

# Therapeutic Storytelling in a Pupil Referral Unit: The story of intersubjectivity

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# Abstract

**Background:** This thesis reflects upon a heuristic study of a Storytelling Programme which took place in a KS3 Pupil Referral Unit. Previous experiences in the field, as a community storyteller, revealed the power of stories to calm and engage young people. In my community work I had seen that storytelling particularly engaged those considered 'hard to reach.' This research was designed to explore the storytelling process further with the aim of understanding more about the impact of the process and to understand the key components as identified by the young people themselves.

**Methodology:** A heuristic research methodology was adopted within this study. The Storytelling Programme was delivered to twelve young people at a Pupil Referral Unit in the North West of England. Five of these participants were interviewed along with their teacher, and their reflections were integrated with my own to create a crystallized understanding of the storytelling process, whilst also remaining true to the unique experiences of each participant.

**Findings:** Heuristic analysis of the Storytelling Programme revealed that young participants developed new personal narratives that reflected new ways of being and thinking. Change was demonstrated by the young people expressing a more positive sense of self. A striking finding, echoed by all participants, was the significance of the relationship in facilitating the therapeutic change process.

**Discussion:** Whilst some of the changes could be linked to particular stories, the participants could not articulate whether their increased sense of well-being came from the stories or more generally from the programme or my 'way of being' (Rogers, 1980). It appears that stories and the therapeutic relationship intertwine within the storytelling process to create opportunities for therapeutic change. The findings of this study suggest that story is a particularly useful indirect medium to engage 'hard to reach' young people who have disorganised attachment styles. Storytelling offers the opportunity to place the intersubjective relationship as central, fostering an implicitly nurturing and co-regulating dyad that can offer reparation as well as the opportunities for catharsis and the development of emotional literacy through the processing of the story material.

**Conclusion:** It appears that storytelling intertwines the interpersonal relationship with the stories to create a process which is both interpersonal and intrapersonal. The storytelling process appears to facilitate dyadic co-regulation, which may be an essential first step in the therapeutic change process. Once in a state of calm the young people could connect to the story stimuli and develop new ways of being and thinking. Whilst stories appear to promote changes at both the relational and semantic level, the findings from this study suggest that the implicit relational changes had primacy in facilitating significant therapeutic change.

**Key words:** Therapeutic Storytelling, Adolescents, 'Hard to Reach' Young People, Attunement, Intersubjectivity, Moments of Meeting.

# Declaration

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# Introduction

## *Buying a suit*

*A man paid a visit to his tailor for a new suit.*

*As he looked in the mirror he noticed that the waistcoat was a little uneven.*

*“Oh, don’t worry about that” said the tailor “just pull the left side down a bit and hold it in place with your hand, no one will notice”*

*The customer made the necessary accommodations and looked again in the mirror. This time he noticed that the collar didn’t lie flat as it should but was instead all curled up.*

*“Oh that’s nothing” said the tailor “just turn your head a little and hold it down with your chin”*

*The young man complied and as he did so he noticed that the trousers were too tight and were rising up on the inside of his right leg*

*“Oh that, don’t worry about that either, just pull the seam down on the inside of your right thigh and you’ll be fine”*

*The customer surrendered to this suggestion also, and proceeded to purchase the suit, voicing no further concerns.*

*A few days later the young man was walking through the park in his new suit. As he limped through the park with his chin on his lapel, his left hand pulling at the short-side of his waistcoat, and his right hand tugging at his inside leg seam, two old men stopped their game of chequers to watch him as he stumbled along.*

*“Poor guy” said the first man “so disabled”*

*“Yeah” said the second man “so disabled it’s a wonder that he can get through life...but you know, I wonder where I can get a suit like that.”*

*Adapted from Clarissa Pinkola-Estes (1992; p.275).*

## Thesis design and rhetoric

The style and layout of the thesis is coloured by the relativist and intersubjective nature of this research, and this will be described in more detail below. In keeping with the constructivist paradigm the rhetoric of this thesis is in the first person (Ponterotto, 2005) which grounds the study in my own subjective perspective (Sela-Smith, 2002). In addition, the thesis contains reflexive detail to provide relevant contextual data for the reader (Etherington, 2004). A reflexive narrative is inherent in heuristic inquiry which acknowledges the emotional and intellectual impact of the inquiry upon the research process and the researcher’s personal development (Ponterotto, 2005; Sela-Smith, 2002).

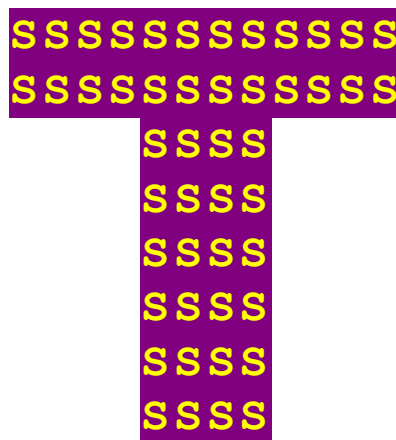
In this introduction I make a reflective comment upon the tensions and illuminations that I have experienced in writing this thesis as I feel that this best facilitates understanding of the thesis and provides a lens through which it can be read. In the subsequent section, within this chapter, I present the research Aims and Research Questions. I then follow this Introduction Chapter with chapters on the epistemological and methodological constructs that guide the research process to achieve these aims. This therefore denotes a change from the usual thesis design which traditionally places the Literature Chapter ahead of the Epistemological and Methodological Chapters. I will now provide the rationale for the change in thesis design.

Two narratives have emerged from this research process. One pertains to the research quest to better understand the storytelling process as experienced by the participants and myself, and the other is how to communicate the findings that pertain to an elusive concept such as intersubjectivity, which is inherent in the therapeutic storytelling process.

My primary concern is to avoid privileging one narrative over the other as both intertwine throughout the research process, yet I feel both are conveyed with greatest transparency and clarity if presented as two separate contextualised narratives. By introducing the Epistemology Chapter ahead of the literature my intention is to identify the ontological and epistemological perspectives as the foundation to the methodological aspects of this research but also highlight how these philosophical beliefs permeate the storytelling process, the therapeutic process and my core way of being. Therefore this locates the relativist ontology and

hermeneutic epistemology (Ponterotto and Gieger, 2007) as the primary voice through which the study of the Storytelling Programme is told.

This process parallels hemispheric processing in the brain. Neuropsychology studies suggest that the right hemisphere maintains a holistic, contextualised perspective, (McGilchrist, 2009) for example the right hemisphere identifies the whole purple letter T (see example below), whilst the left hemisphere focuses upon the detailed marks from which the T is constructed and identifies the yellow letter S's.



McGilchrist (2009) also illustrates this bi-lateral processing by suggesting that a bird will focus upon the food that it's pecking with its left hemisphere whilst scanning the environment for prey using a more global attention provided by the right hemisphere. It is not necessary to debate these conclusions from neuropsychology here as I simply offer them as metaphors to help the reader understand that it is my belief that the ontological and epistemological underpinnings not only permeate this study but also form the holistic framework, enabling focused attention to be applied to the Storytelling Programme which is then examined within the holistic intersubjective context. Consequently, I follow this reflexive introduction, which essentially sets out my relativist ontological position (Ponterotto, 2007), with the Epistemological Chapter as this presents my ontological position as a more detailed

and contextualised relativist narrative which I feel is relevant to the reader from the outset of the thesis.

Having provided some initial reasoning for the thesis format, I will now describe the ontological tensions that were at the foreground in the writing of this thesis to elaborate on the context for this decision. I then provide a story in the hope of offering a sense of these tensions.

### **Ontological Tensions**

The tensions relate to the writing of the thesis and not to the research process itself. Conducting the research and Storytelling Programme was a particularly empowering process. Academic and clinical supervisors, the Head of the Pupil Referral Unit and the remit of the Storytelling Programme gave me an opportunity to work from a very confident place within me, a state of being which rests on a belief in my intuitive processes.

I have learnt to trust my intuitive self and typically allow it to guide my clinical practice. My aim was to reach the 'hard to reach' through story and I had an intuitive sense of how to do this. However, much of my clinical practice relies upon implicit and affective processes which are not easily verbalised. Schwartz (2013) notes "(w)hen my Self is fully embodied during those sessions, I feel a deep, pure loving connection to my clients and many clients report feeling the same. We do not have to talk about it to feel it" (Schwartz, 2013; p. 8).

It has been a struggle to communicate something that is a natural and implicit part of me. In particular, I have laboured to bring this embodied process into awareness and

to give it a suitable academic voice. In part this is a result of the compressed timescale of this study within a Professional Doctorate programme. In part, it is because academia pays homage to traditions which I feel impose restrictions upon my self-expression.

The written thesis requires me to verbalise that which typically remains elusive and transient, and further, that I articulate this with an appropriate academic voice. My intuitive processes have been developed through my own intrapersonal practice and I have learnt to apply and develop them with regard to interpersonal dynamics; the application of intuition in an academic setting is newer and less well-developed. This leaves me feeling frustrated and, having had my 'self' guide me throughout the study process, I now find 'self' confidence to be elusive.

*"I'm not lost for I know where I am. But however, where I am may be lost."*  
Winnie-the-Pooh: The complete collection of stories and poems by A. A. Milne (1994).

