigurations of inter-professional agencies and multi agency teams meant they had to simultaneously learn how to work together whilst continuing to deliver services for children and young people. This was problematic for some, as backgrounds, assumptions, working practices and terms and conditions varied. McKimm's (2009) model of professional identity was a useful framework for conceptualising what was happening. This showed that professional identities sometimes clashed due to the 'enculturation' that they had experienced in joining their profession. Teaching people to lead in this context in a multi-agency MA

required a pedagogical approach that would allow them to understand and work with these difficulties.

The approach needed to value individuals and their professions and that would help create a new enhanced 'multi-professional' identity, transcending professional boundaries. Wenger (2006) described the value of single profession communities of practice but in this circumstance the need was for the creation of a new 'multi-professional' community of practice, where they could navigate new forms of practice themselves through action research in situated contexts. Winter, Buck and Sobiechowska (1999) had demonstrated the use of reflective writing to promote professional development, and this inspired me to use narratives or stories.

The Developmental Storytelling Process

There were four parts to the story telling process that I developed. The first was to elicit stories about an individual's experience (for instance of being in the new team, of experiencing change, of working collaboratively, of a changing professional identity – whatever was appropriate). The personal example that I used above has lots of description and detail in it – this could be because I moulded it into a workable example which appeared to flow spontaneously in a session with other participants. Some people had equally embellished and descriptive stories, whilst others were a simple storyline – this would depend I would suggest on the familiarity and comfort that the individual had for figurative speech. When I first used the process I thought that professionals would baulk at creating 'stories' and that they would prefer to recount the narrative of what really happened, but in three years of using the technique I have only had two people who did not want to use metaphor. The technique does require trust however, and as a tutor or facilitator I would need to build rapport and establish a safe working environment before introducing the exercise.

How? Part 1.
I create a magical scene for people to walk into – story books, props, mystical music, soft seating, powerpoint flicking slides of book covers.
When people enter I tell them that we are going to work with stories and metaphors in a purposeful and developmental way.
I tell the first part of my story (as above) and invite them to decode it, giving their own interpretations of it. This shows that there are multiple interpretations depending on the perceptual filters of the individual and that no-one can know the meaning that I intended when I encoded it.
I remind the participants of the issue that we are working on together.
I ask them to quietly think of a story (any story happy, sad, drama, tragedy) that they can recall on the issue that we are working on.
I give them five or ten minutes to quietly think.
Next I ask them to turn it into a metaphorical story – they can invent it, base it on a known story, or use a real story, tale, fable.
I give them another five – ten minutes to complete this.
I ask them to then find a partner that they would be happy to tell their metaphorical tale, and partners exchange tales.
I do not ask them to share the stories in the whole group setting.

So why use story and metaphor?

The theory of narratives (spoken accounts of a personal experience) and stories (experiences encoded in symbolism, myth, metaphor and magic) shows them to have three benefits for this context. They are: identity forming; socially-constructed and situated learning tools; and forms of experiential learning.

Throughout the chapter I will refer interchangeably to narratives and stories but I recognise that there is less fictional intentionality in a narrative, and ask the reader to be aware of this. I have adopted Gabriel's (2000:239) description of a story as having the following features; '[they have] plots and characters, generating emotions in narrator and audience through a poetic elaboration of symbolic material. This material may be a product of fantasy or experience, including an experience of earlier narratives. Story plots entail conflicts, predicaments, trials, coincidences and crisis that call for choices, decisions, actions and interactions and purposes'.

Stories for identity formation

Humans have told stories for centuries, using them to pass on and reinforce aspects of culture. As individuals we experience stories from childhood. Most of us are told stories; as children at home and school, and as adults among peers and colleagues and by popular culture (i.e. TV and radio). We use stories as 'sense making' tools. Boje (in Simpson 2008:106) describes storytelling as 'the preferred sense making currency of human relationships'. I attribute this to our cultural experiences of stories, as they are 'intrinsic parts of being human' (Macguire 1998:xiv). Individuals use stories to represent and to make sense of who they are. As we read stories we relate to different characters and situations, exploring how they represent who we were, who we are, and who we might be. The stories that we choose to read tell us something about who we are.

