

Stuart, Kaz (Karen) (2009) Narratives as action research tools in interprofessional contexts. In: 33rd Collaborative Action Research Network (CARN) International Conference, 30 October - 1 November 2009, Athens, Greece. (Unpublished)

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# Stories and Narratives

Action Research Tools for  
Inter-professional Work,  
Youth Development and  
Impact Evaluation

# Story vs narrative

- Story = An account or recital of an event or a series of events, either true or fictitious. Stories are not necessarily grounded in reality.
- Narrative = A narrative is some kind of retelling of something that happened (a story). The narrative is not the story itself but rather the telling of the story. Narratives are grounded in reality.

# 3 contexts

- Professional development
- Youth development
- Impact Evaluation /Action Research /  
Narrative Inquiry

# Multi professional development

- Integrated services for children and young people (Children Act 2004)
- Mediate new identities (McKimm 2009)
- 'Glue' communities of practice (Wenger 2006)
- Embody situated learning

# Youth development

- Children and young people are facing complex multi faceted transitions (NCH 2007) and paradoxical transitions both a child and an adult (Balzagetten 2010)
- Transitions = developing new identities
- Culturally situated learning
- Experiential learning

# Impact evaluation

- Identifying learning and behavioural changes (Kirkpatrick 1975)
- Rich and multifaceted, offer new insights and collaborative techniques (Broussine 2008)
- Thick description (Geertz) + Multiple layers of analysis
- Validity not necessary, impartiality not a goal, 'truth' not sought.

How do you use stories or narratives?



# What is a story or narrative?

“[they have] plots and characters, generating emotions in narrator and audience through 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”. Gabriel (2000:239)

# Identity forming

- Processing experiences (Bettleheim 1976)
- Sense making tools (Boje in Simpson 2008)
- Intrinsic parts of being human (Maguire 1998)
- Emancipatory (Propp 1984)
- Represent our chosen 'life script' (Steiner 1974)

# Narratives as Experiential Learning / Action Learning

## Kolb 1984

- Active experimentation (plan)
- Concrete experience (do)
- Reflective Observation (review)
- Abstract conceptualisation (apply)

## McNiff 1998

- Planning
- Researching
- Analysing
- Conceptualising
- Doing something different

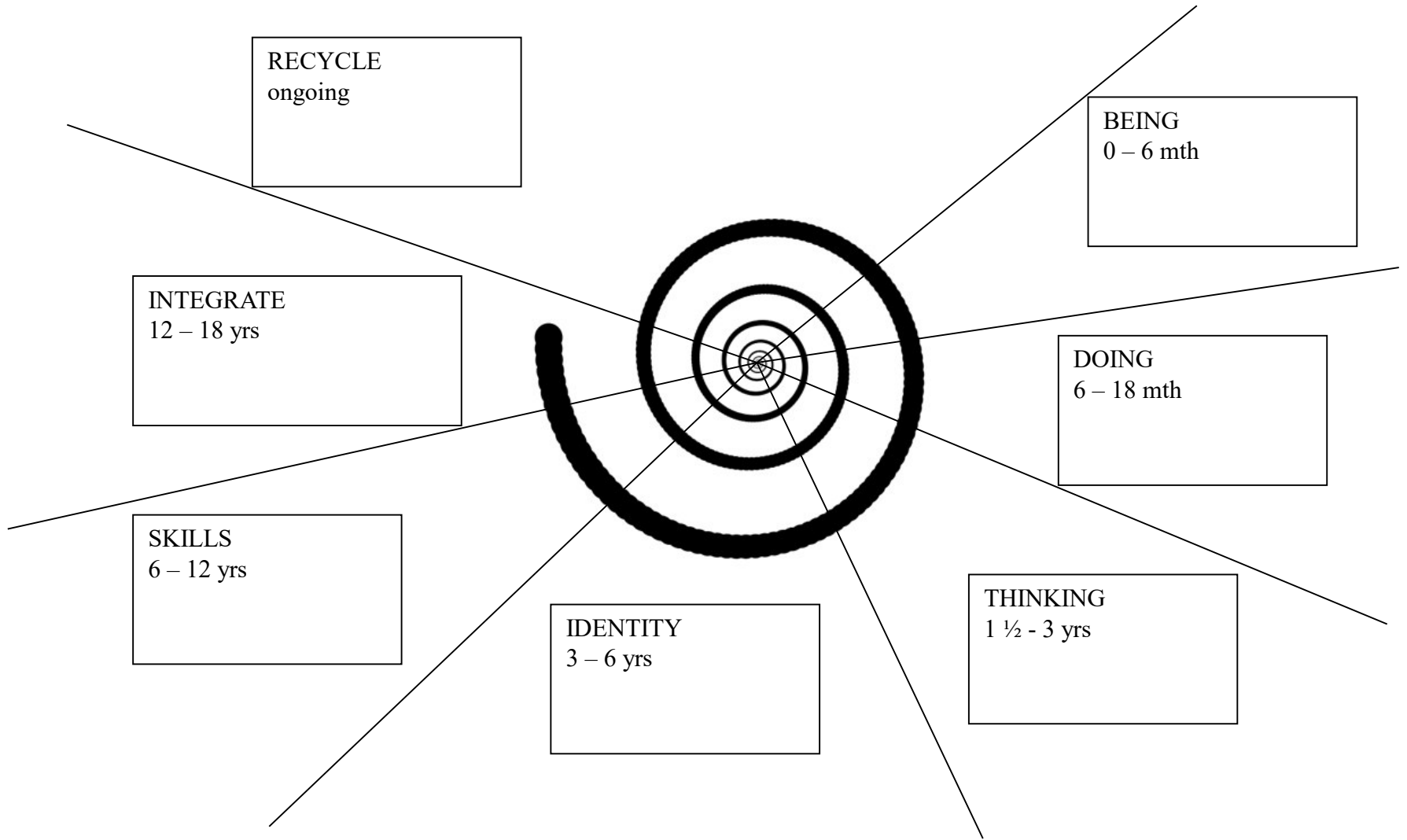
- “...stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell our experience. A story has a sense of being full, a sense of coming out of a personal and social history.... Experience .... is the stories people live. People live stories and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones”.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p415)