Writing the thesis has been a complex struggle to avoid an overly reductionist process. I endeavoured to bring into awareness implicit relational processes which typically operate "outside focal attention and conscious experience" (Lyons-Ruth, 1998; p.285). However, this complex and elusive process is compounded further because much is lost when ideas are translated into a logical, linear linguistic narrative (McGilchrist, 2009). Barrico (2002) notes that the infinite mess of ideas gets reduced into something else, when trying to convey it in words, a form of logic is imposed upon the idea that constrains it, giving it a coherent structure and shape which did not exist in its original 'continually changing' form.

To counteract this potentially reductionist process, both the design of the creative synthesis as a story, and the decision to include stories throughout the thesis, act as devices to facilitate a more holistic conceptualisation of the experience. William West (2010) recommends that it can be helpful “if the researcher produces metaphors in response to the experience of researching” (p.224) to bridge the conscious and the unconscious and facilitate access to tacit knowledge. Alan Garner (1993) asserted in his keynote speech at the Society for Storytelling Inaugural Gathering:

“The job of a storyteller is to speak the truth, but what we feel most deeply can’t be spoken in words. At this level, only images connect. And so story becomes symbol.”

Garner (1993) Keynote speech SFS.

I use stories throughout the thesis to provide an experiential opportunity for the reader, to optimise resonance and understanding (Tracy, 2010) and provide opportunities for the findings that I present to be mapped onto this experience. As an example of this process I now present a story to provide an extra layer of understanding of the tensions outlined above.

### *The Key Flower*

*Long ago, a shepherd was grazing his sheep on the mountainside. While wandering amongst the rocky crags he noticed an unusual flower whose petals formed the shape of a key. He picked it up and stuck it in his hair, and walked on with his sheep. After a while he arrived at the top of a nearby hillside, one which he knew well, but this time he saw something that he had never seen before. In the crags he saw a particular stone which formed a doorway, curious, the shepherd pulled at the stone door, he applied great effort but it wouldn't budge. As a result of all the exertion the key flower fell from his hair, and as he bent to pick it back up he noticed a keyhole in the stone door, and, chancing that it might just fit, he tried the key flower in the lock. Surprisingly the door opened into a sunlit cave filled with gold coins.*

*The shepherd wandered around, enjoying the splendour, and naturally he, put handfuls of gold coins into his pocket. As he did so he thought of how it would be useful for him and his family. He could do with fixing his roof to stop the rain from coming in, oh and his wife and daughter would love new bonnets; and his old donkey was past it, he could buy a new one and put his old pal out to pasture for its remaining days.*

*The more his dreams and desires grew, the more he stuffed his pockets. Soon he had had his fill.*

*He scampered out of the cave and skipped down the hillside, whistling as he went, he pictured the look on the face of his family as he showed them the results of his day's work.*

*As he got further and further down the hillside the heavy weight of coins felt lighter, and lighter, he skipped further and his pockets felt lighter still, until he stopped, put his hands in his pockets and what did he find? Nothing but dried up crumbly leaves...well the shepherd was puzzled, he walked on home trying to understand, trying to make sense of it all, what did it all mean?*

*When he got home he wanted to tell of all that had happened, but he was confused, how could he explain it? He said nothing.*

*Sometime later, as he sat by the fire in his autumn years his mind went back to that day. He could picture himself inside the sunlit cave surrounded by the gold coins, and on this occasion he told of his adventure.*

*When he'd finished his family turned and smiled and congratulated him on such a good tale.*

*"But that's what happened!" he insisted "every word of it," and then he just smiled.*

Adapted from Erica Helm Meade, (2001; p.64).

## Aims and objectives

The intention for this research was to gain some understanding of the storytelling process, that is, the interplay between storyteller, story and listener; this could be described as the space between. As a listener I had experienced the powerful impact of a storyteller 'singing my life with his words' (Roberta Flack, 1973; The Fugees, 1995) and as a storyteller I had witnessed the striking changes that occurred when stories were told to agitated and 'hard to reach' young people. It appeared that stories offered a medium to engage those deemed 'hard to reach' in a meaningful way. It therefore made sense to try to understand what the storytelling process might mean for these pupils.

The research aimed to understand something of this intersubjective process and acknowledge the perspective of all participants; that is, the perspective of the young

people excluded from mainstream education for whom the programme was designed, the main staff member who participated, and my own perspective as researcher and therapeutic storyteller.

The study utilised heuristic methodology underpinned by a relativist ontology, which legitimises the perspective of the researcher in the fullest sense, not just through the heuristic analysis but also as a co-participant and facilitator of the research process. Heuristics is a qualitative research method which positions subjective and implicit knowledge, such as introspection and intuition, as legitimate in the research of human experiences (Moustakas, 1990).

To answer my research question I needed to develop my awareness and attunement to the implicit knowledge which was typically poorly or indirectly articulated by all participants. Striving to articulate the implicit intersubjective knowledge was a core component of this study.

### Research Questions:

What are participants' reflections on their experience of a Storytelling Programme?  
What can these reflections add to our understanding of the process of therapeutic storytelling?

Or a less prosaic and perhaps more tacit question which will become clearer below:  
What is it that everyone wants?



# Epistemology

## *Picasso*

*Picasso was travelling on a train, sharing a compartment with an American art dealer.*

*"Hey aren't you Picasso?"*

*"Si"*

*"Well can I ask you something?"*

*"Si"*

*"Why do you paint people the way you do?"*

*"I don't understand?" puzzled Picasso*

*"You know art should reflect real life, it should hold up a mirror to nature" continued the American reaching for a photograph from his jacket pocket. He leant toward Picasso and showed him "See my wife doesn't look the way you paint women, with an eye on top of her head and her nose on the side of her face, you see my wife looks like this, that's how she really is"*

*"Oh now I see" sighed Picasso, "Your wife is two inches tall, very, very flat and thin, and black and white?"*

Adapted from Nick Owen, *The Magic of Metaphor*, (2001; p.164).

## Qualitative research

In this section I am going to explain my decision to adopt qualitative methodology and provide the rationale for a social constructivist epistemology. I will develop this discussion further to include why I believe heuristic methodology is best suited to answer this Research Question rather than, for example, phenomenological inquiry. I will begin with a broad definition of qualitative research before moving on to explicate my social constructivist epistemological perspective by contrasting phenomenological inquiry with heuristic inquiry. In the subsequent Methodology section I will introduce and compare the approach to heuristic methodology as outlined by Douglass and Moustakas "The internal search to know" (1985) and Moustakas (1990) and contrast it with "heuristic self-search inquiry" as outlined by Sela-Smith (2002).

## **Operationalizing qualitative research**

The positivist paradigm has dominated Western philosophy consequently the conception that man can be objectified without context has been privileged (Elliott, et al, 1999). Positivism has its origins in the Enlightenment period and posits the centrality of the individual within a world that can be objectively known through quantitative research methods (Ponterotto, 2005). In contrast qualitative research is based upon a paradigm that posits the centrality of the subjective knowledge of the research-participant and acknowledges the subjective stance of the researcher (Ponterotto, 2005; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Elliott et al, 1999) as well as the dynamic between the two (Ponterotto, 2005; Etherington, 2004). As a result it consists of a broad group of research methods employed to describe and interpret the contextualised 'lived experience' of research participants and the researcher within the research process (Ponterotto, 2005; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). McLeod (2000) suggests that this establishes it as an appropriate epistemology for understanding therapy and facilitating the ability of clients to articulate and contextualise the process of therapeutic change as related to their 'lived experience'.

In 1999 Elliott, Fischer and Rennie noted that the late nineties had produced "a dramatic increase in the use of qualitative research methods" (Elliott et al, 1999; p. 215). More recently, in 2005, Ponterotto noted a paradigm shift in Counselling Psychology toward a more balanced incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative methods; this stems from recognition that qualitative methods are more congruent to the practice of Counselling Psychology (Morrow, 2007).

## **Ontological perspective**

Having outlined the qualitative paradigm of this thesis I will now explicate my world view (Creswell, 2009) or ontological perspective (Ponterotto, 2005). Essentially this thesis rests upon a phenomenological philosophy. My ontological premise is that the essence of human experience and human knowledge resides in the 'lived experience'. Reality is therefore subjective and contextual resulting in multiple, equally valid realities (Ponterotto, 2005).

Both phenomenological research and heuristic inquiry aim to understand phenomena through the subjective 'lived experience' (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 2001, 1990). However my strategy for inquiry (Creswell, 2009) or chosen epistemology (Ponterotto, 2005) is social constructivist which I conclude directs me toward heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). I will now narrate the decision making process that led me to this conclusion. I will begin this section by operationalizing the terms reflexivity and 'bracketing', along with my use of the terms phenomenological inquiry and phenomenology. I will then critique the way in which reflexivity is used in phenomenological inquiry before explicating how the concepts of social constructivism and intersubjectivity lead to my choice of heuristic methodology.

*Reflexivity* is a common practice in qualitative research as a technique which makes known the researchers' presuppositions, acknowledging their subjective values, biases, and inclinations. Reflexivity is described by Tracy (2010) as one of eight key criteria for producing excellent qualitative research. Reflexive practice comes through a sustained position of thoughtful self-awareness (Holloway and Biley, 2011), exploring how the researcher is situated and, as far as possible, accounting for the

effects of the researcher's stance (Malterud, 2001). It enables us to describe what is known and provide contextual data of how it is known (Etherington, 2004).

