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Career conversations with occupational therapists: capturing the qualities of narrative

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ABSTRACT

Occupational therapists are known to use storytelling and storymaking in their clinical practice to assist people with disability to visualise and work towards a positive future which they, themselves, can construct. Little work seems to have been done using the same medium of storytelling with occupational therapists in order to explore aspects of their professional life, career and possible future. The aim of this study was thus to investigate the use of narrative in research and in occupational therapists' clinical practice, and to examine its potential for exploring occupational therapists' career stories.

Qualitative research was undertaken drawing on the biographical tradition, life history research and narrative inquiry for its methodology. A total of seven taped interviews were recorded with the agreement of two female occupational therapists who had been in practice for a minimum of eight years. In conversation, they told the story of their entry to the profession and of the ups and downs of their career as an occupational therapist. Emotions such as pleasure and pain seemed to be experienced as their stories emerged.

Their narratives produced rich data. Systematic analysis revealed characteristics of both the storytelling process and of the narrative itself. The nature of the occupational therapists' careers and the context in which they were played out became apparent. Despite there being only two participants, their stories illustrated how their work was strongly guided by their personal values. Their stories revealed that triumphs and setbacks at work could be experienced in different ways. Their reflective comments made during the storytelling process sometimes offered new insights into these experiences, so that telling the story became, for them, a way of reviewing the issues and seeing them in a new light.

The findings also showed that the therapists' career could not easily be isolated from their home life. The two appeared to be inter-dependent, and in this study were perceived to be in balance. Both occupational therapists expressed satisfaction about their professional and personal life and, as a result, were unwilling to project too far into the future about how their career might develop.

It was concluded that storytelling, and the reflection involved in producing the narrative, could assist a therapist to explore issues and dilemmas that occurred at work. The process of telling the story could help to redefine the situation in relation to the context in which it was occurring and could help to determine a satisfactory future course of action. It is possible that storytelling in a confidential relationship with another could assist the professional development, not only of occupational therapists but also of other health professionals. A forum, such as in a mentorship arrangement, could allow work-related issues, career options or opportunities to be explored for their costs and benefits and enable better informed career decisions to be made.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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IN ANTICIPATION

Providing narratives is central to our understanding of our position in time, of knowing where we find ourselves in the history of which we are a part. In our personal history, our interpretation of the present is a product of the past. What we have earlier experienced constitutes a part of our horizon, a limitation in our way of seeing. But at the same time, the interpretation we make at a certain point in time apprehends the future. Our life is interwoven along the three dimensions of time we call the present, the past and the future. We retell stories of what we have been through, but the narrative is told differently at different points in time; it changes with our changing interpretations. The narrative provides us with a way of imagining what has taken place.

Gustavsson (2004)

Preface

MY STORY

I have come to write this dissertation as an occupational therapist fascinated by the stories that people tell. Some years ago, as a clinician, I treated people from many different backgrounds whose stories of the impact of disability on their life often had a profound effect. Teachers, chefs, secretaries, hoteliers, mechanics, factory workers and many others came for treatment following some trauma in their life that subsequently affected their ability to engage in occupations at home, at work or in society. The story of their accident or illness (for example stroke, industrial injury, psychosis) and its impact on their domestic, work and leisure activities served to inform a therapeutic programme aimed at achieving a realistic future for each person. The meaning and value that each individual attributed to different aspects of their life emerged through their story and suggested the emphasis to be placed on different components of the therapeutic programme to ensure both personal needs and wishes were addressed.

Similarly, much earlier in my career and before becoming an occupational therapist, I worked as a police officer, often dealing with people in distress. Battered women who had left home, women and children who had been sexually assaulted, people who had been burgled or defrauded provided other stories of life. These people also needed help at a time of crisis that tended to involve some physical and/or emotional trauma. In each case, the individual offered a personal account of their perception of events and took stock of their present situation. For most people, formulating an idea of the future was difficult, but each had to re-assess the situation in which they found themselves and many had to start adjusting to changed circumstances.

There were clear similarities and differences for me between the two career roles. Both placed me in a situation where I was to hear some very personal and private disclosures

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within an individual's story that could frequently be of a distressing nature. Stories often involved physical and emotional experiences. Both demanded that I act and react according to the training afforded to me for the different career roles. As a police officer, I was providing an early, front-line response often related to the immediate safety and welfare of the storyteller and any crime that appeared to have been committed. As an occupational therapist I was providing a longer-term intervention programme based on an individual's personal story and expressed preferences about a future lifestyle for that person that would help determine realistic treatment goals. In some sense, both had a therapeutic side as I was dealing with human life and the aftermath of trauma. However, as a police officer I had predominantly to be concerned with extracting facts supported by evidence from the stories. As an occupational therapist I would be concerned with personal perceptions, interpretations, meanings and values that were revealed as a story progressed.

As a young police officer I had no theoretical understanding of the concept of 'storytelling' as a medium of communication. The vehicle of communication was normally the interview, either formal or informal. Common law, criminal law and the laws of natural justice normally informed the interview process serving as a framework for determining 'facts', 'truth' and 'evidence'. Later, during my career as an occupational therapist, storytelling eventually became an acknowledged tool of occupational therapy practice, its place in therapy underpinned and confirmed by research (Mattingly and Fleming, 1994)

In my own research earlier (Alsop, 1992) I had listened to occupational therapists' stories about their experiences within an occupational therapy department. These illuminated occupational therapists' observed work practices and helped me to develop an explanation of their behaviour within the organisation in which they worked. However, I only acknowledged their experiences, not their story. It was not until much later in my research career that I appreciated how biography, life history and storytelling might legitimately form part of a research process. Once I was introduced to, and then explored narrative inquiry I started to recognise the parallels between narration and storytelling in research and in occupational therapists' practice.

In the clinical situation occupational therapists encourage their clients to tell stories about aspects of their life, their life roles and occupations as they existed prior to the onset of disability (Mattingly and Fleming, 1994). An occupational therapist's assessment of the client and his or her current situation indicates how, and the extent to which, life has changed as a result of disability. Knowledge of the client's residual strengths and the meaning that he or she attaches to specific roles and occupations in life help the therapist and client together to create a vision of a possible future to which the client might reasonably aspire. This vision can be expressed as a story in a process of storymaking that Mattingly (1998: 2) termed *therapeutic emplotment*. Thinking in stories enables the therapist to create therapeutic episodes that are relevant to the story so that therapy is made meaningful for the client (Kielhofner, 1997).

Mattingly, an anthropologist who conducted research with occupational therapists, described how clients' stories contributed to the therapeutic process and how, when occupational therapists told stories, the activity assisted them in clinical reasoning and in their ability to make better informed decisions about treatment (Mattingly and Fleming, 1994). Mattingly's earlier research (Mattingly, 1991) had highlighted how problem-setting, an important phase of the problem-solving process (Schön, 1983) could occur through storymaking. Problem-setting through storymaking was later shown to be a creative act that served to produce a better understanding for occupational therapists of the therapeutic dilemma in which they sometimes found themselves, particularly with complex cases, and to establish a clearer picture of the specific problems to be addressed.

As Mattingly (1998) explained, occupational therapists also engaged with colleagues in storytelling for a variety of other purposes, for example, to entertain, to gossip, to confess, to argue, to reveal or to try to make sense of work experiences that were puzzling, powerful or disturbing. Mattingly also confirmed that stories had long been associated with practices of healing as part of both ritual and professional practice. A cursory glance at some of the literature suggested that health professions other than occupational therapy also recognised the therapeutic benefits of drawing on stories told by their clients in

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practice, for example, counselling (Payne, 2000), medicine (Greenhalgh, 1999), psychiatry (Greenberg *et al* 2003), family therapy (Freedman and Combs, 1996) and nursing (Johns, 2002). However, these professions do not appear to use storymaking in the same way as occupational therapists. In occupational therapy, storymaking not only establishes the specific problems to be addressed, but the collaborative process of envisioning a future. Creating a story together of what it might look like helps to refocus the mind in a positive way away from past action to future action, away from disability to ability, from healing to self-help, from dysfunction to function. The therapist might thus only be a catalyst for enabling the client to effect the change.

Similarities in the use of storymaking by occupational therapists and in the research process, where narrative was at their heart, began to emerge for me. It seemed that storytelling could be a method of generating data for addressing both therapeutic and research problems. A question that began to be posed by me, however, was how far could storytelling be useful in non-clinical situations? Was it possible for occupational therapists, who were used to storytelling and storymaking in the therapeutic sense, to make use of storytelling for their own benefit in circumstances other than those involving therapy?

Given my own interest in career, personal and professional development (Alsop, 2000a) it seemed reasonable to seek to investigate the qualities and potential uses of narrative though an exploration of occupational therapists' life stories that focused on their career.

Chapter 1

STORYTELLING IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY:
RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Locating the research

This chapter formally establishes the background to the study and the rationale for undertaking it. It provides an introduction to the way in which occupational therapists use stories in their clinical practice and raises further questions about the potential of narrative, storytelling and storymaking for gaining insights into the work, lives and world of occupational therapists.

Occupational therapy practice, life history and story telling

Occupational Therapists are health professionals who predominantly work in the public sector with people who, by reason of psychological, physical or learning difficulties, are limited in their ability to carry out normal activities of life and so to function independently in the context of their home, their work or in society. In order to facilitate change and promote clients' independence, occupational therapists, as part of everyday practice, encourage clients to engage in occupational storytelling. In this way occupational therapists can gain an understanding of the past and present significance of particular activities in the life of the individual. They listen to clients' stories of how their disability emerged and has impacted on their life (Mattingly, 1998).

Narrative, life history, story telling and story making have an integral place in the practice of occupational therapy (Kielhofner, 1997; Mattingly, 1998). Arguments abound that occupational therapists' ideological concern for the client must guide the choice of epistemologies used to investigate the lived experience of those encountered in practice situations (Larson and Fanchiang, 1996). When the ability of a person to perform familiar activities in daily life becomes impaired through illness, trauma or other health problem, self-concept and life plans have to undergo reformulation and the person's biography has to

be reconstructed. This requires occupational therapists to explore the meaning for the person of their impairment, their experiences of treatment and the possibilities for reconstructing their occupations, their selves and their lives in the future (Fleming 1991a, 1991b). Occupational therapists' practice implicitly or explicitly involves constructing and interpreting the person's life history as a chronological narrative that identifies and makes sense of important events in that person's life (Frank, 1996). As occupational therapists gain an understanding of life stories they begin to understand the person's world – a world into which they must insert therapy in order to bring about some transformation in that life (Helfrich and Kielhofner, 1994).

Frank (1996) explained that use of narratives by occupational therapists occurs as part of a larger movement to use narratives in fields such as history, sociology, anthropology, education, social work, psychoanalysis, counselling and psychotherapy. Media such as case histories, life charts, histories and stories have their place in practice to ensure that the person engaged in the treatment process has a voice and is enabled to provide an interpretation of events, discontinuities and difficulties in their life. That same voice has an opportunity to help define possible futures and identify a preferred future that becomes translated into realistic treatment goals, aims and objectives.

Not only do occupational therapists listen to stories in an attempt to work with the individual to gain a shared understanding of that person's world as a basis for planning treatment, they also tell stories. The nature of these stories was described in a study into clinical reasoning conducted by an anthropologist, Cheryl Mattingly, and an occupational therapist, Maureen Fleming in collaboration with clinicians in the USA during the late the 1980s (Mattingly and Fleming, 1994). The researchers described how occupational therapists used storytelling to talk about their cases informally over lunch, explaining that they moved between 'chart talk' and 'storytelling'. In 'chart talk' the focus was on the pathology – symptoms, impairments, treatment needs and goals, in order to present a biomedical picture of the person. The second aspect, 'storytelling', was based on the person's experience of disability and embraced the social context and the situation in which that person found him or herself.

The stories were complementary in that neither could be discarded in determining a future story and in seeking effective outcomes of the therapeutic process. The illness experience, however, individualised that person's situation. The therapist entered the life story to determine what role therapy was going to play in the unfolding story of illness and rehabilitation (Mattingly, 1991).

Occupational therapists think with stories, create stories, tell stories and interpret stories. Narratives have also been used by occupational therapists in educational processes (Ryan and Mckay, 1999) so emphasising the value placed on this method of communication by the profession. It can therefore be argued that storytelling is fundamental to the clinical practice of occupational therapy. Occupational therapists are familiar with the concept of storytelling and storymaking to the extent that they engage with it as part of their everyday practice. However, there is little evidence to suggest that storytelling has been used more widely with these individuals to explain their position as occupational therapists in their own career story. The focus of this study therefore is to be on the use of storytelling in relation to occupational therapists' own world and professional career.

Rationale for the study

Personal interest in this research has developed in several ways over time. Firstly, an earlier study (Alsop, 1992) provided insights into occupational therapists' role, values and behaviour in organisations. This took the form of an ethnographic, illuminative, case study focusing on how occupational therapists behaved in relation to policies and procedures within the occupational therapy service in which they were employed. Observations of, and conversations with, occupational therapists highlighted both their legitimate and underground practice and the ways in which they operated in order to meet the needs of their patients, and their own needs, based on their personal values. It also emerged, however, that for the majority of occupational therapists, the need to engage in professional development was important to them in order to maximise their potential to meet their patients' needs.

The earlier research (Alsop, 1992) also highlighted the relationship between occupational therapists' behaviour, in other words their *performance*, and the organisational context in which they worked. Contextual relationships are often attended to in research it seems, notably in ethnographic studies and case studies, as was the case in this research. The influence of context on people's lives commonly features in biographical studies and life history (see, for example, Abma, 1999) and has been noted in relation to careers and the employment context (Woodd, 2000) so may well emerge in the exploration of occupational therapists' career stories. Context is certainly important in occupational therapists' practice which is concerned with the relationship between the person and his or her performance within any environment (Christiansen and Baum,1997).

Personal interest in occupational therapists' professional development thus grew, culminating in a range of publications suggesting ways in which occupational therapists might learn and develop themselves professionally in their career and present evidence of their learning (Alsop, 1995a 1995b, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2001a, 2001b, 2002). However, the published work was not founded on evidence but on suppositions based on custom and practice. This left scope for more systematic study into occupational therapists' career and development needs.

Early exposure, through these doctoral studies, to the biographical tradition and to the use of storytelling as a way of generating data has led to an emerging awareness of the apparent parallels between the use of storytelling in the research process and the use of storytelling in the therapeutic process. Both aim to illuminate aspects of an individual's life. Stories, it seems, can provide insights into past experiences and meaningful events, can help to construct a realistic picture of the present and can offer hope in the form of a prospective story that will guide future action. Storytelling therefore seems to have a dynamic quality that also serves as a learning process because of its capacity to shed new light on experiences.

The use of narrative as a medium for understanding the past, present and future world of their clients may be well known to occupational therapists but there is less evidence that storytelling has been used to gain an understanding of their own professional world. Other studies have been conducted into occupational therapists' professional practice, for example (Hollis, 1997) and their life world (Finlay, 1998) but none has used narrative. So can storytelling offer a way of exploring the more personal aspects of occupational therapists' life, notably those associated with their own professional development and career progress?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate narrative as a research method and to critically evaluate the ways in which it might apply to occupational therapists' careers and professional development. A study of this nature would complement research that has already been undertaken into occupational therapists' clinical reasoning (Mattingly and Fleming, 1994), the use of storytelling and storymaking in the clinical process (Clark *et al* 1996; Mattingly 1998) and into occupational therapists' life world (Finlay, 1998). The intention here is to assess the qualities of narrative and its application to occupational therapists' work in ways that are related to them as individuals, employees and people with professional careers and aspirations.

The study aim was thus defined as:

> *To investigate the use of narrative in research and in occupational therapists'*
> *clinical practice, and to examine its potential for exploring occupational therapists'*
> *career stories*

Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation addresses two lines of enquiry in tandem: narrative and career. The structure of the dissertation is thus designed to maintain interest and focus on these themes in parallel with each other, and to show, where appropriate, how they interrelate.

This chapter has formally established the rationale for the study and introduced storytelling and storymaking as features that are integral to occupational therapists' practice. In the next

chapter, literature related to the nature of narrative and its various uses in medicine, social work, therapy and research is critically examined. In chapter 3, the literature review continues, exploring narrative as used in fields of organisational research. The chapter also examines literature related to the concept of career. Chapter 4 introduces the biographical tradition and the way in which it has developed as an acknowledged research approach within the interpretive paradigm. This chapter further develops the idea of narrative inquiry and of storytelling as a potential method for generating qualitative data around aspects of a life, and around career in particular. Chapter 5 establishes the basis for adopting narrative inquiry as the approach of choice and outlines some of the methodological dilemmas that impacted on the study. Chapter 6 then describes the research procedures, addressing such issues as the identification of participants, ethical matters, interview strategies and data analysis processes.

Chapter 7 introduces the participants and, with chapter 8, presents the findings of the study, firstly offering critical and reflective comment on the participants' stories and subsequently on how the individuals define themselves in relation to their career. Chapter 9 offers further discussion on the characteristics of narrative and its potential for enabling health professionals to gain insights into their career. Links are made between the processes of storytelling and continuing professional development. Chapter 10 offers personal reflections on the research process and highlights some the strengths and limitations of the study and some of the learning that has taken place.

Chapter 2

NARRATIVE AND STORYTELLING IN PRACTICE

Introduction

In the summary of her opening chapter about the history of the profession of occupational therapy Ann Wilcock (2001:17) claimed that the book would 'tell the story of how engagement in meaningful and satisfying occupation has been used for health and well-being throughout the existence of humankind'. She continued by making reference to stories told by the ancients, stories of occupation for health told in the Bible and stories of occupation told by medical historians. These references to stories may not be coincidental for a profession that appears to place so much emphasis on storytelling as a therapeutic process.

As will be discussed shortly, storytelling appears to have many functions. The use of narrative in medicine, therapy and social work indicates that it has a remedial function. In a complementary way, narrative inquiry enhances knowledge and understanding through systematic research. Narrative could also be viewed as a medium for learning and professional development, opening up avenues for facilitating personal, professional and organisational change. The next two chapters will explore these premises.

This chapter first sets out some of the characteristics that distinguish narrative from story and storytelling and then explores some of the ways in which narrative and storytelling are understood and used within different forms of therapeutic practice. The use of story in organisational settings is addressed in chapter three.

The nature of narrative and storytelling

'Storytelling has always been an art of the people, of ordinary folk' used primarily, but not exclusively, for entertainment (Gabriel, 2000:9). Storytelling has been referred to as an act

or oral performance that is socially situated, where people give meaning to their experiences (Abma, 1999). Emerging stories are not representations of experiences but interpretations of experiences that can lead to alternative perspectives and new insights. They are also dynamic in that stories are often transmitted in conversations where they may be subject to change, depending on the circumstances (Boje, 1991). Stories also have transformational powers. They can act as a mirror for the storyteller, reflecting back and prompting change (Abma, 1999). Storytelling is one form of narrative referred to by Gabiel (2000:3) as 'a craft', by Sandelands and Boudens (2000) as an 'art' and which, according to Thomas (1995b) develops in the young both as an art and craft during language acquisition.

Various authors have noted differences between narrative and story. Abbott (2002:12) defined narrative as 'the representation of an event or a series of events' where these take place through the course of time. Story, by contrast, is something that is delivered through narrative but which appears to pre-exist it (Abbott, 2002:32). A narrator tells, or re-presents, a story that happened in the past, looking back on events that form the story. The narrator might even be a character in that story (Short, 1996). Johns (2002) held that when a story is re-presented as narrative it tends to become more sophisticated, more structured and more organised and, compared with a story, can be more selective in what it contains. Narrative thus has a role in 'organising, maintaining and circulating knowledge of ourselves and our worlds' (Freedman and Combs, 1996:30). As stories that provide the knowledge are mediated through narrative, they can be at the mercy of the way in which they are told (Abbott, 2002). Consequences of stories and new possibilities for the future can be reflected upon before a story is told thus distorting the picture of the experience that is ultimately presented to others (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).

Gabriel, a researcher, (2000) claimed that not all narratives were stories. He distinguished between accounts of events that were factual or descriptive and aspired to objectivity, and stories that had some emotional effect. Johns (2002) distinguished between story and narrative, claiming that narrative involved reflection. He saw narrative as part of a

reflective, self-conscious and interventionary process that required abstract thought. This suggests that the act of narrating a story could be a more deliberate and controlled affair than just storytelling. Johns claimed that narrative told the story, traced an unfolding journey and paid attention to steps along the way for their significance within the whole journey. Johns also noted how narrative could be persuasive and could accommodate both contradictory experience and the complexity of experience.

Mattingly (1998:105) commented that scholars have turned to personal narrative to explore their informant's sense of self as this related to, or contrasted with, culturally shared meanings. She noted that personal histories, unique experiences and private ruminations could be revealed through narrative. Narrative as stories of experience could also reveal human character. Narrating a story tended to bring personal experiences into the open to be made coherent and to be developed into a culturally intelligible script.

Narrative can appear in many different forms, both written and oral. One of the key observations of narration that Smith (1994) made, and Mattingly (1998) endorsed, was that the very act [of narration] forces a self examination that changes both the self and possibly the life itself. Aspinwall's (1985) formal study of 'Sarah's' life and teaching career demonstrated how change might be brought about by narration. Reflective practitioners such as 'Sarah' commonly face situations of uncertainty, instability and uniqueness (Schön, 1983). The reflective act of narrating to present a biographical account of experiences could bring into focus those aspects of practitioners' lives that are unique and problematic. It could offer the opportunity to frame them and bring clarity and further understanding to a previously hidden story.

Storytelling has been with humanity for generations. Many authors (for example, Abbott, 2002; Mattingly, 1998) have identified storytelling as a legacy of Aristotle. Primarily a form of communication, storytelling has been used to teach, to explain, to entertain, to enlighten, to illuminate and to serve as a warning, an example or a moral tale. It has helped to perpetuate myths and folklore and reinforce cultural norms and traditions. Storytelling in

many forms, such as sermons, poetry and dramatic performances, have all served to convey 'messages' to audiences. Even pictures and mime, as 'silent' stories, communicate sentiments and emotions. Through stories, information is given, relationships are discovered and lessons can be learned. Stories are thus part of everyday life. They convey cultural values and personal experiences and meanings as well as the social conditions and influences of the time (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

Reason and Hawkins (1988) described a story simply as any event retold from life that appeared to carry some meaning. They recorded how storytelling enhanced cooperative inquiry. 'Expression', as part of the collaborative communication process, became the medium through which the meaning of experience manifested itself. These researchers chose to use storytelling to explore professional experience in the worlds of therapy, education and organisations, recognising the versatility of the approach. Narrative as a process of inquiry is explored later. However, it seems important here to note that the act of predefining a story as an event that carries meaning suggests that the storyteller acts as the first filter, pre-judging the significance of the story for others.

Key events may be selected by the storyteller to illustrate as well as to illuminate, in other words to provide a key message or warning for a wider society. Key events may also become turning points or points of transition in a person's life, told as stories that prompt a change of direction. Narratives of lives compiled over time are likely to comprise many stories of events. Stories within a narrative may be self-contained, having a plot and a beginning, middle and end and may be viewed as a sequence of events that are significant for the narrator. They may be factual accounts of events or stories that are dramatised and embellished to add interest or to emphasise significance within a longer life story. A point made by Sandelands and Boudens (2000:60) however, was that 'stories have a unique epistemological significance' in that stories can tell a truth about feeling but tell a lie about facts because a story states facts but exemplifies feelings so the emotional truth of a story becomes evident.

Despite the emotion, narratives are said to be concerned with action (are event-centred) and 'social doings' (are experience-centred), and tend to be about unpredictable or unintended consequences of action. The narrative offers the meaning to others, often through 'evocation, image [and] the mystery of the unsaid' (Mattingly, 1998:8). It has powers of persuasion, seducing the listener into the world it portrays. It could thus be an emotional experience for both narrator and listener where truth is difficult to establish.

Narratives are therefore stories about 'events' and 'experience'. The art of narrating can work up or play down an experience within a social situation that has particular meaning for the narrator at any one time. Events omitted in the storymaking process, either by default or design, may even be as significant as those placed at centre stage. As Atkinson (1998:7) pointed out, 'Storymaking makes the implicit explicit, the hidden seen, the unformed formed and the confusing clear'. However, what is offered is still in the gift of the narrator, and what is emphasised and expanded, and what is dismissed as irrelevant or unimportant will all contribute to the interpretation of events.

In the literature, much emphasis is placed on the narrator as the person who composes and tells the story. However, Mattingly also raised the question of the part played by the listener and his/her reciprocal role as a co-constructor of meaning. As the narrative is made public and open to scrutiny, its meaning can be shaped by others who have played no active part in the event on which the story is based. From an active listener who has been gently teasing out the story, the researcher becomes an active participant in the interpretive process.

Rossiter (1999) suggested that there was much potential in using a narrative approach to understand adult development and the place of learning in people's lives. Life stories comprise that which is remembered from the past, and a constructed understanding of it, but with recognition that any interpretive approach is based on the assumption that lives change somewhat unpredictably over time (Cohler, 1982). Narrative helps in the

understanding of a purpose to life (Polkinghorne, 1988) and of the development and change over the life course as self as an unfolding story (Rossiter, 1999).

In narrative, memories emerge that are sifted, selected and reconstructed (Irwin, 1996). They are expressed as a recollected story, richly elaborated, detailed and complete. The future, in contrast, is a projected scenario that is likely to be based more on hope. It will be vague, sketchy and incomplete (Crites, 1986), a story that has yet to be lived. It may be planned in some form or other in order to meet personal aspirations or goals, or to serve as a stepping-stone to another future. Alternatively, there may be resistance, particularly to any learning that has to take place, if continuity is threatened by change.

The present, the time at which the story is told, is the meeting place between past and future, the decision point between continuity and transformation (Rossiter, 1999). Stories may make it possible to analyse and diagnose problems (Brown and Duguid, 1991) and understand developmental change, transitions and transformations, the part played by learning and the meaning of the learning experience. They present as much of an opportunity to individuals as to communities and to the listener as to the storyteller to use the storytelling process itself as a learning experience as incidents in the past are revisited, recollected, recounted and re-interpreted.

Narrative in medicine

As noted earlier in this dissertation, a number of healthcare professions have claimed to use narrative in different ways as a basis for their work. This appears to stem from a belief that individuals who have a health-related problem can be best understood and assisted by paying close attention to what is said, and what is not said, in the stories they tell. From the stories, emerge the factors that will guide a therapeutic programme.

Psychiatry is one of the fields of medicine in which stories could inform practice yet it appears that psychiatrists are still reluctant to engage with stories. According to Clare (2003), his psychiatrist colleagues needed to take more note of the human story. Clare commented in the Foreward to *Narratives in Psychiatry* (Greenberg *et al*, 2003:7) how

medical practice could be best informed by 'paying the most careful, systematic and informed attention to what, why and how the patient is saying what the patient has to say'. He was advocating that psychiatrists should not lose sight of the person amidst technological and laboratory-based assessments and contemporary medical treatments. Illness, he claimed, had become separated from life, 'an external phenomenon to be tamed and despatched without too much attention being paid to the human being who is trying to make sense of what is happening, to absorb the experience of being ill within the overall context of his or her life'. Clare suggested that inside the patient was everything that was needed to guide therapeutic intervention and encouraged his colleagues to listen more carefully during their interactions with patients.

Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1999:48), writing on narrative based medicine, explored the qualities of narrative, suggesting how it provided 'meaning, context and perspective to the patient's predicament', not only offering an holistic approach to assessing a patient's problems but also assisting in generating an understanding of the situation that cannot be arrived at in any other way. The very need to highlight its potential suggests that narrative is not always drawn upon in medicine in the diagnostic or therapeutic process. The current focus on evidence-based medicine could be said to render the patient's story irrelevant because commonly experienced symptoms fall neatly into a diagnostic framework that dictates a particular regime of tests and treatment based on perceived best evidence. Those whose symptoms fall outside the parameters of diagnostic boxes may have a story to tell that might suggest other courses of action, yet it is possible that no-one wants to hear the story (Greenhalgh, 1999). Greenhalgh advocated that clinical judgements should be based on an integrated approach using evidence within an interpreted story. This was endorsed by Koliadin (1999) who commented that narrative-based thinking, with a bit of common sense, might lead to a better vision of reality than a vision generated by evidence-based science.

Interestingly, Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1999) reflected on the lost oral tradition of myths, legends and stories as the means by which early medicine was practised. Even though it

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might still be thriving in non-Western societies, Western society seemed to have forfeited the skills of listening to, appreciating and interpreting patients' stories in favour of more scientific approaches to medicine. Valuing the experience of the individual appeared to have been neglected as greater reliance was placed on technological and laboratory tests. 'Illness scripts' (Greenhalgh and Hurwitz (1999:49) produced in the clinical encounter and repeated as stories to medical colleagues are referred to as aids to medical education rather than as media through which a patient's ill health experience might be better understood. Di Gallo (1999) responded with the point that in mental health research, narratives may generate new hypotheses about how people cope with traumatic experiences, so reinforcing the educative value of listening to narrative in practice.

Despite the efforts of advocates of narrative, such as Clare, Greenhalgh and Hurwitz, it could still be suggested that the medical profession finds it difficult to do anything other than acknowledge and process medical symptoms and the results of scientific tests using the medical mode of thinking that places such information into diagnostic categories, and ignores the individual experience of ill health or well-being. Even if stories were to be listened to, what then? The tendency of the medical profession is to determine a diagnosis and treatment plan unilaterally. There is little suggestion that treatment is based on a new or negotiated story that both parties create and share. Greenhalgh (1999) indicated that more attention would need to be paid in the future to negotiated decision-making where a story is created to determine future possibilities from which to make an informed choice. Some professions seemed to have adopted this approach whereas others have yet to do so.

Narrative in social work
There seems to be a similar scenario in social work. Richards' (2000) study highlighted the problem of assessing older people with reported functional problems. The needs-based assessment used was found to be rigid and it tended to sideline the individual's story often leading to misinterpretation of the real need. This sometimes resulted in inappropriate and unwanted interventions as the individual's insights into the real problem were marginalized. In the bureaucratic system referrals were categorised as 'inability to cope' or

'person at risk' suggesting 'helplessness and passivity' on the part of those seeking help although the individual's story at interview often revealed a very different picture.

Here again, a system that was intended to be a streamlined service for the collective population appeared to fail individuals because no-one listened to their story. The process appeared to have a disempowering effect on those concerned and to ignore the potential value of a personal perspective.

Narrative in therapy

Various professions do, however, claim to use narrative selectively and effectively in their practice. Occupational therapists, psychotherapists and psychiatrists use it in varying degrees in therapeutic situations. They involve patients in the process of storytelling and sometimes in storymaking to help define and resolve problems. Narrative therapists, however, use a distinct approach to counselling that relies on storytelling in their practice.

Narrative therapy 'centres people as the experts in their own lives,' as people who 'have skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives' (Morgan, 2000:1). Morgan explained that narrative therapy tended to be understood through different themes that included, for example, particular ways of understanding people's identities, ways of understanding the problems and their effects on people's lives, ways of talking with people about their lives and problems and ways of understanding the therapeutic relationship. Storytelling not only set the scene and helped define the problem, but it also helped map the direction of a journey that would help address the perceived problem.

