Three-scene storyboarding: how narrative enlarges careers-work

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This article examines the uses of narrative in careers work. It illustrates story-telling with three-scene storyboarding – a method for linking remembered experience to useful reflection as a basis for action. It is introduced here to probe the uses of narrative in careers work – the possibilities and the problems.

Narrative thinking draws on a range of perspectives. The article examines philosophical issues and their practical implications. It shows how literary theory gives us a useful distinction between a case-study and a narrative. It probes how narrative is rooted in the way neurological states link to cultural experience. All help us to understand how a story can find meaning in experience and purpose in response.

Introduction

Inspiring stories, we are told, have the power to change lives; and so they do. They also have the power to confuse, mislead and deceive. Yet story-telling is a prototypical teaching-and-learning method – from the earliest times we have learned from narratives – in art, myth, legend, saga, fable, parable and gossip. They reach from the walls of our caves to the displays on our on-line devices.

Issues

The most distinctive feature of all storytelling is sequence in time: stories rely on saying what comes 'before', 'between' and 'after'. Ricoeur (1988) is among the most influential commentators on time and narrative. He tracks centuries of thinking, leading to a distinction between analytic and existential philosophy. Analytic philosophy speaks of what can be expertly observed, deduced and quantified. Existential philosophy, speaks of how meaning, purpose and value in experience can be inferred. Ricoeur concludes that the inscrutability of analytic accounts of time causes us to turn to narrative – and, in particular, 'before', 'between' and 'after' metaphors. We speak of time as if it were a movement – from past memories, through present experience, towards future anticipations. We can get 'ahead', and put things 'behind' us. We can be 'overtaken', and need to 'catch up'. Actually we do none of these things – this is metaphorical image not cosmological reality. And Ricoeur claims that getting this wrong explains an endemic dissonance in the human condition. This article shows that careers work is caught up in that condition, and that Ricoeur does not exaggerate about it.

Bruner (1985) distils it: narrative credibility appeals to believability and meaning, while paradigmatic credibility is logically and scientifically validated by verification and falsifiability. We all do both: trying to find out how things really are, and – at the same time – trying to make useable sense of them.

Between them Ricoeur and Bruner explain a repertoire for enabling career learning. Career workers know that two things are going on in that work. The words 'paradigmatic' and 'narrative' speak of them. Paradigmatically, we use analytic diagnosis of abilities and motivations, and call on research-based labour-market information. We collect and collate the facts into correlation-based quantifications of explanatory factors. And all of this is incorporated into learning activities – interview schedules, worksheets,

psychometrics and data-bases all rely on this kind of thinking.

Narrative invites people to voice experience and how they feel about it – calling on constructs, preferences, and anticipations. It sees things as belonging, and not belonging, to each other in experience. Mind-maps express some of this (Cregeen-Cook, 2011). Narrative adds a sequencing dimension – showing one thing leading to another, hinting at explanations of what happens, and anticipations of what might be done about it. Learning activities include creative writing, role-play, simulation and open conversation (Simpson, 2011).

Philosopher Strawson (2004) will have none of it, arguing that narration sets a self-deceiving self in a falsely-coherent situation. Better, he says, to treat each event as a fact – a separate and bounded reality. Narrative is not just unnecessary, it is undesirable: it is not how to find the truth but how to mistake it. Stories might inspire but, for Strawson, they definitely mislead.

He has a point: narrative is anecdote, not the same-for-everybody truth. But Strawson misses the point: to understand existence only in terms of scientific analysis is to misunderstand humanity. We act less in response to verifiable facts, more to the meaning we attribute to experience. Epistemologists may shudder, but careers work cannot afford to overlook the species-wide tendency to attribute meaning to experience.

And so Strawson's forced-choice thinking forces out too much. So here's the challenge: how do we know when to call on any part of our paradigmatic-to-narrative repertoire. And how can we avoid using one part of the repertoire to do what another can do better? Storyboarding is a test-bed for that task.

Three-scene storyboarding

Storyboarding cannot supplant fact-and-factor paradigmatic methods. It is designed to be used when analytic methods cannot reach what is going on in people's lives.

There is evidence to guide us on this (Hughes and Gration, 2009; Bimrose and Barnes, 2008): careers workers are trusted for the facts and factors useful to immediate moving on. But when it comes to finding meaning and purpose, people are more likely to turn to those they know and who know them. While they trust us on the 'what shall I do?' questions, they tend to turn to direct-and-personal experience for the 'why would I bother?' issues.