*Bracketing* refers to the process of setting aside the researchers' prejudgements and experiences (Creswell, 1998). Bracketing is carried out in order to identify the data in its purest uncontaminated form without extraneous input from the researcher (Patton, 1990).

In this thesis I identify a broad concept of *phenomenology* and a more specific conceptualisation of *phenomenological inquiry*. I suggest that phenomenology refers to the study of phenomena where the researcher seeks to reveal the essence of the nature and meaning of phenomena through a disciplined focus upon the structure of the experience. Wertz (2005, p.175) notes: "(p)henomenology is a low-hovering, in-dwelling, meditative philosophy that glories in the concreteness of person-world relations and accords lived experience, with all its indeterminacy and ambiguity, primacy over the known."

Phenomenological research is diverse in its conceptualisation and methods (Finlay, 2009). Typical characteristics include rigorous and rich description of the 'lived experience,' phenomenological reductions, and a search for key essences (Giorgi, 1997). Those conducting phenomenological inquiry methods are characteristically required to approach the phenomenon with an open mind (Rossmann and Rallis, 1998; p. 184). Husserl (1900/1) urged that the accumulation of scientific knowledge should begin with a fresh and unbiased position in relation to the subject matter. Phenomenologists acknowledge subjectivity and intersubjectivity, however, some work with the belief that they can set aside all prejudgments of their experience

through the practice of 'bracketing' (Lukiv, 2006; van Manen, 2006; Ashworth, 1996; Giorgi, 1994) and strive for objective accounts of subjective reality (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). Lukiv (2006), for example, recommends rigorous techniques for bracketing in phenomenological inquiry proposing that it permits a disciplined subjectivity which allows the researcher to be 'as objective as possible' in their engagement with the research question, preventing biases from 'trampling' the study or preventing the researcher from stepping 'beyond' the data.

### **Critique of phenomenology methodology**

Whilst 'bracketing' is a popular practice within the field, other phenomenologists critique the efforts to strive for objectivity (Finlay, 2009; Halling et al, 2006; Wertz, 2005). 'Bracketing' assumes that the researcher can remain unseen by 'bracketing off' their assumptions. This fails sufficiently to take into account the impact of that which remains outside of awareness (Selig and Davidson, 2013), and further, denies our growing understanding of the intersubjective nature of our own internal states (Siegel, 2007; Stern, 1998; Lyons-Ruth, 1998). Potentially Husserl's aim with 'bracketing' or 'epoche' is something similar to meditative knowing, that is, the setting aside of all prior learning. However, it could be argued that 'bracketing has been employed in phenomenological research methods in an over-simplified manner and fundamentally, as Douglass and Moustakas (1985) note phenomenology encourages a kind of 'detachment' from the phenomenon being studied somewhat akin to the aim of 'objectivity' in positivism. Douglass and Moustakas note the following tensions in their contrast of phenomenology research with heuristics below:

- Phenomenology encourages detachment from the phenomena being investigated whereas heuristic inquiry emphasises relationship and connectedness.
- Phenomenology seeks definitive descriptions whereas heuristics identify essential meanings embedded in personal significance
- Phenomenology reduces and distils the structure of experience, whereas heuristics concludes with a holistic re-presentation of whole which is formed from an integration of existing understanding with knowledge that previously resided in the tacit dimension.
- Phenomenology concludes with the essence of experience with the researcher removed from the phenomenon, whereas heuristics retains the essence of person in the experience, they remain whole and visible.

Douglass and Moustakas (1985; p.43).

My contention rests on a critique of the phenomenological researcher's attempt to position themselves along the continuum of objectivity and subjectivity in which they strive to be "as objective as possible" (Lukiv, 2006). Such a position appears to reduce the power of a social constructivist epistemology by contradicting the impact of intersubjectivity (Selig and Davidson, 2013; Finlay, 2009; Stern, 1998; Lyons-Ruth, 1998; Merleau-Ponty, 1968.). A key tenet of social constructivism maintains that the researcher's values and 'lived experience' provides a context that cannot be separated out from the research process (Ponterotto, 2005), therefore employing a methodology that fully acknowledges this matches my interpretation of a social constructivist epistemology.

## **Social Constructivist epistemology**

The origins of social constructivism can be found in the work of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (1781) in which he describes human perception as a result of the way the mind organises the incoming sensory information. Our experience, knowledge and meanings, therefore, are created through our experience of being in the world, and our experience is shaped within the context of our historical social reality (Dilthey, 1894; cited by Ponterotto, 2005). Social Constructivism identifies a dynamic between the researcher and participant and positions this dynamic as central to understanding the 'lived experience'; the researcher and the researched jointly create findings and meanings through the interactive research process (Ponterotto, 2005). As Strong et al note (2008) meanings are dialogical in that words are purposely selected not just as an exchange of information but to be understood and to exert an influence.

## **Psychological constructivism**

Each person functions in the world through their unique, individualised constructions, and these constructions typically remain implicit and arguably cannot be fully known to us. These constructs are actively created to enable us to adapt and function in the world, "not to accurately discern the true nature of things" (Toomey and Ecker, 2007; p.204). These constructs comprise our memories, stories, our personal narratives.

It feels more congruent to work to explicate my own personal constructs and any defences that exist with regard to the experience being studied (Sela-Smith, 2002). Being transparent about my positioning of having stepped 'into the data' is more compatible in developing trustworthiness in the study, that is to demonstrate through reflexivity and reflective practice how my positioning can facilitate the process of

indwelling and intersubjective knowing (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985) and enhance what can be explicated from the storytelling experience. This process has a great deal of similarity with the therapeutic process and feels like “an authentic internal process” (Sela-Smith, 2002; p.85) to guide my exploration of the Storytelling process.

The research design for this thesis is based upon the idea that “human reality cannot be objectively known, but only be represented” (West, 2001; p. 130). This is a decision based upon my personal perspective of the world and how experiences are co-constructed (West, 1998). Therefore, the research was a search for knowledge and understanding through the application of a sustained introspective gaze applied to the ‘lived experience’ of storytelling. The aim was to explicate implicit knowing of this intersubjective process, therefore a pluralistic phenomenological research framework was indicated (West, 2001), more specifically, a qualitative research methodology that legitimised the tacit knowledge of the ‘lived experience’ through a deep search of self (Selig and Davidson, 2013; Djuraskovic and Arthur, 2010; Sela-Smith, 2002; Moustakas, 2001).

I concluded that heuristic methodology as outlined by Moustakas (2001, 1990) and Douglass and Moustakas (1985) could offer a flexible and dynamic research process (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985) which would generate ‘rich’ data that was diverse, broad and complex. In the next section I will outline heuristic methodology.



# Methodology

I am now going to outline the heuristic research conceptual framework as developed by Moustakas (1990) before contrasting his approach as outlined in 'The internal search to know' (Douglass and Moustakas (1985), with the 'heuristic self-search inquiry' as proposed and outlined by Sela-Smith (2002). This will make clear my choice of methodology as "The internal search to know" (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). I will then delineate the different stages of heuristic methodology as outlined by Douglass and Moustakas (1985) and Moustakas (1990).

## Heuristics (Moustakas, 1990)

Heuristics (Moustakas, 1990) is essentially based upon the premise that "human beings exist within an experience of meaning" (Polkinghorne, p.48) and that researching this requires an exploration of the self in the experience through a reflective process of search and discovery (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). That is, it is a research process designed for the exploration and interpretation of experience, utilising and developing the self of the researcher (Hiles, 2001). Rogers describes it as "a disciplined but intuitive search that explores, by every possible subjective means, the essence of personal experience" (Rogers, 1985; p.12).

The term 'heuristics' is derived from the Greek *heuriskein*- to find out or to discover (Sela-Smith, 2002; Moustakas, 1990), and *heuretikos* which has the meaning 'to find' (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). Heuristic inquiry begins with immersion, self-dialogue and self-exploration, and then moves to explore the nature of others' experiences (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). It has a focus upon a problem or question, rather than a formal hypothesis to be tested. This question has personal

resonance for the researcher, something which they have a passion to explore and understand. It is “a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem-solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p. 39), and is a process that requires us to be open to what will be made known (Moustakas, 1990) and to be open to whatever method works (Sela-Smith, 2002).

Hiles notes that heuristics bears remarkable similarity to the experience of the therapeutic process (1985). In my own clinical work I aim to bring into awareness my own experiences and sensations that initially remain tacit. By applying rigour I find that new information comes into awareness in the course of the therapy session, post-session note-taking, supervision and further informal periods of mindful reflection (Kornfield, 2013). Mearns (1997) contrasts the learning of technical therapeutic skills with an “inside out conception of skill”, that is that our own intrapersonal awareness is central to our ability to understand, attune to and empathise with others (Djuraskovic and Arthur, 2010), and that this skill is developed through focused attention upon our own implicit knowledge of our selves (Kornfield, 2013). Sela-Smith, (2002) writes similarly of heuristic inquiry, that rather than applying formal research techniques, heuristics legitimates intuition as the guide at each stage of inquiry, attuning to the “feeling responses of the researcher to the outward situation rather than exclusively to relations between the pieces of that outside situation” (p.59).