Gabriel (2000:120) highlighted that cultural stories can be purposive; 'Individual stories may be attempts to proselytise, neutralise and bolster organisational control'. This conception of stories as political tools is supported by the early work of Vladimir Propp (1984:14) who thought folklore was the genre of the oppressed classes, and could be a tool to understand oppression and suffering. This highlights the use of stories to describe organisational cultures and norms, and to expose tacit rules. As such, narratives are growing in credence in leadership literature, as Denning (2007: xv) writes, 'storytelling already plays a huge role in the world of organisations and business and politics today', and there are a growing number of workshops, tools, and books on the use of narratives, stories and metaphors available today.

The stories we listen to, create and tell can generate change. 'People live stories, and in their telling of them, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones.

Constructions of experience are always on the move. Stories, when well crafted, are spurs to the imagination, and through our imaginative participation in the created worlds, empathetic forms of understanding are advanced' (Koch 1998:1183). Stories are not fixed; they are developmental so changing the events or ending in a story can metaphorically open new ways of thinking and new possibilities to individuals and groups, helping to create personal and professional development by further understanding of self and circumstances. Stories can however oppress as they perpetuate grand narratives of for example 'heroic deeds'. These need to be countered with non- dominant narratives or at the very least critical commentary.

Bettelheim (1976) first wrote of the developmental scope of enchanted stories for children; 'the fairy tale speaks softly and subtly to the child, promoting psychological growth and adaptation, the fairy tale encourages the child to face the world with confidence and hope'. Stories thus legitimise early childhood emotions and experiences (understanding feelings of hatred towards our own mother as hatred and fear of the evil stepmother for example). This links to early work by Freud on the metaphors that the unconscious mind uses to represent unresolved issues – a starting point for psychoanalysis. Transactional analysis (TA) holds that at an early age we develop a life story or 'script' (Steiner 1974) that we then endeavour to live out – this may explain some of our repetitive life patterns. Narrative authors have had a similar perspective, Denning (2007) for example states that; 'Just as the tiniest sample from your living body can reveal the DNA of your whole biological person, so a brief, well chosen story can shed light on your entire life history. When you tell a story about an apparently trivial incident, it exposes the entire fabric of your character' (Denning 2007:82). Life scripts are used in psychoanalytic, developmental and organisational TA to surface the unconscious 'script' that is being lived out to enable awareness and autonomy (Berne 1976). On the basis of this individuals or organizations might choose to 're-parent' themselves (Illsley-Clarke and Dawson

1989), re-writing a new ending to the story. Awareness of these life scripts can allow us to alter the pre-determined path. Whilst I did not intend to work 'Therapeutically' with stories, I was aware of the 'therapeutic' benefits possible. The implications for this are the need for a safe learning environment and careful facilitation of story work.

My story – part two.

> "My little girl is lost and alone, she has explored beyond safe boundaries. With no guides or travelling companions she is out of her depth. Despite finding gold, she has also trespassed and the owner of the house will know that she has been there because she cannot clean the ball. She needs permission to explore and discover the world rather than doing it covertly and she needs safe boundaries. She needs support to become who she can be, and she needs protection now from whoever owns the house."

How were these developmental needs identified?

In the second part of the developmental storytelling process I 'teach' the students or delegates about the cycle of development. The 'Cycle of Development' (Levin 1982:34 see figure 1) is a Transactional Analysis model that accounts for the process of developing from child to adult. The concept is cyclical rather than linear. It shows childhood progression through six developmental stages. A significant life event (new job / illness / change of home etc.) may also restart the cycle or cause us to revisit stages at any point in our future lives. The cycle is shown in the figure 1 below, and the developmental actions associated are shown in table 1:

Insert Stuart Fig. 1 here

Insert Stuart Table 1 here

This conceptualisation of development is powerful and solution focused, enabling adults to locate their personal and professional development on a cyclical, developmental spectrum. It accounts for how people are in different stages developmentally in different circumstances – they may for example be fully integrated

at work, but in a phase of being in their private lives due to a recent divorce. The model allows reflection on the self and others in different contexts.