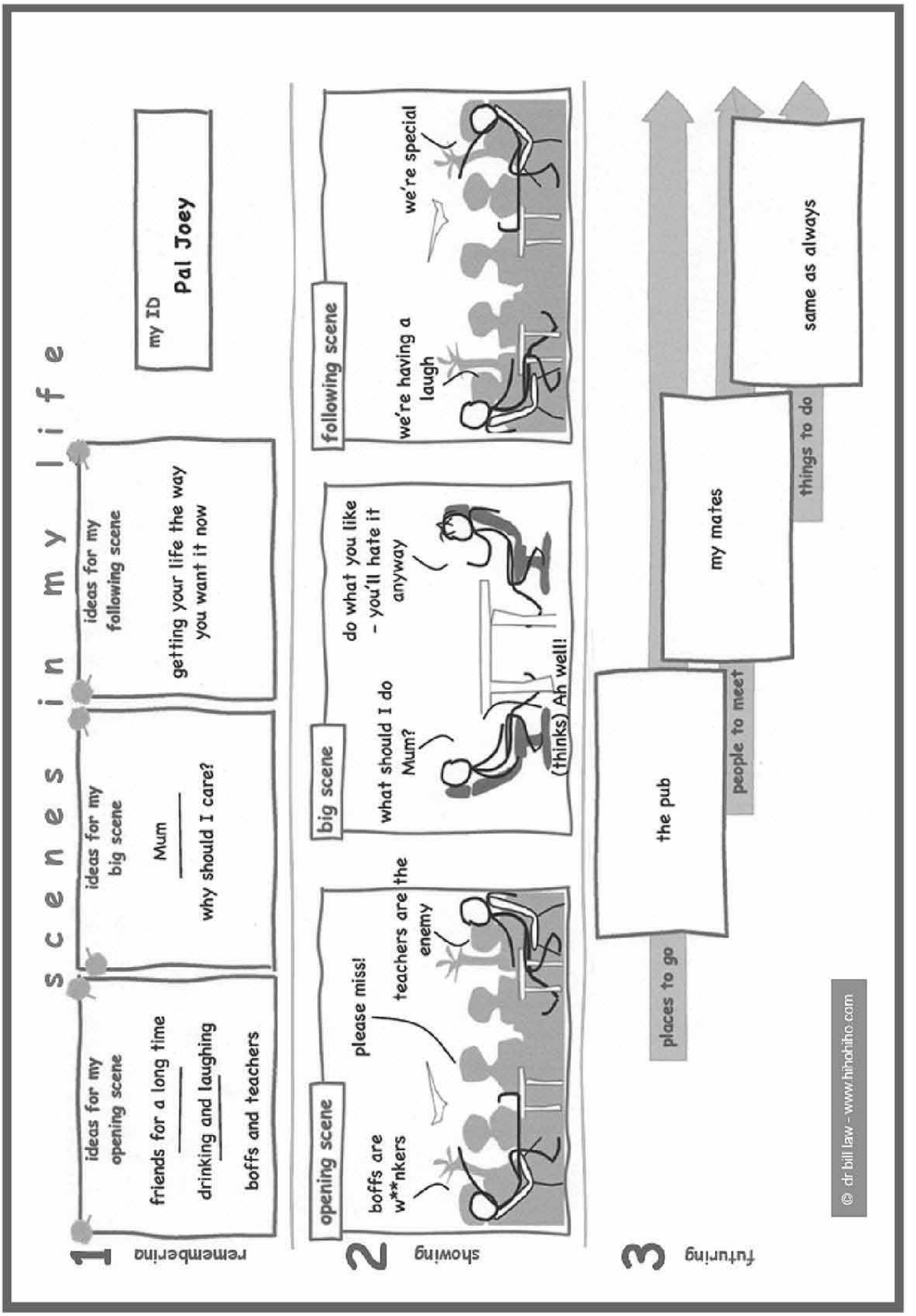
Three-scene storyboarding is designed to enable people's reflection on the 'why?' issues. People work with significant episodes in their own experience. The method comprises a format for setting down what is found in experience, and a procedure for examining it…[1]

1. linking reflective talk to remembered experience
2. using a combination of words and images
3. seeing self both as individual and with others
4. interweaving thoughts and feelings
5. inviting a person to be a witness to his or her own life
6. anticipating action.