## Contrasting Sela-Smith’s approach with that of Moustakas

Sela-Smith (2002) arrived at her methodology “heuristic self-search inquiry” (2002) through the pursuit of a “purely independent goal” (2002; p.85) without the

knowledge of the methodology outlined by Moustakas (1990). Her process was independent of any external pressures and was purely motivated by a need to resolve a personal crisis. As a result she presents a coherent description of a process for engaging in deep intrapersonal change which essentially parallels the guidelines laid out by Douglass and Moustakas (1985) and Moustakas (1990). However, Sela-Smith (2002) highlights two main differences. First she emphasises how her own internal world makes up her outer experience and her second and most significant point is her suggestion that heuristic inquiry is deemed a “failure” (p.71) if the researcher cannot evidence a surrender to “a self-search within an experience” (p.71) which results in personal transformation. Her main contention with the work of Moustakas (1990, 1961) is that he failed to surrender fully to the practice of self-search as a result of his own resistance to entering into a painful process. Sela-Smith (2002) identifies resistance on the part of Moustakas in his study of loneliness (1975, 1972, 1961) which she suggests resulted in ambivalence, confusion and distortion in his subsequent proposals for heuristic methodology (1990).

I propose that Sela-Smith’s (2002) critique has limitations. Fundamentally Sela-Smith (2002) and Douglass and Moustakas (1985) differ because they have two very different objectives. Firstly, like Sela-Smith (2002), Douglass and Moustakas (1985) also highlight the subjective nature of knowing and this forms the premise that the process of self-searching is the primary focus, that is, that the researcher understands what they bring to the experience, not to engage in ‘bracketing’ as proposed by phenomenologists (Wertz, 2005) but to gain a greater understanding of their own relationship to the phenomenon before expanding upon this search for understanding through external resources. This search acknowledges the primacy of our own internal frame of reference and our connectedness and relationship to

phenomena, fundamentally heuristics “retains the essence of the person in the experience” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p. 43).

Secondly, and most significantly, Sela-Smith (2002) outlines a method for researching the transformation that occurs through a focus on “the self in the experience” (p.77) whilst Douglass and Moustakas (1985) see heuristics as fundamentally an exploration “to know the essence of some aspect of life through the internal pathways of the self” (p.39) they strive to achieve knowledge of a phenomenon whilst retaining the very presence of the person in the experience (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985)). Sela-Smith’s (2002) approach appeals as a process for personal and professional development, and has similarities to the therapeutic process that we may be inviting our clients to engage in, and which she did engage in herself during her research process, however, Douglass and Moustakas (1985) outline a process that we may engage in as therapists, that is to know another, through ourselves with the inevitability of unknown accumulated defences. I propose that these two approaches are different in practice, purpose and therefore focus.

At this point I will clarify the concepts of implicit, tacit and unconscious which seem to be used interchangeably at times in much of the literature and yet some subtle differences exist between the concepts as delineated within the literature:

*Tacit* is defined as that which is undeclared, unstated (Collins Dictionary, 2013), expressed without words or speech, implied or indicated but not directly expressed. From Latin *tacitus* silent (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Polanyi (1969) referred to tacit knowledge as that which is deeply embedded and not typically available to conscious awareness, but in which lies the root of all knowledge (cited by Sela-Smith, 2002). Sela-Smith (2002), herself, describes the tacit dimension of personal knowledge as

“that internal place where experience, feeling, and meaning join together to form both a picture of the world and a way to navigate that world, “tacit knowledge is a continually growing, multileveled, deep-structural organization that exists for the most part outside of ordinary awareness” (p.60). Moustakas (1990) describes it as “the deep structure that contains the unique perceptions, feelings, intuitions, beliefs, and judgments housed in the internal frame of reference of a person that governs behavior and determines how we interpret experience” (p. 32).

*Implicit* is something suggested though not directly expressed (Oxford English Dictionary, 2013). It is something that can be understood from something else though unexpressed, something that is involved in the nature or essence of something though not revealed, expressed, or developed (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Its origin lies in the latin *implicitus*, variant of *implicātus* interwoven (Collins Dictionary, 2013). A psychological definition comes from Stern (2004) who describes implicit knowledge as “nonsymbolic, nonverbal, procedural and unconscious in the sense of not being reflectively conscious” (p.113), he adds that implicit knowledge is extremely rich (Stern, 2004). Stern describes implicit knowledge as arising from non-conscious right hemispheric processing, whilst it can be described as unconscious, it is not the same as the psychoanalytical “dynamic unconscious” of repressed knowledge (Stern, 2004; p.116). Implicit knowledge and memories are accessible through the application of focal attention (Siegel, 2011). Stern (2004) argued that “the concept of resistance does not apply to implicit knowing” (p.143).

*Unconscious* refers to the part of the mind containing instincts, impulses, images, and ideas that are not available for direct examination (Collins Dictionary, 2013). It is a not knowing or perceiving, and refers to the part of mental life that does not

ordinarily enter the individual's awareness yet may influence behaviour and perception or be revealed (as in slips of the tongue or in dreams) (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Depth psychologists Selig and Davidson (2013) state that we can never fully know what lies within the unconscious, but on the other hand we can be open to the profoundly creative forms of communication that stem from the unconscious (Selig and Davidson, 2013).

Sela-Smith (2002) refers to Moustakas (1990) own description of the heuristic process that it accesses knowledge which is embedded and integrated within the self. She also notes that Moustakas credited his development of the heuristic process to the work of Bridgman (1950), Buber (1961, 1965), Gendlin (1962), Jourard (1968, 1971), Maslow (1956, 1966, 1971), Polanyi (1964, 1966, 1969), Rogers (1985) (Sela-Smith, 2002; p. 55). There is no evidence that the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious has a place in heuristic methodology as described by Moustakas (1990). The process that Moustakas (2001, 1990) refers to is accessing the implicit and tacit domain.

Her own description of an experience in this 'interiority' (Sela-Smith, 2002) consists of a sense of awakening that she had in response to a dream:

“When I woke, still aware of that “dream moment” standing between what was known and unknown, I became consciously aware of painful knowledge that my feeling self, long dissociated from my thinking self, had known for many years.... In the months that followed, my work in therapy helped me find the deep level where personal beliefs had kept me bound in a marriage that was killing me and working in a business that had become disconnected from my heart”

Sela-Smith (2002; p. 57).

Arguably Sela-Smith's (2002) dreamwork stemmed from the implicit domain since she was able to interpret it in to something that made sense to her, on the other hand there may have also been some more unconscious or dissociated elements (Spinelli,

1994) that she accessed through months of therapy, but this is a very different process to heuristic inquiry as outlined by Moustakas (1990), and her experience of heuristics, as described in her paper *Heuristic Research: A Review and Critique of Moustakas' Method* (2002) clearly involved months of a therapeutic intervention which has been incorporated into the research process.

I suggest that there is evidence that Moustakas (1990) did access tacit knowledge and answer his research question "What is the experience of loneliness?" however, he did not answer the question which Sela-Smith (2002) would have liked him to answer "what is my experience of loneliness?" which is a very different question involving a very different process, as intimated above. Sela-Smith (2002) clearly states that she would have liked Moustakas (1990, 1975, 1972, 1961) to have followed this latter process and focused upon his own experience but this is not what he set out to do. Moustakas (1990, 1975, 1972, 1961) choice may have been as a result of resistance, but as Laplanche and Pontalis (1967) note "the name 'resistance' is given to everything in the words and actions ... that obstructs his gaining access to his unconscious" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1967/1988; p.394; cited by Stern, 2004; p.143), resistance has a protective purpose by providing a defensive buffer for our vulnerabilities by mediating the relationship between something that's valued and something that's vulnerable (Davy and Cross, 2004) and is not necessarily something to be overcome.

Sela-Smith (2002) outlines a deep, life-changing process that not everyone can afford. It requires the space and financial resources to follow a "purely independent goal" (p.85) free from external demands. Sela-Smith's (2002) formulation with regard to Moustakas (1961) and his state of resistance may be valid however, she appears to

lack compassion toward Moustakas and does not sufficiently credit him for engaging in the painful self-searching that he does undertake and does not sufficiently acknowledge that his research focus is an understanding of loneliness through the experience of himself and others, the focus is not specifically 'himself in loneliness'. Douglass and Moustakas (1986) themselves highlight the sensitive nature of "when to probe deeper, when to shift the focus...all are considerations of timing and attunement that demand a disciplined sensitivity" (Douglass and Moustakas 1985; p. 41). In addition Sela-Smith (2002) appears to make the assumption that she has been open to her defences without acknowledging that resistance often remains outside of awareness, whilst she experienced the timely exploration of some of her resistances, potentially as a result of therapeutic intervention, she cannot know what others continue to influence her perspective.

For this study I decided to follow the approach proposed by Douglass and Moustakas (1985) and to pursue the road to 'knowing' as an external process first through my own experience of the phenomena and then expand this knowledge through the understanding of others experience of these phenomena. I have carried with me throughout this research process a desire to understand the intersubjective nature of storytelling, centred round a prosaic question of "what is this storytelling process?" I will heed the warning of Sela-Smith (2002) and will seek to acknowledge and explore my defences and to fully acknowledge that my perception and experience of the outer world is grounded in my inner world (Sela-Smith, 2002; Douglass and Moustakas, 1985).