Narrative therapy is based on the premise that people tell improvised stories of their lives that describe experiences in many social situations. These stories emerge from personal experiences but are influenced by the social context in which a person lives and by the language, concepts and assumptions that are embedded in that culture. Stories vary according to the audience. Stories may not necessarily be complete. Details or chunks may

be omitted, so providing a rationalised or edited story. Stories position people in their world. People thus live naturally by stories. If, however, a life is affected adversely by stories that are uncomfortable, dissatisfying or disempowering in ways that prevent people from engaging in preferred stories and ways of being, then they may seek help. Narrative therapy involves re-storying in order to assume another perspective on life, or another position or a different relationship with the problem (Payne, 2000). In order to facilitate this change, those involved in narrative therapy see themselves as 'interested people' who are skilled at asking questions, at helping people to notice restrictive cultural stories in their life, and at working at enriching people's personal life narratives (Freedman and Combs, 1996).

In a similar way, 'illness narratives' are stories generated by people whose problems arise from the experience of disease or illness (see for example Weingarten, 2001). Weingarten however, rather than dwelling on the negative aspects of these narratives, sought ways of classifying illness narratives to provide a way of understanding the situation and approaching the illness in a positive frame of mind. She highlighted three classification systems. The first, she explained as *Coherence, Closure* and *Independence.* Narrative coherence is described as the interrelationship between plot, character, roles and themes or values that leads to clarity (coherence) or lack of clarity (incoherence) in dealing with the situation. Narrative closure is the degree to which people understand the illness and so know how to respond to it. Narrative independence is the relative interrelatedness between one person's narrative and another. In families, the relationship can be quite strong. Assessing a personal illness narrative against the classification criteria can provide an explanation for problems experienced and may help set a direction for some resolution.

Secondly, Weingarten drew on the work of Frank (1995) who categorised stories based on the experience of the storyteller. Three terms were proposed, *Restitution* narratives, *Chaos* narratives and *Quest* Narratives. In restitution narrative the focus is on diagnosis and treatment. Chaos narrative seemingly describes feelings of being out of control, being

swept along by the tide, instability. Quest narrative, on the other hand, purports to be narrative that seeks insights from which something might be learnt.

Weingarten, after consulting Gergen's (1994) work, then proposed other labels, describing *Stability, Progressive* and *Regressive* narratives. These mirrored the direction, or lack of it, of the disease or illness. Weingarten acknowledged that there could be other, equally valid, ways of categorising narratives. Having some method of framing stories had helped her deal with her particular illness narrative. Rather than feeling trapped inside, condemned by the illness, classification had given her a perch outside the illness narrative, so as to look at it, work in partnership with it, and so deal with dominant discourses that might otherwise marginalize her voice.

Narrative Inquiry

One way of determining and understanding the nature of individuals' existence in a social world is through processes of inquiry that respect, and are respected for acknowledging the human voice and interpretations of individual experiences. Personal accounts that are placed in a social and historical context provide rich stories from which society can learn. Plummer (1983) argued that such accounts are ignored at our peril. Reflective accounts, where meaning is constructed and reconstructed through dialogue, can be transformational (Abma, 1999) for both the individual and the society in which they live.

There seems little doubt that narrative inquiry has increased over the last few decades. In many and varied studies, the stories that people have recounted have provided insights into their existence, their inner self, their personal life, their social group and their history. Early research focused on historical incidents and events, for example Thomas and Znaniecki (1927). Later research has addressed concepts such as love (Haavio-Mannila and Roos, 1999), loneliness (Bennett and Detzner, 1997) and criminal behaviour (Maruna, 1997) among others. Learning (personal, social, organisational and transformational) has been the subject of research using narratives of individuals in fields such as education (Thomas, 1995a) management (Reason and Hawkins, 1988) management education (Gold

and Holman, 2001) health (Mattingly, 1998; Abma, 1999) illness experience (Vickers, 2001) and occupational transition (Jonsson *et al*, 1996). It is possible that the increasing popularity of narrative research is due partly to the versatility of the approaches used and partly to their increasing credibility within the world of research.

Ellis and Bochner (2000:744) claimed to turn to narrative inquiry as it seemed to offer an alternative approach to research that involved a relationship with the participants that was more personal, collaborative and interactive. It permitted a focus on human experience, meaning and the choices made by individuals living in an unpredictable world. Through the medium of stories it was possible to explore 'complexities of lived moments of struggle' and attempts made to regain continuity and coherence.

Reason and Hawkins (1988:80) argued that the expression of experience and thus enquiry into meaning, was an important but neglected aspect of research. From these observations made more than a decade ago, meaning and interpretation in research have experienced a revival (Thomas, 1995b) and the discovery of meaning now seems to be the central reason for storymaking and for the use of narrative in the research process. Lieblich and Josselson (1997:xi) commented that to uncover, describe and interpret the meaning of experience was now a common quest of those from a variety of disciplines who used narrative in their research.

Narrative in organisational research has already been highlighted in the work of Czarniawska (1997) and Gabriel (2000) and will be reviewed further in the next chapter. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) took their own work on the use of narrative in educational research and compared it not only with that of Czarniawska (1997) but also with Polkinghorne (1988) in psychology, Geertz (1988) and Bateson (1994) in anthropology and Coles (1989) in psychiatry to illustrate the variations in use of narrative in research. They reinforced Reason and Hawkins' perception of narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experience through collaboration between researcher and participants, over

time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. Simply stated, they said, 'narrative inquiry is stories lived and told' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:20).

While similarities are relatively easy to identify, differences in the way in which narrative has been used might also be noteworthy. Coles and Czarniawska took rather more interest in the educational value of research and the place of learning, either through drawing out theory from practice (Coles, 1989) or in promoting organisational learning (Czarniawska, 1997). Both Polkinghorne (1988) and Payne (2000) claimed narrative as the basis of their work with people and their lives. Narrative was used as a means of drawing out an understanding of actions or behaviour. Polkinghorne took it further, attempting a form of narrative research. Geertz (1988) and Bateson (1994) took an anthropological perspective dealing with ambiguity, assumptions, values and beliefs, and adapting to difference thereby learning as a narrative anthropologist.

Clandinin and Connolly (2000:51) proposed a framework that they termed 'a three dimensional narrative inquiry space' using the dimensions of *personal and social* (interaction) *past, present and future* (continuity) and *place* (situation) that might be used with any inquiry. They linked this to earlier observations where they described four directions in an inquiry, namely *inward* (internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions) *outward* (the environment) *backward* and *forward* (temporality, or past, present and future). To do research is thus to experience simultaneously these four directions and to seek answers to questions that point to the different ways (Clandinin and Connolly, 1994).

Thomas (1995b) reviewed some of the history of storytelling as a feature in teachers' lives and claimed that teacher-focused research studies have, over time, provided a medium through which teachers could express themselves and make statements about their personal and professional lives. Thomas identified a number of modes in which stories might be written, including journals, logs, diaries, vignettes, critical incidents, life histories and autobiographies. Teacher narratives, he suggested, were vehicles for drawing out aspects of

accumulated experiential knowledge. Stories that are recorded in one of the above modes are, however, only likely to provide further insights to the author until disseminated in another mode to a wider audience. Nias and Aspinwall (1995) disseminated their research into teachers' careers and the subjective reality of being a teacher. Interview data, they reported, not only provided them with insights into teachers' lives, it also enabled them to make connections about teaching and the experience of being a teacher. Goodson and Sikes (2001) claimed that research that involved life story work could enhance professional collaboration and develop professional practices.

Storytelling has long been seen as a powerful vehicle for communication and, on the face of it, an effective medium through which authentic information about people and situations might be obtained for research purposes. However, historically, storytelling work has been described as unscientific, full of bias or entirely personal (Koch, 1998). Koch advocated that it was essential to pay attention to the credibility of the research data and to address carefully the question of rigour. Allied points and cautionary notes were also made by Johns (2002) in relation to validity and Gardner (2001) in relation to memory.

Narrative as a form of learning

Almost without exception, the messages that emerge from literature about narrative include those that reveal insights into events and experiences and that can have transformational consequences. Transformation might have a therapeutic value such as learning to understand and cope with bereavement and loss whether this be individually or collectively, such as after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11th 2001. The telling and retelling of stories that relate to such catastrophes offer a way of starting to come to terms with feelings of loss, of dealing with them and of creating a direction for the future (Fairbairn, 2002).

Fairbairn also explained how hypothetical stories could be used to serve a different form of learning. Hypothetical stories could prompt discussion, deliberation and debate around examples of ethical and moral dilemmas that individuals, such as health professionals,

might come to experience in real life. As the stories are explored, new insights tend to emerge. The views held by other people and the reasoning process in which individuals engage in order to address the problem help develop new perspectives and understanding. Thus, the experience promotes learning and professional development.

Arnett (2002), whilst exploring the essence of some of Freire's work on pedagogy, referred to narrative as a form of participatory learning. Freire's communication ethic advocated story as the starting point of communication as a way of engaging all parties in the process. Similarly Brown and Duguid (1991) had earlier reported on organisational learning that occurred as groups of people came together, told stories that were meaningful in relation to a specific problem or project and used their collective knowledge to solve problems. They thereby learnt together as a community.

People with ideas come together in dialogue and engage in reflection and action. Learning through dialogue emphasises fellowship and solidarity (Arnett, 2002: 492). Yet learning can be restricted if there are competing visions or tensions between different classes of people as they attempt to communicate with each other. As Arnett (2002: 498) reported, 'narratives of privilege exclude the disadvantaged from participation, but a story-centred communication ethic at least attempts to find common ground through storytelling'. Through the encounter with a narrative, an individual shapes and refines their sense of the other person, as one person's story is received through the lens of another person. There is danger, however, in that there is risk of making the story of another person what the listener wants it to become (Cottle, 2002).

To return to occupational therapy, examples are beginning to emerge of how storytelling is becoming useful not just for therapeutic purposes but also in learning situations. McAllister (2003:231) explained how, in her doctoral work, she explored with clinical educators the development and resolution of challenges that students had presented to them on placement. Thoughts and feelings surfaced as stories were told. The reflections not only offered the researcher insights into how educators used their skills to deal with challenges,

it also offered the participants some insights into the emotions that the process evoked. It was recognised that storytelling brought to the surface 'buried emotions, anxieties and self-doubt' that required careful and sensitive handling in the process of research.

McAllister (2003:229) claimed that stories were rich in detail and provided 'valuable insights into the knowledge bases, values, expertise and reasoning at play in professional practice'. The use of story in her own research convinced her of the value of storytelling as a professional development tool.

Learning through storytelling does not only emerge through partnership and collaborative work. Autobiographical work also prompts experience-based learning as individuals make themselves the object of examination and reveal their story as an unfolding journey of self-discovery. Autobiography involves not just recalling the story but recreating it. As with other stories, however, the revelations depend on the extent to which the story has been modified or refined in its re-presentation (Erben, 1998).

This chapter has explored the nature of narrative and storytelling and some of the functions they serve in the health and social care professions. It has highlighted a range of topics that have been the subject of narrative research and demonstrated the increasing use of storytelling as a medium for learning and professional development.

This review has helped me to clarify my understanding of, and to distinguish between, the terms 'story' and 'narrative' even though some authors appear to use the terms interchangeably. 'Story', as I have come to understand the term, reflects the facts of the event or account of the experience that occurred. Storytelling I now view as the process of delivering a narrative at some time after the event or experience, whereby that narrative becomes a version of the original story reflected upon and personalised by the storyteller. The event or experience might be referenced, but in the process of narration, the story could be modified by the storyteller to accommodate the perceived needs of a particular audience or context, or in relation to what the storyteller wished to divulge, omit or

emphasise in the circumstances. The narrative could also be subject to change over the course of time and therefore I needed to view it as both temporary and dynamic. The narrative would be the interpretation of experiences but its presentation may either be polished and concise or reflective and deliberative, possibly dependent on the time lapse between experience and the narrative or the extent of the emotional impact of the experience on the person's life.

Needless to say that, as a researcher looking to engage occupational therapists in storytelling, I had to be aware that their version of events, or the meaning for them of the career experience, might only reflect what they wished me to know at that time. Their narrative might not present all the details. Aspects of the story might be marginalized or exaggerated for effect. The impact of an experience on the life of the individual might have been dulled with time or, alternatively, narrating it might resurrect the emotive side of the experience. Just as McAllister (2003) revealed, emotions previously buried but which re-surfaced in the research process, could require careful and sensitive handling, an aspect in my research that ethical processes would need to reflect.

The next chapter addresses storytelling within organisations and the way in which life and work histories help illuminate professional careers.

Chapter 3

ORGANISATIONAL AND CAREER STORIES

Introduction

It has so far been established that occupational therapists and other health professionals use storytelling in their work with people (Mattingly, 1998; Payne, 2000). Stories can emerge through work that takes place in settings, groups and organisations that are established purposefully to address selected problems related to ill health or lack of well-being. The emphasis here is on bringing about improvement in a life by envisioning and working towards a personally desired future with the narrator and listener working in partnership. Stories told through narrative inquiry and other educational processes can also facilitate understanding, learning, professional development and personal growth. Storytelling can generate feelings of emotion and can prompt ways of resolving personal dilemmas. The process can lead to the experience of transition and growth.

The multi-dimensional and multi-functional characteristics of storytelling have thus begun to emerge. This chapter moves further into the realms of narrative to explore storytelling as a feature of organisational life and then begins to make the links between work life within organisations, narratives and careers.

Organisational storytelling

There is evidence that storytelling occurs in organisations but it seems to operate for seemingly different purposes than those so far explained in this work. Those who have used narrative approaches in organisational research, for example, Czarniawska (1997) and Gabriel (2000) have revealed not only how stories perpetuate organisational culture but also how they can facilitate organisational learning and growth. An exploration of the dynamics of organisational life and of the feelings and emotions experienced by members

through their stories (Sandelands and Boudens, 2000) can promote learning and development of a more collective order.

According to Schein (1992) an organisation comprises a group of individuals who share the same culture and contribute to the achievement of common goals. It also serves as the emotional arena in which social dramas are played out (Fineman 1993). Gabriel (2000) suggested that a culture, as folklore, is partially reinforced by the stories told within organisations. Stories can comprise 'a unique combination of random events, interests, intentions and counter-intentions and existing routines' (Czarniawska, 1997: 92). They can help communities to pass their spiritual, moral and cultural heritage from generation to generation, they are vital for the instruction of young people, they generate behavioural expectations and they offer models of emulation and avoidance (Gabriel, 2000: 88).

Stories can reveal both individual and collective views of organisational life, raising issues for further debate and providing a clearer understanding of organisational reality and future direction (Gabriel, 2000). Stories can also reveal paradoxes or lead to multiple meaning-making from a given set of circumstances (Czarniawska, 1997) so that formulating a new direction with clarity becomes more difficult. Stories can also capture the imagination. Sharing imaginative thoughts with others can help members to rethink, redefine and reshape organisational life. Creative images might be enacted in new ways to effect change and prompt organisational learning and growth (Morgan, 1997).

Organisational narratives thus present the main ways of communicating and knowing within organisations (Czarniawska,1998). They can inform both practice and research and thus prompt change. Research through narrative can lead, not only to a deeper understanding of organisational realities, but also to insights into feelings and emotions experienced by people at work (Sandelands and Boudens, 2000). Organisations present the settings in which human behaviour and emotion can be explored (Fineman, 1993; Czarniawska,1997). They are the contexts in which human intentions have meaning, make sense and are best understood (Gabriel, 2000).

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Historically, Gabriel (2000) argued, storytelling has been seen as folklore and as a form of entertainment more within the realm of fantasy than in the realm of science. It could be subject to invention and elaboration and might therefore be considered unsafe as a means of developing scientific knowledge. Yet Gabriel, drawing from the work of Benjamin (1968), raised the issue of story being the product of personal experience and hence something to be valued. Benjamin had proposed that the devaluation of personal experience was partially responsible for the earlier demise of storytelling in society. Yet all has not been lost. Storytelling, Gabriel (2000:15) advised, could still be found in 'nooks and crannies of modernity, from the psychoanalyst's couch to the impersonal spaces of organisations'.

Sandelands and Boudens (2000) reinforced the fact that narratives have long been evident in the study of human experience. They, too, noted the turn of the humanities away from scientific claims of objective truth towards personal truths and unique perspectives on experiences. But they also saw narratives as being able to contribute to the discovery of universal human truths about the feelings and forms of human life.

So storytelling continues to provide vital and valuable insights into the nature of organisations and the experiences of their members through 'windows into organisational life' (Gabriel, 2000: 29). Some of the stories will evolve over time. Some will disappear, some will reappear, some will become embellished and be given new meaning. Stories are the raw material of research into organisations and their members. They serve as natural 'packages' for organising information of many different kinds (McAdams, 1993).

According to Czarniawska (1998) organisational studies take at least four forms: organisational research written in the mode of a story, organisational research through stories, organisational research that conceptualises both organisational life as storymaking and organisational research as story reading, and disciplinary reflection in the form of literary critique. These forms of research are generally to be found in case studies. Peters and Waterman (1982) referred to their book *In Search of Excellence* as being the product

of research that involved interviews with representatives of major organisations. However, the data were frequently referred to as stories through which examples of corporate excellence emerged. They were referred to by the authors as incidents of unusual effort on the part of ordinary employees.

So, it can be confirmed that stories abound, not only in therapeutic but also in non-therapeutic environments. Whereas storytelling in therapeutic situations enables individuals to make sense of trauma and drama in individuals' lives and to forecast a desirable future, storytelling in organisational settings helps to perpetuate the culture in those settings and also makes an important contribution to sense-making within the context in which they are told. These stories are of enormous value to researchers as they provide clues about the symbolic and emotional life of organisations capturing both typical and atypical states of affairs for examination (Gabriel, 2000). From his work in organisations, Gabriel proposed a definition of stories:

> *Stories are narratives with plots and characters, generating emotion 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, whose actual outcomes are often at odds with the characters' intentions and purposes.* (Gabriel, 2000: 239)

This definition is important as it helps with an understanding of the way in which narrators and characters in the story deal with situations that have an impact on their life.

Dalton (1989) explored the interplay between individuals and their employing organisations and how the organisational setting might promote or inhibit individuals' development and growth. He reviewed different models of career, noting how work-related organisations enabled individuals to find a role and identity within the organisation. He highlighted Schein's (1978) reciprocal model that acknowledged both the organisation's and individual's contribution that resulted in mutual growth.

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Hall (2002) claimed that careers provide people with a sense of meaning and purpose in their life, and quality of life. Work provides a setting in which a whole range of human needs can be met. For this to materialise, however, there has to be person-job fit. There can be no expectation of continuing loyalty if there is no interest in the job. This might partially explain how Peters and Waterman (1982) found stories of excellence within organisations. A career, however, is perceived as an individually tailored state of affairs related to work life that, for each individual, provides a unique set of experiences that might lend themselves to storytelling.

Careers in organisations

A career has variously been defined as 'a succession of related jobs arranged in a hierarchy of prestige through which persons move in an ordered sequence' (Wilensky, 1961: 523); 'the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time' (Arthur *et al*, 1989: 8) and 'the individual's sequence of experiences, roles and relationships in work-related organisations' (Dalton, 1989: 89). These definitions, whilst stressing the sequential nature of a career, also infer progression or development along some aspect of the life course.

Herriot (1992) perceived the idea of career to be dynamic and about change in the individual in view of the potential learning that could take place within employment. Arnold (1997: 1) claimed that careers encompassed a wide range of sequences of occupational experiences that do not necessarily involve promotion but that may cross occupational and organisational boundaries. His definition cast the career as something personal. It was, he stated, the 'sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person' (Arnold, 1997: 16).

It seemed important to Arnold to be concerned with how the different elements of a career unfolded over time, the extent to which they matched with the individual's interests as those interests changed over the life course and the extent to which they enabled the individual to develop new skills and realise potential. However, it had also to be

recognised that two people with the same career history would describe their career in very different ways in the light of the way in which, individually, they viewed the world.

Hall (2002) reviewed four ways in which career might be perceived: as advancement, as a profession, as a lifelong sequence of a job and as a lifelong sequence of role-related experiences. He challenged the notion of vertical mobility as a characteristic of a career claiming that this was not necessary for advancement. He concluded that a definition of a contemporary career needed to be much broader. The concept of career needed to be seen more as a process and he offered the following definition:

> *The career is the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours*
> *associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the*
> *person's life* (Hall, 2002:12).

Hall was concerned that the shift towards increased personal choice for those on career paths would be reflected in a career definition and so that success in a career could be measured in different ways. A definition could not be confined to seeing a career in terms of upward mobility alone and it could not be restricted to a series of positions within the same employment, it had to embrace mobility between jobs. It had to reflect the greater autonomy of individuals who changed jobs to further their career, who wished to pursue personal interests or who made personal choices around the needs of the family. A new definition of career had to reflect the current and dynamic social context of work. Hence his definition explained career as a life long process yet still focused on those activities that related exclusively to work.

Nicholson and West (1989) had earlier made the point that a more neutral term such as 'work histories' might be more suitable to denote sequences of job experiences, with the term 'career' being reserved for the sense that individuals made of them. Work histories would then become 'lifetime journeys', and careers would be the tales that were told about them. These authors recommended that work histories and careers be studied in three ways, firstly, as the meaning of work to individuals that shape their future; secondly, as

transitions, the periods between them and the adjustments that individuals must make, and thirdly, as elements of particular cultures.

From the literature it would seem to be important for individuals to seek a 'fit' between themselves and the environment in which they are to work although, interestingly, 'fit' could be interpreted a number of ways. Individuals might seek career moves to provide an increasingly better fit in what they do or they might shape their jobs to fit better with their personal interests or requirements (Savickas, 2000). Savickas also suggested that fitting work into individuals' lives might be more important than how individuals come to fit into occupations. These observations imply that individuals can and should be in control of their work, their career decisions and career moves. Career and employment choices might reflect a need to keep work and non-work in balance.

Woodd (2000) recollected Herriot's (1992) assertion that a career was just as much about beliefs, values, expectations and aspirations as the relationship between the individual and the organisation. She summarised some of the psychological theories that emphasised congruence between personality and environment but also acknowledged the limitations of development models that focused on life stages and ignored context. An individual, she argued, could not be separated from the context or their perception of it.

When it comes to the relationship between the individual and the job, Schein's (1978) concept of career anchors still appears to have some merit as it continues to be used in organisational research (Yarnell, 1998). Schein's definition of a career anchor was 'a pattern of self-perceived talents, motives and values that serve to guide, constrain, stabilise and integrate individual careers' (cited in Yarnell, 1998: 56). Derr and Laurent (1989) recognised how career anchors, and the nature and interdependence of internal and external factors could impact on individuals' career decisions. In the study reported by Yarnell (1998) biographical data on employees provided a basis for comparing individuals' career anchors, for example, those that dominate in the careers of men compared with those that dominate in the careers of women. The research went some way towards determining the

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factors that motivate different people so that effective career development strategies could be created for the workforce.

Marshall (1989) claimed that career theory was firmly rooted in male values. Dalton (1989) also reflected that only in the last half of the twentieth century had women become a significant feature of the workforce in organisations, intimating that women's careers may well have suffered, and may continue to suffer, from neglect. Gallos (1989) reviewed the gender differences in career perceptions and the dimensions that apply to women's careers, such as different life phases, carer responsibilities, the meaning of success and the way in which women's careers tend to combine achievement with nurturance. Kelly and Marin (1998) reported on the perceived conflict for women between work and family, job mobility and job satisfaction. Probert (1999) highlighted the disparity between men and women with regard to education, training and career development opportunities and Mavin (2000) questioned the relevance of traditional career development models to women whose working patterns were entirely different from those of men. It would seem that their career decisions had to take very different sets of circumstances into account.

Career decisions
Drawing on the work of Parsons (1909), Arnold (1997) reflected that a clear understanding of one's own attitudes, abilities and ambitions, together with a knowledge of the requirements and conditions of particular work opportunities, were factors that assisted individuals to make decisions about a future career. However, it was also noted that this understanding assumed some stability of both an individual's personality and the context of the characteristics of the work. However, it was likely that fluctuations in neither of these components were taken into account. Values, which Arnold (1997: 99) defined as 'abstract outcomes' a person wished to attain, and talents, which were described as attributes or pre-dispositions to being able to learn a skill, could also be considered significant and influence decisions either to pursue or reject particular careers or career paths. Yet, giving consideration only to personal traits failed to acknowledge other personal circumstances, such as domestic circumstances, that might enable or prevent the

pursuit of particular employment choices, especially those for women. Decisions must therefore be made in relation to a range of factors that have a bearing on individual circumstances. Women seemingly experience more conflicts than men in career decision-making (Hall, 2002) given the roles that they tend to play in domestic as well as work life.

Career: learning and life stages

Hall (2002: 90) has now argued for thinking of careers as 'learning stages'. This is based on the premise that a career is a process of continuous learning throughout working life as a person undergoes many role transitions. He went on to explain that the interaction between the person and the work environment produces opportunities, learning, attitudes, achievements and other outcomes that can affect the future course of a person's life and influence later performance. A career thus involves personal learning and development over time and this may be particularly so where frequent changes in employment take place. Arnold (1997) claimed that careers were becoming increasingly less predictable and life long learning was required for effective career management that could involve frequent moves from one employment situation to another. He saw transitions between one job and another as interrelated stages where each stage demanded something different of the individual. So careers are not necessarily experienced as smooth, continuous processes in life. There are different life stages, passages or seasons that separate out the components of a life (Plummer, 2001) and these may be reflected in the career path.

Narrative study of careers

Faltermaier (1992) commented on the revival of narrative methods in research and a growing interest in the interpretation of the worlds of individuals. Retrospective accounts of events, he suggested, made it possible to capture longer periods of a life without the need for a longitudinal study. It was possible to explore life events, changes, turning points and priorities in a life through the individual's perception and interpretation of events. Life events could be peripheral or central, or mark a turning point in a life, yet they could still be singled out from the flow of life changes and experiences.

Turning points could be defined as 'marked and discrete changes in the life world of an individual' that were meaningful and emotionally significant for the person but which ought to be analysed, not in isolation, but within the biographical and social context in which they occurred (Faltermaier, 1992: 50). A turning point might be related to education, employment, or some relationship and would normally indicate a change in circumstance, a change in direction or new challenges for an individual (Sloan, 1992). Career decisions might be counted among them. Transitions can occur (Nicholson and West, 1989), sometimes in relation to change of role. Events or interactional moments and experiences that Denzin (1989: 70) called epiphanies can leave marks on people's lives. Storytelling might help organise these experiences in some meaningful way.

'An understanding of career comes from an understanding of the stories people tell about themselves' (Young and Collin, 1992: 8) so studying careers means listening to people's narratives and interpreting them, but most importantly, interpreting them in context. The wider context might be the individual's life plan. The individual locates him or herself between the past and anticipated future and takes a reflective look back at the past, having been distanced from it for a while. There is temporary connectivity with the past to enable it to be integrated with the present and the future so giving it a place within a personal life history (Hopfl, 1992). Hopfl (1992: 19) considered the issue of time as a 'much taken-for-granted dimension of experience' in that throwing it into focus 'is to touch on a level of subjectivity that inevitably discloses aspects of the nature of being'. She continued by stating that 'since time is the ordering principle that makes sense of experience, to ask someone to tell you about their time is simply another way of asking them to tell you about themselves'.

So Collin and Young (1992) confirmed that careers could be explored through narrative. Thomas (1995a) provided some examples. Thomas claimed that narratives were vehicles for bringing out aspects of teachers' accumulated experiential knowledge in context-specific situations and that recurring themes could be identified.

These observations have reinforced for me the potential use of narrative inquiry for exploring the careers of occupational therapists. However, the importance of the situation in which a career is enacted and the inter-relationship between career and context have also been highlighted as a factor in sense-making of an individual's career. These, together, can contribute to an understanding of the meaning of work. Additionally, the relationship between the person and the job has to be recognized, as has the potential of these elements moving in and out of harmony. Changes in the environment could challenge the 'fit' and adversely affect the control that an individual had over his or her working life. This review has also raised awareness for me that a career may not be experienced as a smooth, continuous process and that each stage and each transition may bring different challenges for the individual. There is a need for accommodation between the person and the environment and if this does not occur there may be serious consequences.

This chapter has examined storytelling as a feature of organisational life and as a process for exploring an individual's career. The next chapter provides a critical appraisal of the biographical tradition and examines its potential as a methodology for research into aspects of the life course.

Chapter 4

THE BIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION

Introduction

This chapter explores the characteristics of the biographical tradition. Biographical approaches enable the meaning of events and experiences within a life story to be constructed. These approaches began to gain favour under the umbrella of constructivism when it was realised that there was a need for a more sympathetic approach to researching human experience, which positivism could not fulfil. The chapter will show that narration and storytelling are the means by which the essential aspects of human life can be discovered. Life history, life story and life review are also reviewed in this chapter. Overall, the chapter aims to set the theoretical context in which this study has been carried out.

Disciplined inquiry

'Research is a process of systematic (and not so systematic) inquiry that leads to knowledge stated in propositions' (Heron, 1981:19). Research has also been described as 'disciplined inquiry' that stands up to public scrutiny, the discipline with which it is carried out and reported being the benchmark of the research process (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). For much of the last two centuries, positivism, embracing objective, disciplined approaches, was recognised as the dominant research paradigm. Knowledge of a scientific nature was to be discovered only by researchers who remained detached from the research process and used valid and reliable measures that claimed to be error and value free. The turn of the twentieth century, however, saw the emergence of a number of other approaches that focused on humanism and that have since been advanced, albeit with some difficulty, as 'disciplined inquiry'.

Positivism claimed to deal with the physical world but could not deal adequately with the human world, which was complex and comprised many human perspectives (Schwandt,

1994). This world, and the lives of those who experienced it, needed to be explored and interpreted, and some understanding was required of personal experiences and the meaning for individual actors of their world. Positivism was thus rejected as being too rigid for exploring human life. Whilst it was objective and value-free, it dismissed human insight and the significant contribution that human participants could bring to the inquiry. Human life was deemed to be full of ambiguity and uncertainty and a research approach was needed that could embrace the human situation and make allowances for unique perspectives and individuality within an ever changing social world (Harre, 1981).

So whilst positivism, and postpositivism that superseded it, remained closely aligned as traditions that excluded human participation and interaction, the newer traditions of critical theory and constructivism gained favour as they actively embraced these traits. Critical theory, and most particularly constructivism, emerged as paradigms that used naturalistic inquiry and acknowledged the contribution of participants as being central to the research process. They emerged as paradigms of choice through which the human voice might be heard.

Naturalism and constructivism

'Naturalism' emerged as an alternative way of coming to know and to understand the world, focusing on and using the perspectives of those who lived in it and held views about the world. Not only did naturalistic approaches actively seek and value the contributions of participants they also sought to understand the relationship between the researcher and the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), a feature necessarily absent in approaches within the positivist paradigm. Approaches used in naturalistic inquiry offered greater methodological choice to researchers discontent with the perceived limitations of experimental scientific designs. They allowed, indeed sought, different interpretations of experience. Multiple realities constructed with participants through the research process were accepted within the tradition. Ethnographical, phenomenological, biographical and other humanistic forms of inquiry became established as qualitative approaches under the umbrella of naturalistic inquiry, offering different ways of studying lives within society and lives as they change

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over time. Guba and Lincoln (1994) declared their interest in naturalistic inquiry and its redefinition as constructivism.

Constructivism, otherwise known as the interpretive paradigm, was seen as a 'revolutionary move', rather than an accommodation in previous thinking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It focused on interpretation and construction of reality and not so much challenged positivism as offered a complementary way of discovering reality, and different kinds of reality that could be entertained as reliable knowledge.