Among the distinctive processes are looking for a turning-point and representing it in filmic images. The figure (Figure 1 overleaf) shows a paper-and-pencil version of the format.[2]

1 Find a detailed account of design, format and procedure at Law (2012).
2 For illustrative purposes this is a simple portrayal – based on Paul Willis's (1971, 2001) account of 'Joey'.

Figure 1: Paper-and-pencil storyboard



The focus is on an episode where there is a possibility of a change of direction in life (Joey wanted to change things, but he didn't). That is a turning-point. It is the middle scene in the three-scene format – left-to-right in the figure…

a. opening scene – before – the way things were
b. big scene – between – when things might be changed
c. following scene – after – how things became different [or didn't].

The opening and following scenes are the immediate before-and-after contrasts – how the person came into, and out of, the big scene. The idea of a turning-point means that the future need not be like the past – necessary to any pursuit of career flexibility.

The process runs top-to-bottom in the figure…

1. remembering – gathering memories and sorting them into three scenes
2. showing – selecting and assembling elements into a graphic portrayal
3. futuring – anticipating the where, who and what of future action.

A person might helpfully do this working with others.

Ideas for storyboarding action

Literary commentators Wood and Byatt (2008) conclude that the brain is as much for forgetting as remembering. Storyboarding's remembering process needs, then, to move back-and-forth between the scenes, allowing one significant memory to call up another until a basis for attributing meaning is found.

Storyboarding must also be able to deal with often unrecognised social influences on what people do (Schwartz, Barry, Ben-Haim, Yakov and Dacso, Cliff, 2011). And philosopher Dennett (2003) outflanks that issue. His modelling shows that organisms increase their repertoire by evolving complex ways of dealing with environments, and that enlarged capacity – mentally to re-organise what we find – gives humanity its claim to independence. The more ways-of-seeing, the more ways of understanding what is going on and what to do about it. It makes for what literary commentators call rounded stories (Abbott, 2002) Such narratives suggest that there is more than one possible resolution that can come out of this. Storyboarding is designed to take on that complexity (Table 1).

Table 1: Elements in rounded stories

people:	protagonist – antagonists – other people – groups – on-going relationships – new encounters
places:	familiar – unfamiliar – feeling 'at home' – seeing different ways of doing things
talk:	soliloquy – conversation – thoughts-and-feelings – exchange – agreement – argument – conflict
events:	routine – continuation – luck – loss – gain – surprise – shock – 'eye-openers'
meanings:	beliefs – values – expectations – what seems worth doing and possessing – who seems worth listening to

In narrative thinking, a rounded story invites you to look beneath the surface. It is intriguing and never entirely exhausted of meaning. That means, says Dennett, that nothing is inevitable – he calls it 'evitability'. There is more in Joey's experience than might be recognised by measured facts and quantifiable factors. Socio-political researchers (Lexmond and Reeves, 2009) refer to the search as mindfulness – stop-and-think attention which resists distraction, focusses concentration and sees things to completion. They see it as supported by significant others. Storyboarding is designed to enlist that support from educators – including careers workers.

There is also a need to engage with the self-justification that disguises how things are (Tavris and Aronson, 2007). Storyboarding's filmic method allows for such then-and-now probing. When Joey has made his film he can watch it – while, then, he was the protagonist, now he is the audience. The protagonist was subjectively engaged in the there-and-then of the episode. But in the audience Joey becomes a witness to what is, here-and-now, a predicated life. Three-scene storyboarding can engage a person both as a subjective 'I am', and as a predicated 'is that really me?'.

All of this is contributes to anticipated action. Wood and Byatt also show the converse of memory is anticipation – the same neurological areas are activated in both. Storyboarding can be extended into a deeper account of how things got this way and what can be done about them (Law, 2007).

Narrative in research

There are wider narrative implications in Clegg's (2005) proposals for research. She argues for 'critical realism' – bridging existential experience to paradigmatic expertise. It interposes between evidence and findings an account of what might be going on – not as an hypothesis to be retained or annulled, but as a possibility to be entertained. It is a clear case of the absence of evidence not being evidence of absence, but as – itself – evidence worth scrutinising.

Scrutiny in ethnography comes later in the process from Willis (1977); Williamson (2004) allows ethnography to speak for itself. Nonetheless, the narrative element in both has significantly expanded understanding of career. While paradigmatic method can identify and quantify factors for career development, narration sets out accounts of career management. Between them number and narrative make us strong on the facts of career and strong on the ascribed causes of career. Willis and Williamson find those ascriptions in background, shaped by attachments and moved on by encounter.