I conclude that the inner challenges and inner knowing gained from this process are different from the research findings, a supplementary gain rather than the nugget



mined from the study. Heuristics is an 'internal search to know' and consequently retains the essence of the person in the experience (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985), however, I do not feel that it is necessary to outline any more of what pertains to my own self-discovery than that required to illuminate the research question. I will now explicate Moustakas' (1990) heuristic guidelines.

## Heuristic guidelines as described by Moustakas (1990)

Moustakas (1990) refers to heuristics as "...the process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience" (p.9). It resembles the process that Archimedes was engaging in when he made his discovery of the principle of buoyancy (Moustakas, 1990). To achieve this discovery Moustakas (1990) outlined a series of stages that will occur spontaneously allowing the phenomenon to reveal itself fully (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). These are not rigid stages to be moved into according to a timetable but are fluid states that will emerge spontaneously as the heuristic process unfolds (Sela-Smith, 2002; Moustakas, 2001). "A natural process is in play when one attempts to know a thing heuristically" (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p.47).

Moustakas heuristic methodology is organised into the following 6 stages:

*Initial engagement-* In describing heuristic research Moustakas (1990) identifies the stage of "initial engagement" beginning some years before the research process. Moustakas understands that the research question will have some significant personal and wider social meanings for the researcher, a quest which the researcher may have been engaged in for a significant period of time. This stage is the discovery and clarification of this "passionate concern that calls out to the researcher" (Sela-Smith, 2002; p.64). This call may originate from a discordant feeling that the

researcher feels the need to attend to in order to achieve harmony, clarification, completion or integration (Sela-Smith, 2002). Referring to his own process in his heuristic inquiry in to loneliness, Moustakas noted the occurrence of a crisis that created a question or a problem (Moustakas, 1961; cited by Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p.46).

*Immersion*- The state of immersion occurs at different times throughout heuristic inquiry. It is a state where the researcher lives with the research question, or data, whilst awake and asleep, the question is seen to be everywhere and attention is focused and sustained. The researcher engages in a “search from the internal frame of reference” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p.47) and it is facilitated by self-dialogue, self-searching, following intuition and observing dream states. “A feeling of lostness and letting go pervades” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p.47) as the researcher relinquishes control over the focus of the search.

Once the research question has been identified and clarified through the initial engagement stage the researcher spontaneously enters into a state of immersion. The focus and the method, for the research, are revealed through rigorous self-search and self-dialogue which reveal tacit knowledge and hidden aspects of the research question previously unknown. This stage is a preparatory state prior to entering into the discovery stage it is “more a way of being than a method of doing” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p.48). The researcher revisits states of immersion again at the point of data collection, and it functions as an initial stage of analysis.

*Incubation* requires the researcher to retreat from the intense focus of the previous stage. Awareness, alertness and involvement with the question is removed, however,

it is believed that whilst the focus is withdrawn and the research material is no longer in conscious awareness, unconscious processes engage with the material and produce an expansion of knowledge (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas (1990) describes it as the stage when “inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside of immediate awareness” (Moustakas, 1990; p.29). Moustakas (1990) likens this stage to the search for a house key which is not found when the search is focused upon it, but is often found when awareness is removed and placed elsewhere, Moustakas (1990) adds “(d)iscovery does not occur through deliberate mental operations and directed effort” (Moustakas, 1990; p.29). Sela-Smith (2002) clarifies that this is not a stage where the study is put on hold, or put to one side, but is a natural stage arrived at as a result of the state of immersion now being complete. That is that all of the information needed to arrive at conclusions has now been provided by the available resources and tacit knowledge can now be revealed. Moustakas (2001) describes it as a more flexible and iterative process, he writes that the task of data analysis is to alternate periods of immersion in the data with periods of rest, or incubation, facilitating fresh energy and perspective (Moustakas, 2001). This fluid repetition is essential for the data to reveal itself.

*Illumination* - At the stage of incubation focus is removed from the research and this permits other aspects of the experience, new dimensions, hidden meanings, corrections or distortions to be revealed. This is the state of illumination, when these new dimensions break through into awareness. It is the stage where the researcher has a spontaneous open-ness to knowledge that is tacit and intuitive, allowing it to break through into conscious awareness where before defences might have prevented conscious processing from taking place (Moustakas, 1990). It has been described as an awakening to other aspects of the experience (Hiles, 2001). It is a

reflective process but fundamentally it is the tacit workings that tune into aspects hitherto unseen (Moustakas, 1990). A synthesis of the data begins to take place incorporating the new understanding (Sela-Smith, 2002). Glimmerings appear that lead to a unifying picture (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985).

*Explication* - At this stage focus and indwelling occurs whereby the nuances and essential constituents of the experience are revealed. It is a process of self-searching, self-disclosure and comprehensive elucidation of new themes within the data. It is a stage of conscious examination of the tacit knowledge that has come into awareness (Moustakas, 1990). Identifying the themes and understanding them at a deeper level can lead to “a comprehensive depiction of the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p.31). A more complete understanding arises out of this stage (Sela-Smith, 2002) and this can only occur when the major source of data resides within the self (Sela-Smith, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). It is the prelude to understanding that can then take place through dialogue with others (Sela-Smith, 2002). “A response to the tacit dimension in oneself sparks a similar call from others” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p.50) “(t)he interhuman opens out what otherwise remains unopened” (Buber, 1965; p. 8 cited by Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p.51).

*Creative synthesis* - The heuristic creative synthesis takes a holistic approach, as opposed to reductive, and re-presents the phenomenon revealed as a new whole, it is the culminating depiction of an integration of the core components and themes, the inspiration for which arises out of intuition and tacit understanding (Sela-Smith, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). This is an intuitive stage which re-produces the experience in a re-created inspired form such as a story, poem or artwork to illustrate the research findings, “an original integration of the material that reflects the

researcher's intuition, imagination, and personal knowledge of meanings and essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1990, p.50). Sela-Smith (2002) describes the creative synthesis as something transpersonal that seems to take on a life of its own imbued with "synchronicity, harmony, connection and integration" (Sela-Smith, 2002; p.69).

# Introducing Therapeutic Storytelling

Having outlined the philosophical underpinnings of this research, I will now introduce the focus of the study, that is, therapeutic storytelling. Here I outline my initial engagement (Moustakas, 1990) with the research area. I also present a story to illustrate the power of stories and the power of the intersubjective process.

## Initial engagement

The aim of this study was to understand something of the intersubjective process of storytelling. I had experienced the power of storytelling from the perspective of both listener and storyteller and I had a passion to understand this process further.

Moustakas (1990) saw the heuristic research question as originating from a personal search to know about something that has particular resonance for the researcher, a view echoed by McLeod (2003) who notes that “(R)esearch that has meaning...comprises a personal felt sense of a need to know” (p.9). Heuristic research could be described as a personal quest to know something through oneself (Moustakas, 1990) and/or to know something of one self (Sela-Smith, 2002). Drawing upon storytelling terminology, quests have an ancient history, typically quests are a search for immortality, truths, missions to right wrongs, and typically a quest culminates in self-discovery. As outlined above I was open to self-discovery, however, my primary focus was to understand something of the intersubjective process of therapeutic storytelling through myself. Thus, in this next section I will outline key events to illustrate how this research relates to this personal quest.

My interest in intersubjective communication is something that dates back to the early days of my therapeutic career, and has been consolidated on the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (Prof. Doc. Couns. Psych.) During this training I have had the opportunity to pursue this interest further through a breadth of clinical practice and academic work. One particular area of focussed study was Person-Centred Theory, and as a result of this I began to understand and frame my own clinical skills as essentially encapsulated by Rogers' conceptualisation of the necessary or core conditions of therapy (1956, 1951). I began to realise that my clinical skill which I had described as "I don't do anything, I just listen" essentially consisted of a genuine, warm, empathic and non-judgemental attitude toward each client that I encountered.

In addition, as a storyteller I was already familiar with the concept of 'presence' as an internal state of being 'centred' in one's core, a place of calm and clarity, and I noted the similarity to Rogers (1986) state of 'presence.' Rogers described it as a state that is closest to his inner self and existential therapist Bugental (1976) operationalized it as being "totally in the situation" (p.36).

As a Community Storyteller and having practised meditation over the last 30 years, I am fully aware of what Rogers' (1986) meant when he described 'presence' as being closest to his inner self. I began to become aware of an aspect of this state, of being totally in the situation, during my first training placement when I noticed, on playing back audio-recordings from clinical sessions, that during the session I had been oblivious to ambulances attending the local hospital, yet they were very distracting when trying to transcribe the audio tapes. I recognised this as typical of my own storytelling state, and could now identify this state in my clinical practice. Further, I

recognised this state as facilitating a 'space between,' that is, creating a potential space for intersubjective meeting.

In this particular study I was motivated to look at aspects of the intersubjective relationship, and wondered what the listener might experience through the intersubjective relationship of storytelling which appeared to have the potential to connect from the storyteller's core to the core, or heart, of the story listener. A well-chosen story, which had resonance for the listener, could create an opportunity for highly congruent verbal and non-verbal empathic communication which could be experienced as attuned and therapeutic.