Constructivists thrive on difference and anticipate change. They recognise that knowledge is not a fixed composition of given or determined facts but is created from multiple perspectives and is shaped and redefined over time. Reality is seen as a construct of the human mind and people construct the world in different ways, framed within and by the stories they tell. There can therefore be 'different understandings of what is real' (Bassey, 1999: 43). As people change their minds after new experiences, or even after reflecting on their experiences, a new reality is reconstructed. Reality has plasticity (Schwandt, 1994) to allow for adaptation and to accommodate change, and to make adjustments for new sense-making. Constructivism is therefore much more adaptable than earlier conventions embraced within positivism. It allows for individual life stories and collective stories within society to be told and explored and to be revisited and reinterpreted to reflect change over time. It is therefore dynamic as a tradition, able to reflect the past yet accommodate a future.

To summarise, constructivism has emerged as a paradigm that takes account of the position of participants in their social world and the interpretations that they offer of their experiences in their world. Ethnographic, phenomenological and biographical modes of inquiry have these characteristics in common. These approaches rely on individual contributions to the research process, often using storytelling to discover the perceptions and positions of individuals in relation to the society in which they exist.

Storytelling: the human voice

Research that seeks to understand human experiences uses the human voice as the vehicle through which stories of experiences are raised to consciousness and made public.

However, Reason and Hawkins (1988) explored whether storytelling could be construed as 'science' that produced knowledge. They cited Churchman (1971:178) who claimed that not all stories qualified as science but science had to take stories seriously. Stories provided the 'hardest body of evidence and the best method of problem definition' but for the purpose of science, good stories were needed that provided insights into the human condition. Reason and Hawkins (1988) claimed that science had always been critical and open to amendment but suggested that storytelling, as scientific inquiry, had to be conducted with care.

Stories have been much-used by biographers to explore individual lives and to examine them from different perspectives (Plummer, 1983). Events, roles, experiences, relationships and the contemporary and historical context in which those lives are being, or have been, played out can be explored. Individual life stories enable personal identity to be examined through the ups and downs of life, through turning points and through positive experiences as well as through those experiences that engender feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction. Individual explanations and the exploration of meaning for the individual enable a complex, multi-dimensional picture of the individual to be built up.

Abma (1999) suggested that telling the story of significant events or experiences may actually become a turning point or a transition for the storyteller, prompting a personal change of direction. Bridges (1980) would see such a story as having a particular sequence that mirrored the way in which an individual worked through the transition and dealt with the issues it generated. A story dealing with transition would first involve an ending, then a middle or neutral zone, and finally a new beginning. Any process of inquiry would need to capture and interpret these stories as a complete entity to ensure that the experiences of the individual, as he or she works through personal dilemmas and their resolutions, are not

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ignored. Protagonists, events, complications and consequences should all be considered as contributing to a story (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

Narrative, as stories of experience, can reveal human character. The terms narrative and storytelling are often used interchangeably in the literature despite their different characteristics as explained in chapter two. Storytelling is a medium for examining individual perspectives. It can be used to explore personal and social experiences and events in individuals' lives. Interpretations can be offered and efforts can be made to construct meaning in an attempt to understand the individual in the social world. But it would seem to be important to capture the full sequence of events so that sense-making takes account of the experience of transition. The constructivist paradigm that accepts personal accounts of situations thus gives individuals a voice in the process of discovering knowledge that is rich in intensity and diversity. It recognises both unique and common perceptions, setting them in a social context. Biographical accounts have helped to enlighten the research world about individual lives and their place in, and contribution to, society.

Biography
Creswell (1998) described biography as a tradition of inquiry where the focus is the study of an individual and his or her experiences. A biography has been defined from the Webster's Dictionary as 'the written history of a person's life' (Smith, 1994:286). It comes from the naturalistic, qualitative research tradition and is guided by phenomenological and interactionist principles (Sikes and Aspinwall, 1992). The biographical method is a strategy of inquiry that seeks to explore and interpret the many facets of a person's life, normally with reference to the context in which that person exists. The emphasis is on 'the self' and that person's relationship with others and with the environment (Sikes and Aspinwall, 1992).

The biographical method uses narration and storytelling (oral or written) to reach to the heart of an individual's personality and personal story. Biographical studies gained

prominence in the early part of the twentieth century through sociologists in the Chicago School and with the publication between 1918 and 1920 of the much-acclaimed and oft-referenced *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* by Thomas and Znaniecki (1927). The biographical tradition embraces autobiography, life histories and oral stories as well as biography, each of which has a discrete definition (Creswell, 1998).

Autobiography, the form most closely associated with biography, has been described by Burgos (1988, cited in Alasuutari, 1997:3) as a valuable method of investigation that yields information about life experiences, subjectivity, individual choices and the rational and conscious motives for actions. Smith (1994) saw it as a 'special case in life writing' and noted it as one of the most rapidly developing forms of inquiry. It gives voice to people, he claimed, and opportunity to extol important parts of human existence. The same qualities could also be attributed to biography but the key difference with biographical studies is the presence and active involvement of the researcher in the construction of meaning and in the formulation of the written account of the life in question. This would indicate collaborative sense-making and a biographical story that ultimately combined at least two individuals' perspectives.

Biography as a research tradition thus seems to have a confirmed place alongside ethnography and phenomenology and an enduring place in social research that offers insights into an individual's world.

Life history, life story and life review
Biography, life history and life story appear to be well-established methods of discovering details of individual lives through which meaning and perspectives can be explored. But the literature is not so clear on how the different terms relate to each other, nor about the discrete differences between them. A number of different definitions or explanations can be found. It seems that some authors use terms interchangeably whilst others have noted differences in they way they are used.

Plummer (1983:14) for example, provided criteria for life history research but not a definition. He claimed that life history was a full account of one person's life in his or her own words gathered over a number of years with gentle guidance from the social scientist. It is a subjective account, a detailed perspective on the world, and examples could be found in anthropology, psychology and sociology. This would suggest a minimalist contribution from the researcher rather than a partnership through which the life was explored and the meaning of events determined.

Alasuutari (1997) similarly reviewed the facets of life story without presenting a clear definition. He noted that life stories have traditionally been approached from two complementary perspectives, as lives in their social context or as a construction of an individual's personality or identity - as reflected in the events recounted. Alasuutari offered an explanation about the subtle difference between the sociostructural and sociolinguistic approaches to biography and their relationship with life story. The sociostructural account explores individual perspectives in relation to their own world, including some external factors about the society in which the individual exists. It places the individual within the structure of the world. The sociolinguistic account, on the other hand, offers insight into the person and becomes a story of his or her personality. The way in which the story is told (the linguistics) holds the story that is then interpreted as personality traits, or facets of the individual's persona. Alasuutari (1997:5) summarised the position: 'the sociostructural trend conceives the life story as a picture of life whereas the sociolinguistic trend perceives it as a picture of personality'. The full picture of a life story may, however, comprise a combination of both.

Clausen (1998) considered ways of securing accounts of individuals' lives or episodes in their life using the preferred terms of life review and life story. Life stories provided knowledge of how the person sees his or her past and present life and the influences that helped to shape it. There are stories that are told spontaneously (with no guidance from others) for a particular audience or particular purpose, possibly to illustrate an aspect of life. Then there are stories that are elicited by the researcher using guidelines that aim to

address particular research aims or objectives, whether to understand how a person experiences his or her life, or some particular social process as it impinges on people's lives. Both may entail a person's presentation of self and reveal how the self developed over time.

Clausen's (1998:192) definition of life review was as a process that entails 'a person's efforts to re-envision episodes or long sequences from the past'. This is compared with life history, which Clausen saw as 'the person's subjective, retrospective report of past experiences and their meaning to that person' with a full life history including other sources of data to complement the person's own account.

Clausen was rather dismissive of life story referring to it being used by psychoanalysts to reveal spontaneously 'what is on one's mind'. He aligned it within the biographical tradition but as an incomplete collection of narratives because it was an ever-changing picture. As with life, it could never be complete. The beginning is usually imprecisely defined as 'some point in time' and the ending is inconclusive. He argued that a life story could not be presented in the neat and tidy format of a novel with the conventions of plot, beginning, middle and ending because it is constantly subject to change.

A further point made by Clausen (1998:194) was that a 'spontaneous life review at any point in time is not a factual account but rather a construction influenced by the circumstances that triggered the review, the quality of the person's relationship at the time and the accuracy of memories of past events'. It would seem that antecedents may be particularly influential and that the presentation of self as a story is already an interpretation of self. The storyteller would offer others a story that was already drafted to confer a particular meaning associated with the current situation thereby denying others opportunity to interpret the raw facts. It can be seen here that Clausen's remark seems to bring this aspect of life course inquiry into the interpretive paradigm.

Disciplines and their traditions

It has been established that naturalistic inquiry offers ways of studying lives within society and lives as they change over time. Ethnographic, phenomenological, biographical and other humanistic forms of inquiry have emerged as qualitative approaches under the umbrella of naturalism. Disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and psychology offer different perspectives to present their view of individuals in their social world. It is claimed that those who conduct such studies tend to think historically, interactionally and structurally. They also think reflectively and biographically, seeking strategies that allow them to make connections within lived experience and sociocultural structures (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:199). This would demand sensitivity to the gathering and interpretation of data that recognises the position of individuals in their cultural and social surroundings and the interrelationship of each with the other. But what perspective does each of the disciplines hold of life history and life story?

Smith (1994) mapped out the use of the terms life history and life story within the domains of anthropology, psychology and sociology. It seems that what can be expected from each of these disciplines is a different focus as well as different processes for eliciting the 'story'. These are likely to be attributed to historical tradition within the discipline and may or may not relate to a considered strategy for information or knowledge generation.

Anthropology, it seems, has a long tradition of drawing out life histories. Not only do lives pass through cultures where a view can be given of the culture, but culture can also be written through lives. There is reciprocity in knowledge generation.

Psychology, on the other hand, identifies more with life story, and not exclusively the story provided by the individual but a story compiled using various sources of information, particularly documents. The focus would be on personal needs, drives and plans, - on goal orientation and attainment. Sociology, however, uses life history as a tradition of the Chicago School. Stories of lived experience add different dimensions so that a history can be compiled. The focus might be significant events or turning points that have an impact

on a life from which some construction of meaning might be possible. New events and turning points would require reconstruction within the totality of the life course, in the light of the prevailing social situation.

On this basis, there appears to be no definitive way of explaining terms such as life story and life history. Even though Atkinson (1998:8) defined life story as 'a fairly complete narrating of one's entire experience of life as a whole, highlighting the most important parts', he acknowledged there was little difference between a history and a story. In reviewing literature, reference can be made to the discipline and tradition to assist in determining definition and common usage but there seems to be no single approach to using the terms, leaving interpretation open-ended and somewhat ambiguous.

Aspects of a life

A full biography resulting in a complete historical account and interpretation of a life can lead to depth of understanding of that individual's life and place in society. Life stories offer 'a primary means for understanding the pattern of an individual life' - the development of an individual over time and the individual's relationship with the wider community (Atkinson, 1998:5). Studies in life story can also help to explore how an 'historical moment' has influenced lives. The 'historical moment' could be the trigger for change in many people's lives or might be the 'critical incident' that affects the life of one individual in a very personal way. Alternatively, biographical approaches may be used to explore selected aspects of lives, such as work life or a role in the community, or of an individual or across a section of the population (Atkinson, 1998). Whatever the focus, it should be possible to gain insights into human dilemmas, struggles and triumphs and the values that guide actions and shape experience, and to make links with the historical and social context in which they are played out.

Collin and Young (1992) confirmed that career paths, decisions and future plans could be explored through narrative. It would be a requirement, however, to place careers in their wider ideological, sociological, economic, cultural and historical context and to recognise

the career as part of a wider life plan (Hopfl, 1992). In the process, it would still be important to remember that any findings are merely interpretations of events, recollections and constructions that have already taken place (Hopfl, 1992). The explanation of career decisions will emerge after the decision was taken and could thus be influenced by its consequences. Career plans, however, if also explored, might provide insights into a different reasoning process where the consequences of decisions would only be envisaged rather than experienced.

Ways of knowing and meaning-making

One way of determining and understanding the nature of individuals' existence in a social world is through methodological approaches that respect, and are respected for acknowledging, the human voice and interpretations of individual experiences. Personal accounts that are placed in a social and historical context provide rich stories linked to a wider environment from which society can learn. Reflective, personal accounts, where meaning is constructed and reconstructed through dialogue, can be transformational (Abma, 1999) for both the individual and for the society in which they exist. Ambiguity, uncertainty may forever be present. Knowledge may continue to be conditional and subject to change, but at least through storytelling the issues that matter can be raised to the surface and offered for interpretation and understanding within the context of the current situation.

Expression 'is the mode of allowing the meaning of experience to become manifest' (Reason and Hawkins, 1988: 80). These authors, through their experience of cooperative inquiry and the use of storytelling, raised a fundamental question about the nature of meaning. Were they creating it or discovering it? They felt a need to explore whether the meaning was already there, but lying dormant, or whether the act of storytelling actually created the meaning that they now recognised. They concluded that meanings were created from events although 'an event' may be either the trigger or subject of a story, or the event of telling that story some time later.

Schwandt (1994), however, reflected on continuing tensions in interpretation. When are constructions constructions? Are they only in the minds of individuals, are they only constructed as they are spoken or are they constructed through the interpretation *with* (rather than *by*) a researcher? Schwandt raised Guba and Lincoln's (1989) argument that constructions are in the minds of individuals; they cannot exist outside those minds in the same way. The constructions become modified as they are shared with others to become social constructions of knowledge. What may not be clear, however, is the difference between the original, individual construction and the ultimate social construction, and the extent to which the latter merely becomes a compromise, rather than an emergent new construction, as external influences play their part in the redefining process.

Atkinson (1998) later claimed that in the process of telling life stories, important personal truths 'as we see them' are shared in the exchange. This creates the 'personal construction of reality and the story told about it' that we learn from the storyteller. Atkinson drew on the work of Bruner (1991) to re-assert that personal meaning (and reality) is actually constructed during the making and telling of narrative and that the stories become the way of organising, interpreting and creating meaning from our experiences. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and later Eakin (1999) claimed that meaning-making can be assisted by the use of metaphors that are constructed during thinking processes and then expressed as narrative to illustrate a sense of experience. Metaphors illuminate and help listeners to make sense of events through a shared understanding of relationships to which the metaphor draws attention.

Interpretation and the construction of meaning also have their draw-backs. According to Czarniawska, (1998) narrative could be ambiguous and leave open the possibility of different interpretations of the same event or story. Reason and Hawkins (1988) added a cautionary note. They claimed that just as creative storytelling may be used to enlighten and determine meaning, so it might equally be used to distort meaning. Through storytelling and the interpretation of stories, selected emphasis and selected distortion can suggest different meanings. At worst, it can result in propaganda. Therefore, if storytelling

is to be used as a medium for generating knowledge that stands up to public scrutiny, care needs to exercised and inquiry and analysis need to be undertaken faithfully in the spirit of the disciplined inquiry.

In summary, this chapter has provided an overview of the biographical tradition within naturalistic forms of inquiry. Life story, life history, and life review have been examined as approaches to discovering and explaining aspects of human life through narrative. It has been shown that terms are used inconsistently across disciplines making it more difficult to name the mode of choice. Questions have been raised about what really can be understood through stories told as part of a disciplined inquiry. Reality is deemed to be transient and subject to change. It may be impossible to know whether any 'reality' can ever be discovered. Key factors may be withheld. Stories may be fabricated or may be told in such a way as to mislead. Caution is clearly needed as stories cannot necessarily be verified in ways that other research data can be confirmed. The use of storytelling nevertheless provides a means of generating data though which meaning can be explored. Care is needed, however, to ensure that any research process can withstand public scrutiny.

The biographical tradition and processes of narrative inquiry are those considered to be appropriate approaches for this research into occupational therapists careers. Biographical approaches should allow selected aspects of a life to be explored using storytelling to gain insights into the dilemmas, struggles and triumphs experienced by the therapists in their work life and any relationship between work and private life. Drawing on a person's biography and storytelling would seem to mirror the way in which occupational therapists commonly work with their clients. It would therefore seem appropriate to consider the approach as one that not only aligns with their practice but also as one with which occupational therapists are already likely to be familiar.

This chapter, and the two preceding chapters, have helped me to develop my rationale for taking an interpretive approach to this research, and for proposing to draw on the biographical tradition and narrative inquiry for the study. The debates have allowed me to

explore different theoretical dimensions and issues that could impact on the study and have helped me to formulate my position on taking forward the research agenda in this way. I am confident, yet cautious about the use of the biographical tradition, which, as a qualitative approach, may still attract public scepticism. However, in my view, it appears to lend itself well to an exploration of that aspect of a life that individuals might label as their career. As Creswell (1998) pointed out, the focus is on the individual and his or her experiences. Furthermore, the meaning of those experiences for the individual must be examined in relation to work and the context in which it occurs. Yet it seems there are potential pitfalls in using narrative inquiry where, as a researcher, I have to rely on the stories that individuals might tell about their career. Many of the stories are likely to be removed in time from the career experiences being recounted. Some may be distorted, some embellished, some downplayed. The true reality of the meaning of work and career may be hard to uncover. However, in order to achieve credible results, it will be necessary to observe the strict principles and practices of qualitative research. Given the dual focus of the study, it also provides an ideal opportunity to explore simultaneously the qualities of narrative and the strengths and limitations of such an approach.

Using interviews to generate stories, therefore, it should be possible to gain an understanding, not only of the participants' careers, but also of the qualities of narrative itself and any further potential for using storytelling with occupational therapists in their non-clinical practice. In the next chapter I take forward the research story and explain the procedures used in the study.

Chapter 5

THE RESEARCH STORY

Introduction

Having undertaken a review of literature to establish the potential of the biographical tradition and storytelling as media with which to work on this study, this chapter now addresses methodological and associated ethical issues. It sets the research into the context of other projects that I have undertaken and questions I have raised in the process. The chapter establishes the study as narrative inquiry into occupational therapists' careers and examines other research that might have a bearing on it.

Early decisions

Reflecting back on this piece of research, it has occurred to me that the study has been an evolutionary process. The Education Doctorate commenced in the year 2000 and my early intentions had been, through case study, to investigate the methods used by occupational therapists to keep up to date and remain competent to practise through continuing professional development (CPD). As explained earlier, CPD was a topic already familiar to me (Alsop, 2000a) and at that time, new procedures mandated under the Health Act 1999 were about to be put in place by the Health Professions Council, once established, to ensure that occupational therapists (and other health professionals) maintained their competence. This was likely to be a critical time for these professions and a study that captured occupational therapists activities, plans and feelings about it was perceived to be an interesting and worthwhile endeavour.

With this in mind, one of the learning tasks that I carried out early in the doctoral programme was an authorised taped interview with an occupational therapist to capture a perspective on the participant's career and CPD strategy. Apart from introducing me to the various challenges of carrying out and interpreting such an interview, through the process I

began to appreciate the richness of the story of the participant's career that was actually told to me.

In fact, on listening to the story, CPD played only a minor part in it. It appeared that learning was incidental to the career. Learning, both informal and formal, appeared to have more to do with the personal interests and goals of the occupational therapist than with continuing competence. Achievements from formal learning may have given confidence in academic ability but did not appear to have any particular bearing on a future career at that point in time. Yet a kind of career strategy did become evident. The story highlighted career options and some of the strengths and limitations of those options. It exposed some of the reasoning processes that formed the vision of a career and some of the values and personal insights that guided the decision-making process. Here was an occupational therapist's story. It was not concerned with a therapeutic encounter, as used in practice, but with a personal exploration of a past, present and future career. It was nevertheless an encounter that appeared meaningful to the individual. It was not an illness story but a story that might still be interpreted as a taking stock of a current personal situation and thinking ahead.

From these observations, and with further exploration over the coming months of the literature on life story and the biographical tradition, I was prompted to review my research intention. I began to realise that life story, as used in research, appeared to have some parallels with therapeutic storytelling and emplotment. I began to question whether the process of talking about a career could enable occupational therapists to shape a future for themselves in the same way as storymaking with clients helped to enable them to envisage a new future. How could storytelling aid this process? Were there particular characteristics of narrative that facilitated the process of redefining a personal story into one that had not yet been envisioned?

Hence the study was conceived with the following aim:

To investigate the use of narrative in research and in occupational therapists'
clinical practice, and to examine its potential for exploring occupational
therapists' career stories

Thus I set out to inquire into the nature and application of narrative in occupational therapists' practice. By using narrative and focusing particularly on the career course, it was hoped that new insights would materialise to provide a new order of understanding about narrative and its application for the profession of occupational therapy.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND CHOICES

In most studies there are methodological choices to be made but in this study, the biographical tradition, life course approach and narrative method were under investigation. To begin with, however, I needed to reassure myself that the methodology was appropriate and that I could justify its use in this research. A review of other relevant studies and the methodology used, provided a useful starting point.

Review of other related studies, methodology and findings

In my own, earlier, research (Alsop, 1992) I used a case study design with interviews and observations to explore the behaviour of occupational therapists working within one occupational therapy department. The case study had worked well in this defined situation. As Creswell (1998) confirmed, case studies are generally contained within a bounded system and explored over time. The detailed, in-depth processes of data collection over an extended period can include interviews and conversations and the researcher is involved in interpreting the story (Denzin, 1989). However, a 'case' is normally understood through multiple sources of information and tends to be set in a particular context (Creswell, 1998). Although Thomas (1995a) reported that case study had been used in biographic work to explore teachers' experiences within a classroom, the approach was considered inappropriate for a study about occupational therapists' careers across the life course that had no parameters, and was thus rejected.

Although no specific studies were found that focused on occupational therapists' careers and professional development (nor yet those of other allied health professionals) a number of studies made reference to these issues either directly or indirectly. A PhD study conducted by Linda Finlay (1998) explored occupational therapists' life world and their experience of being an occupational therapist. The study took a phenomenological approach in an attempt to discover, through interviews and participant observation, the meaning of occupational therapy for the participating occupational therapists. What emerged was a rich description of the frustrations and pleasures of being a member of the profession and confirmation that some dimensions of the life world are shared with other occupational therapists. Essentially, however, she concluded that each individual experiences the world in a unique and complex way.

It was possible that phenomenological principles, as outlined by Creswell (1998), would have a bearing on my study because it aimed to address the meaning of experiences of occupational therapists' career as expressed by them in stories. As Holstein and Gubrium (1994) explained, phenomenology is about how the world is experienced and how social objects are made meaningful and are understood in a common way in a shared world. However, this study was set to explore the career of individuals over time through their life course, so a phenomenological study alone was unlikely to be suitable. Finlay's study did, however, alert me to the features of hermeneutics, a tradition that could have some bearing on my study, as will be discussed later.

Other dimensions of occupational therapy have been studied. Hollis (1997) used multiple methods in her PhD research, including focus groups and video recordings, to explore occupational therapists' practice and their professional development and behaviour as related to levels of clinical ability. Interestingly, although radically different in intentions and approach, the themes that emerged in this and Finlay's study suggest common features in occupational therapists' practice. Both Hollis and Finlay concluded that the work and world of the occupational therapist is complex, it involves facilitating change through problem-solving, and it depends for its success on therapeutic relationships.

These formal studies indicate a range of methodological approaches to the study of occupational therapists' work and have helped to build a picture of the occupational therapist's world. They do not, however, explain how that world emerged during the course of occupational therapists' careers, nor do they shed light on individual career stories. None of the studies used narrative.

A more recent PhD study (Roberts, 2002) that also used multiple methods to examine occupational therapists' thinking and development following continuing professional education concluded that development in thinking occurred over time but not necessarily due to continuing education. The significance of this study, as reported, (Roberts, 2003) is not so much in the methodology but in the topic and results. Once again there emerged evidence of an interrelationship between occupational therapists' home and work life, educational experiences and professional development suggesting that professional growth was likely to be influenced by multiple factors within and beyond the workplace.

An inability to locate studies pertaining to narrative, life story and occupational therapists' careers made it necessary to look for examples from other professions. Faltermaier (1992) used qualitative and biographical interviews to explore the socialisation of nurses into their profession. He interviewed 17 female nurses about events that occurred prior to starting nurse training and in relation to five years of their career, after qualification. The aim was to understand each case separately and then to determine the issues that affected them collectively. Data were interrogated according to the research questions but were also analysed using a method informed by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Results revealed four types of nursing career based on similarities and differences in the individuals' experience of life events, such as marriage and pregnancy, and the ways in which nurses coped with different demands of working life.

Faltermaier's study confirmed the appropriateness of the biographical approach for studying selected aspects of health professionals' careers even though the results reflected

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a synthesis of data from individual life accounts. It also highlighted the value of grounded theory for exploring emerging themes. Still, the study dealt only with personal stories enacted in the past, not with a prospective future. Once again, however, the interrelationship of work life and private life emerged as a facet of professional lives. Erben (1998) claimed this was an inevitable and justified feature of biographical investigation.

According to Erben (1998) and Goodson and Sikes (2001) it is within the teaching profession that many biographical studies have been carried out. The story of 'Sarah' (Aspinwall, 1985) mentioned earlier, is one example of an individual's story in which professional development was explored. Other examples of individuals' life story are difficult to find. Thomas (1995b) however, noted the autonomous writing of Stumbo (1989) who provided a reflective account of her life as a teacher. It was apparently written spontaneously and unaided, yet highlighted her values, ideals and continuing need to learn. These are isolated examples yet they provide evidence to support the contention that biographical approaches allow exploration of what is meaningful to an individual. It seems, however, that teachers' life stories are more frequently generated in order to illuminate common features of their practice rather than to explore their 'life' or career *per se*. They are stories of events in their life rather than of a life. They are analysed and the findings presented as insights that will benefit the community, the teaching profession, rather than the individual.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) explained the benefits of studying teachers' life histories and claimed that, not only could life history research influence professional practice it could also assist an individual in his or her own self-understanding. Here at last was recognition that the act of relating a life story could assist the storyteller in their personal and professional development. Goodson and Sikes clarified the fact that benefits tended to arise as the individual engaged in self-reflection. Personal values, relationships between different aspects of their life and external influences on a career could be explored and

'cathartic benefits in times of crisis' were other possible gains (Goodson and Sikes, 2001:74).

It seemed that storytelling could be a process of self-discovery. Participating in a conversation and creating a story from past experiences allows the storyteller to revisit those experiences and search for meaning. The life history interview, as a collaborative process, also offers the medium for sharing experiences and perceptions and for remodelling a story to accommodate new insights and interpretations (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Plummer (2001) argued that those who tell the story of their life often find it has given them some coherence, a sense of their development, an understanding of how crises might have developed, who is important in their life and possibly the meaning of life itself. Furthermore, 'an individual's story has the power to tie together past, present and future in his or her life' (Plummer, 2001: 243).

It was now possible to reaffirm that this research aimed to enhance knowledge of the characteristics of narrative inquiry, occupational therapists' careers and the relationship between them using biographical approaches and storytelling as a method of data generation. The biographical tradition did not, however, represent the full methodological story. Hermeneutics also featured in the process.

The hermeneutic tradition

Hermeneutics has been defined as 'the study and method of understanding human expression' (Phillips, 1996: 62) and, in a complementary way, as 'the theory and practice of interpretation' (http://www2.canisius.edu/~gallaghr/ahdia.hmtl). In essence it is about the interpretation, clarification and understanding of texts with regards to their meaning. As Bauman (1978:12) suggested, 'to understand a human act...was to grasp the meaning with which the actor's intention invested it'. The responsibility is with the researcher, as reader, to do justice to the text by acting with a level of consciousness. Phillips (1996: 62) referred to it as 'an encounter between the researcher of the present, aware of his or her historically conditioned categories of understanding, and a past that presents itself for

interpretation'. According to Lye (1996) it involves the interpreter engaging in dialogue with a text but first examining any 'fore-meaning' that exists within him, any stance or position that might pre-empt, and thus affect interpretation.

Gadamer (1981; 1989) viewed reading as a form of conversation, suggesting the active involvement of the reader with the text in order to gain some understanding of it. Schwandt (2000:195) acknowledged Gadamer but also drew on Bernstein (1983) to clarify the position of understanding as 'participative, conversational and dialogic', 'always bound up with language and 'achieved only through a logic of question and answer'.

Bramall (1999), in his review of Gallagher's (1992) work on hermeneutics and education, reflected on the way in which hermeneutics had been used historically in relation to interpretation and understanding of texts. But Bramall challenged Gallagher's vision of extending the hermeneutic paradigm to one associated more exclusively with learning than with dialogue. Gallagher argued that learning could be understood as proceeding from dialogue. This suggests a difficulty in determining the association between dialogue, interpretation, understanding and learning. But Bauman (1978: 14) had earlier argued that hermeneutics saw 'understanding' as residing in a sort of 'spiritual unification' of the writer and the reader, the actor and his interpreter' where unification necessarily started from a unique historical and biographical position. This suggests both a conscious and subconscious awareness of the actor's intentions stemming from an active involvement with the text that leads the researcher to a different level of understanding, and hence learning. According to Schwandt (2000) there can never be a final, correct interpretation even though some theorists might argue that meaning is not so much constructed as negotiated, and therefore agreed.

METHODOLOGICAL DILEMMAS

Research is rarely without its dilemmas and this study was no exception. My personal position as a researcher and my relationship with participants had to be considered. The nature of interviews as conversations and the means of generating data, and the reliance on memory for storytelling and associated concerns about 'truth' have, had to be addressed.

There were also ethical considerations to be taken into account for the protection of participants.

The personal position

My position as an occupational therapist had to be acknowledged for this study even though I worked in education and not in practice. As someone who has published fairly widely in the professional literature and contributed nationally to the profession in disparate ways, some members of the profession were likely to know me, or know of me. I needed to be aware that 'familiarity' might affect the study.

There was a possibility that anyone approached to participate would have pre-conceived ideas about me and my expectations of them. These pre-conceptions could have had an impact on conversations and limit any disclosure of information. I needed to be aware that my role as researcher and as an occupational therapist interviewing other occupational therapists, might lead me to make assumptions about the meaning of professional language, intentions, and situations to the extent that I failed to seek clarification of issues in the conversations that I had with participants.

Throughout the study there was a need to maintain an awareness of my various roles as an occupational therapist, researcher and participant and the possible affect that I might have on the process of research. I concluded that I had to position myself more as a learner in the situation and rely on my ability to present myself, in a non-threatening way, as genuinely interested in the participants' stories.

Presuppositions

Unlike in autobiography where subjects make themselves an object of examination and where the essential self is discovered as the individual's life unfolds, in biography a life is discovered with somebody else, the researcher (Usher, 1998). As a researcher, I was in a position to take an active part in the process so that the interpretation of a life would become more an evolutionary process of collaborative meaning-making. However, I

needed to take care. As Scott (1998) observed, the biographer tends to offer a different perspective on the life, bringing to the research both his or her own biography as a set of presuppositions, and knowledge of the research process. Any presuppositions on my part set the context in which the researched lives were to be understood. Yet I still had to allow each life to unfold, partially prompted by the cues that I gave or the questions that I posed. Had these been different, the data generated could have been different. I will never know. The role that I played was as a facilitator to enable the story to begin and to unfold, yet I was a partner in its interpretation.

The biographical partner

Mattingly (1998) raised the question of the part played by the listener and his/her reciprocal role as a co-constructor of meaning. As narrative is made public and laid open to scrutiny, meaning can be shaped by others who have played no part in the event on which the story is based. From an active listener who has been gently teasing out the story, the researcher becomes an active participant in the interpretive process.