Critical realism allows for expanded thinking, by wondering 'what else might be going on here?'. It is a storyboarding question – with research potential (Law, 2010a).

Literary theory

Eagleton (2003) finds enlarging features in narrative. He richly illustrates how the roughness of narrative's unfinished nature makes it more than a fact-by-fact chronicle. An example of a chronicle would be a case-study or report, assembled to inform professional interests. He mentions class, race and gender interests; and he urges a contemporary need for new narratives.

Hooley and Rawlinson (2011) illustrate how literary studies over time helps an understanding of narrative in careers work. And Booker (2004) disentangles recurring plot-lines – some with career-management resonances…

quest: the protagonist, with distinctive abilities, takes on a challenging task – resisting all diversionary enticements and invitations

voyage and return: events move the protagonist into unfamiliar places – exciting but threatening – perpetual reminders of origins

divided self: a many-talented protagonist takes on a risky task – that obsession separates from all familiar contacts – with tragic consequences

comedy:[3] many characters variously encounter each other – from different points-of-view – causing misunderstanding and needing resolution

3 A comedy is, like an Italian commedia, a theatrical form – and not necessarily funny, though Shakespeare's 'comedies' have amusing scenes.

What Booker calls plot a movie-goer might call genre. It gives us filmic terms which people might find in their story – and want to change.

> *what genre you would say this episode is in – 'action?', 'chase?', 'thriller?', 'soap?', or 'noir?'*

Although Booker sees plot lines as carrying necessary meanings, others point to reform possibilities – in the way a story can evoke new ways forward. The claim is made for Shakespeare (Bloom, 1999) and Dickens (Lodge, 2011). An updated claim applauds the writing in the tv-series *The Wire*, noting its ethnographic authenticity (Penfold-Mounce, Ruth, Beer, Favid and Burrows, Roger, 2011).

Oatley (2011) argues that we learn from storytelling in child's-play, by drawing on metaphorical images which equip people to make sense of their lives. No narrative tells one truth, each tells a version of a truth. And narrative invites the search for meaning. Where one thing can mean another the possibilities for interpretation and re-interpretation are inexhaustible. Oatley also shows that the narrative we run through our minds, in our retelling of the story, serves as a rehearsal for the action that we take in life.

The search for hidden truth, the appeal to abstractions, the use of language to mean something other – all of this features in religious texts. Kermode (1979) shows that the interpretive process is intended to subvert dominant conventions – they equip the weak to upset the apple-cart of the powerful. More than one parable does that. To interpret is to arrest attention, and the surprise completes the story[4]. All of this is attractive, says Kermode, because the call for our response is stronger than the call for our compliance. Ready-made interpretations, seeking compliance, tell us most about the interests the story is made to serve.

Storyboarding can illustrate much of what literary theory shows. It can pose questions, open perspectives, suggest meaning and rehearse action. But Kermode is signposting the possibility of capture. In careers work it happens where 'inspiring stories' shut out bad news, and 'labour-market experience' pretends to be generalisable information. Interpretation is taken away from narrator-and-audience and corralled behind ready-made boundaries set up by other interests. It would be rash to assume that storyboarding will readily evade such capture – resistance calls for an alert and independent professionalism (Law, 2011).

Neuro-science and culture

The value of a meaningful narrative is found, claims Kermode, in what we do rather than in what we know. That distinction is a reflection of Ricoeurean dissonance between experience and reality. For Kermode the tension is between 'volitional' and 'representational'. He writes in accord with neuro-science: there is no great survival value in being able to represent the truth, our hope is in being able to work out what to do. Educators might speak of this in terms of skill rather than knowledge. Students recognise its relevance to their lives.

Boyd (2009) develops the idea: living organisms need survival strategies; and, in mammals, they are practised in play. In humans that play is an originator of creative activity – including storytelling. Drawing on a wide range of narratives Boyd illustrates how our interest in stories is culturally acquired and innately inbred – both are about what to expect in life.

Storytelling is a shared activity. A good yarn must be able to recount what is in the characters' minds and appreciate what is in the audience's. Audience attentiveness – mindfulness – is critical. But, both Kermode and Boyd agree, we attend because no interpretation is fixed or predictable. The story may be simple, but the telling and re-telling suggests more resolutions than, at first sight, seem obvious.