As a Storyteller I had experienced schoolchildren who engaged with stories in ways which were enthusiastic and meaningful. An example of such was a County-wide project which I ran in conjunction with junior schools and libraries where I told stories about local legends to help schoolchildren engage with their surrounding landscape. Demographically these children are typically deemed to be socially-excluded, in addition they are often excluded from their own landscape which is often inaccessible both culturally and practically. The evaluation from this project indicated that the children had improved their self-esteem (measured by simple questions such as how do you feel about the landscape? How do you feel about yourself knowing that you live in/come from this landscape?) The storytelling experience appeared to have changed their personal narratives; they subsequently talked of a connection with the landscape and pride in themselves. The stories illustrated the magnificence, wonder and power of their surroundings and they connected with this through the story metaphor.



On another occasion I told an Arthurian Legend which poses a riddle *"What is it that every woman wants?"* I offer this somewhat long tale below. I feel that it illustrates the power of stories, and also evokes something of the nature of intersubjectivity. For this reason I feel its inclusion is justified.

### *The Hideous Hag*

*Arthur was gathered with his men in the Great hall of Carlisle Castle. The Yuletide season was upon them, and they were feasting merrily.*

*The heavy doors of the Great hall burst open. A woman dressed in fine clothes burst into the feast and made straight for Arthur. She threw herself at his feet and pleaded for his assistance. Arthur looked at the beautiful woman in front of him.*

*"Stand and tell me of your plight"*

*The young woman rose and told Arthur, and his court, that the Giant of Hewin castle was holding her husband captive and she pleaded for Arthur's help to rescue him.*

*Arthur immediately rose to his feet, ready to leave the feast and help the damsel in distress, but Gawain desperately tried to dissuade him, insisting that he would go in Arthur's stead. But Arthur, feeling his manhood slighted, refused and left the Great Hall with the young lady at his side.*

*They all knew of the great Giant who lived at Tarn Wadling near Penrith. His castle was built upon a huge black rock on the edge of the tarn, where once a village had stood.*

*Arthur and the lady rode toward Hewin Castle. As they reached the castle Arthur rode on alone; the lady had achieved the Giant's mission to entice Arthur to the castle, and now she disappeared into the trees, never to be seen again.*

*Arthur carried on up to the castle entrance and rapped on the gate. He stood waiting beneath the dark and ominous sky.*

*"Show yourself, I am Arthur, King of this land, I demand you present yourself to me"*

*The Giant, the Dark Knight, emerged from the great doorway.*

*"What do you think you're doing demanding me to come before you? You call yourself the Great King but I am the King of the dark arts...we will soon see who is the mightier"*

*This riled Arthur and he drew his trusty sword, Excalibur, and brandished it at the giant towering above him. Mysteriously his arm became weak and Arthur was unable to hold Excalibur, Arthur watched his sword slip from his hand as his strength drained from him and he fell to the ground crippled with paralysis. "What have you done to me?" cried Arthur lying limp at the Dark Knight's feet.*

*"Oh that is but a mild enchantment, I can do worse, or I can break the spell. If you return here in a year and day with the answer to my riddle then I will spare your life, but know my power Arthur, know that your life is in my hands"*

*The Dark Knight allowed Arthur to recover sufficient strength to enable him to go in search of the answer to the riddle.*

*The weakened Arthur headed straight for Carlisle Castle with the riddle running around his head "What is it that every woman wants?"*

*Arthur's state seemed to blight the whole kingdom; over the coming months crops failed, animals grew sick, and wolves rampaged across the land as Arthur and his men searched for the answer to the riddle.*

*Day after day Arthur held court asking all those before him to offer answers to the riddle.*

*"Well my wife likes gold and riches" declared one nobleman*

*"Expensive dresses and robes" pronounced another*

*"No my wife likes to be showered with praise and compliments about her beauty" asserted a third knight*

*"Riches" affirmed one of the ladies of the Court*

*While another proclaimed that she desired power.*

*"Respect" said one of the older courtly ladies*

*No-one could agree.*

*Meanwhile Arthur had sent his Knights of the Round Table to see what they could learn from the people. They went amongst the poor, the rich, the young and the old; they rode westwards, eastwards, to the north and the south; they rode through the dark woods, up mountain passes and along the shores of the land.*

*Amongst the knights was Gawain who travelled the land asking, young and old, simple and wise, the beautiful and the wizened.*

*The year was almost up and Gawain was making his return to Carlisle Castle when he was stopped in his tracks by an old woman trying to huddle against the rain. Gawain climbed down from his horse and took a cloak to cover the old woman. She was all dressed in tatters and almost soaked through already. She was a hideous, hunchbacked hag, her skin was wrinkled and warty and her nose all crooked and crow-like, unpleasant to look at but still Gawain felt for the old woman and tried his best to shelter her from the driving rain.*

*"Well kind Sir, you have given me what I needed and I could give you what you need"*

*"What is that?" demanded Gawain*

*"You seek an answer to a riddle and I have that answer, but several knights have passed this way before you and failed to strike a deal with me, now it seems that your turn has come"*

*"So tell me, what is your price?" Gawain enquired*

*"I will give you the answer that you seek if you take me for your wife?"*

*Gawain recoiled at the thought; he had hoped for a young wife, and hopefully a beautiful wife...he didn't like the thought of spending his days and nights with this Old Hag.*

*Ugh what was he to do... but Arthur... he must save Arthur. Gawain paced backwards and forwards, and then he strode up to the Old Hag and looked deep into her eyes, and he saw that she was just a person who lived and breathed and hurt and loved, just like he did, and he knew what he must do to save Arthur, and he agreed to marry the Old Hag.*

*He lifted her on to his horse and they returned to Carlisle Castle together.*

*The news of their wedding both excited and frightened the Court. How could Gawain marry this hideous old woman? But the marriage was set and preparations were soon under way. Before long Gawain and the Old Hag were married, they ate and drank and partied ...well I was there, and you should have seen the Old Hag dance...*

*soon it was time for them to retire to their chamber.*

*"Come close to me, husband" challenged the Hag*

*Gawain stepped forward*

*"Go on, kiss me" demanded the Old Hag*

*Gawain looked at the Old Hag who stood before him, and again as he looked into her eyes he saw beyond her hideous warts, he saw something sparkle within her, he saw past her wrinkles to the woman she had once been, he no longer saw her hideous face and he kissed her and the second that his lips touched hers she was transformed into a beauty, not just any beauty but the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.*

*But how could this be? The Old Hag, now the beautiful young woman, spoke softly to Gawain "you have broken an enchantment placed upon me, but there will be times when I will still be the Old Hag, and there are times when I will be the woman that stands before you now. Now it is for you to choose, would you have me as a beautiful woman to sit by your side by day, or have me as a beautiful wife by night?"*

*Gawain was almost driven to distraction by the choice...*

*In the end Gawain turned to his wife and said "you must choose"  
At that point the spell was completely broken, and the Loathly Lady, the Hideous Hag was no more, Gawain now had the most beautiful wife by day, and by night...and all because he had found the answer to the riddle  
And with that Gawain made his way to Hewin castle to tell the Dark Knight of the answer that he knew to be true, so that the spell upon Arthur could be broken at last.*

Adapted from various sources including  
Rosalind Kerven's "King Arthur and The Hideous Hag" (2008; p. 10).

The answers that the children gave in response to this riddle were heartfelt and revealed their personal concerns "not to have cancer", "to be adopted", "to be with their family," "not to be lonely". On other occasions children deemed "hard to reach" and "hard to manage" demonstrated calmness and contributed positively and meaningfully to storytelling sessions. These experiences were very powerful and form the initial catalyst in this research process. They appeared to illustrate that stories went to the heart of the young people, to their inner world, and they seemed to illustrate that storytelling had a calming or soothing effect on even the most distressed children. It appears that intersubjective communication through storytelling is potentially powerful. This was illustrated by a listener at a recent storytelling event who noted "I experienced an intimacy that I have only found a few times in my life".

In this research I have chosen to keep in mind the intersubjective quality of communication. This guided my choice of qualitative, and more specifically, heuristic research methodology which encourages the explication of implicit phenomena. The aim of this study was to understand something of the intersubjective process of storytelling. The journey that I embarked upon had no map and few landmarks yet led me to a place of intense understanding of the storytelling process, and intersubjectivity more generally. However, this understanding has been difficult to

convey through words. Much potentially remains implicit and that which has been made explicit, through the process, consists of glimpses of threads that have been difficult to weave into a coherent whole. I feel that these threads have an abiding essence yet their composite interactions are typically transient moments of connection. In one sense there was little substance to the Storytelling Programme, there was no structure and no clear objectives. It was a flexible and fluid process to reach the 'hard to reach' that was typically 'in the moment' and therefore somewhat elusive even upon reflection.

*"When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and you Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it."*

Winnie-the-Pooh: The complete collection of stories and poems by A. A. Milne (1994).

In addition it resulted in a personal and professional awakening to so many layers of interactive communication that occurred on a symbolic and embodied level. I became aware of my own polyvocality (Gergen, 2008), that is the many voices and narratives within me. To represent my own polyvocality as a linear, linguistic narrative, would force me to select and reduce the findings into something which leaves me feeling irritable and dissatisfied about the criteria for selection and omission.

Consequently, to harness the writing of the thesis I need to bring myself back to the distinction between Sela-Smith and Moustakas. I have chosen to ground this research in Douglass and Moustakas (1985) "internal search to know" thus my focus is to understand the intersubjective storytelling process through myself, rather than a focus on my own "self-search inquiry" (Sela-Smith, 2002).