Sikes and Aspinwall (1992) recognised the role of the 'biographical partner' in the research process. The person eliciting the story becomes a partner of the person narrating it. The role demanded empathy rather than judgement to enable the storyteller to clarify his or her own understanding and to avoid imposing another sense upon the story told. The biographical partner acts as a facilitator, listening, evaluating, reflecting, supporting and probing but essentially sharing in a conversation through which both participants learn together (Aspinwall, 1992). As Atkinson (1998) remarked, life stories can help people to see their lives more clearly, or perhaps differently. The interviewer empowers the storyteller by guiding him or her sensitively into a deeper understanding of his/her own life, thus bringing enhanced meaning to life.

Biographers, it seems, have also to be aware of the multi-layered contexts of lives. A number of interviews conducted with the same person over time attempts to reveal the different layers. Biographical research would thus seem to be progressive in nature, moving from concrete, but possibly superficial, recollections of historical events to abstract

reflections that may only be revealed through sensitive probing in a 'secure' relationship with the participant. As Alasuutari (1997:16) reminded us, selves are 'the constructions we live by' and to understand these personal constructions of reality we need to search long and hard. They may not surface without a struggle, even for the most experienced biographer. Even then, as the story is recounted and interpreted, it may result in the 'interweaving' of two different agenda, that of the person and that of the biographer (Scott, 1998: 43)

The task of the listener and biographer is therefore not an easy one. According to Smith (1994: 290) 'What meets the eye is never what it seems'. An individual can have a number of 'faces', only some of which are revealed willingly to an audience. Underlying traits of character and personality that Edel (1979, cited in Smith, 1994) referred to as 'the figure under the carpet' can also be difficult to identify. Smith made a further point that individuals do not exist in isolation but in a context that also needs to be captured in the biographical account. The inter-relationship of person and environment and interplay between them is likely to shape behaviour and must therefore be examined carefully as part of the process (Plummer, 1983).

The nature of interviews

The term 'interview' can sometimes strike a note of formality but according to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) an interview is also a conversation. It is the art of asking questions and listening. It is a way of 'writing the world, a way of bringing the world into play' and it functions as a narrative device that allows those so inclined to tell stories to do so about themselves (Denzin, 2001: 25). It is not a neutral event but one influenced by those taking part and it can require openness, emotional engagement and the development of a potentially long-term, trusting relationship between interviewer and respondent. The participants thus become co-equals 'carrying on a conversation about mutually relevant, often biographically critical, issues' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 634).

Fontana and Frey (2000) remarked on the scope of the interview, noting it as an interaction between two or more speakers. Fontana and Frey (2000: 663) argued that interviewers are now being seen more as 'active participants in interactions with respondents' with interviews being 'negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents'. However, the context, particular situation, feelings, nuances, manners and people involved can all have a bearing on the outcome (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). An interview has also been referred to, initially by Pool (1957: 193) and later by Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 16), as 'an interpersonal drama with a developing plot' thus attributing to it some of the characteristics of a story. Indeed subsequently, Gubrium and Holstein (1998) referred to an interview as 'storytelling' whereas Dingwall (1997: 56) referred to it merely as a 'social encounter'. The nature of interview is thus varied offering a medium through which conversations may be held. The issue, it seems, is how the participants engage with each other to shape the discourse.

Interview techniques had also to be considered. Unstructured interviews with minimal interruption from the researcher should yield stories from the participants given an appropriate environment. According to Hollway and Jeffson (2000) structured or semi-structured interviews would tend to set the agenda and suppress responses, and keep the interviewer in control whereas a narrative approach would allow the agenda to remain open to development and change according to the narrator's experiences. Using this method the narrator retains control, selects what is told and makes clear its relevance to the story. The story told is therefore constructed within the context of the interview. Oral history has been classified as one form of unstructured interview technique with the specific purpose of capturing various forms of life (Fontana and Frey, 2000).

Eliciting stories was clearly not going to be an easy process. As Hollway and Jefferson (2000) pointed out, people's storytelling ability can vary enormously and some people perceive themselves as not having stories to tell at all, or that their life lacks sufficient interest or worth to justify a story. Much therefore had to depend on the nature of the

biographical partnership and trust that was created between myself and the participants. The process and quality of data could also depend on memory.

Biographical memory

'Biographical memory' is understood as a social process where lives and life events are remembered in terms of experiences with others (Schwartz, 1996). As Plummer (2001: 233) indicated 'life story work involves recollecting, remembering, re-discovering, along with active processes of memorialising and constructing history'. The sub-stories recounted rely on memory, which can become distorted over time and modified either by later occurrences or even in the process of their telling (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Perhaps only the best stories would be selected and told to reveal a one-sided story. Some stories could be incomplete. Painful memories could be repressed and not drawn upon in the storytelling process. The intention behind the story could lead to a distorted focus. The nature of 'truth' could be called into question although, according to Plummer (2001), most life story researchers accept that it may not be possible to establish the real truth of a life through a life story. The responsibility of the researcher is to seek authenticity of data through checks and cross checks with the data in order to minimise risk of unsubstantiated claims.

Smith (1994) stated that 'biography, like history, is the organisation of human memory'. Recall and what is disclosed in an interview can be selective for many reasons, for example because of unreliable memory, an intent to conceal or mislead, embarrassment or just an unwillingness or inability to articulate experiences to the researcher (Gardner, 2001). This can be problematic for the researcher trying to ascertain a full and accurate picture of past events. If past events depend on memory, or can be influenced by antecedents and 'corrupted' by their consequences or by more recent events, it raises questions about how reality can ever be constructed. It may only be possible to establish the story of the past as framed in the present. Scott (1998) observed that stories told were retrospective but made at particular moments in time and that the contexts in which they were originally enacted were also different. This has to leave questions around the credibility of the data, yet it has

also to be acknowledged that whatever emerges as the story is the participant's story at that time.

Ethical considerations

The term 'ethics' is used to refer to 'the moral standards or values by which human conduct is judged' (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1997: 115) and must apply at all times before, during and after a study. Grady and Strudler Wallston (1988) commented that ethical issues in research are particularly important in the process of recruitment to the study. The topic and design of the study also need careful consideration with special thought being given to any possible negative consequences to participants of the research process. The protection of human rights is paramount (Payton, 1994) with basic principles including those of doing no harm, respect for freedom of choice and fairness to all concerned. This means that every effort has to be made to identify beforehand all possible risks to participants and to protect their interests during the study and after its completion (Drummond, 1996). In practice, it means making clear in writing the purpose of the research, the level and type of involvement sought from participants, each person's right at any time to withdraw without consequence and their absolute right to confidentiality and anonymity.

Sensitivity

Research is clearly an activity that demands sensitivity and discretion, particularly in the realms of managing anonymity and confidentiality, in selecting which research data to present and in the ownership and subsequent use of that data. Lincoln (1995) raised questions of ownership. To what extent do data equate with life stories and thus who owns the data and who owns the life? Lincoln seemed to be pleading for recognition, respect and perhaps justice for those who willingly gave their time for intensive periods of data collection and then were expected to fade into oblivion. The power in the interview situation was with the researcher, the power to select or dismiss data for the report was with the researcher and the accolade on publication was with the researcher. Lincoln

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foresaw a future where participants might challenge ownership of the research report on the basis of the amount of material actually co-written by them.

If the power is with the researcher, and there is no acknowledgement of participants under their real name, for reasons of confidentiality, then the research places participants in a very passive, disempowered position merely 'providing their voices for us to repeat' with no choice as to which voice is selected or omitted from the presentation (Lincoln, 1995: 49).

Baez (2002) raised ethical considerations of confidentiality and privacy. He cited Bok's (1982) distinction between secrecy, which infers concealment, and confidentiality, which are those methods used to conceal. Bok noted that autonomy over personal information allowed a participant to have secrets, but if secretive information was disclosed, protection was needed. However, this could set up tensions in the research process if the respondent tried to maintain control over his or her realm of secrets, and the researcher attempted to penetrate that realm (Baez, 2002: 45). It appears that in asserting secrecy, individuals could exhibit agency; that is, they could control the flow of information about themselves (Baez, 2002). The researcher would be in no position to challenge because any threat of exposure might cause the participant to avoid honesty, to distort the truth, to provide only a partial story or to refrain from revealing secrets, some of which might be unpleasant or painful.

Recalling potentially stressful or unhappy events might be difficult for participants. Yet according to Vickers (2002) the respondent might also find some value in sharing his or her story, even when painful emotions are stirred, because of the cathartic effect that storytelling could have on a storyteller. This assumption does not, however, absolve the researcher from the need for care particularly during the interview process. Any signs of distress should prompt the researcher to offer to terminate the interview. As Goodson and Sikes (2001: 90) recognised, 'life history informants are required to make a considerable commitment in terms of time and intimacy of involvement, which can increase the potential of harm'. Their rights as individuals and autonomous beings therefore must be

respected at all times. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided a comprehensive review of important considerations in naturalistic inquiry, proposing techniques such as 'prolonged engagement' (1985: 301) to ensure appropriate investment of time to build trust, to address any necessary internal checks and to be alert to any possible distortions.

One further dilemma raised by Plummer (2001) was that a career was only part of a life story. It was the intention in this study to ask occupational therapists about their careers from a point leading to their professional qualification. Plummer warned about 'amputating' an aspect of a life from the whole, suggesting that experiences within a life were often inextricably woven together whereby one aspect could only be viewed as part of the whole. A comprehensive picture had to be sought for credibility.

This chapter has addressed methodological issues that had to be taken into consideration before and during the study. The review of ethical issues in particular raised my awareness of how ethical principles had to be applied throughout the study. It was going to be important not just to formulate a letter of consent for participants to sign prior to the study informing them of possible implications and offering guarantees of confidentiality. It was going to be essential for me to engage responsibly at all times, but especially in the process of data generation. I was going to have to maintain an awareness of the demeanour and mood of the participant and respond appropriately to any changes that might ensue from the conversation, particularly if there appeared to be distress. Clearly the interview would have to be stopped and any concerns dealt with at the time. I would have to count on my experience as a former police officer and as an occupational therapist to address the situation calmly and professionally, allowing the participant to express any concerns or observations that she wished, which naturally would be excluded from the data. Serious repercussions from the interview would most probably lead to a complete curtailment of the research with that participant. Courtesy would dictate that a follow-up call be made to ensure her recovery from the episode and to reach agreement about a way forward.

The next chapter will explain how participants were identified and how the research was undertaken.

Chapter 6

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of how the study was conducted. It explains the rationale for selecting the two participants and describes the interview process. Some of the difficulties encountered in the interview process are examined and the approach to data analysis is explained.

Overview

This study took the form of a qualitative inquiry in the biographical tradition to explore the nature and application of narrative in occupational therapists' non-clinical practice, focusing particularly on their career course. A qualitative approach was selected because it is concerned with peoples' lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions and feelings (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and their life worlds and social contexts and interactions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Data generated through narrative in the form of stories told during interviews or conversations (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, 2000) aimed to illuminate the various experiences and capture the many layers of meaning and significance of these experiences in terms of an individual's past history, present and future situation. Over a six month period a series of taped, unstructured, in-depth interviews was carried out with the agreement of two clinical occupational therapists in order to capture the story of their career. Data were analysed using an interpretive approach based on the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Participants

Two female occupational therapy clinicians employed in different local services and who had been practising for not less than eight years were targeted for the study. Clare and Sue, as they will be known for this study, were professional colleagues with whom I had a

working relationship but who were not well known to me at a personal level. I needed to be sure that I came to the study with no assumptions about previous professional activities in their career in order to remain as open and objective as I could during the interviews. Equally I gauged that, in order to agree to participate in conversations of a personal nature, each would need to have met me before in order to make an informed decision about whether she could talk to me and trust me with the data. The reactions of each of them to the request to participate were very different. Clare questioned whether she had anything to offer the study, Sue stated clearly that she welcomed any opportunity to talk about herself. These comments were indicative of two very different sets of data that were to be forthcoming.

In selecting the participants, I made some conscious decisions. Firstly, both were to be female. The rationale for this decision was that occupational therapy is predominantly a female profession and so two female participants would largely reflect the population. Additionally, there could be particular features of a woman's career that might emerge to illuminate the significance of different life roles. It was also purposely decided not to include anyone who was currently an educator, researcher or private practitioner. These criteria, and the length of time qualified, were to ensure a career within occupational therapy practice over a reasonable timeframe.

Although the number of participants was small, I expected that two occupational therapists with very different career profiles would become exemplars of practising occupational therapists. I never intended that comparisons should be made between the participants and I clearly recognised that there could be no expectation of generalisation from the data. I thought that interviews with Clare and Sue would illustrate, rather than define, occupational therapists' careers and serve the purpose of helping me to explore how storytelling contributed to the process. Two participants allowed depth of understanding about the personal story and the professional career of each individual. Multiple interviews undertaken with each of them sought personally constructed experiences, explanations and insights within a safe relationship, developed over time. However, I kept in mind the

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possibility of extending the study to include a third participant should it be warranted for any reason. A third participant might have reduced any temptation to compare findings. However, it was still intended to treat the participants' stories as separate, self-contained and wholly individual in nature. A third participant would only be used as a reserve and in the end was not included.

A letter outlining the study, the right to withdraw at any time, possible emotional implications and the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity was given to Clare and Sue prior to the first interview (see Appendix 1). Both had previously indicated their willingness to take part in the study. Both gave written consent to being interviewed and re-interviewed on a number of occasions and to those interviews being taped. Prior agreement was reached with Clare and Sue about the timing and location of the interviews, most of which eventually took place at a location close to their workplace, but not within it. The number of interviews with each therapist was not determined at the outset although they were asked to commit to three or four. The quality of data generated and their willingness to pursue lines of inquiry through repeated interviews guided the process. Assurances were given about the security of the tapes during the research process, their use exclusively for the study and about their disposal on its completion.

No ethics approval was sought from any committee or employing authority in relation to the engagement of the participants in the research process. Each participant, although a practising occupational therapist, made the decision to participate as an independent, autonomous individual and interviews took place at a time agreed with them that did not interfere with their employment responsibilities.

The interview process
In this study three interviews were conducted with Clare and four with Sue. Interviews with Clare took place over a three-month period and were completed prior to interviews commencing with Sue. The second set of interviews also took three months to complete. Each therapist had been invited to bring with her to the first interview a copy of her

curriculum vitae, a lifeline or any other document that might help her to talk about her career as an occupational therapist. The first participant brought a lifeline and the second produced a curriculum vitae. During the first interview, Clare and Sue used these documents as physical prompts to guide their story and to establish the relationship and timeframe between one employment situation and another.

This study involved conversations with Clare and Sue about their career and aimed to be as non-directive as possible to elicit a free-flowing account or story of each professional life. No interview schedule was thus planned. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) noted that structured and semi-structured interviews tend to set the agenda and suppress responses. The control remains with the interviewer. In contrast, the narrative approach allows the agenda to remain open to development and change according to the narrator's experiences. The narrator retains control, selects what is told and makes clear its relevance to the story. The story told is thus constructed within the context of the interview.

I transcribed the tapes personally after each interview and forwarded a transcript to the participant before the next interview. This provided an opportunity for her to indicate changes to be made with regard to factual accuracy. In the event, minor changes were necessary on two scripts and related only to details that had been misheard in the transcription. Participants otherwise accepted the transcripts as presented.

During each subsequent interview I explored emerging issues in greater depth. I first invited the participant to make any comment on the last transcript that she had received. For the second and third interviews in the series I made a short list of key words that related to the previous interview that I wanted to use to guide the next one. No attempt was made to analyse data systematically between interviews or before both sets of interviews were completed.

The interviews remained largely unstructured, to enable each therapist to engage in the process as freely and fully as she was able. I interrupted only to clarify points otherwise

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my contribution was confined to asking questions which were prompted either by the participant's emerging story or by my, quite scant, list of key words. The interviews remained informal but it was not an equal-sided conversation, the participant being the dominant contributor. As will be shown, however, the degree to which each contributed without prompting varied considerably.

Difficulties encountered

I engaged as an active listener in the interview process, storing questions that arose in my mind until a suitable point in the conversation. This proved to be a very hard as I am naturally disposed to asking questions or making comment during normal one-to-one situations. There were times, particularly in the early interviews, when I started to interpret what was being said and propose suggestions as to how issues might be understood. I was keen to clarify the position but often, in my eagerness to get to the heart of the matter, my supplementary questions were inappropriate. I attempted to impose my own interpretation on to situations that the participants had described and sought their agreement on this interpretation. I found myself having to curb my curiosity and resist making connections between the data too quickly as the interviews progressed. My position as an occupational therapist may have led to connections that seemed natural to me, but inappropriate to the participants. Fortunately, both participants were clear about whether to agree with, and possibly expand on, my judgement of the situation or to refute it entirely and explain their own position on the issue. Both refused to concur with my interpretations if, from their perspective, they were inaccurate. Thus Clare and Sue remained in control of their data.

According to my judgement, the first interview with Clare went fairly well. Details of her career story emerged in a comprehensible way. After reading the transcript, Clare fed back some small corrections and I amended it accordingly. I spent time with the transcript reading it through in order to identify points that might be picked up in the next interview. This was merely a preparatory activity, not one of close scrutiny or analysis. When I asked at the beginning of the second interview whether Clare had been alerted to anything about her career that had not been apparent to her before, she replied that nothing had surprised

her because she was pretty self-aware. I was somewhat surprised at this response as I had anticipated that any revisiting of, or reflection on, events might have yielded new insights, but this apparently was not so.

The second interview progressed as planned but I seemingly only managed to elicit more factual details and some personal perceptions about her current role. I followed the same routine of transcribing, returning the transcript to Clare and making any amendments passed to me. With two scripts now in front of me I started to critically appraise my achievements, anxious that I had little material that bore any resemblance to a 'story'. I saw on the pages of the second transcript short responses to my questions that revealed little more depth of understanding than the first. My concerns were that I was asking the wrong questions, asking the right questions in the wrong way, or that no matter what I did I was unlikely to elicit the career conversations that would provide meaningful data.

I sought advice and was reassured to hear that others could detect stories in the data that had so far been generated. It was also suggested, however, that I might review the way in which I was seeking that data. I thus revisited the transcripts and concluded that perhaps I had been too leading or perhaps too constraining in the way in which I had posed questions, failing to afford opportunity for expansion of issues raised. In the next interview I resolved to ask for elaboration on emerging points in a different way. I also concluded that I might have to redefine my concept of 'story'.

I had always felt comfortable in the interview situation and had actively tried not to interrupt too much to allow the flow of material. Clare was producing answers that were succinct and, in a way, complete. She did not initiate conversation but waited for the next question to be posed. I was clearly not asking for elaboration when perhaps I should have been. I resolved to change my approach for the third interview.

A number of changes occurred in this interview although I still asked at the start whether Clare wished to comment on the transcript of the previous interview. She did not. I took

account of advice in the way I asked the question. *'Tell me about how you first got into theatre'* I asked. Earlier conversations had indicated that amateur dramatics was a serious hobby of hers so I resolved to move the last conversation to address a topic of personal rather than professional interest in the hope of eliciting a fuller story.

The data generated was very different from that of the previous two interviews. Clare offered a fuller, more animated story that was fluent and provided details of relationships, emotions and feelings that were qualitatively different from those of earlier interviews. Of course, this may not have been the result of a changed interview technique. It may have been due to Clare's increased familiarity with the process, after all, she did admit at the beginning of the third interview that she was getting used to the medium. Equally, the change may have been the result of a change of topic, which, this time related to personal rather than professional life and was clearly a well-loved activity.

My confidence in interview technique was restored. The pattern of words on the transcript of the third interview provided evidence that the storytelling process had been more successful this time, albeit that this might have been attributed to a number of reasons. Interviews with Sue produced no such problems. Sue had already told me that she enjoyed talking about herself and this proved to be so. I posed questions from time to time and a stream of stories emerged. Career details and anecdotes of social life were intertwined, set in context and presented with varying emotions. This produced narrative that showed, for example, choices and challenges and the way in which they were managed. Elaboration came without asking; stories unfolded as a spectrum of career adventures.

Initially three interviews were conducted with each of the two participants but some weeks after completion of the third interview with Sue I received an email communication from her. She had recently made a key career decision that partially stemmed from having engaged in the interviews for this study. She agreed to a further interview so that the rationale for her decision could be recorded.

Data analysis

Once all interviews were complete my task was to analyse systematically the two data sets. As indicated previously, my intention was not to compare and contrast the data but to identify the characteristics of the conversations that would help me to further understand the nature of both the career and the narrative and any relationship between them.

Analysis was conducted through a number of stages. Transcripts from all seven interviews were first reviewed to gain an overview of the story and the meaning of career for each of the occupational therapists. In the second stage, the data were re-visited to establish what might be revealed firstly about the concepts of career and the meaning of work, and secondly about narrative or storytelling. Lastly, the relationship between the concepts was examined and key themes were mapped out. Appendix 2 describes the process in more detail and shows how issues emerged and themes were identified for further discussion.

These discrete stages proved the best way forward. Other systems were tried and abandoned. Data analysis was initially tackled as a single process that involved searching for themes and ideas in the data. Results, however, became blurred. Just like an image that merges two discrete pictures but allows only one to dominate in the vision at a time, so emerging themes relating to 'career' and to 'narrative' moved in and out of focus. It allowed no clear picture to be built up of either concept. This hindered progress and proved to be unhelpful in trying to describe the qualities and meaning of concepts. The process was thus separated out to concentrate on one facet of the study and then the other.

In this phase of the research process other critical issues had to be recognized such as trustworthiness, honesty and authenticity. Vickers (2002: 617) stated that, 'interpretive authority most commonly resides with the researcher'. But no matter how honest the endeavour to maintain trustworthiness there is still the opportunity to distort the participants' experiences or impose themes and ideas on those experiences without just cause. This was particularly so because the essence of scholarly work is expected to be 'new ideas, new knowledge and new vantage points' (Vickers 2002: 611). Hollway and

Jefferson (2000) referred to honesty. The authors suggested how data should be approached openly, even-handedly, in a spirit of inquiry, deploying a theoretical framework that was laid out and justified. It was important only to make such judgements as could be supported by the evidence and equally important not to ignore evidence as it suited. Hollway and Jefferson also used sympathy and respect, as well as honesty, as underpinning principles for dealing with data.

The data analysis and writing phases clearly had to be as carefully administered as the interview process so as not to jeopardize the rigour of the research. It was important to be aware of possible pitfalls. As Baez (2002) pointed out, dilemmas can occur when attempting to write up the research because disclosing the findings accurately and faithfully can potentially reveal the identity of the participants and place them at risk. Qualitative researchers generate 'personal experience information' (Baez, 2002: 42) that necessarily has to be treated with respect and in confidence because exposing participants' views or actions may cause harm. Participants needed to appreciate that confidentiality was respected otherwise they would be reluctant to discuss their experiences honestly. In this research, the participants worked locally and might well be recognized from small pieces of information inadvertently or carelessly disclosed, even though personal identity remained concealed. Great care was taken to avoid misuse or disclosure of information that might lead to participants being identified. Maintaining the confidentiality of participants and the accuracy and integrity of the research was paramount. This ultimately meant making informed choices about quotations from the study to be used to illustrate emerging themes. Some relevant material was purposely deselected on the basis of confidentiality.

This chapter has detailed the process of generating data with two consenting participants and has highlighted some of the difficulties and anxieties that I experienced. The next two chapters address narrative and career concepts respectively, as findings from the study. In the discussion that follows, relationships between them are highlighted.

Chapter 7

UNFOLDING STORIES

Introduction

The two participants in this study, Clare and Sue, offered me insights into their career through a dialogue or conversation with me that allowed them to express thoughts, feelings, reflections, opinions and observations about their career journey. These occupational therapists recounted, through narrative, that aspect of their life that involved both anticipating and experiencing a career and the relationship between their career and other life activity. In fact, as will be shown, the storytelling process came to illuminate the life story by shedding light on distinct elements of it, or at least prompting questions to be raised about the thoughts and feelings behind the words. The nature of the language used, the tone of voice, the turn of phrase often suggested that there was more to the story than perhaps met the eye. Storytelling thus emerged as a process that was filled with highlights, humour and even horror stories that added a dimension to the data that was more than content alone.

This chapter will introduce the participants and explore their story from a number of perspectives. There were multiple voices to be heard, for example, professional, employee, partner, hobbyist, some were more confident than others. The relative merits will be explored of storytelling as a medium of communication that can help develop new insights into, and connections between, work and other meaningful life experiences.

The participants

At the time of the study Clare and Sue (names changed to maintain confidentiality) both held senior positions as occupational therapists in local services. Prior to the study, both had held a number of occupational therapy appointments in different organisations and in different geographical areas. Sue had also been both a lecturer and student in Higher

Education but had since returned to clinical work in a mental health service. Clare had always worked in the community.

Both participants were happy to tell the story of their career, its ups and downs, its setbacks and successes. In the first instance, Clare and Sue were offered space to explore and explain that aspect of their life that had been devoted to preparing for, and engaging in, a career in occupational therapy. Each chose where to start the story, the sequence of events, what to include and what to explain. There were prompts from me in terms of questions, observations or points picked up for clarification, but essentially the process aimed to give participants control over their storytelling and their reflections. In the process of examining these issues two features of 'story' were recalled. Firstly the contention that narrative, unlike story, contained an element of reflection (Johns, 2002) and secondly that not all narrative was necessarily story although story was likely to have an emotive element (Gabriel, 2000).

The first three interviews were carried out with Clare. In the first, she explained how she came to be an occupational therapist.

Clare's story

> *It was quite a late decision, really. Throughout my growing up in the school period it was always going to be a doctor first and then I realised I wasn't going to make the grade then it was going to be a nurse then I realised what nursing entailed, and it wasn't until, um actually I was going along a completely different street after that and I got really interested in geography and I was going to do a degree in geography then I didn't get the A level grades then it was a complete review of where I was at and a friend had gone to OT college in that year so I found out a lot more about it and it seemed to fit the interest in the medical profession and I applied and got it.*
>
> (1.1.2)

This brief, succinct account set the scene both as to how occupational therapy became the profession of choice for Clare and how conversations were often to progress.

Occupational therapy was not Clare's first career choice, it was a profession she had found by chance having failed to realise other career aspirations. At the time of the study, she still regretted never having become a doctor and was having to come to terms with the fact that this was likely to be an unfulfilled ambition. Aspects of her professional career are covered in the next chapter.

In the one-to-one conversations, Clare described herself as being academically-minded, someone who liked using her imagination, but someone who was very shy and generally lacking in confidence. Yet, as will be shown, Clare demonstrated that she was verbally competent and naturally reflective, providing what might be described as very 'professional' answers to questions posed, in that they were concise, cohesive and to the point.

In the first interview Clare revealed her ability to reflect on her situation and to offer formal insights into some of her predicaments. At other times her responses tended to be factual, somewhat cautious and rather restrained. Nevertheless, her responses could often be regarded as short stories. For example, Clare outlined an experience of going for a new job:

> *... a senior practitioner post came up within the team and myself and a colleague went for it and I didn't get the post, which I was very, very, miffed about and even reflecting back now I still think that I should have got it but there must have been... I can remember it being an appalling interview but in terms of the two people on the table for the job, I should have got it... I genuinely feel that; so very miserable about that and very disillusioned, dispirited, and whether my manager wanted to get me off his back because he was fed up of me whinging... he arranged an opportunity for me to be seconded for six months to another office locally... (1.1.70)*

Despite its brevity, here was a story with a beginning, middle and end. The narrative shows reflective components and outlines the emotive feelings experienced by the narrator as a result of the failure. It is both contained in terms of there being little wastage of words yet revealing of personal endeavour, aspirations, expectations and reactions to loss. Another marked feature of Clare's responses was that they often demonstrated how adversity develops into opportunity. Responses rarely ended on a negative note suggesting that

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Clare, through her own endeavours, had found ways of dealing with disappointments and working through them. She demonstrated characteristics of self-sufficiency that aligned with her perspective of her self-awareness. Whilst she admitted failure in various situations during her career, she also seemed philosophical about it.

Clare gave an account of her progress through her career often reflecting on the impact on her of various twists and turns in her story, yet ending once again on a positive note.

> ...that was September 95, um, what happened next? Again, couple of years, started to get bored, itchy feet started going for jobs. I had about three interviews and didn't get anywhere. Wanted to try and go up the line but wasn't sure how. Went for a policy and practice manager in Somerset, which I was probably a bit lacking in experience for, so I didn't get that. It was actually a colleague team manager that got that within Dorset, but I would have loved the job and I think I would have been able to do it but I was probably, I didn't have quite enough experience and a couple of team management posts in Somerset and Brighton, didn't get those either. But that worked out pretty well because I think I was just itching for the next stage on, but team management wasn't really the niche I wanted to go into. Um, now what happened then? Yes, at the same time [my line manager] went off very suddenly for six months and I had to act up into her post so I got a real flavour of team management and it confirmed utterly that whilst I felt I could do the job I didn't want to do the job and I wanted to... to reach out more into policy development and get involved in strategy and that kind of thing but keep very firmly within the OT camp, which is a difficult place to go really for OT especially in Social Services. (1.1.78)

Although she responded openly to questions, responses tended to be very focused with little elaboration on, or diversion from, the point. She rarely offered more than was needed to address the question. She did not become embroiled in a long conversation. Her narratives seemed to be the result of a speedy process of sifting and selecting just enough, credible information and choice of words to deal with the issue.

There were times, however, when it was difficult to view the interview as a conversation, or a conversation as a story. The interview process was intended to enable storytelling but Clare presented as a woman of few words. Some responses included her reactions to accounts of events, even so, there was evidence of reflection that aligned them to

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narrative. In one conversation Clare spoke of her pride in having written a couple of chapters for a book:

> *I was very proud of that, actually…I'm quite critical of it as a piece of work but in other ways I'm very proud that I've actually done it. It was quite a difficult task because it was only eight thousand words and quite strict guidelines as to what it was all about academically. I feel it was not terribly rigorous and it could have been an awful lot better but then I would have needed twice as many words…* (1.1.82)

Clare appeared to engage regularly in the process of reflection through which she probably gained some of her self-awareness but she did not always appear to own the self-knowledge that reflections could reveal. The career conversations provided opportunity to recount the reflections rather than serve to develop any new insights through the process of storytelling. Clare never showed signs of using any emerging perceptions to guide current decision-making.

Clare repeatedly claimed to know herself well. It seemed that nothing emerging from the interviews would surprise her. This may have been denial, or just a professional way of coping with a question about her reflections on her career. At the end of the second interview, she still claimed no new insights but by this time there was a suggestion that she might have been holding back:

> *'I don't think everything has really come out because I'm very aware of me as a person, of what motivates and drives me. I wonder what you are making of it, that's the interesting thing, that's always in the back of my mind, thinking what deductions you are making of it. I guess I'm wondering whether some of what I'm articulating and that I'm thinking about, and wondering whether that is coming across as I'm intending it to, but I don't think there are any revelations, any sudden outbursts of inspiration'* (1.2.166)

In fact Clare did seem to be very self-aware but she appeared cautious about revealing some of her traits. She hesitated and contradicted herself as she spoke of her concern not to be viewed as a 'control freak', a term she, herself, had coined through earlier conversations

> *'because it isn't me, but it is me in some ways… it is not naturally of me and I wouldn't want anyone to think that of me at all, but there is obviously an element of that in me, I recognise it, but I can see it's quite a negative trait'* (1.2.170).