# Narratives as socially constructed situated learning tools

- Repositories of situated experience (Denning 2005)
- Practice development tools (Clandinin and Connelly 1994)
- Mediate shared understandings (Koch 1998)
- Laden with individual and group meanings
- Create communities of practice (Wenger 2006)

So lets do some...



Pam Levin Cycle of Development 1992

# My pedagogical approach

- Arrive into a magical storytelling room
- Build rapport and establish a safe emotional environment.
- Introductions and ice breakers.
- Model story telling as a personal introduction
- Invite them to decode the story
- Think (silently) of an example of their current situation
- Reflect (silently) which story (broad range) it would it be and why.
- At this point they share the story with a peer or small group of colleagues, but do not necessarily expose its link or relevance to real life.
- Plenary session and literally 'walk' through a developmental model (Levin's 1992 Cycle of Development is ideal).....



- Back in pairs or small groups, they reflect on what might be the needs of the central character of the story.
- Individual (silent) reflection again and consider the ending that they would like to happen in the story. They can add anything they like to achieve that – a new character, tool, setting, prop.
- Back in pairs they share their new amended stories.
- They individually reflect on the learning and write action points to take back and apply into their context.
- In a group review they share experiences and realisations to establish common meanings (without going back into the stories).
- Closing ceremony and departures.

# Multi professionals

- 40 international + 30 UK based
- “Your workshop just helped me to reach a difficult life decision that I have struggled with for years!”
- “Making a new ending for a story for me is now a coping strategy for things that stress me out!”
- “ I never thought I was so resourceful – but everyone always follows the pied piper. I don’t think that they are all rats though!!”
- “we nearly didn’t show up to ‘storytelling’, but are so glad that we did – what rich learning!”

# Youth Development

- The 'Twitts' in a mountain hut.
- My journey – narrative timelines.
- My favourite story ever...and why...
- Metaphorical teaching
- What I heard was...what it means to me was...
- If I could be any character.
- Sound bytes.
- 'My story'
- 'Happily ever after'

# Impact evaluation

- Video clips / sound clips on DVD / YouTube / website
- Transcribed stories / excerpts
- Thematic coding of issues
- Open coding of key areas of development
- Thematic coding of elements of story
- Discourse analysis

# Five new themes...

- Disclosure
- Self realisation
- Psychological depth
- Solution focused
- Validation, reframing, unconscious connections, 'new' and magic.
- [ beware metanarratives]

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