The model not only signals what might be going on for individuals personally and professionally, but also offers a clear guide to interventions and roles of caregivers (may be literal parents or line managers). In the workplaces the cycle of development has been used to plan induction processes as it shows what new employees might be thinking and feeling the tasks that they need to complete, and what their managers need to do to enable this to happen. It can guide personal, professional and organizational development, and connected the logical with the affective domains, is useful in offering a way for people to anticipate the reactions of themselves and others to change, and the actions to take to move through these (Clarke and Dawson 1998).

How? Part 2

I walk into the centre of the circle and explain that I am now going to teach them a developmental model that is TA or psychodynamic in origin.
I explain that it is a spiral and that I am going to recreate it on the floor.
I place each card in turn, slowly.
With the first card I offer an explanation of the developmental stage in terms of child development and ask them what the care givers role is at that stage of development.
With each subsequent card I ask them to describe the stage and the needs of the child, and to identify the role of the care giver.
Once the cycle is completed, I walk around it explaining how it reoccurs in adult life, and what I might mean for us then.
I use my personal experience of having unresolved issues in 'being' as an example of how we can sometimes need to revisit stages.
I ask them in their pairs to identify the developmental stages, needs and caregivers role for each of their metaphorical characters. The work on them jointly in metaphor.

Stories as socially constructed situated learning

Denning (2005:178) argues that stories are a concrete form of knowledge (contrasted to abstract and tacit understanding) and as such are repositories of situational experience; he claims that cognitive scientists have proved that this is how we encode and make sense of experience. Polkinghorne (in Clandinin and Connelly1994:15) noticed that stories are used by practitioners (in medical settings)

to make sense of their work, sharing both clients narratives and practice narratives. Story in these contexts do not supplant the analysis of practice but enables new ways of thinking which support ways of articulating change and encouraging innovation (Denning 2005). As a professional tool, stories then yield powerful shared understandings in the workplace, and the possibilities of overcoming professional barriers.

Situated learning occurs when co-workers acquire knowledge through the dynamics of everyday learning and interaction (Lave and Wenger 1991). An important part of situated learning is the construction of knowledge within the social and cultural circumstances in which the learning occurs. Wenger (2006) noted that in some situated learning, the learning was explicit and steered by a common interest or passion in developing practice. This (still informal and situated) group of people were termed a community of practice (Boud and Middleton 2003). Narratives are the quicksilver of these communities of practice; both the historical stories and the day to day stories create norms of 'how things are done here', and help practitioners make shared sense of dilemmas and problems in the work context. This socially constructed learning I recognized could be the root for the development of inter professional education as professionals from different backgrounds come together to create new ways of working.

My story: part three.

> "……the little girl hears a noise on the stairs..she gasps, drops the ball and looks up in terror. Coming down the stairs is a large black outline, slow steps and heavy breathing….she looks for somewhere to hide but can find nowhere in the damp empty cellar space…."Now what do we have here?" booms the voice a step above her…. A sharp sulphur smell announces the lamp light, and the girl is gently illuminated. As her eyes adjust she looks up into the lined face of an old man. His eyes are twinkling, his mouth is curved into an ironic smile, his clothing as rich and decadent as the furnishings in the room above. "Come with me my girl, I have some more things that might entertain you – bring the ball, you'll need my special solution to get those grubby marks

> off…what do you think to my anti-theft elixir? Effective isn't it? Chip chop, up you come…." The old man turned and climbed the stairs taking the light with him. The little girl picked up the ball and dashed after him, into a whole new world of potions, inventions and magic."

Having identified the needs of the characters in the story, I then ask the students or participants to re-create these metaphorically by adding a new ending. Part of the joy of a story is that the ending can always be re-written, developed and go on to another chapter or volume. We do not always have this view of real life.