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Clare was coming across as someone who liked to be in control of herself and her situation, although not necessarily of others. She wanted to have influence and make an impact at work but realised that she may be presenting a side of herself that could be construed as unpleasant. So she acknowledged self-awareness but at the same time tried to hide an image that she was not proud of.

The third interview revealed a different side of Clare altogether. As mentioned in the last chapter, my approach to interviewing was modified in the hope of eliciting a fuller story about aspects of Clare's life and career. In this third interview Clare became much more animated and talked much more freely about other life activities and personal interests. There were noticeable differences in her enthusiasm as she responded to the invitation to talk about her interest in theatre. It was as if she had let down her guard. A story unfolded about Clare's involvement with amateur dramatics, a social interest that she shared with her husband. Noticeably, she talked about activities that were personally meaningful to her in a very different way to the way in which she had spoken of her duties and responsibilities at work.

Compared with the curt responses relating to her career, Clare opened up and provided a lengthy, more intimate and detailed narrative of her involvement with theatrical productions, her actor friends and the interests that she shared with her husband. Although my interview technique was modified, the trigger for the change in the nature of Clare's response was more likely to be the topic of conversation than the different interview approach. Nevertheless, I had learned some lessons about interviewing for research purposes and tried to keep these in mind for the second set of interviews.

For Clare, the storytelling process seemed to serve as a career-affirming process as she summed up her current position.

> *I think I've become much more competent as a person and begun to recognise what my skills are and once you recognise what your skills are you can develop them. Once you know you're good at something then you do more of it, don't you, self-fulfilling, isn't it? ... I think we were talking about this in the first interview about my ambition outstripping my ability and I think I'm finding, it's certainly the case*

throughout probably the first half of my career if not more, wanting to do more than I was actually able to, but now that's more of a match, I think my ambition and my ability are now probably much more closely aligned. (1.3.83)

Given Clare's acknowledged lack of confidence, this admission might be seen as quite courageous under the circumstances, particularly in the light of talking to another occupational therapist. But a one-to-one conversation with someone with whom a rapport had been built up over time, may have given Clare the opportunity to be honest and open about her position. There was no suggestion that she created opportunities with anyone else for this kind of discussion, so the conversation enabled her to express openly and honestly her perceptions of her current situation and re-affirm her career direction.

Clare did seem both confident and competent in her present role and she was certainly satisfied overall with her life. She acknowledged that life was very good, she was ready to move on if the opportunity arose, but in the meantime life, which included work and social life combined, was satisfactory all round (1.3.103).

Sue's story

Sue, the second participant, needed little prompting to tell her stories. Where Clare had been sparing in the use of words, Sue seemed to throw caution to the wind and speak her mind in all its glorious detail. She initiated many of the stories herself. They were long, detailed and dealt with both fact and feeling simultaneously. For Sue, the stories were based on values largely held in relation to sensitivities around other people.

Sue had given the profession of occupational therapy a good deal of thought and had tested out other careers paths before settling on this profession as 'a very positive choice'. She was already partially socialised to occupational therapy from earlier experiences and never regretted her decision to become an occupational therapist. In the following extract from the transcript, Sue provides a full picture of her life before occupational therapy and of how she came to undertake the training.

I suppose I have a background in mental health care really because both of my parents always worked in the NHS and so as part of that growing up, I spent a significant amount of time in my childhood living within the grounds of a large psychiatric hospital...

...so for most of my childhood that [occupational therapy] *was around in the family, and being talked about, and it was where we lived, and obviously I spent time in and around OT departments from quite an early age, so it was something that I always knew and was very familiar to me...it was always quite an exciting place to be 'cause there were always lots of art materials and just really good things happening, it was always quite a sort of interesting, vibrant place to be around, which I always enjoyed.*

At school though, I developed, I'd always had, I think, a real interest in history and so there was a real pull from history to do something with history. I think, as well, I think I, at some sort of level, was resisting OT because it just seemed obvious. It was something I knew about, it was something that I was really interested in, and I think maybe sort of at the age of 16, 17, 18, I felt that I wanted to broaden my horizons a bit and it would have been very obvious just to have slipped into OT, I suppose, and I'm very glad I didn't at that stage because what I did was to go to College. I did a history degree and spent five years doing it cause it was a four year degree and I spent a year working for the Student Union working as a sabbatical officer and was quite involved in student politics but interestingly, the welfare side of politics, so I found myself in the role of working with people who had run into financial problems or who had run into academic problems, interestingly, and was the Education and Welfare Officer for the year, which I really, really enjoyed.

But whilst at university I also took the opportunity to do history-related things and I spent some time working at the Castle Museum and did various bits and pieces...the side of it I enjoyed was they had open evenings at the museum and it was demonstrating stuff and talking to people... So I attempted to get on to some curatorship courses but they were incredibly competitive and my degree wasn't really good enough to get on them, so that didn't happen.

So I was sort of thinking about what to do, knew I didn't want to teach history as such, because I had spent such a lot of time with teachers at Ripon and York St John and towards the end had spent an awful lot of time around the OT. I got increasingly involved doing things around the OT course in terms of course evaluation stuff and stuff supporting students. So gradually I started to move back in that direction. I was very reluctant to go and train for three years really 'cause I felt like I'd been a student for five years already and was sort of eager to get cracking quicker than that really. I then discovered that Derby at that time ran a two year Diploma course, which was an accelerated course ... So I then decided to go and do OT and, I mean, I was really excited about it and I think it was a very positive decision but I was very glad that I'd explored other options first.

So it was always there, basically. But I went and did some other things. I think I did it and approached it much better for doing it as, I don't know about more mature, but as someone who had cast their net a bit wider first and had tried some other things and enjoyed the student experience, I really enjoyed that growing up time, I think, which meant that when I came to going to do my Diploma in OT I was really focused and on what I wanted to do and the student experience wasn't as important to me. So it was a very positive choice and one that I have never ever regretted.
(2.2.2/3)

Sue's account of her entry into occupational therapy was intertwined with a personal commentary on her story that included details of her thought and decision-making processes. She recalled the challenges of her training brought about partly by her own doing. By her own admission, she was 'bolshy' which sometimes triggered incidents that led to conflict. Nevertheless, she made the grade and, on qualification, was clear that mental health was to be her preferred area of work.

> *I felt that the roles were much more fluid and I felt that there was much more freedom, and it was the area of people's experience that interests me really (2.1.25).*

Sue's choice regarding the location of her first appointment was influenced by a relatively long-standing personal relationship.

Relationships often seemed to be at the root of Sue's successes, her struggles and her decisions. She advocated the value of relationships on which she based her practice:

> *relationships are absolutely crucial, 'cause you talk to service users, they are not interested in your label they are interested in what you can do for them, or if you can do anything for them, and at the end of the day that boils down to how well you listen and whether you gel with them as a person or whether you can relate to them as a person and whether they can relate to you (2.1.23).*

She claimed that being a good therapist was ultimately about the relationship that you make with people and she intimated that both service users and colleagues were included in this comment. She gave examples of jobs she had held where good working relationships with members of other professions created a harmony amongst team members that was valued and that made the service successful. Yet it was often disintegrating relationships in either her private or her professional life that instigated her career moves.

Whilst initially she had taken a job after qualifying because of an existing relationship, that relationship eventually fell apart.

> *It was just sort of two people going in completely different directions really and the relationship fell apart or had been sort of falling apart I think since I qualified. I think me doing my course, I started to change...I was a person in my own right with*

a job and was really enjoying it and getting a different social life and I think our social lives and just our interests started to diverge and so that relationship broke up. (2.1.43)

The change in Sue was too much for her partner. It was almost as if she had found herself at last and was becoming mentally quite self-sufficient. Sue moved into a new relationship and into a new job in a different geographical area. But it was also relationships, this time with colleagues, which caused yet another career move. As a junior member of a staff team in conflict she was in no position to suggest or implement strategies that might have resolved the situation. She became somewhat of a scapegoat for other people's problems but it made her very unhappy and she experienced a sense of failure. She ultimately chose to leave because of the consequences for her of the difficulties, which she had to redefine in order to find her own way of understanding them.

> *What I'm doing is defining that as some kind of failure and I don't think it is necessarily... what I'm having to do ... is work quite hard on rationalising the situation... (2.2.30).*

For Sue in particular, storytelling unexpectedly became a vehicle for personal reflection and for self-discovery. This is not to say that Sue had no self-awareness but to suggest that, at the time of the study, her work life was in some turmoil, she was stuck and she was looking to move on. She was trying to operate effectively amidst an array of organisational non-decision-making and feeling personally responsible for lack of development. Whereas earlier she was confident and self-sufficient, here she appeared to be losing herself, feeling disempowered and sensing failure.

> *I guess the decision to move was out of some sort of sense of being stuck where I was and that that was starting to affect my sort of motivation and sense of achievement... I felt that I had explored all the avenues I could and that I'd made the case really for the work that we were doing but nobody could give me any sort of assurance, any sort of definites in terms of yes, the project would continue and it would be funded (2.4.2)*

The storytelling process offered her an avenue, not only for reviewing her career, but also for placing herself within it and viewing her position from a different perspective. It enabled her to determine a way forward through the difficulties she was experiencing.

> *I think it was talking to you. I think it was having the opportunity to review my career, to think about what was important to me, to think about what drove me….*

> *I don't think that I'd had that opportunity before to sit down and talk about me in that sort of detail… and to take that great sort of slice through it or to think about the things that you pulled out… it helped me to work out what I was finding difficult about where I was, which helped me sort of analyse that a little bit and identify who was part of it and get a bit of distance on it and then a few things shifted… talking to you then helped me sort of re-look at that and think so what's important …and where am I going in my career? (2.4.8).*

There was what might be interpreted as a therapeutic slant to her observations in that the process of storytelling to a listener had had some beneficial effect, a point that will be discussed later. However, although this had not in any way been the intention of the storytelling process, the process of self-discovery proved to have greater significance for Sue than was ever imagined. It became a vehicle for affirming her values, particularly those relating to people, and it became a process for redefining the meaning of work, for rationalising her intentions and served as an aid to her decision-making.

Beyond the story

Compared with reading the transcripts, listening to the tapes of both participants revealed additional characteristics. The pace at which details were given, the expression of humour, the tone of voice, the clarity and firmness or tentativeness of a response could be detected. Differences were particularly apparent between when career stories were discussed and when personal interests were shared. Career stories tended to be more reflective, and possibly more deliberately presented whereas personal stories seemed spontaneous and more open.

The career story was only part of the life story, an aspect of it, and it portrayed one side of the person. Listening to (rather than just reading) aspects of the story revealed different

sides of the person. It was, however, the synthesis of the stories of career and other life balancing activity that started to reveal the person as a whole.

Mood

Words read from the script alone could not always portray the mood of the narrator. Although Clare's mood appeared to remain fairly stable across all the interviews, Sue's mood tended to vary from one conversation to the next. This was largely revealed through listening to the tapes rather than through reading them. Sue's voice became soft and barely audible when talking about things that seemed to cause her distress. The pace of talking quickened and her voice was raised when she spoke of things that frustrated her or of things that interested her. In a sense, there was a similarity between these issues as the things that frustrated her were often matters in which she was deeply interested and about which she was particularly concerned. They tended to relate to the values she held and the issues about which she was passionate.

Talking more about her career, Sue acknowledged:

> *it motivates me...I sometimes struggle to keep perspective on it and I think sometimes I've just found it very difficult personally, and there's reasons, to affect me personally and emotionally and I think that's probably always going to be there although I think I'll get better at that...but I think because I feel things quite deeply about work and I'm so sort of sometimes passionate about it, I think then that sometimes leaves me open to feeling quite wounded if other people don't see it quite the same way...first of all I get really cross about that, and irate, and then I start to feel really hurt about it as somehow I've failed to make a point or I'm not going about it the right way (2.3.38).*

When holding strong values, the consequences of career effort not working out as intended seemed to be felt quite severely and quite personally.

> *I'm not very good at hierarchies and I'm not really very good at being told what to do and so there's always been this tension in work between sort of hierarchies, the established hierarchies that exist and that people who sort of are receiving services are often at the bottom of the pyramid and I sort of struggle with that, you know, so I think that's what led me into the work I do now because I see people who have been the users of the service, whether they've been abused by it or have felt that it's been very positive, I see being involved in a small way in them actually getting to*

work in the service and to use their skills and expertise in the service as supremely subversive, I mean I love that... (2.3.11)

The emotional side of career tended also to be revealed during the conversation in the language used to express feelings. The above two quotations provide examples of emotive language – *'feeling quite wounded'*, *'hurt'*, *'I've failed'*, *'I struggle'*. Sue often felt she had failed, as she reported earlier when she experienced team conflict.

Similarly, reflecting back on another situation...

> *it's not actually about not having done a good job its actually just about circumstances have conspired not to give me what I want... but it hasn't felt very comfortable cause that's felt as though that's been about having been out of control and having failed and not having finished the job... ' (2.2.30)*

The language here is interesting. Failure has once again featured in the language used by Sue about her career but it is not so much that she has failed as she has been unable to meet her own high standards at work and *'circumstances have conspired...'* against her, suggesting that the blame lies elsewhere. But the feeling of failure can be quite damaging and lead to a sense of grief.

> *The difficulties I have are what I'm losing really so I think I have been grieving really for the business of lost opportunity, lost potential... losing working with the people we've been supporting... losing that opportunity to be doing something a bit on the edge... (2.2.34)*

In contrast, however, the drive in Sue's career came from *'being useful, feeling useful... wanting to feel that I've done things differently'* (2.2.16); *'what gives me the buzz without a doubt is the contact with people at the coal face'* (2.3.34).

Her strong values and sense of equality also motivated her. The narrative may have revealed feelings and emotions but it raises the issue of a career having to lead to meaningful rewards for the career person. People will experience career setbacks differently. Some, like Clare, may be self-sufficient and have personal reserves on which to draw when disappointments arise. Others may appreciate a support mechanism to enable them to manage the situation positively before feeling hurt, wounded, dispirited, distressed

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or experiencing the symptoms of grief. Feelings of despair may lead to inappropriate or rash decisions about career moves taken alone and in turmoil. Sue's final decision was arrived at after she had been able to assess clearly the costs and benefits of loss for herself following conversations with others who remained neutral about the outcome. Storytelling had thus aided that decision-making process.

The research process involved the participants being guided, questioned and sometimes challenged on their accounts of their career as further clarification was sought about various aspects. This sometimes resulted in them drawing together for themselves different threads of their life and gaining a different perspective on their career for themselves, as Sue noted in particular:

> *It has helped me reflect upon my career, it's helped me make sense of it, I think, some of the things that are happening at the moment... that opportunity to talk about it has really helped me sort some of it out...I think it has identified some things and helped me make connections about what's going on... it's a really, really useful process (2.2.48).*

This chapter has introduced Clare and Sue, the participants, as narrators of their own story. The storytelling process allowed them to reflect on aspects of their career, its highs and lows, and to provide an account of the effect that each person's career journey had on her individually. The way in which their story was recounted also highlighted mood and emotion as dimensions of the conversation but these were only evident when the tapes, and not just the transcripts, were attended to with care. The transcripts thus only provided part of the story. Some characteristics of a story seemed to be more accessible by listening carefully both to what was said and how it was said. Data analysis that only relied on a systematic thematic analysis of scripts may not have done full justice to the story. Nuances of emotion, undetected in the script, revealed different kinds of insight that added another dimension to the story.

Chapter 8

CAREER STORIES: THE MEANING OF WORK

Introduction

This chapter explores the meaning of work for Clare and Sue, how they define themselves in relation to their career, the factors that drive them and their personal values and characteristics that influence their approach to the work they do. The importance of relationships is revisited and their attitudes to leadership and management as a feature of their work are discussed.

This research was never intended to be a comparative study but comparisons are inevitable when participants share the same profession. Their stories embraced some common ways of approaching the world that were likely to stem from personal values and from being socialised into the same profession. Nevertheless, there were some unique dimensions that characterised them as individuals in their own right. Both thus presented as having a professional self and a personal self that intertwined to influence career moves and strategies.

Work played an important part in the life of both Clare and Sue. Clare worked full time and Sue worked part time as she had a young family. For both therapists, it was the possibility of making a difference to other people's lives that motivated them in their work. Clare put systems in place that would help her colleagues deal with service related issues more effectively, Sue ensured that users were able to contribute personally to service delivery. Both therapists were strong advocates of the rights of disabled and disadvantaged people and were instrumental in developing services to meet their specific needs.

Defining self

Both therapists defined themselves in terms of their career. Clare perceived her career as *'very important'* to her. *'I can't separate myself from my career, it's one and the same thing'* (1.2.16). Even though she said she could not necessarily commit to the same career for the rest of her life, there had to be a fit between her own values and beliefs and her chosen profession (1.2.178).

Similarly, Sue claimed:

> *It's part of how I define who I am ... I think that when I first thought about OT or went to train in OT, that was a very large part of who I was and how I defined myself and how I described myself* (2.3.2).
> *It's important to me to have a way of defining who I am, what I am, that's because you have to work within the system you work in, people want to know what your label is* (2.2.24).

This raises questions about whether defining self is an internal or external process and whether the definition is the same across both domains.

For Sue, the definition of self changed with life experiences, partly as a result of taking time out of work to travel in South America, where she was exposed to different cultures and different ways of doing things, and which she described as *'one of those life-affirming and life-defining experiences'*, and partly as a result of having children.

> *I think it's probably having children that's changed that 'cause I think that's become another way by which I sort of define myself and what I do and who I am* (2.3.2).

For Sue, these experiences brought about some redefinition of the meaning of work in relation to her self. She began to see it as less *'all consuming'* ... *'less of a driver and perhaps less important than other aspects of life'* (2.3.2). Clare had no plans for children but depended on her husband for support in her career moves, particularly those that involved relocation. As will be shown, drives in Clare's career came more from an intrinsic motivation to succeed and to exert influence within her sphere of employment.

Career drivers

Clare was shy, as she explained:

> *There was a tension between me as a person who would rather sit in a corner out of the way and not be noticed, and what I want to do as a professional* (1.2.96).

Yet as a contradiction for Clare, the overriding theme emerging from conversations with her was that she wanted to exert influence and make a difference within her professional world.

> *... as I've seen myself go up the career ladder I seem to be gaining more influence and exerting that ... lower down the ranks you don't have the influence and that was certainly my main drive for moving... to gain that influence and use it'* (1.2.54).

> *With each job has come more opportunity to influence ...It's what I've always sought, for the good of the profession, it's not an egotistical thing, but I'm sure it must come back to some kind of egotistical basis, but that's not my prime reason, it's been about getting involved and making it work as a service* (1.2.56).

This tension appeared to be related to personal confidence that could be overcome in the work situation by adopting the professional role. Yet Clare was also conscious that she might have been giving the impression in these conversations that she was, in her words, *'a status-seeking control-freak'* (1.2.96). The need for her to be able to work autonomously and to exert influence over whatever service she worked in featured repeatedly in the conversations. Her ideal job, she claimed, would involve *'more influence'*

> *and I like to think that's professional influence. I don't think that's about personal gratification. Oh it must be, yeah, of course it must be, but I think the main drive is influence for the profession so its about going up the hierarchy, up the ladder* (1.1.258)

The conversations with Clare revealed a number of contradictions. For example, she argued in the first interview that she was academic, which fitted into to her desire to become a doctor. Making reference to the occupational therapy course she followed, she claimed it was tough but enjoyable.

> *I just got on with it really... I am quite an academically minded person anyway so enjoyed the academia of it, it seemed very rigorous, which is what I wanted* (1.1.20).

Later, when qualified, she commented that by 1993 *'my brain was turning to jelly and started to dribble out of my ears and I wanted new challenges'* (1.1.70). She registered for an MSc by distance learning but found the mode of study difficult and dropped out two years later, before doing the dissertation. However, this was partially the result of meeting the person who was to become her husband and she admitted,

'I got a social life', 'I went from virtually nil social life to extremely full social life' (1.1.70).

It seems that a personal system of prioritising activity was invoked. The MSc was abandoned and never resumed. She later explained:

> *I don't have the staying power and self-discipline to do it... I love the idea of doing further study, it really appeals, and I'd love the gongs that go with it, you know, I'd love to have an MSc, I'd love to have a doctorate... but I haven't got the self-discipline at the moment to do it... when I get home there are other things that take priority like ... watching tele, sitting on the couch with a bottle of wine* (1.1.304).

The demands and priorities of home life, now as a married woman, superseded other goals of personal gratification, despite their status symbols, and ensured a balanced existence between home and work life. Clare was clear that she was already 100% committed within her job role at present and she had to progress work that was job-oriented rather than academically-oriented. There was no space at the moment in her life for further academic study.

For Clare, the fulfilment of ambition and achievement came from work and from job moves, not from academic study. Work, it seems, was the legitimate place for pursuing ambition. Studying for an MSc would have impacted too much on home-life as the employer's support for study time was non-existent. Job moves, initially locally and then further afield, offered promotion, enhanced responsibility, greater autonomy and increased influence over service development and provision. Job moves countered the boredom that had set in during the previous job. However, in the process of applying for new posts, personal ambition did not always match her level of personal experience, and there were disappointments as well as successes in the job application process.

Strategically, Clare placed herself, not just in the position that she wanted to be in, but in a position from which she could step easily to the next rung of the ladder.

> *I'm always ready to go before I'm ready...I'm sort of keeping my eye open and trying to move my career and place myself in a direction, in a position to be able to move on when opportunities arise* (1.1.88).

Intrinsically, Clare gained satisfaction from her work.

> *I'm driven by my work... that's what I'm trained to do and seem to be doing OK, ... so I get my own sense of positive feedback from work that keeps it going'* (1.3.27).

Sue's move into Higher Education to do a Master's degree, in contrast, was more a legitimate means for her to escape from an unhappy employment situation than a conscious aim to improve qualifications, to attain any kind of status or to fulfil personal goals. Sue had had high expectations of the job she was in at the time, but these failed to materialise because she found herself in the midst of interpersonal conflicts that could not be resolved.

> *It didn't feel a good place to be. I felt very isolated, really isolated, very unsupported...I felt very undermined, my confidence just plummeted...I was being compromised...I was just becoming really screwed up about it...so just took the decision to move on* (2.1.71).

The move initially entailed taking agreed time out of work to do a Master's degree full-time but a month into the course Sue realised how much better she felt and resigned her post completely. As far as the course was concerned:

> *I loved it and enjoyed every minute of it and it was challenging ... it was about being given stuff, it was about ideas and thoughts... that you then had to chew over, and it was great* (2.1.74).

Here, Sue regained her confidence. She took new, part-time employment to help fund the course and continued to work for the same employer after completing her Master's degree. Her dissertation, however, led to other projects that ultimately became very meaningful in her life.

Asked about ambition, Sue admitted to being less ambitious now than she had been in the past but then in trying to define ambition she reinterpreted the term.

I don't know whether it was <u>what</u> I wanted to be as <u>how</u>* I want to be doing it. All along is this sort of anti-establishment... this thing about people being better than others (2.1.105).*

This, she claimed, stemmed from a culture within her family.

Whilst financial independence was important to Sue, it was not the most important driver. Sue sought situations where she could feel useful and to which she could contribute; situations that had a clear purpose, where she knew what was expected and she could see a job to do. Yet she also gained satisfaction from doing something *'a bit on the edge'* and *'doing things differently'*. She liked to be given the freedom to pursue ideas, to engage in original thinking and to be dynamic and radical where it was appropriate, but within a strong management structure, an issue to be addressed later.

Sue moved between working in Higher Education and working in the Health Service but it was employment in the Health Service that, according to Sue, provided her with much valued choice, flexibility and security. These advantages outweighed financial gains, as they were the means by which she could spend time with her children, organise and enjoy both her private and professional life and obtain personal fulfilment from both.

Challenging boundaries

Both occupational therapists found barriers impeding. For Sue, personal values and respect for others caused her to challenge others' practice. For Clare, organisational barriers interfered with function, which in turn restricted appropriate services being delivered to users. Clare took opportunities to challenge the status quo and to develop services that were more responsive to client needs. For Clare, this meant using her own influence to effect change.

> *I've always found it immensely frustrating, the barriers, the political, organisational, financial barriers that are put up between the organisations and I'll do anything to get round them or through them within my sphere of influence (1.1.340).*

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* emphasised on tape

Even in employment positions early in her career she actively sought out opportunities to be influential through project work.

> *... with each job, has come more opportunity to influence ... it's what I've always sought for the good of the profession; it's not an egotistical thing ... that's not my prime reason, it's been about getting involved with the profession and making it work as a service* (1.2.56).

Here, Clare tried to rationalise the purpose for her seeking influence but had to admit to it being as equally personal as professional.

Success, in Clare's terms, came from *'removing the boundaries'* that prevented occupational therapists from doing their job and creating systems and mechanisms that allowed flexibility and creativity in meeting the needs of service users. It was personally satisfying *'being able to influence the development of the profession and the service'* (1.1.190).

Sue claimed always to have had a problem with hierarchies and boundaries and frequently challenged them (2.1.30). A strong sense of personal respect for other people and an expectation of that respect from others tended to guide her behaviour.

> *I struggle enormously with hierarchies and pecking orders and a perception or an organisation, which says that some people have got a right to say things and other people haven't...* (2.1.23)

> *I probably always wanted to be doing something that's been about actually just trying to challenge some traditions and challenge some of the received wisdom, challenging sort of the institutionalised ways of doing things pushing at some of the stuff, raising some questions... occupational therapy has enabled me to push some boundaries a bit, or rattle a few bars a bit, I hope positively* (2.1.106/7).

Sue struggled with attitudes, with the tension between *'established hierarchies'* and people who were receiving the service and who were perceived to be *'at the bottom of the pyramid'* (2.2.10). She was prepared to challenge people who held those views and the systems that disallowed people from exerting equal rights.

Being creative

Clare made a clear distinction between aspects of a job that were enjoyable and those that were not. For example, the necessary task of dealing with the constant stream of referrals in the light of limited resources was described as being ' *very tedious and boring, very mundane'* with *'not a lot of opportunity for development'* (1.1.96). Opportunities for effecting progress within, or developing, the service were more important to her, as was variety in her work. The freedom to work on multiple tasks at any one time, often self-initiated, was welcomed and provided some of this variety.

> *I've always got my ear to the ground to see what's going on... anything I hear of or that I think we should be involved with, I jump straight in... so I have got involved with a lot of stuff that is going on... there's loads and loads of stuff and I've managed to keep all the balls in the air so far* (1.1.114).

Again, the underlying suggestion was that multi-tasking was not just professionally acceptable but also personally gratifying. It was an overt way of demonstrating competence and a strategic way of becoming increasingly central to organisational life.

Learning on the job was part of the course and ensured that projects did not flounder. Working on her personal choice of projects became self-fulfilling. Clare insisted, however, that any project she engaged with had to fit the overall strategy of the service, and in each case had to be of benefit to service users. But, she claimed,

> *I get something out of it as well, I get my fulfilment, professional fulfilment... and for me the two have to go hand in hand, I'm not that altruistic* (1.1.148).
> *I couldn't ever do a job if there wasn't anything in it for me and I wasn't having an impact on the service* (1.1.164).

Boredom ensued if projects ran out or no longer presented a challenge.

'Creating' systems, policies, procedures became the way in which some of the frustrations of the job were addressed and personal satisfaction was gained. These efforts led to *'creative options'* to meet service user needs. Creating ways in the system to be different often meant challenging traditional ways of doing things, so having the courage to do that, gaining the support from service managers to do it, and seeing how the systems had a

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positive impact on service delivery provided much needed intrinsic reward. She particularly appreciated people who were willing to '*think outside the box*' (1.1.354).

Similarly with Sue,

> *what gives me a buzz is being able to hear an idea from somebody, or have an idea and then do the bit, do the groundwork, do the talking, do the persuading and then sort of see something happen* (2.3.34).
> '*I like to be given the freedom to pursue ideas and pursue my own way of doing things'* (2.2.4)

It seemed that the occupational therapists had both a capacity and a need to be creative. Even if it did not emerge in employment it emerged in their private life. Sue enjoyed gardening. Clare's leisure pursuit was amateur dramatics and she explained the similarities with occupational therapy. '*Both are creative professions*'. In the theatre,

> *it's an extremely creative process moving from words on the page to something three-dimensional on stage and breaking down the wall between the stage and the audience* (1.2.192).

Breaking down barriers and making new things happen traced the link between personal and professional values and the way in which individuals pursued the activities that were meaningful to them in work or leisure time, and provided personal satisfaction.

Values and standards

As with all health care professionals, occupational therapists are required to work to philosophical values and standards set by the profession. Additional to established professional standards are those that tend to arise from a personal set of beliefs and values that underpin all activity. Sue wanted to '*convey a sense that people are valued*' (2.2.14). She expected people with mental health problems to be treated equitably with those who did not have such problems. She expected the contributions of people in either low or high-status employment, from cleaner to consultant, to be acknowledged equally. Similarly Clare was concerned that those who were most disadvantaged did not lose out when resources were allocated.

Clare had high expectations of herself and did not like to do things unless she was coming from a position of knowledge and understanding. In one example where she was attempting to work across organisational boundaries she claimed:

> It's all founded in my knowledge of manual handling. If I didn't have that knowledge I don't think I could have come from such a strong position. But also, the really strongly held belief that the service user is at the centre of all this and it's their experience that matters... (1.3.37).

In a different sort of way Sue also had high expectations of herself. She claimed not to be able to cope with 'not finishing things off' or not having done something properly (2.2.30). This tended to produce a sense of failure, so both standards and stakes were high. Sue described two particular sets of circumstances in her career when attempts to remedy a situation had not paid off. She questioned her own ability to resolve the matter. In the event, both positions proved too difficult and she determined to leave the situation and move on in her career. She had had high expectations that had not materialised, reflecting 'do I stay and martyr myself to this or do I just sort of survive?' (2.2.30). Her choice was to survive. Nevertheless, she added, 'not finishing something hurts me quite a lot'. It was evident that neither seemed able to compromise their values. For Sue in particular, an uncompromising position often led to decisions about resignation. So although occupational therapy was the profession of choice that fitted a personal value system, the extent to which it could be played out in different services had a bearing on job satisfaction and job continuity.

Relationships

Both participants acknowledged the need for professional networks and support in their roles and recognised the benefits of good management. Clare rarely mentioned professional relationships; exceptions were those that might be associated with strategic developments. The impression Clare gave was of someone who liked to work single-handed, autonomously and not as part of a team. She communicated as required to do the job but in some ways appeared to have quite a narrow professional existence that focused exclusively on service issues. Clare was not involved in direct service delivery so working

relationships were confined to colleagues. It was only in her private life that relationships were formed, and then these centred on one particular hobby of amateur dramatics.

Sue, conversely, appeared to have a wide range of professional and social networks that were important to her and that were wider than occupational therapy. For Sue, meaningful relationships were crucial to the job. Strong relationships with team members provided a unified way of delivering services that were essentially about helping someone to move on. It did not matter which professional group help came from, no service user was particularly interested in your label, ' *at the end of the day it's ultimately about the relationship you make with the person*' (2.1.23).

A supportive team, it seems, was also important for security and as a place to take risks. However, it was crucial to feel comfortable within the team. Strong dynamics could be very influential in binding a team together and supporting members as they engaged in very radical thinking (2.1.69) but dynamics could also destroy a team, as Sue had experienced to her cost (2.1.60).