In conclusion, this research stems from a search to understand implicit interpersonal communication and more specifically focussing upon stories as a medium for interpersonal communication that has positive, beneficial or therapeutic properties. The study and storytelling programme is essentially a subjective and intersubjective process. We know that stories create a world beyond words and provide meaningful forms of communication which are pre-verbal and pre-literacy, and, that engaging with stories offers the potential for complex and holistic mental processing. I can recognise my own polyvocality (Gergen, 2008) in response to stories, and identify the multi-faceted and multi-layered aspects of the storytelling process. Throughout this thesis I have endeavoured to simplify the complexities of this process to provide a coherent narrative that does justice to this research process and the responses expressed by the young participants.

# Literature Review

In this Literature review I will provide some context for therapeutic storytelling. I will begin by discussing our need for story and then move to discuss the historical legacy of therapeutic storytelling, before moving on to describe theories of how we engage with and process stories. In particular, I will discuss how stories and metaphor are processed in the mind and brain. This will take the reader from the therapeutic storytelling literature into neuropsychology and then into the relational aspects of storytelling and intersubjectivity. Following this I will examine the literature around Attachment Theory and how this pertains to working with adolescents. Finally I will identify absences in the current literature and how this study aims to address some of these gaps.

The review of therapeutic storytelling literature was based upon an electronic search using the following inclusion and exclusion criteria

Keywords: Therp\*, stor\*, child\*, metaphor, “therapeutic storytelling”,

Timeframe- since 1992 to present day (April, 2012)

Search engines: google scholar for a scoping review; psychinfo; SAGE; ERIC

Inclusion criteria focussed upon a therapeutic approach where the therapist presented the client with a story which they could utilise for therapeutic gain, rather than a story that the client had created.

The literature in this area is disparate and includes varied approaches to using stories across a breadth of clinical populations such as bibliotherapy, autogenic story-making, oral storytelling, drama and creative approaches to story and ‘story medicine’. The search for this thesis was based upon a broad strategy to review this

diverse literature with a more specific focus upon 'story medicine' literature that had the commonalities outlined in the inclusion and exclusion criteria below. The initial search revealed a few dozen diverse studies on the therapeutic use of stories. Ideally, I wanted to focus upon those involving young people with emotional and behavioural issues but there were not sufficient studies with this client group that met the inclusion criteria in full. Therefore, it was necessary to broaden the inclusion criteria to include those papers focussing upon young people with mental health issues or "emotional and behavioural" issues. Seven papers were highlighted (see unpublished Systematic Review; Long, 2012) and although they included qualitative case studies, quantitative or mixed studies they were all kept as specific papers to inform the current research since this heuristic study was not an evaluation of the effectiveness of stories, but rather an attempt to understand more of the therapeutic storytelling process; in addition the larger body of literature provided the broader context within which to place this more detailed focus.

**Participants** =children with emotional and behavioural difficulties or mental health issues who were seen in clinics or educational support units.

**Intervention** = the use of a story to achieve therapeutic change; known within the literature, but not necessarily referred to in the studies under review as "story medicine."

**Comparator** = there was no comparator since this systematic review was an attempt to understand how stories were used and did not evaluate effectiveness as such.

**Outcomes**=The systematic review was a qualitative approach to understand the way in which stories are used in therapy with children and young people and did not seek to evaluate the outcome of the therapy as such.



Given the paucity of studies on the use of stories in therapeutic work with children and young people grey publications i.e. those not published such as thesis etc. were included.

The geographical location of the studies reviewed here are from South Africa, the United States of America, Canada, Eire and the UK. Clearly, this review has a western bias.

### *The Hatmaker and the Monkeys*

*Once upon a time there was a hat maker who made all kinds of hats, big hats, small hats, tall hats, short hats, top hats, feather caps, paper hats, hats for weddings, hats for parties...well you get what I mean.*

*It was market day and the hat maker wanted to take his hats to market to sell. He put his hats into a basket, one hat on his head and lifted the basket of hats onto his shoulder and he set off for market.*

*He enjoyed his walk in the beautiful early morning sunshine, the birds were singing, and all was well.*

*It was a long way to market and after he had walked for a while he felt like he needed a rest, so he sat down under the shade of a tree, put his hat across his face and took a little nap.*

*But when he woke up, all the hats in his basket had gone. "Oh no," he thought, "it took me months to make them. I must find them." He searched high and low and couldn't find them until, by chance, he happened to look and saw that in the trees there was a crowd of monkeys and every one of them was wearing one of his hats.*

*Oh! He shook his fist at the monkeys. The monkeys copied and shook their fists back. He wagged a finger at the monkeys; the monkeys wagged their fingers back. Ooooh! he jumped up and down in frustration and do you know what? He noticed that the monkeys were doing the same. The monkeys were jumping up and down.*

*Ah Ha! He thought, and began to dance, and all the monkeys joined in, and at the end of the dance he threw his hat down, and all the monkeys threw their hats down too.*

*The hat maker was happy, filled his basket up with hats and continued on his way to market. He got to market, sold the hats and returned home.*

*Now whilst he sat making his hats he loved to tell his children stories, and that story became one of his favourites and one of their favourites and they asked for*

*it again and again and again over many years. Eventually it came to pass that the hatmaker had grandchildren and he told them his stories too.*

*In time one of the hatmaker's grandsons grew up and he too became a hat maker and one day found himself walking through the forest to market with a basket of hats; and just like his grandfather he decided to take a nap underneath the very same tree.*

*But when he woke up, all his hats had gone. Aah! But the young hat maker wasn't worried. He looked up into the trees and, sure enough, saw a crowd of monkeys wearing his hats. "Hello monkeys," he called. "I've heard this story. I know what to do." He waved to the monkeys, they waved back. He jumped up and down and so did the monkeys, he danced a jig and finished with a flurry, throwing his hat to the ground, and he waited.*

*Then he looked up, there were all the monkeys still wearing his hats, he scratched his head and one of the monkeys lent out of the tree and whispered to the young man "Our grandfather told us stories too!"*

Adapted from various resources including

Chris Smith of The Story Museum and "Len Cabral's Storytelling Book" (1997).

### **"Everything is story"**

I ground this research in a belief that stories are all around us and within us. It seems that narrative is the way in which we story our lives to make sense of the world around us and ourselves within it (Riessman, 1993). Native American Psychiatrist and Clinical Psychologist Lewis Mehl-Madrona described how stories have been a basic human need since time immemorial:

*"Everything is story" "Story is the basic unit of psychology and medicine, because everything humans do is done in the form of a story or a narrative...in fact, neuroscientists are finding that the default mode of our brain is to tell and recall stories...stories light up more areas of our brain than anything else and in fact when our brain is on idle, when our brain is just resting, what we tend to do is we run stories, simulations... story is the most powerful basic unit of information and in terms of psychology it makes a lot more sense to talk about defective stories than it does to talk about defective people..."*

Mehl-Madrona, (2012)

Storytelling has had a renaissance over the past couple of decades with the current zeitgeist within many professional circles recognising the diverse applications of storytelling. Stories have been used to communicate a variety of messages including

selling products, to promote healthy behaviours, or to develop creative and divergent thinking (Fleetham and Fleetham, 2009), to teach morals (Fisher, 1996) and emotional literacy (Thomas and Killick, 2007) and to develop solutions to organisational disputes (Allan et al, 2002), and of course for entertainment. As a psychologist and community storyteller I have experienced the impact of stories which appear to connect us with ourselves and with each other. These intrapersonal and interpersonal processes have been explored within this research.

## The History of Therapeutic Storytelling

“Stories are a transformative force in people’s lives, provoking self-reflection and change, and are profoundly human”

Crawford et al (2004; p.10).

“We can recognize ourselves in a story...and celebrate “what we human beings are capable of...what it is to be human and to reveal to us our shared strengths and weaknesses and dreams and passions and terrors and absurdities: isn’t the very point of story, the value, the heart of story, to do just this?”

Crossley-Holland (2006; p.1).

The therapeutic effects of storytelling have been well-known for centuries. Stories have been used across cultures and over centuries to address fears, anxieties and existential issues and to teach cultural mores (Bettelheim, 1975). The door of the library at Thebes, in Ancient Greece, bore the inscription: “depositories for healing of the soul” (Harper, 2010; p.2) and similar references can be seen in Alexandria, Egypt where an inscription describes stories as “medicine for the mind” (Heath et al, 2005; p.563). The pervasiveness and longevity of storytelling could be seen as testament to its effectiveness, and within the history of storytelling we can glimpse potential explanations for the effectiveness of storytelling.

Stories provide us with frameworks to understand ourselves and our world around us. Kornberger (2006) describes the impact on Odysseus when, lost on his journey home from the Trojan Wars, he is washed up on the shores of a foreign land. Odysseus does not reveal his identity even though he is invited to dine with the King. Whilst enjoying the hospitality he listens to a bard who tells Odysseus’ very own tale; upon hearing his tale he weeps and releases the emotion pent up within him, he then continues to tell the rest of the tale himself. On hearing his own tale Odysseus experiences catharsis as he acknowledges his plight, that for ten years he strived but failed to make his way back to Ithaca. He tells his tale all through the night, and at dawn he is given a ship to complete his journey home, “(he) falls asleep and when he

opens his eyes he is back in Ithaca” (Kornberger, 2006; p.18). Hearing his story enables him to bring into awareness his turmoil, he can then access and accept what he needs to resolve his predicament and he is returned safely home. Stories have many functions but perhaps a key function is to bring us home to our heart and soul.