My Story: Part Four

> "What my story revealed for me was that I had often felt like a fraud in the professional roles that I had worked in. Whilst I logically knew that I was capable, and whilst I performed to or above standards in each role, I found it hard to shake an internal sense that one day I would be 'found out' as incapable, named and shamed as an imposter. This internal dissonance often led me to overwork, overperform and create my own work stress as I endeavoured to ensure people could not detect any weakenss in what felt like a façade. Identifying this pattern has allowed me to seek feedback from colleagues and students that my work is of standard, to soothe myself that 'good enough' is indeed good enough, and to feel more grounded in my ne academic identity."

The fourth and final stage of the developmental story process was to identify the meaning from the new endings that they had created, and to transfer that learning into the current work situation. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle offers a pedagogical structure that draws from past experiences to inform future situations. As such it is appropriate to enable multi professionals to draw from their past 'mono professional' experiences when moving into their new integrated settings. The experiential learning cycle places importance on reflective practice (Moon 1999, Yorke Barr, Sommers, Ghere,and Montie 2006), this reflection in action and on action (Schon 1983 &1991) is an approach to professional development adopted across the children's and young people's workforce in the UK. The ability to reflect on past actions and to decide on future actions may provide a more resilient approach to the development of services for children and young people. The stages of the cycle

offers a framework for the thinking and feeling areas of the experiential learning cycle, the perceptual continuum, and the tasks and permissions indicate developmental activities for the processing continuum. The experiential learning cycle approach and the cycle of development model are mutually reinforcing and can create deep insight and learning for individuals at cognitive and affective levels. The cycle of development presents the opportunity to take responsibility for meeting their own needs, or for asking for them to be met by others, allowing integration. This in experiential learning terms will allow them to observe and reflect on their life pattern, forming abstract concepts, and in planning the next steps they will test out new conceptualizations of themselves in new situations.

The action research cycle (McNiff 1998) bears a resemblance to the learning cycle in its cyclical phases of planning, researching, analyzing and doing something different as a result. As such, engaging professionals or young people in an experiential, or action research process (sometimes known as practitioner research) would allow them to identify the current situation, the desired changes that they wanted to make, and the ability to carry out those changes. This use of narratives and or stories when linked to the experiential learning cycle and action research cycles offered a structure for development. This led me to consider narratives and stories as research tools in their own right.

How to? Part Four.
In the final part of the process I would ask the delegates / participants to work individually again.
I asked them to reflect on the story endings that they had created, and the needs that had prompted the new ending.
I asked them to identify what the meaning is from the metaphorical story that they can apply to their personal or professional situations.
What were the lessons?
What would that ending look like in real life?
What were the needs in reality?
How could they meet them?
Finally I asked them to write down the action points that emerged on index cards that we would share as a group.
In a plenary setting we shared actions and insights (but not any of the literal or metaphorical stories)
We then shared our experiences and views on the developmental story telling process.

The process could be called a narrative inquiry, especially as I aligned it to action research in the previous section. Narrative inquiry is a research technique in its own right and Broussine (2008:19) identifies that creative methods allow insight into human experience as they are; 'rich and multifaceted', they 'enhance our capacity to find different expressive forms' and they are well suited to collaborative approaches to inquiry. When accepted as auto ethnographic accounts (Anderson 2006, Ellis 2004, Sparkes 1996), stories can provide genuine insights into personal and collective experiences and understandings.

Stories are not reality, they contain exaggeration and embellishment. This 'levelling' and 'sharpening' (Denning 2005:181) adds meaning to the experience rather than robbing them of validity. Broussine (2008:169) argues that stories allow us to recognise different forms of knowledge from multiple participants; 'accessing dimensions of experiential knowing that are not represented in predominant presentational forms, and they offer processes of sense making for generating new propositional and practical knowing' which is vital for this type of generative practice. So my developmental storytelling process drew on experiential learning scaffolded onto a psychodynamic framework to create practitioners narrative action research. This blend of disciplinary approaches was effective and appropriate (if irreverent!) in this multi-agency context.