Literary theory comprehensively elaborates those possibilities: scene-setting offers clues that engage curiosity (Wood, 2008); plot complexity expands unexpected meanings and options for action (Jackson, 2007); on a wider scale and free of clichés, a story can inter-connect levels of experience, where an audience might even reach for a personal cosmology (McKee,

4 Kermode identifies story elements similar to turning-points: a moment which gives sense and structure to the whole; a fixed point requiring movement back-and-forth in the story; and a pressure point giving a clue to meaning.

1999)[5]; nonetheless different points-of-view provoke surprising reversals, disruptions and twists (Edgar, 2009)[6]; and much of what is needed to be known can be part-hidden, waiting to be discovered (Costa, 2010).

The search for meaningful narrative is embedded in genetics and culture. Storyboarding is useful when it finds that life-relevant meaning – however hidden it might at first have been, and however simply the story is told.

Neurology

Neurologist Damasio (1999) shares Boyd's starting point: living organisms need to survive. He characterises survival responses as sometimes opening up to stimulus, and sometimes closing down. He finds a number of levels at which people respond. The most-basic is core consciousness, avoiding pain and approaching pleasure. He shows how people incorporate this into a deeper and wider account of how things are, in what he calls autobiographical consciousness. Damasio uses the metaphor of 'a movie in the brain'[7]. It images how we each construct sequences of scenes, assembling significant impressions into an account of what is going on. He suggests more: we have the additional potential for being able to locate ourselves in that account, observing ourselves as part of the story. We are, then, witnesses to our own lives – in what storyboarding might make visible as predicated self.

Damasio's use of narrative imagery conceives a single account, unifying what paradigmatic thinking fragments. A movie shows self-with-others, and sets out a thought-and-feeling account, which scene-by-scene suggests action. Storyboarding's procedure – remembering, showing and futuring – are useful where it can represent this.

Iain McGilchrist (2009) further extends the thinking. He shows that the brain's network of systems is by no means in agreement with itself. For while the left brain has evolved to work with clear, convincing and unitary accounts of the way things are, the right brain is fitted to develop broad, subtle and empathetic accounts of the experience of those realities. Calling on history, he finds recent western cultures favouring left-brain ways-of-seeing. He dismisses 'male' and 'female' brain-hemispheres; but he sees finding meaning as at least as important as knowing fact. It implies the need for a radical correction in the way western cultures enable people to learn.

McGilchrist adopts a metaphor, where a 'master' has a right-brain commitment to beliefs that he can only partially demonstrate. That master has an 'emissary', driven by a left-brain commitment only to what can be demonstrated. But, in the west, the emissary over-enthusiastically betrays the master. The result is a lop-sided edifice in which the dynamics of belief are thwarted by the futility of knowing. McGilchrist speaks of Ricoeurean dissonance.

While McGilchrist finds dissonance between left-and-right brain, Blakemore and Frith (2005) work on higher-and-lower locations. Brain-imaging finds three important learning areas. Semantic memory, centred high in the cortex, assembles facts-and-factors – such as needed for 'academic' success. Procedural memory, activated at a deeper level, holds how-to-do processes and rehearsals – such as craft and technical skills. Episodic memory draws on the deepest levels of the brain, retaining our most significant memories[8].

Damasio is among the many behavioural investigators to conclude that memory is integral to identity. At the extreme, a person who is unable to remember a friend, exercise a skill, re-experience family-feeling – that person has lost contact with self. A corollary is that neglected memory curtails identity. And the reciprocal is that recovering memory is enlarging[9]. Yet, in formal education, episodic memory is neglected by a

5 McKee guides screen writers through a storyboarding-like beginning-middle-and-end format, characterising narrative as a mirror of memory.

6 Reversals, disruptions and twists can be turning-points.

7 Damasio's phrase sparked my first thoughts on three-scene storyboarding.

8 Our developing understanding of higher and lower brain function promises to be useful in discriminating recurring intuition from instinctive impulse – both best expressed in narrative terms.

9 That learning-for-living is enlarged through expanded community interactions has a substantial literature (Law, 2009).

programme devoted to facts-and-factors[10].

Storyboarding is designed to counter that trend. To be useful it must engage a network of different, and sometimes dissonant, learning: thinking and feeling in the same scene, habitual and challenging in the same episode, remembered and acted-upon in the same life.