Relationships with partners were strong. Sue's relationship with her partner was intertwined with her professional life. Decisions had been taken for each partner to work part-time and to share child-minding responsibilities. Sue's partner also served as a mentor in a sense that 'supervision' was set up quite formally in order for Sue to work through employment or career dilemmas. This would mean her arranging time specifically for that purpose, '*can I have a supervision session after we've eaten tonight?*'(2.2.6), she would say. Work experiences would be brought into the home to be explored and deliberated upon through the partnership but by the partners adopting different roles for the purpose. Personal and professional lives in the experience of career thus seemed hard to separate.

Leadership and management

According to Sue, leadership was as important as strong, dynamic team relationships. It was something she valued enormously when it was there and found extremely difficult when it was absent.

> *Where I feel I've really struggled it's been down to the fact that I'm not feeling that I've got somebody or leadership or that what I'm trying to do isn't being championed in any way* (2.1.86).

Sue sometimes referred to this as leadership and sometimes as management but it was clear that it was necessary for her to have someone to whom she could relate, who could fight her cause and who could give a clear direction to the way ahead.

> *It's being clear about what's expected, what you're being asked to do and then you can have the scope to get on and do it and deliver it in the way you think best* (2.2.12).

Both were important to her – clear direction from a manager and personal autonomy to follow through.

> *It's that balance between feeling free to pursue things and do them in the way I think they're going to work but also to get some feedback on that and some guidance* (2.2.4).

In her own role, however, Sue was a leader. She described herself as an activist, as someone who had to get stuck into the task, but also as having a potential weakness in that, *'I lead from the front, I'm actually not very good at let's stand back and let's see what this team does with this ... because I have clear ideas* (2.2.14).

Despite acknowledging the importance of professional relationships, neither participant wanted a position that involved managing people. Clare did not feel that managing a team was her strength, preferring policy development and the professional advisory elements of her role. She was happy to leave the managerial side, which involved *'number crunching'* and performance indicators, to others. It was too administrative, very frustrating and did not allow her to influence the service in the way she wanted.

Clare enjoyed *'a free rein'* from her own line manager but had learned that she needed to take solutions, not problems, to him for discussion. Freedom may have been accorded because of Clare's strong orientation to the needs of the service user, and her identification with the culture of Social Services that had built up over time. She admitted, however, that she was purposely focusing her energies on issues that were important to the organisation, which happened to be in tune with the occupational therapy philosophy at that time.

A notable contrast to the strong leadership desires expressed by the participants was that both tended to resist leadership roles in their private life. Sue loved to be involved in her local community *'I'm a real joiner... I just like to be involved'* (2.3.28), for example in Friends of the School, the local tennis club and other family networks.

> *What's interesting about that is I'm just happy to be a cog in the wheel... I don't want to be visible, whereas at work I'm quite happy to be a bit more visible ...sort of stick my neck out* (2.3.30).

Others had suggested she take on the coordinating role of the Friends of the School but she declined, she would rather be a participant, a follower, than a leader within her local community.

Clare saw herself either at the bottom or at the top. In her amateur dramatics she claimed, rather unconvincingly, that she might be happy *'just being a stage hand'* (1.2.102) or doing backstage work (1.3.4). Yet the reality was that if she ever considered the theatre as a career rather than an outside interest

> *the route I'd want to go down would be the production management route, the influencing what's happening and making things work so I think you'd probably find a fairly similar pattern and I'd want to crawl to the top of the tree again* (1.2.02).

As a professional she most definitely wanted to lead, but in her personal life she might initially be content to work behind the scenes, but for how long?

Turning points, disappointments and losses

Clare observed that finding and getting to know a very special bunch of people involved in amateur dramatics was *'a change point'* in her life (1.3.5). It was a very meaningful experience for her as she became accepted as a member of the group. Meeting her husband had also led to significant changes in lifestyle. Other experiences had produced different reactions. Unsuccessful attempts at job-seeking had led to feeling *'very miserable ... very disillusioned, dispirited'*. In her ambition to move on, however, she had assessed herself as being more capable than prospective employers considered her to be. Disappointments had been felt quite severely.

Rejections, however, were followed fortuitously by opportunities, firstly for a secondment and, in a subsequent position, for acting-up. The latter offered Clare the chance to experience managerial work but she concluded that it was not the kind of work she wanted in future. Specific opportunities that had caused disillusionment turned into opportunities for learning, largely about herself. When she eventually obtained her current post, which was in a new geographical area, it was a further turning point for her in that she had finally reached a position of seniority where she could influence service provision. This, however, *'coincided with quite a dip in confidence,'* and it was, for a time, very deskilling (1.1.88).

Despite her efforts, Sue had experienced a number of disappointments over time that had led to decisions about her future career. Uncertainty about the funding for one role in Higher Education and the experience of interpersonal conflict in another situation had forced decisions to leave her employment for something new. Frustrations in the most recent role, and lack of clarity about the future funding of the service and her role within it had caused much concern and a myriad of emotions that had led to a period of sickness. Talking about her work, Sue said

> *I feel things quite deeply about work and I'm so sort of passionate about it, I think then that sometimes leaves me open to feeling quite wounded if other people don't see it the same way... first of all I get really cross and irate, and then I start to feel really hurt... (2.3.38).*

As she explained,

I guess the decision to move was out of some sort of sense of being stuck where I was and that was starting to affect my motivation and sense of achievement (2.4.2).

It was a hard decision to go, but it was the right decision at the time. I think I had lost my direction somehow and was really stuck... I did feel quite energised by a new challenge (2.4.14).

But not only did she feel stuck, she also felt a strong sense of loss

there was a lack of enthusiasm but I think that was also sort of the grieving process really. I mean I think I was very aware of what I was leaving behind, something that we'd built from nothing... it was the grieving because of that relationship I'd had with my colleague... I knew that I was going to be missing a tremendous amount (2.4.14).

Yet Sue changed her mind and decided not to quit the job she felt so passionate about. Reflections on losses and gains had probably contributed to her decision but she clearly identified the storytelling process as a prompt to her decision-making.

Talking to you helped me with that process of recognising that feeling of disempowerment, of feeling out of control with all that...I mean I think that was when I realised I was really losing it...I felt they were trying to stitch me up and I was starting to feel paranoid...so talking to you I think helped me to bring a lot of that to the fore (2.4.25).

By her own admission, Sue needed to feel secure, that she was achieving things and that her work was valued (2.4.45), factors that influenced her decision to stay or leave.

Life balance

The work that engaged the two participants appeared to make significant demands on them emotionally and intellectually. Personal and professional goals and values seemed to influence the amount of effort that each was prepared to put into the job. It seemed that, whilst service oriented goals could be achieved by working with existing organisational policies and systems, this satisfied neither of the occupational therapists who had more ambitious plans to bring about positive change for service users. They drove themselves forward by challenging systems, policies and most of all attitudes to the extent that both worked to the edge of their capacity to cope. Clare just managed to keep all the balls in the

air, admittedly taking on a significant amount of work that she personally deemed important for raising the profile of the profession. Sue broke new ground in the service that she had established, challenged attitudes in the process, but became emotionally drained by having to fight, apparently single handed, for resources to sustain the development. Her health was the loser.

For both occupational therapists, a satisfying home life enabled balance to be maintained between work and other pursuits. They attained this themselves by establishing boundaries around their professional life so that they could manage both home and work life without one impinging too much on the other.

Clare, for example, worked late at the office on evenings when her husband worked late. This allowed her to work quietly to finish projects. The pattern of the day was distinctly different when her husband was due home early.

> *The days when he's home early you won't see me hanging around at work. The days when he's working late then I don't mind, I'll use that time effectively so I think I've got the balance* (1.3.49).

The interest in amateur dramatics was shared with her husband and this brought them into contact with a small group of close friends beyond occupational therapy. Occupational therapy work was not taken home so did not impact on personal life. The two lives were kept separate.

Sue assumed different roles on leaving work. She was a wife and mother with responsibilities that extended beyond the work role. She also had plenty of personal interests and an active social life in the locality in which she lived. This kept work and family life quite separate to provide the much-needed respite from the active demands of work. As already discussed, Sue did take work home but only within the parameters of having agreed a place, time and change of role for 'supervision'. Home provided the respite arena for time out when work became too emotionally draining. The support of her partner as a listener, more than anything else, helped Sue to come to terms with the difficult situations she found herself in and to make decisions about her future. *'He was*

invariably good at just sitting on the fence really and not saying much' (2.4.27). He seemed to act more as a mentor for Sue until she felt empowered to take necessary decisions for herself.

In this and the previous chapter, the narratives of the two participants have been explored. Details that illuminate aspects of their story and aspects of their career have been presented. In the next chapter, the discussion will revisit the research question and examine how the findings help provide an understanding of narrative and the relationship between storytelling and occupational therapists' careers.

Chapter 9

STORYTELLING: ITS PLACE IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The aim of this study was to investigate the use of narrative in research and in occupational therapists' clinical practice, and to examine its potential for exploring occupational therapists' career stories. As will be shown, their stories not only provided insights into their career but also into the wider potential of storytelling to aid decision-making and to promote their professional development. This chapter will establish storytelling, not only as a feature of occupational therapists' practice, but also as a feature of an occupational therapist's life as a professional and private person. It will examine the qualities of narrative emerging from the career conversations and explore the concept of career from an occupational therapy perspective.

This discussion draws on the narratives of two occupational therapists only. Whilst some themes emerged from the study, which are useful to explore in their own right, they cannot be claimed as representative of the profession. As Thomas (1995a) remarked in the introduction to *Teachers' Stories,* no story can be regarded as typical or representative, but within each narrative there will be episodes, experiences and emotions with which other teachers might readily identify. The stories told for this research aimed to seek insights into narrative, 'career' provided the focus for the conversation. So while individual occupational therapists may associate with some of the emerging issues, no generalisations can be made across the profession.

STORYTELLING IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS' PRACTICE

It has already been established in the literature that occupational therapists use narrative with clients in their professional practice (Kielhofner, 1997; Mattingly, 1998; Ryan and McKay, 1999) and that it can transform professional practice as therapists reflect on their

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experiences (Abma, 1999). As Kielhofner (1997) explained, the stories that are of interest to occupational therapists are those that relate to a person's occupational self. They are stories about work, leisure and daily living experiences that are woven together to provide a meaningful whole in relation to a person's situation. People engage in occupations through which they locate themselves in an unfolding story and thereby achieve a particular direction in their life. Stories are as much about what has happened in the past, as about what is happening now or could happen in the future.

These observations are likely to be familiar to occupational therapists who use narrative in their work to understand the needs and aspirations of patients and clients, as authors such as Frank (1996) Kielhofner and Forsyth (1997) and Ryan and McKay (1999) have suggested. Yet little has been said about how narrative might help occupational therapists to understand themselves and their future direction. Given the findings presented in previous chapters, it starts to become clear that issues arising for occupational therapists in their domestic, work and leisure time mirror those experienced by their clients, but without the disability. There are still problems, however. For everyone, life challenges and life balance feature in different ways. Sometimes, problems do become too much to bear and temporary withdrawal from the situation is one of the strategies adopted for dealing with the situation. It may not be labeled therapeutic but has the same goal in that space afforded allows time to take stock, review the position and plan for a different future. Mattingly's (1998) healing dramas may be as relevant for occupational therapists as for their clients.

This study has provided an opportunity to assess the qualities of narrative and its application to occupational therapists' work in ways that are related to them as individuals, employees and people with professional careers. In returning to the study purpose, the chapter deals firstly with career conversations and then with the qualities of narrative.

CAREER CONVERSATIONS
Landscape and life world

This research has provided a fascinating account of two occupational therapists' stories of their life and career in occupational therapy. The stories, whilst very different in character,

have illuminated each person's career journey and experience of a career, the rewards and concerns emerging from those experiences, the feelings associated with them and the way in which balance has been attained between personal and professional life. Their stories also reflected their professional life world that Finlay (1998), in her study of occupational therapists, concluded was shared across members of the profession, yet was simultaneously unique and complex in character.

The essence of phenomenological research is that it begins in the life world and aims to seek out a deeper understanding of everyday experiences through the ways in which humans express their experience of the world (Van Manen, 1997). However, it was also noted by Van Manen that individuals can be seen to inhabit different life worlds at different times of day and in different 'lived spaces' such as at work and at home, and each affects the way that an individual feels and experiences the world. To understand the world, it is necessary to understand the person's 'lived time' as the temporal way of their being in the world, and the dimensions of their past, present and possible future. The past is often reflected in recounted memories of previous experiences that have left a trace and can be resurrected yet that may, in essence, have changed as an anticipated future takes shape. A life world is also affected by relationships with others who are encountered within it and the position they adopt in relation to the central character.

This study has shown that whilst, professionally, occupational therapists might share a life world and engage in the enactment of a commonly understood philosophical base for practice, the personal experiences of a career tend to be individual and tailored to meet a unique combination of personal and professional circumstances. It has also revealed that some occupational therapists can assume control of their professional world and manage their career in ways that are personally meaningful and satisfying, yet in harmony with their private lives in order to attain and maintain life balance.

The occupational therapists' stories, however, were not told in a vacuum but in relation to a landscape that provided an environmental backdrop to the career decisions that were

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taken, a landscape that arguably was quite influential in directing the career course. Evident in the stories were career expectations, personal challenges and experiences of career moves that emerged as a result of different internal and external influences. The stories revealed some of the tensions between personal and environmental expectations and the resultant internal struggles that sometimes manifested themselves within the individual and that needed to be resolved. Human factors often formed the basis of some of the tensions arising from the external environment. Difficult team dynamics and/or lack of managerial support were seen to influence career decisions. In contrast, unsuccessful attempts at securing a new job presented a challenge to the individual's internal world, which had to be rationalised and managed until a new employment opportunity arose. Some of these were evidently painful experiences that were re-lived in the storytelling process.

Keats Whelan *et al* (2001) demonstrated how stories could be affected by 'landscape'. Referring to Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) 'professional knowledge landscapes', described as comprising relationships among people, places and things, Keats Whelan *et al* argued that stories arising from experiences could be shaped by the landscape in which they were framed. Stories could be told in a variety of ways, depending on the audience, and could attract multiple responses. The landscape can thus shape 'the living out of future stories' and lead 'to storytelling with growth and change' (Keats Whelan *et al*, 2001:154). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) later illustrated this by drawing on their research field notes to describe how the nature of conversations with participants changed over time on the basis of changed relationships with them. The researchers were first viewed as experts and later as friends. The landscape was modified as trust increased and this led to the creation of different stories. It serves as a cautionary tale suggesting that research data may be completely different, depending on the landscape in which it is generated. Certainly in this study each occupational therapist adopted a more professional demeanour in the first interview, almost as if being interviewed for a job. They did not really relax until the third interview when more emotion was revealed as detail of the private world was added to that

of the already shared professional world, and the current professional world was shared further.

In this study, there seemed to be a relationship between the landscape, or the professional world of work, and the individual. Stories revealed the need for each therapist to make a difference in the world in which she operated. This need went beyond a responsibility of the professional role; it became a personal expectation or perhaps even a personal quest. There seemed to be an indwelling drive to be influential, to challenge the status quo, to move boundaries, to instigate change, whether it be attitudinal or organisational change. Frustration arose if this need could not be satisfied, as it seemed to derive, not just from the occupational therapists' professional philosophy and beliefs that they were agents of change, in other words, a characteristic of the shared life world, but from deeply entrenched personal values. The individual experience and the context of career thus appeared to be interrelated.

Professional careers; personal drivers

For Sue and Clare, their values appeared to be the key factor that guided their career and underpinned many career decisions. Hall (2002:12) suggested a working definition of career as 'the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life'. This definition reinforces the affective side of career but also places importance on the way in which the individual constructs or enacts the career. Hall labelled it a working definition of career, intimating its dynamic nature and proneness to change. He suggested that pursuing a career these days tends to mean pursuing one's own path. 'It is driven by the person and can be subject to frequent changes in shape and direction' (Hall, 2002: 49). No longer is career choice a single event but a course of a life that unfolds over time. It is commonly described metaphorically as a journey with career steps, a career path from which one strays from time to time to fulfil other needs or goals and a career ladder that should be climbed rung by rung through promotion or job moves. Hall argued that, given the complexity of today's environment, organisations now take less responsibility than in the past for their

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employees' career development so individuals must view a career more as 'self-employment' and plan their career moves for themselves. These moves may relate to professional progress or to changing personal circumstances.

In the main, it seems that individuals have two key decisions to make, one concerning the field of work and the other relating to the nature of the organisation (Hall, 2002). Choice is likely to depend on the perceived 'fit' between the individual and these two domains. Regarding field of work, this could be guided by any number of factors proposed in various career theories including Holland's (1973) personality factors, Roe's (1956) personal concepts and interests and Hall's (1976) attainment of psychological success. 'Fit' with the organisation would appear to cover more practical issues related to work/life balance such as hours of work (flexible or part-time), the trade-offs that might be negotiated in order to manage work and family commitments or a schedule compatible with a partner's work arrangements.

In Sue and Clare's career stories a number of factors were at play. Personal ambition seemed to play a part for one participant. The 'fit' between organisational and personal values and, more latterly, family commitments appeared to be important for the other. Essentially, however, neither would compromise on values. Their values appeared synonymous with those of the profession of occupational therapy, and could therefore explain their career choice. Organisational choice centred around personal needs for flexible working hours and the ability to be autonomous in practice. Sue and Clare both seemed to see themselves as competent and largely confident in their chosen area of work. Neither was vying for managerial positions that involved management of a team. In occupational therapy, a predominantly female profession, it seems that it is possible for occupational therapists to attain positions of influence within a service organisation and to determine their career destiny in a way that best suits their character and personal circumstances.

This study has also highlighted that career activities and priorities can change both as a result of circumstances within the family unit and through other circumstances, such as new relationships or soured relationships in personal or professional life. It has also highlighted the fact that some professional women can and do take career decisions based on a multiplicity of factors that interrelate in their lives. In this small study the needs and aspirations of other family members appeared to take precedence over personal career considerations once the family unit had been formed and the unit functioned as a complete entity. Financial considerations, particularly financial independence, were important but less of a priority compared with family life. These findings mirrored those in Judi Marshall's (1984; 1989) study as she interviewed women managers. It seems that these women tended to prioritise life balance across home and professional life and distribute their effort and energy to achieve life meaning in both domains.

Both Sue and Clare seemed to have achieved the life balance that they sought and employment arrangements that were compatible with their personal circumstances. Of course it is possible that the jobs that they held might be perceived to be within the sphere of women's work given their close association with 'caring' professions, but occupational therapy was the profession they both chose as a single person and the fact that life balance could be maintained given changes in their personal circumstances was, perhaps, fortuitous. Given their work histories, however, and their somewhat vague visions of their future, their current employment could be seen as transient and not a long-term venture. Hall's (2002:88) view of career was of 'work-in-progress' and as something constantly evolving, presumably to accommodate changes in lifestyle and life priorities, nevertheless, he claimed, careers could provide an individual with a sense of meaning and purpose in life, a way of expressing the self (Hall, 2002:52).

Marshall (1989:287) made a point about agentic career planning, which seeks 'control, certainty and predictability'. Agentic-based individuals, she claimed, have strategies and shape their career. Whilst some may have to compromise, such people still have goals and aspirations. In some ways Clare fitted this picture. She did not see her current position as

permanent. She was still looking, as she had done previously, for the next step up the career ladder. Although she worked in tandem with her husband's goals, she also had goals of her own. Without family responsibilities, she had the freedom to pursue these personal goals fairly rigorously. Sue also had a strategy but it was mainly concerned with achieving goals within the current position of employment rather than moving on. Thoughts of changing jobs emerged as a reactionary measure rather than a deliberate strategy for professional development.

Career compromises

Theorists such as Holland (1997) have suggested that, under optimal conditions, people choose a career that is consistent with their values and beliefs yet proponents of social cognitive career theory advocate that personal goals contribute to career choice (Lent *et al*, 1996). For many people, career choices are not made under optimal conditions. Factors such as economic need, familial support and educational limitations may restrict options and the pursuit of preferred career goals (Lent *et al*, 1996). These factors and other limitations associated with job availability may result in compromise. The narratives of both therapists illustrated the compromises each had to make in the early choice of career, yet one tended to dwell on lost opportunity whilst the other maximized the opportunities the compromise afforded. As compensation, however, social cognitive career theory also asserts that, for people who consider themselves highly competent in what they do, performing it will produce outcomes that are valued and reinforce interest in that activity. Both therapists appeared, on the whole, to gain intrinsic satisfaction from their work.

Nias and Aspinwall (1995) noted that it was not uncommon for individuals to pursue 'parallel careers' so as to ensure that needs unmet by the main work role could be addressed in another way. Whilst the main employment might address financial needs it might not always bring complete personal fulfilment. In this study, the theatre was a draw for Clare and active village social life for Sue. These might be termed parallel careers given the amount of time, energy and commitment that went into the associated activity, but without financial recompense. These social activities offered a 'no strings attached'

career in their lives, not necessarily to compensate for unmet needs in the main employment, but to complement the primary career and bring variety of activity to their life and life balance. The meaning attached to the primary career, however, suggested that, even if there were to be financial security for these therapists, neither would necessarily withdraw from their chosen paid employment to pursue solely a 'leisure' role. The intrinsic rewards relating to identity and personal definition gained from the primary career, despite its frustrations, seemed too important to give up.

Woodd (2000) claimed that the scope of career theory should embrace new opportunities that relate to a person's psychological needs, and recognize personal beliefs, values, expectations and aspirations. A career should not just be thought of as progression or advancement in the world of work, it should acknowledge the relationship between the individual and his or her environment. It was important to establish individuals' perceptions of their career and to recognize that that perception may change as life events occur and other systems change. It was also important to enable people to understand their role in career development so that they could be proactive in pursuing personal goals. Woodd (2000) and Hall (2002) thus agreed that individuals must now take personal responsibility for the direction and particular path of their career and that negotiation for employment conditions to suit personal circumstances was now an accepted practice, possibly for both men and women. In this study, this negotiation applied as much to Sue as to her partner who also chose to work part time so that he could share child care responsibilities.

Personal identity and professional life

Dalton (1989:100) saw getting a job as 'a critical step in the establishment of a sense of self or personal identity'. It not only helps with developing an individual's sense of well-being but also helps the individual to answer the question 'who am I?' Employment provides for receiving feedback from the environment to enhance or modify a sense of personal identity. This suggests that identity can be shaped by the nature of employment and that employment situations might only be tolerated if the feedback received is

compatible with the way in which an individual wishes to present herself to the outside world. Nicholson and West (1989) proposed that it should be possible to gain an understanding of how individuals construe the meaning of their lives and shape their futures by examining the transitions they make between jobs. This might be undertaken through storytelling.

McAdams (1993:11) argued that 'If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am'. Storytelling, according to Bateson (1989:34) 'is fundamental to the human search for meaning'. These authors, and also Plummer (2001) raised awareness of how meaning and identity could be teased out through the storytelling process. Plummer (2001:43) however, cautioned that the meanings of stories are never fixed but emerge out of a ceaselessly changing stream of historically grounded interactions between producers and readers in shifting contexts.

In this study, the story was confined to that aspect of Sue and Clare's life that was associated with their career. These therapists were absolutely clear that their career afforded them an identity. It seems that Clare and Sue had a concept of career in their mind as they responded to the question about how important their career was to them. Both claimed it was extremely important because it gave them an identity and a way of defining themselves. Fundamentally, however no question was posed to them that sought a definition of 'career'. Career might thus have been construed by each of them in a different way, for example, as paid employment or as being a member of a profession. It is possible that, rather than a career, it was their professional status or the status afforded them by their work role that gave them an identity. Whilst lack of definition might be considered a flaw in the study, it did permit freedom of conceptualization. What seemed to be important, however, was that the therapists perceived that they had an identity – an identity as an individual, as a woman, as an employee and as a professional – and that they could own, value and live with this identity.

McAdams (1993) proposed that individuals start in adolescence to create an integrative life story in order to understand who they are and how they fit into the adult world. This quest continues into adulthood and through most of the adult years as individuals come to terms with their responsibility for 'defining the self' and for creating a life that is personally meaningful to them. This includes assuming productive roles in society even if, in early years, commitment is of a temporary nature in the realisation that changes may ensue. 'The individual who makes provisional commitments in his or her twenties looks forward to later years through the lens of a *dream* for the future' (McAdams, 1993: 98). The dream may include occupational success although for women, interpersonal or family goals may also feature in some way. McAdams argued that life, nowadays, offered an assortment of occupational roles and lifestyle choices yet unity within a single life story was important. Personal meaning should emerge equally from home and work life.

Work was particularly meaningful to both occupational therapists as it gave them an identity. Sue and Clare had a status at work that they were not prepared to relinquish and a home life with which they were both satisfied. At work, each had a professional persona, an appearance that had to be maintained. This manifested itself in small ways. Clare, for example, aimed to keep work and social life apart by not encouraging work colleagues to associate with the theatrical performances in which she was involved. Back at work, she also had a status to maintain given the level at which she was operating within the organisation and the amount of influence she could bring to bear on different projects. This had not always been so. In earlier years, different types of work opportunities, such as acting-up positions, had helped her to confirm the type of work with which she did not wish to be associated in her future career. She was thus able to target employment opportunities that continued to be meaningful to her and satisfy her goals.

It seems, for both, that earlier experiences shaped their career and enabled them to make informed choices about future career directions. Sometimes feedback was negative and sometimes positive. Both had a desire to influence service provision and bring about change. For Sue, the ability to influence situations featured less explicitly but more subtly

in her story and in a rather more negative way. It was the inability to influence team dynamics on one occasion and management at another point in her professional life that challenged her role and professional identity and left her dysfunctional and discontented with her employment situation. On both occasions she withdrew from the workplace, on the first occasion on the pretext of pursuing higher education, on the second on grounds of sickness. At difficult times she seemed to create a mental and physical space around her into which it was inappropriate for her work colleagues to venture until she was ready to face her world again. Arguably, her inability to cope compromised her personal identity as well as her professional self. It seemed to take its toll on her confidence, which had to be built up again by seeking a personally acceptable way forward.

High personal expectations were thus associated with the professional role that each undertook and failings were experienced in multiple ways. It seems that identity was so strongly associated with career that professional career choices were actually the result of informed decision-making with regard to maintenance of personal identity as these were inseparable.

Disjunction and transition

Maintaining a professional role and dealing with personal challenges was undoubtedly a learning process. Experiences that challenged professional and personal identity seemed to result in intra-personal conflict that each therapist had to learn to manage, and each took a different tack. Clare seemed to manage self-sufficiently through personal reflection. Sue sometimes sought counselling at times when she recognized she was 'stuck'.

Savin Baden (2000) would argue that such experiences might be viewed as challenges to the individual's life world where multiple or conflicting roles can no longer be managed and where current ways of seeing and knowing the world are no longer appropriate. The resultant experience is one of disjunction. Disjunction is not a simple entity but multifaceted and 'characterised by frustration and confusion and a loss of sense of self' (Savin Baden, 2000:87). It can result in a sense of personal fragmentation and become a

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barrier to learning and moving on. Managing disjunction can present challenges but because of its dynamic nature it can also facilitate personal learning, transition, growth and a greater sense of integration. One of the ways in which disabling disjunction can be managed is through dialogue and the opportunity to make sense of experience through speaking with others. This entails risk, however, as initially a story might be perceived as incoherent and as making little sense, although Savin Baden agued that it is the reflections on experiences, told as stories, that are incoherent. A reinterpretation can enable the reflections to become more coherent, better valued and become the stepping-stone to transition.

People have a personal as well as professional identity so beyond the professional self is a unique person with an individual make-up and a personal self. This 'self' however, is not an unchanging entity that can be discovered and described, it is a dynamic entity that can reconstruct itself as necessary to meet the needs of different situations. This reconstruction takes place 'with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future' (Bruner, 2002: 64). In order to move on and not be restrained by the past, some transition must take place. One way of describing transition is as a shift in learner experience so that the individual repositions herself in a different place (Savin Baden, 2000:101) but this process can be uncomfortable as some of the past necessarily must be left behind. Nicholson and West (1989) contended that dealing with disenchantment with life in an organization can be interpreted, not so much as stress-coping but more positively and possibly more acceptably, as problem-solving or pathfinding.

Epiphanies: troubles of the mind

The process of storytelling can thus be enlightening in many ways. Relating stories about our lives to ourselves or to others offers the opportunity to give an account of who we are and to try to make sense of life experiences even though, in practice, the stories may be provisional, uncertain or inconclusive (Roberts, 1998). As McAdams (1993) pointed out and Roberts (1998) endorsed, it can be tempting to see such stories as 'myths' as neither true nor false expressions of experience but an attempt to explain and make sense of the

past and the storyteller's place within it. Significant aspects of the story or personal myth, however, are those elements or events that are 'defining' in that they are particularly important, hold some fascination or are in other ways significant in the course of a life. Denzin (1989: 70) referred to these events as 'epiphanies', as 'interactional moments and experiences' that leave marks on people's lives. They may be moments of crisis where the effects may be positive or negative, but they illuminate personal character.

There were significant moments in Sue and Clare's experiences. When Clare met her husband-to-be, the priorities in her life changed. When she failed to get a job for which she was interviewed and which she badly wanted, whilst she was upset, she also learnt about herself as she reflected that she might be applying for jobs beyond her capability. Sue's travels with her partner presented one of those life-affirming and life-defining experiences. Sue also experienced personal crises as team relationships broke down in one employment and as operational aspirations became thwarted by lack of management and financial commitment in another. For both participants, however, these defining moments prompted thoughts and sometimes decisions about career moves, some of which were fulfilled. Plummer (2001: 40) recognised that lives 'are often flooded with moments of indecision, turning points, confusions, contradictions and ironies' but as Strauss (1997: 102) remarked, there are points at which an individual must take stock, 're-evaluate, revise, re-see and re-judge'. Perhaps more importantly in this study, the participants came to understand the significance of these moments for themselves and learnt from them. For Clare, personal reflection provided insights into her difficulties, for Sue it was partially the storytelling experience. For these therapists, the events seemed more than life-defining, they appeared to result in learning and in personal and professional growth.

THE QUALITIES OF NARRATIVE
The art of conversation
Wildermeersch (1989) argued that conversation or dialogue was critically important for understanding human experience, for reality construction and for transformation. According to Berger and Luckmann (1971) the reality in which we live is socially

constructed so, as Wildermeersch explained, reality cannot exist without the act of giving meaning to it. This tends to happen through interaction between individuals who inhabit different life-worlds and question the validity of each other's arguments so bringing about new insights into their experiences. Additional to interaction between people is the interaction between individuals and their environment. Each of these experiences can result in learning.

Nias and Aspinwall (1995) confirmed through their research that the act of storytelling to another actively influences the sense-making process where meaning can be derived from current understanding and a reflection on past experience. However, it is not permanent. New meaning may emerge through new conversations. As narrative is constructed each time it enables the creation of personal meaning and reality (Bruner, 2002) and the development of a sense of identity (Collin and Young, 1992).

Emotional conversations
Conversations, and particularly career conversations cannot be considered without reference to feelings as they are related to contextual issues and connected to needs, goals, plans and purposes and to a sense of what life should be about. Feelings can be the drive that sustains the career in the long-term. As Young *et al* (1996: 494) stated, 'not only do emotions cue the person to the narrative but they are also used when constructing and developing narrative'.