What I learned from the practice

The narratives that were told by people across both contexts showed real personal insight, a journey, and a change in personal identity. Four themes have emerged out of my use of narratives that I had not conceptualised at the start of the work: disclosure, self-realisation, psychological depth and solution focus. The use of metaphor often gave the individuals (whether professionals or young people) the opportunity to deal with difficult situations confidentially. This opened up subjects that they might not otherwise have discussed – it facilitated disclosure. This in turn then allowed greater learning as more was 'up for grabs'. Self-realisation preceeded change. This was of crucial importance, and individuals and groups needed the time to make the self-realisation… 'oh that's what I've been doing!' before they could move on to make any lasting change. The individual realisations led to group realisation. The more individuals disclosed, the more others did, and the more learning occurred as a result. A positive learning environment and strong enough group rules or group trust was therefore vital, even when working metaphorically.

I found that work at the narrative level can surface unconscious thoughts into consciousness. One professional spontaneously 'encoded' their organisational experience into the story of Cinderella. This surfaced the realisation that unconsciously he felt put upon by the rest of the staff and was treated as a dogs' body. This in turn explained his external resentful behaviour, and offered new possibilities in changing his behaviour or tackling the issue. This facilitation experience substantiates Gabriel's (2000:91) view that; "a story can at the same time express the individuals deeply private and personal desires (e.g. for revenge, justice or recognition), a group's shared fantasy (e.g. of salvation or domination of another group), and deeper structural and political realities (e.g. a groups experience of long term exploitation, insecurity, or privilege). Stories carry personal meanings, cultural meaning as well as personal meanings". So deep psychological material was surfaced into the conscious mind.

Use of an experiential or action research process alongside the stories allowed change. The uniqueness of stories in facilitating this change is that everyone believes that they can write a new ending to a story. Re-authoring their personal stories gave them the open mindedness and the permission to identify the steps or resources that they might need for a successful ending. The experiential use of stories also offers individuals a sustainable approach to lifelong learning and provides a 'narrative map' (White 1987).

How does it create development and change? There are at least four ways in which change occurs that arose from studying the feedback from forty participants:

- Validation
- Reframing
- Unconscious connect
- 'New'

By validation, I reflect that telling a story and being listened to can be a validating experience, especially in the busy lives of professionals. Having someone listen to, and play back a story ('I heard that …') can validate the listeners' experience. This alone can create therapeutic change. This validation can be transformational, and 'Through transforming our negative, painful or chaotic experiences into stories, we take responsibility for them, and we bring ten to bear more constructively on our lives' (Maguire 1998:17).

A story can often reframe the experience that an individual or group has had. It may be reframed by the 'moral' or the story, by the events of the story, or through listening and comparing to others stories. A huge obstacle may seem less significant in the light of others stories or other perspectives. Once reframed, a change can then

occur. Narratives allow us to conceptualise something in a new way, adding shades of meaning – a well told metaphorical story about teamwork can help a corporate team identify with how they function, leading to development, and a story with subtle meaning is more palatable than being told you are 'dysfunctional'. Metaphor may reframe experience, and by using metaphor to encode our stories, we can be offered the safety and distance to share events that would otherwise remain private. This has been my experience of using stories in multi professional settings – it is easier to talk about the difficulties of the prince trying to get to snow white than of the endless hurdles of collaboration. As Broussine (2008:26) states, 'metaphor provides a description of something by reference to another object that is different to, but analogous to, the 'something' originally described'. This is particularly useful when researching personal and practice experiences as metaphors can operate as an emotional receptor for unconscious feelings.

So, 'an appropriately told story had the power to do what rigorous analysis could not, that is to communicate a strange new idea in a meaningful way and to motivate people quickly into enthusiastic action' (Denning 2005:xii). This reminded me of Dadds (2008) concept of empathetic validity, where the measure of the story is how much it moves the readers, rather than whether it is reliable and generalizable.

This is a single point in the on-going journey that I have begun with stories and other creative teaching and research techniques. I invite you to step on the road with me, taking tales as worthy travelling companions.

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