What careers workers do

A story has the power to change lives; but it can also confuse, mislead and deceive. Yet storyboarding invites people to ascribe meaning and to find a purpose in stories. But it is the sense they make for themselves: meaning is not some other person's say-so, it is ascribed by a student or client for her or his purposes.

And, in that way, no worthwhile story represents a same-for-everybody 'truth'. It needs work, and that work is what the best of educators do best – asking questions. If storyboarding is any good it sets off a scrutinising conversation. And that questioning is effective when it is…

- enabling grasp –
  looking finds something worth seeing
- extending reach –
  seeing discovers learning-for-living
- becoming embodied –
  earning-for-living is embedded in identity

On enabling grasp: finding sustainable meaning is not quick-and-easy. It calls for mindfulness – not just looking and finding but considering until you are seeing meaning and purpose. Jean Piaget's research-based account of the construction of meaning is designed to enable this. It has been repeatedly applied to curriculum and is now supported by neurology (Law, 2010b). It can be set out as open questioning:

finding out: have you recalled enough to go on?…

sorting out: so that you can put what you remember into a useful story?…

checking out: where you can you get to what you need to probe?…

figuring out: so you see how things got this way and what you can do about them?

It is a process – not setting out information but inviting people to learn for themselves. It is critical thinking – probing that affects life-chances. It is germinal – ready to be voiced in different ways. It is progressive – each step relying on a preceding step. It is a two-way conversation – questions shaped by answers, answers by questions. It is interactive – between educators and students and others. It is doubly interactive – positioning the person both as a protagonist and witness. Its endpoint is action, part of our grasp on survival – on the savannah, at work and life-wide. Storyboarding needs no assumption that memories are accurate, only that they have been probed enough to lay hold of such sense-making.

On extending reach. Career learning needs to be taken from where it is found to where it is applied. It is not 'academic' learning, where application is contained in assessment settings. Career management needs more: if career learning is not yon-and-hither transferable, then it is not working. The requirement is that it reminds people of their lives so that their lives remind them of their learning. The evidence (Meadows, 1993; Maclure and Davies, 1991) is that transfer needs markers, signalling where in life it can be used. Useful markers come from role thinking, which positions a person in a location, with other people, and taking on tasks (Law, 2006). That extension can reach beyond narrowly defined work roles – its coding can include domestic, neighbourhood, citizen, and activist roles. And those interests can extend from the personal to the planetary. This is learning for life-wide living. And the image of 'career' not just as a race but also a journey (Law and Stanbury, 2009) needs that extent of reach. Careers workers looking for storyboarding partners must look for that breadth-of-mind in all parts of the curriculum, because it will only be possible to find it in some.

Such breadth of learning means taking one thing with another – opening up rather than closing down. Storyboarding encodes the futuring of learning as

10 We have more ways of engaging that learning-for-living than a subject-by-subject curriculum allows (Law, 2006).

'places to go', 'people to meet', and 'things to do'. Extended reach will enlarge possibilities – 'new places to go', 'surprising people to meet', 'unexpected things to do'.

On becoming embodied: However much a person might diversify the presentation of self, the storyboarding hypothesis is that some part of that person's inheritance and experience remains recognisable: we can change life-roles; but we cannot discard identity. Not that anything is fixed: neurology is plastic and learning can be re-learned. But all is embodied – not worn like a garment, attached like a brand, or purchased like a product, but existential.

We do not yet know whether using the physical imagery of drawing in storyboarding is significantly tactile: its movement, its surface, its feel. While drawing, are enfolding arms, hunched shoulders, poked-out tongues or screwed-up eyes evidence of embodiment? Maybe. But re-drawing until ready to be seen? Maybe as much an embodiment of identity as a fingerprint.

Asking 'why storyboard like this?' is useful student-helper conversation. But the most telling embodiment is in the careers worker's questioning. By seeing how an educator probes a story, students learning how to do it for themselves – the process is modelling. Bodily presence connects identity to identity – in tone, posture and expression. It is a two-way connection: the educator modelling an enquiring life, the student becoming disposed to question, to be curious about surprises, to take one thing with another, and – in finding a way forward – to take nothing for granted.

There is exponential growth in what there is to learn, and in the means to learn it. Anything remotely resembling a classroom is accordingly argued to be out-of-date. But, whatever classroom or consulting room can no longer be, each locates people and helpers in direct-and-personal connectedness. Storyboarding helps where it makes that shared presence an occasion for reflection on experience, questioning in disposition, and embodied for response. Would that be enlarging?: life-wide learning-for-living – life-long.

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