Each occupational therapist experienced pleasure and pain in her career journey. Each, when prompted in the conversation, could identify experiences that had given her satisfaction or generated feelings of pride. Each therapist, however, volunteered much more readily the details of disappointments, frustrations and loss as if they were the dominant feelings at the time. The feelings also seemed to be re-lived in the interview conversations as if being re-experienced through the storytelling process. For example, the pace of storytelling quickened and the narrator's voice was raised when speaking excitedly about issues that were evidently meaningful and satisfying. Sometimes a throw-away comment accompanied a story of a proud or other significant moment revealing a touch of

humour that suggested embarrassment associated with a positive emotion. These moments included the time when Clare spoke of having written some chapters for a book that demonstrated her other talents '…but don't read it!' she said, with a laugh, possibly relating her story to my role as an occupational therapy lecturer and anticipating a judgement from me. I offered none.

Disappointments were described as such in the process of storytelling, and were often recounted in a soft, sometimes barely audible voice as if any associated discomfort or pain were being re-lived. Signs of distress were apparent; eye contact was lost. The pace of the story slowed, and sometimes the storytelling stopped, as the narrator reflected and recomposed herself. Frustration was admitted, often with an air of indignation and a suggestion that fault should be attributed elsewhere.

Each therapist seemed committed to telling her story honestly even though Clare admitted that not all was coming out. However, she seemed to choose her stories, or selected parts of them, and her words carefully almost as if she were trying to remain objective, depersonalise the issues and conceal some aspects of her identity. The story was probably not completely truthful but a partially so; it was nevertheless all she would share with the world. Her efforts were sometimes contradictory. For example, She did not want to be known as someone who was 'a control freak' even though her story was peppered with comments about her desire to be influential. Throughout, she answered questions largely as a professional, appearing composed and in control of the storytelling process. She lowered her professional mask only when speaking of her private life.

In contrast, Sue seemed to engage much more fully with the storytelling process. Her emotions fluctuated as she narrated the ups and downs of her career story. She appeared to have a range of voices associated with different emotional states. Different voice tones accompanied them. Soft, loud, fast, slow, excited, despondent could be drawn upon to match with the content of the story in order to convey feelings. *How* the stories were told

and *what* was told could not be separated. They were delivered, and thus needed to be heard, as one.

According to Bruner (2002:65; 66) 'self-making is a narrative art' yet telling stories to others about oneself 'depends on what *we* think *they* think *we* ought to be like' so it can be an act. The language chosen can also give the narrative a particular perspective so, whilst there may be many perspectives to a story, only one may be revealed. 'Through narrative, we construct, reconstruct, in some ways reinvent yesterday and tomorrow. Memory and imagination fuse in the process' (Bruner 2002:93).

The story, however, in all its guises, was heard as much by the narrator as by the listener. Atkinson (1998) pointed out that storytellers themselves are the first interpreters of their story. Bruner (1991) advocated that meaning and reality are actually constructed during the making and telling of stories. Clare often reflected back on the story as she was telling it and sometimes offered new insights almost immediately. In contrast, Sue tended to reflect between the storytelling sessions. It was after the third session, and some reflective time, that she confirmed the changes that she was making to her life as a result of the storytelling process. The storytelling thus became a series of reflective moments for the narrator that possibly led, albeit not necessarily immediately, to new insights into the original experience.

Successes, disappointments and losses within an occupational therapist's career are therefore not unknown. Their stories have shown an affective or emotional side of a career, yet how, within a wider system of health and social care provision, occupational therapists can experience satisfaction and a sense of achievement, which tends to reinforce identity. Emotions have to be managed but they can sometimes be the drivers of change. Whilst occupational therapists might strive for autonomy in their work there are still limits to what can be achieved, and situations can arise where compromises have to be made. The costs and benefits of actions have to be weighed up in different circumstances. Conflicts that challenge professional values and personal beliefs arise but it seems that there are limits to

how far these will be tolerated before they give rise to evasive action. Each individual may have a tolerance level related either to compromise or to the effectiveness of personal coping strategies. Ultimately there may only be so much that can be done to negotiate for a better deal. If it fails, it may call into question not only the personal stance on the matter but the employment position itself.

According to Sandalands and Boudens (2000:48) work feelings are reasoned judgements that people make about themselves at work. In this study there was evidence that a participant felt hurt when valued activity appeared not to gain the respect it was thought to deserve from managers. Sandelands and Boudens suggested that negative feelings emerging from a person's anger or hurt tend to arise from being slighted by a group in the work situation and are commonly associated with a person's place and activities in the life of that group. It seems that a combination of factors play a part in the process and one employee is merely one player in the game. These authors also claimed that it was common to name a feeling just before or just after telling a work-related story as if either to preview or to summarise the feeling of the story. Both occupational therapists identified their negative feelings but, less so, the positive ones. Interestingly, these authors also held that feelings from work did not reflect on job satisfaction. Schein (1978) however, saw values as a factor that helped to anchor a person in a career and helped to explain his or her association with an organisation. Schein's theory suggested that individuals would not take on or continue in a job if the needs of their dominant career anchor were not met, if there was some acceptable alternative. It seems from this study that work demands that challenged personally held values could lead to job dissatisfaction and to an inclination to leave the job thus supporting Schein's theory.

The study has also shown that some women can experience taking control of their career and do make decisions that they perceive to reflect their best interests. They recognise that they do not have to tolerate circumstances that are incompatible with their views and values and that they themselves have the power to create an alternative, future career story.

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Sandalands and Boudens claimed that storytelling was a powerful way for people to learn about who they were, and that more research was needed to explore how feelings about work, and the social vitality of work, might be understood better through creating, telling and enjoying stories about work. By telling stories that captured feelings, people could also learn that they can change their feelings by changing their stories and the plot lines of their lives.

Career stories: trusting narrative

It has been useful in this study to explore definitions and usages of narrative in different contexts. Young *et al* (1996: 490) defined narrative as 'not a reproduction of events but a construction that the teller thinks the other should know'. The resulting narrative might thus become a story influenced by the listener who is known to be interested in it for a particular purpose or from a particular perspective. A story told from a particular perspective can illuminate one side of a story and mask another (Bruner, 2002). Despite this, its construction helps to develop the narrator's sense of identity as meaning is attributed to the story as it emerges (Collin and Young, 1992). Some coherence is formed, often out of unrelated actions, to provide continuity and/or a framework within which to understand past actions and to guide future actions (Young *et al*, 1996).

As Strauss (1997) pointed out, the process of recollecting an event entails some selectivity and a reconstruction of the actual happening. Certain aspects may be included, some excluded, some slighted and some highlighted according to the situation. An event may be reassessed many times in the light of new orientations or facts on the matter. The problem comes in knowing how a story should be interpreted if it is only likely to be a slant on the story. Bruner (2002) saw it as an ontological dilemma posing a question about whether stories are real or imagined.

Bateson (1989:34) added to the debate by suggesting that stories were invented and could be different in the future. 'Not only is it impossible to know what the future holds [for the narrators] it is impossible to know what their memories of the past will be when they bring

them out again in the future, in some new and changed context'. Composing a life involves a continual re-imagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present. These were the arguments to which Keats Whelan *et al* (2001) also drew attention that call into question the validity of story as data.

Johns (2000) acknowledged that a valid narrative would seek to reveal truthfulness yet argued against using the term validity in research involving narrative because of the meaning normally associated with an empiricist paradigm. He drew on Reason and Rowan's (1981) term of congruence denoting 'fitness' or 'suitableness' recognizing that there needed to be confidence in the use of narrative for a stated purpose. Johns was aware that what practitioners said and did might be completely different, aware that people distort reality and often do not recall accurately, all of which call into question the trustworthiness of narrative. However, 'the issue is not one of accuracy of recall but of the meaning of events for people' (Johns 2002:63). Any flaw deriving from incongruity thus has to be acknowledged.

Gardner (2001) also raised the issue of unreliable memory and distortion of the truth in interview situations that might be explained in a number of ways, such as a desire to protect oneself from having to revisit a painful memory or embarrassment. So whilst the research methodology aims to treat participants as 'knowledgeable, intentional agents, active and reflective in the constitution of their own identities and social world' (Gardner, 2001: 187) doubt can be cast on the integrity of the data generated through interviews. The delivery might be described as 'frontstage presentation' (Goffman, 1971) offering a form of information to satisfy immediate need whilst hiding the 'backstage' account that might be nearer the truth. The research should thus not rely on an uncritical interpretation of the material but should deal with the ambiguities and uncertainties that could inevitably occur in the process of biographical research.

These observations would suggest that a story should be distrusted in terms of being an accurate reflection of an earlier incident, a course of action or a life itself. Yet if the story is

provided as a narrative, set in the context of the narrator's own reflections that then add meaning to the story for the narrator, the story might be deemed credible at the moment of narration. In these circumstances, a story may not have a life, but in its transitory state it might serve to establish the present situation and the foundations for developing a future that is relevant exclusively for the narrator.

The place of narrative and career conversation

A conversation is a two way process that affects each participant and shapes their future relationship and interaction. The process of hearing a story is thus also influenced by what the listener brings to the conversation. An active listener, by reason of personal background, may be sensitized more to particular features than to others (Strauss, 1997) and therefore inadvertently pick up on them and guide the conversation to another place. This study has shown that career conversations can shed light on the rationale for past career choices, can confirm and question the present situation and can propose next steps in a future career story. A career conversation with an interested, but objective, listener presents an opportunity, if somewhat biased towards one party, for the narrator to take the conversation in any chosen direction. This remains so even if the listener or facilitator poses uncomfortable questions. The narrator remains in control and can choose to ignore or face the question. Through the conversation there can be an exploration of costs and benefits of different courses of action, and of the reality of taking different courses of action. Using personal reflections on the process, storytelling can help the key participant to make informed decisions about a possible future.

The conversation thus gives the narrator a voice to present a story for consideration, and an opportunity to add detail as a result of prompts from the listener. The narrator, however, also becomes a listener to his own voice and can ultimately become the voice of reason. As a listener, the narrator weighs up the story as representative of his own life situation and can then take decisions about a course of action that sits best with his value system and personal goals. Only the narrator will know the truth and any decision resting on the story – complete or incomplete, truth or myth – will be for the narrator alone. Even so, this may

be beneficial. For occupational therapists and other health professionals, more opportunity to engage in career conversations and in storytelling about their career might help guide or confirm their career choices.

Story as a therapeutic entity

It was always the intention of this study to disassociate from the purpose of storytelling as a therapeutic process used by professionals in fields of health and counselling. It was perceived as more important to maintain a stance that veered towards occupational therapists' professional self, rather than professional activity, so as not to confuse issues of narrative in practice, about which much has already been written. This has not, however, been entirely possible. In this study, the participants revealed and faced facts about their private life in a safe and confidential relationship governed by the ethics of research. In this relationship, one of the participants, Sue, claimed that the sessions had been of therapeutic value. The conversations allowed her to review her career position with someone who was uninvolved in the dilemma she was experiencing. This culminated in Sue expressing her gratitude for the opportunity to talk about her situation, which resulted ultimately in her being able to make informed decisions about her future.

The conversations were research-oriented and thus confidential, and as such were never labelled either as 'therapy' or as 'counselling'. Yet some of these sessions apparently had a therapeutic outcome. The storytelling sessions became a socially acceptable means of self-discovery for at least one participant. Goodson and Sikes (2001) expounded the benefits of self-reflection through which to improve self-knowledge. Identifying with, and understanding the origin of, personal beliefs and values could help formulate a satisfying future. McAdams (1993) claimed that performing a story about oneself could prove to be an experience of healing and growth. He suggested that a life story is modified over time as new insights are discovered and views of the self and place in the world are changed. Stories help organize thoughts and sometimes help the healing process and the journey towards psychological fulfilment and maturity.

Storytelling for professional development

Sikes and Aspinwall (1992) recognized the potential of a biographical approach for personal and professional development. An opportunity to reflect on life with a facilitator could help individuals to recognize personal strengths and useful strategies that could be drawn upon to assist with dealing with different situations encountered in professional life. Chivers (2003) supported this view. Based on evidence from his own scholarly activity he argued for individuals to be given more opportunities to reflect in one-to-one situations using a conversational interview format similar to that used in narrative inquiry. Reflection, he claimed, acknowledging the works of Schön (1987) and Brookfield (1987), facilitated the learning process and assisted continuing professional development. Although appraisal interviews addressed some learning needs they were biased towards organizational needs rather than those of the interviewee. Learning conversations needed to empower the interviewee. The interviewer had to listen closely, be conscious of the interviewee's need to benefit from the interview, ask questions to support the process and remain non-judgemental. Mentoring or peer-support schemes that adopted reflective practice interviews might help advance professional development.

Narrative and mentorship

This research has not so much added to the knowledge of women's careers as confirmed how storytelling might shed light on a career and assist the individual to see a broader picture of a career in the context of other factors. In the light of conversations that took place between the researcher and participant and the positive experience that resulted, it could be suggested that there is a place for narrative in other relationships that focus on career, such as mentorship.

Young *et al* (1996) claimed that when used judiciously in counselling, narratives could help people reconfigure their pasts and plan a different future. However, they warned that narratives should not be used as a retreat to unreality but should be central to devising future action. A mentorship relationship is not a counselling relationship in the therapeutic

sense but some of the principles of using narrative within the relationship might similarly apply.

Darwin (2000) asserted that mentoring has two functions, firstly to help younger protégés advance their careers and secondly to help protégés gain self-confidence. Akin to these functions is the intention to help people to build a sense of identity and purpose. Although not specifically mentioned by Darwin, mentoring could arguably assist an individual to come to know and understand him or herself better and to develop the sense of self. One of the benefits of biographical strategies collated by Goodson and Sikes (2001) is the focus on improving self-knowledge through engagement in self-reflection. In the process, it is possible to come to a better understanding about relationships, influences and other forces that impact on a life. It is the process of storytelling that enables individuals to arrive at a point of greater understanding but this might best be undertaken with someone who is prepared to listen and to facilitate that understanding.

Certainly mentors are seen as offering psychological support to assist individuals with personal and professional transitions and development. Much, however, would depend on the relationship. Perhaps the more traditional view of the mentor/protégé relationship is of the older and wiser person mentoring the younger novice. However, other relationships might benefit from using a different strategy where each becomes a co-learner in the partnership working towards mutual professional growth. Given that the world of work is changing, assumptions cannot be made about the age or general capability of someone new to an organisation or that an organisational mentorship plan implemented over a medium term timeframe will reach its natural conclusion. A mentor allocated from within the organisation may not be the best arrangement for someone to build up relationships and use them to advantage over time. A mentor situated outside the work situation and who might provide continuity of mentorship through changes in employment and transitional stages might be a better choice.

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:20). It is a collaboration between a researcher and participants, over time in a place or series of

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places and in social interaction milieus. This definition and this study imply that the principles of talking about life with an interested party can lead to an improved understanding of situations experienced personally and recounted during interactive moments. Greater understanding helps clarify personal positions and stances taken by other people and can assist in working towards resolution. It is a learning process that enlightens and facilitates change. Narrative is said to be the best way of understanding experience. Experience, as Schön (1987) pointed out, serves as a resource for learning.

Johns (2002:216) claimed that narratives enable 'the development of the individual practitioner's personal knowing, a knowing that is subjective and contextual within the particular situation, and evolving in new patterns in response to new situations within the reflexive spiral of being and becoming'. This may be the ideal. No general claims of this nature can be made in this study although there was evidence that a shift took place in the thinking of one of the participants. John's claim arises from other research that used guided reflection as the medium to produce personal narratives through which were developed insights and ideas as a product of co-creating meaning. The number of studies claiming the benefits for practitioners of storytelling appears to be expanding, giving credence to the assertion that using narrative to promote a better understanding of self and self in relation to practice has merit.

Conclusions

Some occupational therapists can generate stories about their professional life and describe the relationship between their career and personal life, which might amount to life balance. Personally held values and beliefs may provide a rationale for their choice of career and their specific employment, and guide future career decisions and actions. Storytelling can help an occupational therapist to define her personal self and her identity. There is evidence to suggest that such definition arises from the career that a person pursues.

Although some occupational therapists may not do so, others may learn about themselves through personal reflection and have the personal capacity to manage the successes, set-

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backs and transitions that tend to occur in professional life. Others may appreciate the opportunity to engage in storytelling with another person and to examine their thoughts, feelings and possible future directions in company. No matter which way, the individual him or herself must 'hear' the story, engage in personal reflection and make decisions that affect the future. A dispassionate other person, such as a mentor, may be the listener who asks pertinent questions and helps the storyteller to navigate a course through their present situation and gain insight into other possible courses of action.

The opportunity to share experiences with another person can also allow the storyteller to visit pleasurable experiences and take pride in their achievements. This seems important for an individual to maintain a sense of worth given that some personal achievements may have nothing to do with the current employment situation and otherwise go unnoticed.

The listener has to be alert to the messages that the storytelling process reveals both explicitly and more subtly, and to vocal changes and non-verbal communicative processes that give clues to the emotions being experienced. The role of the listener is paramount, asking questions but making no judgments, facilitating the storytelling, delving into some of the issues revealed and seeking clarification, without prying. Not all messages may be revealed in the text or conversation, sometimes only parts of a story are revealed, but the conversation provides a place for different parts of the jigsaw to be placed on the metaphorical table and joined up as opportunities allow, possibly over a series of conversations. Where trust grows, stories may become more personal, more insightful and more meaningful. Essentially, it seems more likely that it is the storytelling process rather than the narrative produced that will have the greatest effect on the individual narrator.

This chapter has offered some interpretations of, and discussion on, the qualities of narrative drawn from conversations with occupational therapists about their careers. In the next chapter I return to my story and offer thoughts on the impact that the research has had, noting some of the limitations of the study and some potential applications of storytelling with professionals in practice.

Chapter 10

MY STORY REVISITED

Introduction

My fascination with stories has not abated; in fact it has been strengthened. This research has taken me into areas of activity that use narrative about which I previously knew very little. It has enabled me to discover narrative inquiry and to relate it both to organisational research and to research in therapeutic contexts. It has also enabled me to place my own research within both these domains. I have been able to verify the relationship between the occupational therapist, her occupational story and the context in which it occurs, and I can relate it to a practice framework commonly used by occupational therapists in their work. I have been able to confirm the similarities between occupational therapists' use of storytelling with clients and their own use of storytelling outside of practice. The study has highlighted that problems in the workplace can reflect on a person's ability to cope in that environment and shown that disjuction can occur. I was not prepared, however, for a finding that suggested a therapeutic side to storytelling for occupational therapists that centred on difficulties experienced in the workplace. This realisation suggests there are grounds for using storytelling as a process with others who might also be disabled by the consequences of multiple forces at work.

This chapter presents some of my reflections on the research process and indicates the learning that I have experienced as part of my continuing professional development. It also suggests a different way of viewing continuing professional development and possible ways of applying storytelling in professional practice.

Reflections on the process

Reflecting back on the process of carrying out the research, I can now view my achievements more positively than earlier, when I wavered as I conducted the early

interviews. I doubted my ability in the interview situation and I questioned the quality of my data. In the interviews, I wanted to engage more in the process of conversation but was aware that I must allow Clare and Sue to tell their story. I wanted to engage in professional debates but had to remain silent and uninvolved. I wanted to challenge, question, discuss, but realised that my place was to listen. If I had entered the conversation in any such way, the story would have been a different story. I would have been instrumental in the production of a different narrative.

It was the essential part of the occupational therapists' lives that had to be discovered. It was insights into their dilemmas, struggles and triumphs that had to be gained. Yet this raised a question about whether it was through interview or through conversation that lives and complications within those lives had to unfold. The interview sought storytelling but still involved question and answer, the two-way process commonly associated with interview. It worked as far as revealing the professional's story of the professional's career; the factual account of a career over time, the verbal CV. But I had to come out of the interview and prompt a one-sided conversation to delve beneath the surface of the account, to obtain a narrative with reflective, self-analytical components.

The first interview with each person became the timeline and reflected the professional context. Personal dilemmas were revealed that had been dealt with in their lives. These were the trips down memory lane with which the narrator could now engage, reflect upon, provide a reasoned perspective on, but from which she had moved on. The experience caused hurt at the time, but time being that metaphorical great healer had provided distance, allowed the head to take over from the heart in the story and turned the issue into a bygone event that had induced learning and resulted in some notion of healing.

The 'live' stories emerged in subsequent interviews, when a kind of 'comfort zone' had been established between narrator and listener. It was possible to delve a little further 'under the carpet' and work in the dust. Emerging from the second set of interviews was a narrative that took the form of a self-analysis. The narrative was less description and more

reflection on the highs and lows and into the personal meaning and interpretation of those career experiences. The second set of interviews produced the emotion and the feelings associated with experiences. The narrator was clearly reviewing clusters of circumstances and undertaking, not necessarily the first analysis of what had occurred (the story may have previously been recounted elsewhere) but a serious analysis that reflected her thoughts at that moment in time.

This occupational therapist, as the narrator, was clearly trying to make sense of the situation for herself, to explain in some personally meaningful, yet logical, way what had happened and to find some acceptable resolution to the issues that had been raised to consciousness. Talking through those issues reflectively, and almost without interruption from the listener, the narrator was able to describe in quite vivid terms a concoction of feelings and emotions, yet could still manage some plausible explanations and a rationale for accepting the past, as it now was. It seemed as if there had to be some dénouement to the story before it could pass peacefully into history. The dénouement could be said to take the form of storymaking so as to settle on a way of moving forward. The new story was one that might reasonably be released into the public domain. It was not a story that produced a picture in the mind of the future, something to work towards, but a story that closed the gate on the past.

The final interviews were of the 'here and now' and they clearly indicated satisfaction with both personal and professional life. The future was unknown but probably not so far removed from the picture painted of the present. The personal value systems and the relationships within the family unit were likely to be the major influences on that future, but it could not be described as a future story. Interestingly, however, there was a sense that the future need not be described, possibly on account of the satisfaction currently experienced with the present, because the past was past.

We may think that professionals are immune from disabling experiences, but it seems that they are not. The disjunction that can be experienced by some individuals may be equally

as painful and disabling as the experiences of their clients, caused not necessarily by pathology but by contextual factors that impact on their ability to function effectively in their environment. There is an analogy it seems, with the work of occupational therapists and the experiences of occupational therapists. Thus, from time to time, individuals may benefit from an opportunity to tell their story and create a story that helps them to find their own resolution to a disabling situation.

One of the limitations of this study might be considered the small number of participants. More stories about occupational therapists' careers might have produced more insights and added weight to the emerging issues, particularly any similarities with the key features of Sue and Clare's stories. A further issue was the choice of only female participants. Had men been included in a wider sample it might be anticipated that their stories would be very different. Their career trajectory and their expectations of a career would almost certainly raise other issues as they applied for posts and worked in a predominantly female environment. Issues of family life and parenthood might have featured in a different way. Ambition and competition may also have been an influence, but this can only be surmised. Further research is clearly needed to explore these issues.

Whatever the limitations, however, the narrative produced in storytelling is unique – it is unique to the individual and unique to the moment at which it emerges. In this study, as with others, the mood of the narrator at the time may have influenced what was said and how it was said, and this may have influenced how it was interpreted. Stories of the past are of bygone days but stories of the present or near past could still be subject to the influence of the current professional, organisational or personal context and shape the story accordingly.

It could be argued that another limiting feature of the study was the way in which data were analysed. A systematic approach was followed to allow issues to emerge naturally from what occurred. Observations were made about feelings expressed and feelings experienced in the storytelling process but the data were not analysed with regards to the discourse itself. Using discourse analysis might have provided very different insights that

have not been explored here. The use of metaphor, that is commonly known to feature in the stories of clients with whom occupational therapists work (Mallinson *et al*, 1996), has not been explored although some observations have been made about choice of words and terms to denote feelings. More attention has been paid to the affective side of conversations as a result of listening carefully, not just to what was said, but more to how it was said. Heard stories, compared with written stories, may indicate different but equally subtle insights into the meaning of experiences for the individual.

The place of narrative in the career journey

The uniqueness of each individual's career line makes the narrative interesting. The story tends to reveal a largely unplanned journey. The interest lies in exploring the rationale behind the decisions that result in the individual being where she is today. But the future story is hazy. Politics, economics, job security, family commitments, personal values and ambition play a part in holding a person in a job. Purposeful professional development did not feature as highly as might have been anticipated in preparing the occupational therapist for a future role, it did not seem to be necessary. Experiential learning 'on-the-job' seemed to fulfil that purpose. This may be because the future of the health and social care system cannot be anticipated so preparing for new roles can only be undertaken in the knowledge of current circumstances. Drawing out the career narrative seemed to be an affirming process that encouraged multiple factors in an occupational therapist's life to be brought together for review. A job move in later career life had, it seems, to be able to offer significantly more than the existing position to make the move worthwhile. Storytelling, possibly with an interested but non-judgmental person, could allow costs and benefits of different options to be weighed up.

Maybe the same principles of learning apply to me. Undertaking doctoral studies and the associated research has resulted in considerable personal learning that has been both exciting and rewarding. It has been a privilege to talk with occupational therapists about their career and to hear about their dilemmas as well as their rewarding experiences. For

each of them in different ways, their reflections on their experiences served to clarify aspects of their career, as they have done for me.

This research has opened up new avenues and thoughts about the potential use of narrative for different professional purposes. The qualities of narrative make it entirely possible for storytelling to be used in different ways to review achievements, to gain insights into personal strengths and limitations, to explore and help resolve dilemmas, to consider the relative merits of options and opportunities and to find ways of managing a future career. As previously mentioned, storytelling might form the basis of a one-to-one conversation with a mentor. It could equally be conducted in pairs or with a peer group where each has the opportunity to relate their story to others and engage in some debate about possible futures. There would probably need to be some protocol established by the group to govern the activity, if only for purposes of setting boundaries and respecting confidentiality.

Reflections on continuing professional development

My reflections on this learning experience have also caused me to revisit the place of continuing professional development and the expectation of the health professions that CPD must be planned, undertaken and recorded systematically. As outlined in early chapters, I have long had a keen interest in continuing professional development and have acknowledged that it can take many forms through formal and informal learning and be achieved through various planned and unplanned experiences (Alsop, 2000). The sheer complexity of everyday occupational therapy practice, that Creek (2003) has more recently confirmed, must surely mean that many occupational therapists are actually learning through experience on the job just to survive in the job. The context in which professional activity is undertaken changes so rapidly that the development of relevant knowledge, skills and/or attitudes is likely to be crucial to the ongoing ability to engage in that therapeutic practice both safely and competently. What occupational therapists do not do so well, it seems, is to recognize the learning that emerges from experience and to articulate that learning as professional development.

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For some therapists, keeping a portfolio of professional development may serve them well as they reflect on their experience and record their learning. Not everyone, however, necessarily responds well to the demands of keeping a portfolio yet they could probably articulate how the various twists and turns of their career have resulted in their learning through experience. Linking storytelling about work to continuing professional development may well serve the function of demonstrating continuing competence to practise.

This doctoral education has formed a part of my life long learning, building on earlier studies and experiences. It has taken me through the process of discovering the biographical tradition, testing out life story and exploring the potential of narrative in order to understand better the occupational therapist's career. It has led me to conclude that storytelling is a versatile tool not only for research but also for gaining insights into experiences and dilemmas in everyday situations. It has been a rewarding journey for me as an occupational therapist and for me as a researcher. I can look back on the story of my past with some satisfaction and feel that I can also create a future story for myself in the academic world.

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To write about one's life is to live it twice, and the second living is both

spiritual and historical, for a memoir reaches deep within

the personality as it seeks its narrative form.

Patricia Hampl

(undated)

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15 March 2002

[Researcher's address]

Dear

Re: My Doctoral Research

Thank you very much for agreeing in principle to being interviewed for my doctoral studies. As I explained to you earlier, I am in the process of studying for a Doctorate in Education and am now preparing to undertake the research element that will form the basis of my thesis. This letter is intended to set out the intentions of the research project and the anticipated implications for anyone agreeing to take part. I would ask you to consider the details very carefully before you finally consent to participating in the study.

The established aim of the study is as follows:

> *To investigate the use of narrative in research and in occupational therapists' clinical practice, and to examine its potential for exploring occupational therapists' career stories.*

It is hoped that this study will provide some further insights into storytelling as a process, with particular reference to occupational therapy.

I am asking participants in this study to agree to being interviewed some three or four times in order to explore their career stories in some depth, and to those interviews being taped. Each interview could last between one and two hours. A transcript of each interview will be returned to the participant concerned, and any observations will be noted. The issues emerging from the transcripts are likely to form the basis of each subsequent interview when the intention will be to focus in on selected aspects of the story. It is possible that the process may involve resurrecting some past memories, and any reactions associated with them. Of course, you will be free to terminate any interview, or indeed your participation in the study, at any time without consequence.

The interviews will be carried out at a venue and time that is convenient to you. This is most likely to be outside of your normal working hours.

I can assure you that any taped material will kept secure and confidential for the duration of the research and will be returned to you or destroyed (as agreed with you) on completion of the study. Your anonymity will be protected and no reference will be made to you personally in any report, presentation or publication.

I hope that this clarifies the position sufficiently for you to make a decision about your participation. If you have any questions or concerns, please raise them with me. I will happily address any issues by e-mail or when I see you for the first interview.

I look forward to seeing you then.

Yours sincerely

Auldeen Alsop
aalsop@netcomuk.co.uk

………………………………………………………………………………………………

I hereby give my consent to participating in the study outlined above, a copy of which is available for me to keep.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify any concerns.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence and am assured of the arrangements regarding confidentiality and anonymity.

Signed……………………………………………………………………………………

Date………………………………………………………………………………………

Process of Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through a number of stages, which allowed themes to emerge that would ultimately form the basis of the discussion.

Firstly, tape recordings were listened to and transcribed, attributing a number to each paragraph of the transcript, for example, 1.2.15.

The first digit denoted the participant (1 for the first and 2 for the second participant).

The second digit indicated whether it was the 1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th interview in the series with the participant.

The last digit indicated the paragraph number on that particular transcript.

The three-digit numbering system was then used for reference purposes in the process of data analysis and subsequently for the dissertation.

<u>Stage 1</u>

Transcripts were read, and re-read. Hi-lighter pens were used to mark informative statements such as key words, phrases or longer monologues, as shown in examples (pp168-172 and pp 174-178). Different colours were used to denote different themes. Whilst this proved helpful in determining broad themes emerging from the study, it was not sensitive enough to reflect the finer points arising from the data. For example, some phrases could be categorised within two or more themes; issues of 'career' were intertwined with issues relating to the narrative and the broad themes did not readily allow for sub-categories to be identified. A more sensitive approach to data analysis was thus needed to identify more specific issues from the broad themes.

Stage 2

In view of the difficulties experienced in the analysis of data, such as separating out issues relating to 'career' and those relating to 'narrative', it was decided to work with the two themes separately. Each of the seven transcripts was thus revisited and analysed to identify key phrases relating exclusively to 'career' / 'the meaning of work'. References to the issue were recorded in a separate notepad, along with the number of the paragraph and transcript in which they appeared. When this process was completed, all seven transcripts were read once again and key references that had some bearing on storytelling or narrative were recorded in the same way. This then provided two separate sets of data that reflected the two key components of the study. Tables 1 and 2 (p173 and p179) illustrate some of the issues arising from this process.

Stage 3

Using the two data sets, one for work/career and one for storytelling/narrative, it then became possible to work with each set at a time to allow the micro-themes to emerge in relation to each key component of the study. Systematically, each data set was then re-read and sub-themes were identified that could be ordered and re-ordered for the purposes of further discussion. A representation of the full analysis of the two themes is shown in figures 1 and 2 (pp180-181).

Figures 1 and 2 show the analysis of storytelling/narrative and the meaning of work/career respectively, and these were used in supervision sessions to explore data further. The links between different sub-themes in each data set were discussed and decisions were made about how the data might best be presented in the dissertation. It was decided to present the participants' 'story', in order to introduce each of them to the reader, before discussing the concept of career. The process and outcome of data analysis thus influenced the structure of the dissertation.

TAPE 1:1   Edited Extracts

1. Q   So…… tell me how you came to be an occupational therapist.

2. R   it was quite a late decision, really. Throughout my growing up in the school period it was always going to be a doctor first and then I realised I wasn't going to make the grade then it was going to be a nurse then I realised what nursing entailed, and it wasn't until, um actually I was going to along a completely different street after that and I got really interested in geography and I was going to do a degree in geography then I didn't get the A level grades then it was a complete review of where I was at and a friend had gone to OT college in that year so I found out a lot more about it and it seemed to fit the interest in the medical profession and I applied and got it

3. Q   so what put you off nursing? Why did you think occupational therapy was different to nursing?

4. R   I think the more I found out about nursing the more I realised the reality of it I think. A lot of it felt as if it could probably be very mundane routine type work whereas OT has much more scope for using the imagination I guess

5. Q   and is that where you saw yourself fitting – using your imagination?

6. R   yeah, yeah I think so, yes, yes, it seemed to encapsulate all of the areas that I was interested in, it had the medical side, the social side, the psychological side and the concept of the whole person really appealed to me, just spoke to me really. I think nursing perhaps as well as a lot of other health care professions is very reductionist and medical-model focused and that wasn't me really.

17. Q   …were you happy with the course.. did it fulfil your expectations?

18. R   yeah, yeah I spent most of the course thinking I am going to get found out soon that I shouldn't be here um, which I think I spent most of my career doing that [laugh] um, but yes I really enjoyed the course it was very, very tough the first year we were convinced that they were trying to knock us down to bare bones to try to build us up again into their ideal form of OT and it was very, very tough but very enjoyable as well

19. Q   how did you cope with that if you felt it was really tough?

20. R   I just got on with it really um….I am quite an academically minded person anyway so enjoyed the academia of it, it seems very rigorous, which is what I wanted, not by the more OT oriented side of the course the arty crafty type, I always wanted to be back in the academic side of things… yeah I enjoyed it

21. Q   was it tough academically or was it tough in terms of dealing with the personalities or what they were saying to you?

22. R   tough academically. Just the volume of it. I always remember Monday morning in the first year on the academic side were four hours of lectures, it went from something like medicine and surgery to psychology to anatomy to something else straight off Monday morning nine o'clock through to one o'clock and that was the pattern throughout the first year

23. Q   and yet you preferred the academic bits to the

24. R   yeah

25. Q   the more practical components

26. R   I enjoyed doing the practical components but it didn't feel like we were really learning anything it was more play and we never got the question answered but how does this apply to OT? ..which I know on reflection I can really understand that now, nobody can answer it……….. the course was rather lacking in that respect.

27. Q   right, what did placements do for you?

28. R   [laugh] you really want to know? Um I hated them, basically I really hated them um.. I'm very shy really, naturally, not as shy as I used to be, so I found moving to a new place living in horrendous nurses homes and moving into a whole new group of people very, very tough and I hated the thought of that and it seemed like a insurmountable mountain at the beginning of the course and I can remember reflecting back on it in the third year and thinking how on earth did I get from first year through all those other six placements and bearing them and out the other side. It seemed to have gone in a flash I can remember actually doing that.. actually sitting down and reflecting on that at one point .. um and some of them were absolutely horrendous, others were good

.

67. Q   OK you've done a timeline so just talk me though so that we can get a picture of the whole career.

.

70. R   yes, having spent well three years at [placename] – well no actually five years in total I think it was, um, just consolidating my practice and becoming more skilled in what I was doing and getting used to what I was doing I.. this is typical of me right the way through my career ..by 93 my brain was turning to jelly and started to dribble out of my ears and I wanted a new challenge so I started the MSc - distance learning. I found distance learning very, very difficult, found the taught elements of the course fine and didn't have any problems with it academically, but the distance learning I found very difficult having to sit down and motivate myself to actually get on with the work. That was a two year programme and in April 95 just before I should have finished I dropped. I got as far as the research and put it off and put it off and put it off until the point of no return. It was far too late to start it and that coincided with me meeting my husband and going from virtually nil social life to extremely full social life, my whole life sort of changed really it was great, you know, significant, so that period towards the end of my – I should have been completing my MSc - I got a social life.

So I dropped out of that. My manager was excellent at that, he was really, really sympathetic and supportive of that and at that point also round about that time there was a senior practitioner post came up within the team and myself and a colleague went for it and I didn't get the post, which I was very, very miffed about and even reflecting back now I still think that I should have got it but there must have been… I can remember it being an appalling interview but it terms of the two people on the table for the job I should have got it, I genuinely feel that, so very miserable about that and very disillusioned, dispirited and, whether my manager wanted to get me off his back

because he was fed up of me whinging,…..he arranged an opportunity for me to be seconded for six months to another office locally for six months which was fine, it's good experience in another team, different people, different experiences, and then towards the end of that six months [a] post was advertised and I was interviewed for that and I can remember it being really spot-on interview. I always know whether I've done well or not and I got that post there, which I was absolutely bowled over about, I was really chuffed about that

71. Q   so was that a senior practitioner post?

72. R   that was a senior practitioner post, yes

73. Q   so how long was it between the one where you had been rejected and the one that you..

74. R   five months

75. Q   five months, not very long

76. R   not very long at all, I mean I'd been ready for a couple of years probably so I was itching for it and I really knew that I wanted it and really went for it and got it …

77. Q   right

78. R   …so yeah that was September 95 um, what happened next? Again, couple of years, started to get bored, itchy feet started going for jobs. I had about three interviews and didn't get anywhere. Wanted to try and go up the line but wasn't sure how. Went for a policy and practice manager [post], which I was probably a bit lacking in experience for, so I didn't get that. It was actually a colleague team manager that got that, but I would have loved the job and I think I would have been able to do it but I was probably, I didn't have quite enough experience and a couple of team management posts, didn't get those either. But that worked out pretty well because I think I was just itching for the next stage on, but team management wasn't really the niche I wanted to go into. Um, now what happened then?.. Yes, at the same time [my manager] went off very suddenly for six months and I had to act up into her post so I got a real flavour of team management and it confirmed utterly that whilst I felt I could do the job I didn't want to do the job and I wanted to…to reach out more into policy development and get involved in strategy and that kind of thing but keep very firmly within the OT camp, which is a difficult place to go really for OT especially in Social Services. About the same time as well I got the opportunity to contribute to a book so I started work on that, did a few chapters in there so that was good

79. Q   so that's coming out imminently?

80. R   it's out in hard copy

81. Q   you must have been very proud of that

82. R   I was very proud of that, actually, I don't, I'm not, I'm quite critical of it as a piece of work but in other ways I'm very proud that I've actually done it. It was quite a difficult task because it was only eight thousand words and quite strict guidelines as to what it was all about so academically I feel it was not terribly rigorous and it could have been an awful lot better but then I would have needed twice as many words so.. if I'm being kind to myself it was as good as it could be within the words but you can always do better can't you?

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83. Q   was it just one chapter – you said a couple of chapters?

84. R   two chapters

85. Q   excellent, well done you.

86. R   so that's out now, so that's cool, yeah, then I finally went for August 2000 a principal OT job came up and I'd been for, I was saying, three or four interviews by then and it was a case of, Oh I may as well, I won't get it anyway, you know, and then I got it, which was a bit of a shock to the system so it meant moving, and it was exactly the sort of post I was looking for, not necessarily the right authority but the right post, because it meant that I had a professional lead but without going down the team management route and keeping very focused within OT.

88. R   … that I guess in any new job coincided with quite a dip in confidence, very deskilling when you move to a new job, isn't it, a new area and all the rest of it and now, a year on, my confidence is resuming and, um, I'm ready for the next job now [laugh] but again probably not quite ready but itching to move on to the next one and that is always my, well it's not a mistake because I don't let it be a mistake but I'm always ready to go before perhaps I'm, I am ready so at the moment I'm sort of keeping my eye open and trying to move my career and place myself in a direction, in a position to be able to move on when the opportunities arise.

91. Q   there are other places to go?

92. R   not OT specific, but the next move would be into service management but I don't think I would do that unless it had a lead for OT in its remit and within physical disability as well

93. Q   so just explain to me the difference between the team leader that you didn't want to do and the lead for occupational therapy that you did want to do and possibly the next move, how would you define each of those three roles?

94. R   well the team management role is as it sounds, really, managing a team of people and to get the business of the department done. It is usually a team of about between a dozen to twenty people, usually multi-disciplinary, which would include OT, social work and unqualified staff as well. I'm not particularly interested in man management element of it really, I think I do it alright but I don't think it's my real strength, I just find it a bit of a pain in the bum to be honest and also the constant shuffling of referrals trying to get them allocated and particularly in an OT service there is just a huge number coming in and trying to get them allocated and managing waiting lists and… very administrative and very frustrating, not a huge amount of influence on the service

95. Q   so it was largely to do with just moving resources around

96. R   moving resources fitting limited resources to a huge bombardment of referrals and I found after a while it got very tedious and boring, very mundane, not a lot of opportunity for development

106.R   … I want to get involved in everything, everything, everywhere I can see a potential role for OT I dive in just to not lose the opportunity really, so I am absolutely jam packed at the moment.

107.Q   who allocates your work?

108.R   I'm line managed by one of the service managers who has a particular responsibility for disability. But really it's a very free rein. I think that's the nature of my manager as much as anything else

114.R   ... I've always got my ear to the ground to see what's going on and I'm also.. anything I hear of or I that think we should be involved with I jump straight in there and fortunately my manager is keen to let me do that so I have got involved with a lot of stuff that is going on, ... there's loads and loads of stuff, um, and I've managed to keep all the balls in the air so far

115.Q   there's something about variety there, do you like variety?

116.R   yes, like variety, yes

117.Q   bored quickly comes to mind

118.R   bored very quickly, yes

119.Q   you put your hands up to that do you?

120.R   yes definitely, and any idea that I've got that I want to develop then I'm in there trying to force the agenda, ... trying to restructure the service, which is probably a bit beyond my remit but there you go... so get myself involved with these enormous agenda, and hopefully the fruits of the labours will be seen, but they are very long, long programmes, projects really

Table 1   Clare – Interview 1.1

Para graph	Story/narrative	Para graph	Meaning of work/career
1.1.2	Initially factual, professional, succinct, Controlled, tidy, uses reporting style	1.1.4	Scope for using imagination
1.1.18	Slightly cautious, tentative use of humour	1.1.6	OT..seemed to encapsulate all of the areas I was interested in…the concept of the whole person
1.1.20	Self-evaluative		
1.1.22 1.1.28	Signs of reflection		
1.1.70	Seems to 'loosen up' in storytelling Abbreviated reporting style; short factual statements, no timewasting	1.1.70	Wanted a new challenge
		1.1.78	Started to get bored; itchy feet; started going For jobs; wanted to try and go up the line Some confirmation of likes/dislikes in the job
1.1.82	Seems more relaxed, explaining something she is proud of		
1.1.86	More reflective, more relaxed language 'so that's cool'	1.1.86	The right post, exactly the sort of post I Was looking for
1.1.88	strategic thinking	1.1.88	New job – dip in confidence, very deskilling -always ready to go before I'm ready -keeping an eye open to move my career and -place myself..in a position to be able to move on when opportunities arise
1.1.94	starts to provide some clarity about what she would/ would not do	1.1.94	influence on the service
		1.1.96	very tedious and boring, very mundane not a lot of opportunity for development
		1.1.106	get involved with everything; everywhere I see a potential for OT I dive in
		1.1.108	likes 'a very free rein'
		1.1.114	ear to the ground to see what's going on jump straight in managed to keep all the balls in the air
		1.1.118	bored very quickly
1.1.120	starts to develop arguments	1.1.120	trying to force the agenda

TAPE 2.2   Edited Extracts

1 Q   So how did it strike you as a career overview?

2 R   I found it really, really interesting. I mean I really enjoyed the experience of talking to you about it and I think because I've been spending some time reviewing my career just recently it was actually really useful to me to think some of these things through and actually identify some of the things that have been the things that I have been finding difficult recently, especially the issues around leadership and it also made me feel really positive about it really in that there's a balance in there between there's still the OT core to it, but that there's the sort of education side of things and the opportunity to just be doing something slightly different, slightly challenging in my practice so I found the whole experience of doing it really, really helpful and I think it's particularly because, you know, I'd been reviewing my career recently. When I got this [the transcript] I felt quite, I found it quite embarrassing reading it really, you know, not the content so much as just – oh gosh is that really how I talk, and sort of like just some of the ways that I phrase things and it felt a bit, reading it it felt a bit self-indulgent really, it felt a bit embarrassing. But it was useful to read it. I mean I knew I could talk but I didn't realise I talked quite like that. But the same feeling from it as I'd had on the day that we did it really, which was, oh well actually that was just really good to have that opportunity just to review things and just to go through it and to make some of those connections and sort of see it as a whole. So found it a really useful thing to do, it was good.

3 Q   Do you want to say anything more about leadership if that's what you picked up particularly, how it strikes you?

4 R   Only to repeat what we talked about before, really, which is, I like to have, I like to have the freedom to do things and to be leading things, I suppose, and I like to be given the freedom to pursue ideas and pursue my own way of doing things but I also like to feel that, somewhere along the line there is somebody else who is supporting me in that, somebody else who I can go to and say am I on the right track here or how do I go about this and I think the times that I have found difficult in my career, as I said in here, and particularly recently have been the times where I've felt that nobody is giving me any sort of clear lead either to say, it might just be as simple as saying that's terrific, that's great or yeah, not sure about that, I don't thing that's the priority at the moment and perhaps you should focus on this. So it's just getting that balance between feeling free to pursue things and do them in the way I think they're going to work but also to get some feedback on that and some guidance about how to do that and that's what's been lacking in my most recent job in that there's just been this complete void and I think because other people - because its new – people haven't managed somebody doing this sort of thing before and its obviously very difficult for them … I've found it hard 'cause I've found there haven't been the people around to say oh well this is how you tackle it, or this is one way forward, right, or OK let's take a sort of systematic approach to this and you can do this, this and this, and I simply haven't had that.

5 Q   Have you used mentorship?

6 R   Yes I have. I have. I sort of established that in the last few months with somebody sort of separate from the project. Before that I used my partner as a mentor and in a way, a funny sort of way, we do that quite formally for each other and we know what we're doing and we'll say 'can I have a supervision session after we've eaten tonight?' and we do sort of set that up really and do that for each other and that is really useful because I find that [my partner] has a very objective way of looking at things. He has a very sort of systems sort of approach and when I get bogged down in

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personalities and what I think people are doing to me, he's able to stand back from that and say 'yeah but you know that's because that's where they're coming from because that's what the system's expecting of them. Well you can't get that from them because that's not - their role is so and so, so that is mentorship and I think that that's fine, just because it's within the basis of our partnership I don't think that sort of matters really, I mean it's very clearly about mentorship and to some extent that's mutual 'cause there will be things that, other ways that he uses me that are my strengths, I think, which is about how people operate in groups and stuff, and that sort of thing, so its sort of mutual so that's felt like mentoring but then more recently I've asked somebody else within the Trust if I could spend some time with him just to talk things through and that's been really useful.

7 Q   So you do take work home?

8 R   I do. I do. I think less, I mean I think, I think I take work home, I've taken work home less in this job than I did in the day service management job without a doubt and that that's simply because in the day service management job I was managing a lot of people so I've always had clinical supervision so to some extent the clinical side of it has always felt fine and I've always known what to do with that and have not been left troubled by that and not taken that home. I think the stuff that I did take home as a day services manager was the stuff around managing staff and managing not just OT staff but administrative staff and reception staff and housekeeping staff and all those things that are just there because you're managing a group of people who've got different interests and so I used to take that home and I was very aware that I used to go home I think a lot more stressed from that job than I have with this and I think that's because I've got no direct line management responsibility. So that's quite different so I don't take that sort of stress home and the stress that I've taken home in the last six or seven months from this has been when its stopped being about being exciting and challenging and its started to become all the political stuff and how to approach it strategically and who to ambush in what corridor and as soon as it got into all of that stuff then that's where it really started to get me down and I think it was about feeling out of control, its about feeling that on the one hand people are saying yeah yeah yeah it's great but there isn't actually any help there to help you continue it. It feels a bit like a mixed message really and I don't like that sense of not being in control.

9 Q   Does that element of control pervade other areas of your work or areas of your life?

10 R   I think so. I mean I think I like, I think I'm, if you do that exercise, you know, pragmatist, activist, I'm well at the sort of activist end of things and I just sort of get stuck in and get on with it and sometimes think about it afterwards and I think that's a weakness and I think what's been interesting about, you know the day service management job is all activism, it's all like 'get in there, get this sorted, here's your list of things to do today it's as long as your arm, these are the tasks that need to be done, this is what needs sorting, this is the group that needs running, these are the expenses that have got to be sorted' and maybe that was why I was perhaps more stressed just because I did so much within day and this role has been really, really good for me because I've had time to sit down and read things and that's been part of the job, I've had time to just sit and think about a case, so how are we going to do this then? I've had time to think, I've really had time to think. I've had time to reflect and that's been really important and I think that's been an important development for me and I think has helped me to change and just stand back from things a little bit and just sort of reflect on it a bit before I sort of dive in and get on.

.…And so I think it's that, you know I sort of struggled with that at the beginning because I thought I 'd got to be running around like a frantic mad thing. But that's been very good for me, I think, to

develop that side and I think that's helped me to deal with the stress levels and I think made me a bit more mature and a bit more patient in my sort of approach to things.

15 Q   So looking at you career as a whole, what actually drives you in your career?

16 R   Er being useful, feeling useful, there being a job to do, seeing that there is something to do and getting on and doing it and finishing it. I hate not sort of seeing things through so I like to see things through. I think another drive is something we talked about last time, which is this whole issue about wanting ... wanting to feel that I've done things differently, that I haven't... or that I am less prejudiced and less institutionalised in my attitudes to people that I work with than other people, that's not to say that I am not, cause I am, and I mean I know there are groups of people that I would find really difficult to work with and can feel quite intolerant of their predicament.

23 Q   ..are you wedded to the profession [of OT], could you live without it?

24 R   um... I mean, I think I probably could and I think perhaps, but I think that's perhaps because... well yes and no. I think in the work that I've been doing in the last three years... I've been working with are people who are not professionals ...so I think that's made a difference to that and I have certainly used many of my OT skills, if you like, in terms of networking and supervision and support and, you know, that whole sort of business of, something that I think lots of OTs that I know are good at, is that sort of just making the right connections between things...

...I don't think I could live without it in the sense that it's important to me to, its back to that thing about things being clear, its important to me to have a way of defining who I am, what I am, that's because you have to within the system you work in. People want to know what your sort of label is really, so I mean I think that's important. One of the things that attracts me to the job that I'm moving to is because there seems to be. So it is a strong OT structure and some strong OT leadership and that was part of what attracted me and that was what was missing for me in [placename] having been there at the beginning of my career then that's been very lacking, certainly in this most recent jobimportant to me at some level because I want it to be there and I find it hard when it's not.

29 Q   When you think back over your career, how would you rate it in terms of success?

30 R   Um, I think it's been successful, I mean I, as I said earlier, I don't cope with not finishing things off and I suppose don't really cope with feeling I've not done something properly. I know, there have been, there have been I suppose two occasions... where some of the feelings that were around were really about failure, were about just not being able to do it, not being able to cope with what was happening or cope with circumstances or find a way through it and there's certainly some of that around for me at the moment in terms of, you know, I'm making a move in a job more because I need to than because I really want to, you know. If what I wanted to happen would be happening or was happening then I wouldn't be needing to look elsewhere and that's only the second time I've ever moved for that reason really [the other time] was because I just found that I needed to get out of that situation and I suppose by saying that what I'm doing is defining that as some sort of failure and I don't think it is necessarily. I think what I'm having to do at the moment is work quite hard on rationalising the situation I'm in now... It's not actually about not having not done a good job its actually just about circumstances have conspired not to give me what I want at

the end of the day… somebody just giving me a mandate to get on and do it and I'll deliver it for them and they know that.

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33 Q   So how are you coping with the transition and thinking about moving to a new job? How are you preparing for it?

34 R   I think in a way there's a hitch with it because of being screened… and its taking longer than it would have done and actually that's proving to be quite a positive thing for me because as the time goes on I'm becoming, I'm becoming clearer about my reasons for making a move and I'm becoming more positive about it. I mean I felt very positive, I saw the advert and it was like, wow and this weight just lifted and I felt better almost immediately 'cause I've actually been off work, off sick, and been to see the GP, got a sick note with depression on it and all the rest of it and I wasn't, I was bordering on being depressed, I think, I was losing my motivation and I was quite irritable and just sort of couldn't see a way through it really. So I had two weeks off and it was sort of the first week I'd come back to work a friend showed me this advert and I just went yes and it was just like this whole sort of weight lifted. I think the things that I, I mean I think the things that I've had to work on and sort out have been the issues that are about, is all this about taking my bat home because I've not got what I wanted and I'm just being immature and impatient about this, you know, just sort of saying ooh I'm off. It's not that, I mean it's about I think just not wanting to feel how I was beginning to feel these last few weeks and actually being able to identify what it was that was causing that because they were very similar things to what I'd had in years before and knowing what that did to me over a prolonged period, a much longer period of time, so this time is really helpful 'cause I think its helping me to make the transition more gradually. The difficulties I have are what I'm losing really so I think I have been grieving really for, again, the business of lost opportunity, lost potential because I think the work that we'd started to do was actually a very good opportunity for the service to have something valuable going on, so that feels like a lost opportunity and for me personally it's it's it's the whole business of losing working with the people, losing that opportunity to be doing something a bit on the edge …

So that's all the sort of negative stuff which has given me some time to work on it and I think I've needed to have that time because I think I need to leave it behind and go to the new job on an up beat which is actually about … right what's this about then, let's get my teeth stuck into this one and use, certainly use everything that I've learned, and I've learnt a lot, you know, use all of that experience, use the same things that drive me in a new situation where I suspect that I'm at least going to get some leadership, from the conversations I've had already with the manager involved, so yeah I suppose that's how I'm preparing for it. It's a bit sort of negative isn't it the way I'm preparing for a new job is to get rid of all the past.

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41 Q   so how long term do you think this new job will be?

42 R   oh I don't know, no idea at all

43 Q   so is it kind of opportunist again, is that how you've seen your moves from different jobs or has there between any planning involved?

44 R   Opportunist? This was opportune in the sense that it came along at the right time. I don't think its totally opportunistic in the sense that it will allow me to develop further the work that I've

been doing so there is a relationship there and that's the attraction of it … so I don't know if that's opportunist or if that's actually about planning for something.

45 Q   So for you it's a development?

46 R   I think it is, yes, I think it is. In some ways it's a development in other ways it's going backwards, you know, not going backwards, but it's going back to something, it's going back to, its going back to more like a day service management job as opposed to a project development job and I think that's going to be quite different because I've not, in my current job, you know, I've not had to manage staff, I've not had to think about how this unit's going to deal with clinical governance and how many risk assessments I've still got to do before this group can happen, you know, I've just not had to think about all of those things. So in some ways it's going back to a lot of the taskyness of the day service management job and, I suppose you know, I'm a bit anxious that it won't have the same challenge in a way, the same strategic challenge that this job has been. I suppose I'm hoping that it might be able to develop that. You know, I'm hoping so cause they're saying, right, this is what we are wanting to develop and I made it very clear when I went for the job at my interview that that's what I would give 'em, you know, they wouldn't get sort of somebody that would just hold the service where it is they would actually get somebody that would do something with it… so it is a development but the timing was opportune, definitely.

47 Q   So now we've progressed through a couple of interviews is there anything that you'd like to say about the way in which these interviews are going or anything that's occurred to you about your career that you can add to this story

48 R   Um, I think this process has just been really, really useful to me and its actually been very opportune, I mean its - thinking about today as well, it has felt more like a supervision or therapeutic session and that's really helpful and I think having done the first one, because of where I was at at the time, as it has helped me reflect on my career and its helped me, its helped me sort of make sense of it I think, of some of the things that are happening at the moment and that's been so helpful to me personally it has been really helpful, so thank you for that 'cause its felt really good just to have that opportunity to talk about it and it has really helped me sort some of it out, 'cause that's what I was doing anyway, so the actual process has been really good. I think it has helped me identify those themes that were about leadership and about the fact that I need things to be clear and I try and create clarity if they're not and that I think is one of my strengths but that that can also be a weakness because you imagine that your clarity is the way to do it. It sometimes rules out listening to other ways of doing it but I think that that's something that has changed and I'd not made that connection until just today really, about that sort of activist/reflector bit, and I think that this last job, especially I think because it has meant working with somebody from a completely different background because it has really made me listen, really made me reflect, really made me think about how I go about things

…and I'd not made that connection until you were just talking today about it. So I think it has identified some things and helped me make some connections about what's going on. I think that makes it a really, really useful process its like supervision plus plus plus plus.
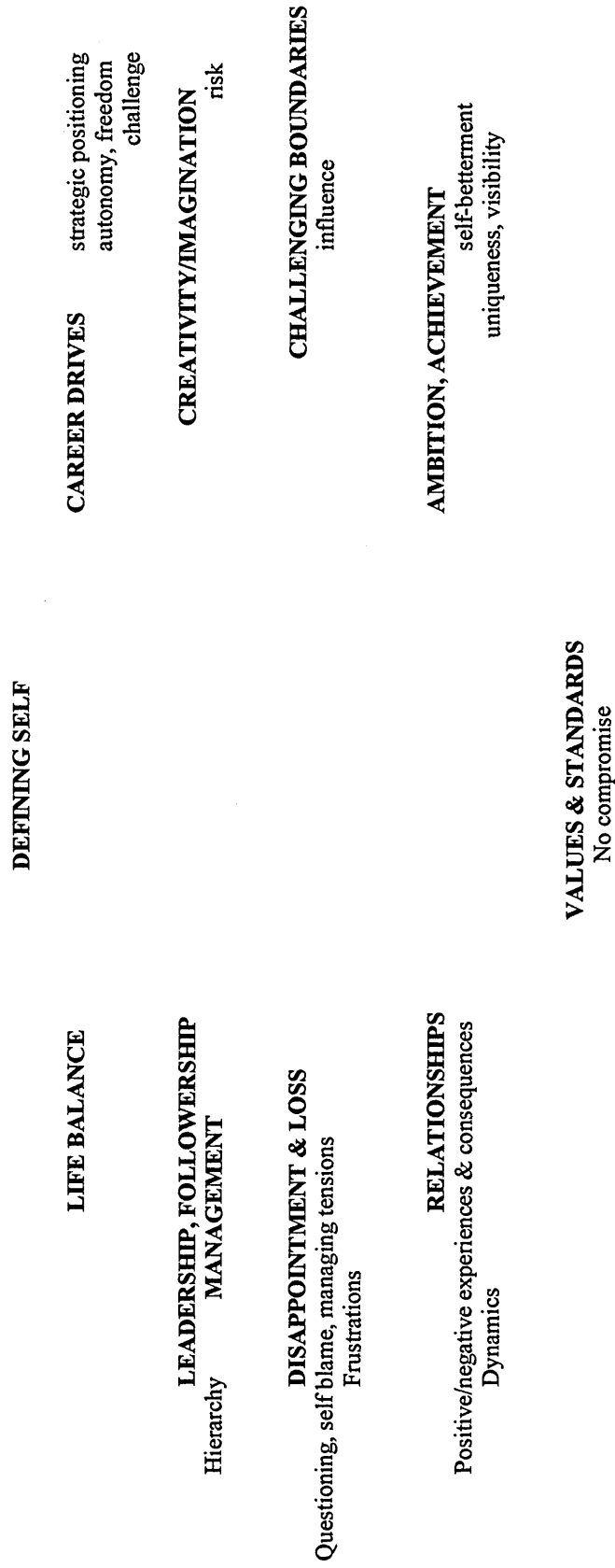
Table 2   Sue – Interview 2.2

Para graph	Story/narrative	Para graph	Meaning of work/career
2.2.2	The experience of talking Spending time reviewing my career Useful to think things through Identifying things I have been finding difficult I found it quite embarrassing Really good to have the opportunity to review things…make some connections, see things as a whole, really useful thing to do	2.2.4	Likes freedom to do things and to be leading things; freedom to pursue ideas and own way of doing things also needs support, feedback, guidance there is a need to get the balance right
2.2.6	used my partner as a mentor		
2.2.8	always had clinical supervision suggest working through issues with others	2.2.8	stress associated with loss of excitement/ challenge at work and politics intervening not known how to approach it strategically feeling out of control
2.2.10	time to reflect; deal with stress		
		2.2.12	expectation of clarity in the job, about what is being asked, and then the scope to get it done
		2.2.14	wanting to feel useful wanting to do things differently wanting to challenge attitudes
2.2.16	self awareness, self knowledge revealed		
		2.2.24	the profession helps to define who I am leadership is important – finds it hard when it is not there
2.2.30	able to talk about failure and rationalisation of situations	2.2.30	claims a successful career seems to need closure on situations seems to set herself standards but are they realistic/attainable?
2.2.34	questioning own thoughts and actions expressing feelings of grief and loss learning from experiences finding an explanation that works for her	2.2.34	Coping with loss; rationalizing change of job -not very convincingly reflecting on the good features of existing job perceiving lost opportunity – of doing something 'on the edge' trying to leave negative feelings behind
		2.2.46	anxious that new job will not offer same challenges; feels like going backwards
2.2.48	talking as a useful process, therapeutic, helped reflect on a career and make sense of it helped me sort it out helped make connections about what is going on overall long, meandering monologues of personal experiences and feelings		

Pattern

Interview
Story
Reflection
Conversation
Exploration
Determination

Style

professional, controlled
personal, open
relaxed and reflective
commentating on own situation
revelatory
contradictory
Language
- professional
- colloquial, slack
- emotional
fast-track responses/abbreviated story

Mode

report
description
definition
reflection
opinion
debate, argument
exploration
explanation
rationalisation
story- single character
story- multiple characters

Mood

Humourous
Self-evaluating
Self-deprecating
Self-critical
Self-confident
Self-aware
Showing
- pride
- passion
- concern
- motivation
- disappointment
- grief

Storytelling

an outlet
a vehicle for reflection
a vehicle for self-discovery
a vehicle for confirmation/affirmation
a vehicle for verbal explanation
a vehicle for developing self-understanding
a vehicle for rationalising, redefining, moving on
an aid to decision-making

Process

speaking to another
being guided, questioned, challenged
facing facts
drawing strands together
looking back/forward
moving on

Figure 1   **Understanding narrative and storytelling**

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DEFINING SELF

CAREER DRIVES — strategic positioning, autonomy, freedom, challenge

CREATIVITY/IMAGINATION — risk

CHALLENGING BOUNDARIES — influence

AMBITION, ACHIEVEMENT — self-betterment, uniqueness, visibility

VALUES & STANDARDS — No compromise

LIFE BALANCE

LEADERSHIP, FOLLOWERSHIP, MANAGEMENT — Hierarchy

DISAPPOINTMENT & LOSS — Questioning, self blame, managing tensions, Frustrations

RELATIONSHIPS — Positive/negative experiences & consequences, Dynamics

Figure 2   **Understanding the meaning of work and career**

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