Stories have been identified as ‘story medicine’ (Kornberger, 2006) for centuries, and have been used in psychotherapy since its nascence (Crawford et al, 2004). Freud is known to have commented on the value of stories (Crawford et al, 2004) and in 1936 Louise Despert and Howard Potter worked with stories as a formal therapeutic medium. Despert and Potter integrated stories into a psychoanalytical framework and noted that they were effective as an indirect therapeutic medium for the “investigation and treatment of emotional problems in children”:

“It is generally agreed that the direct approach to children’s problems is not only disappointing, but often not workable, and that occasionally the sole result thereby obtained is to induce a negative attitude in the child, an attitude that not only blocks the release of his feelings but also deprives the psychiatrist of his chance to gain insight into the problem. On the other hand, it is found that children with behaviour or neurotic disorders are able to express spontaneously their feelings, if an opportunity is given to them, through the use of an adequate medium. The medium reported on in this communication is that of the story.”

Despert and Potter (1936; p.619).

In the 1950’s Shrodes operationalized the therapeutic approach of bibliotherapy, as an approach that engaged the client with story through text, he depicted bibliotherapy as “a process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature” (Russell and Shrodes, 1950; p.335). He drew upon psychoanalytical theory to describe processes of identification, catharsis and insight inherent in bibliotherapy.

Therapeutic storytelling has a long history within clinical practice, yet few studies have been done in the area, and the literature tends to be descriptive and diverse, and draws upon abstract constructs to explain its effectiveness. Current literature, reviewed below, also highlight these processes, identified by Shrodes (1950), as explanations for the effectiveness of stories. However, these processes are abstract psychoanalytical constructs, which whilst recognised by the breadth of psychological approaches which incorporate stories into therapy, nevertheless remain abstract concepts constructed to provide explanations for psychological processes which we cannot easily observe. However, this research process is not a search for objective truth but an attempt to explore the 'lived experience' and within this context these studies contribute clinical and theoretical narratives which develop our understanding of the therapeutic storytelling process.

In a similar vein to Shrodes (1950), Noctor (2006) took a bibliotherapy approach with six teenagers (12-16 years) to work on the intra-psychic conflicts that could be identified in Harry Potter storylines. He concludes that engaging young people with material that is of relevance and interest to them provides a symbolic process which can help overcome resistance, enabling participants to gain the ability and confidence to discuss their own issues and concerns "through the guise of the Harry Potter themes" (Noctor, 2006; p.8). Whilst we cannot draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of therapeutic storytelling, Noctor (2006) provides us with an interesting descriptive case study which exemplifies the psychoanalytical perspective of the therapeutic storytelling process.

William Cook (1994) incorporates stories into a cognitive-behavioural approach with children in the belief that stories can be used to suggest new possibilities for change

and teach new ways of behaving. The approach primarily aims to work at a cognitive level, whilst utilising the value and power of the inherent symbolic nature of stories. A therapeutic story is developed from the functional analysis of the “problem behaviour.” The story is designed to incorporate the key variables related to the client and their “problem behaviour.” Cook (1999, 1994) has designed and named this approach as the Therapeutic Storytelling Technique (TST). Recognising the limitations within the therapeutic storytelling literature Cook has attempted to add some empirical data to the largely descriptive literature. In the following study, Painter, Cook and Silverman (1999) studies 4 children (5-7 years) who were referred to clinic for a therapeutic intervention to address ‘non-compliant behaviour.’ The intervention combined both Behavioral Parenting Therapy with TST. The initial results suggested that TST appeared to decrease the intensity and frequency of the non-compliant behaviour, however, this was not maintained at follow-up. The study had a number of shortcomings as acknowledged by the authors such as the non-concurrent multiple baseline which resulted in an inability to ascertain whether the Behavioral Parenting Therapy or the TST was responsible for the therapeutic change, or a combination of both (Painter et al, 1999). BPT followed by TST showed greater therapeutic change but this was not maintained at follow-up whereas TST followed by BPT produced the greatest maintenance. Further limitations was the small sample size (n=4), in addition each child typically had compounding presenting difficulties. Also, parental response data would have potentially had a response bias and an inherent power imbalance.

Cook et al (2004) also provides us with a descriptive single case study design based upon a 10 year old boy referred with anger management issues. The client was the youngest of four siblings (two boys and two girls. He lived with his siblings with his

father and step-mother. A particular cause for concern was the client's relationship difficulties with one of his brothers. The intervention consisted of traditional anger management strategies alongside TST. The story is created and then told to the child, the child tells the story to the parents, and they are given a recording to encourage the child to listen to the story throughout the week. The results, as collected through parent ratings, suggested that the cognitive-behavioural treatment package was deemed to have a substantial positive impact upon Sammy's expressions of anger; this effect was even more significant with the addition of the TST alongside the anger management intervention. These improvements were maintained at a six-week follow-up session. Limitations to this study include its descriptive case study methodology and sample size (n=1). In addition, as with Cook's earlier study, above, the data source was parental ratings and so the results need to be incorporated with caution because when evaluating the effectiveness of the TST. Cook concludes that TST decreases client resistance and increases the potency of cognitive behavioural interventions. TST may be sugar to help sweeten the medicine or may be medicine in itself (Cook et al, 2004) and he could not find any deleterious consequences.

Another cognitive approach is that of Roberts (1997) who integrated expressive and creative activities with cognitive methods to work with young people. The young people (n=7, aged 12-13 years) attended a special school due to their emotional and behavioural needs. His therapeutic methods draws on the work of drama therapist Alida Gersie (1992) to encourage self-expression, self-confidence, reflective practice, co-operation and the sharing of experiences through the creative expression of unconscious processes. Roberts (1997) concludes that storytelling, combined with indirect and expressive therapeutic methods can address the needs of young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Roberts, 1997), limitations are of course,



its descriptive nature, yet it offers us another perspective on how stories are used within therapeutic practice.

Carlson and Arthur's (1999) paper is another descriptive single-case case study. Carlson worked with a six year old boy, with emotional and behavioural difficulties, for 23 play therapy sessions. She used published therapeutic stories or those made up by the therapist for the particular child. Carlson (1999) is a Counselling Psychologist and uses a play therapy approach underpinned by the child-centred and humanistic values of Rogers (1980) and Axline (1969) and psychodynamic theory. The approach is driven by the belief that by validating the child the therapist encourages the child to follow their own intuitive and self-directed path, and removes obstacles to personal and emotional development. Again Carlson (1999) highlights constructs such as resistance and the unconscious to describe the way in which stories may be processed in therapy. Carlson's (1999) therapeutic goal was to help the child "learn about and accept {himself}" (Carlson and Arthur, 1999; p.218) with the result that he can achieve "a more positive self-concept, assume greater self-responsibility, become self-directing, self-accepting and self-reliant, engage in self-determined decision making, experience feeling of control, become sensitive to the coping process, develop an internal source of evaluation, and become more self-trusting" (Landreth, 1991; p.80 quoted by Carlson and Arthur, 1999; p.218). Carlson works with the theory that the child sets their own goals and works toward them in a self-directed way through play therapy to achieve the goals of "becoming self-responsible, self-directing, (and) self-reliant" (Carlson and Arthur, 1991; p.218) which occurs within a therapeutic relationship of unconditional positive regard, and total acceptance. This is the approach most like the one incorporated into this research process where the stories are offered as 'story medicine' for unconscious

processing and personal reflection. Stories are selected for problem-solving strategies that could model alternative ways for the child to cope with problems of living and these were introduced when the child appeared most receptive, relaxed and reflective.

Evaluation of the therapy occurred through noting clinical changes such as a decrease or absence of previously repetitive themes. Other notable features are the client's increased engagement with the therapist and the session material. Carlson notes that a child's connection with a story may be demonstrated by a reaction such as "I love that story" or asking for the story again (Davis, 1989). Other measures of evaluation are an increase in the child's presenting behaviours. Carlson was both clinician and researcher, however, validity checks from two supervising therapists supported Carlson's interpretations and conclusions.

Bheamadu (2003) also presents a descriptive case study of a six year old child, in this case, presenting with anxiety. Bheamadu's (2003) particular focus is on the use of the metaphor, characters and events in a co-constructed story and how this gets translated into the client's life. Bheamadu (2003) draws on Mills and Crowley's (2001) phenomenological model for therapeutic stories; that stories are co-created and processed at a conscious and unconscious level. Bheamadu's aim is to create "tailor-made metaphors and stories based upon personal, idiosyncratic and psychodynamic qualities of the child" (Bheamadu, 2003; p. 34) which can be used to create a "shared phenomenological reality" between the child, the therapist and the story (Mills and Crowley, 2001; p.65). Bheamadu augmented the storytelling with creative approaches such as puppetry and art.

Bheamadu (2003) presents an exploratory case-study of a six year old child who presented to clinic with anxiety. Bheamadu produced a rich descriptive qualitative case study which incorporated heuristic methods to “bring new meaning and understanding to what was already known” (Bheamadu, 2003; p. 40). Data was collected from semi-structured interview with the child’s mother, along with transcriptions of video recordings of sessions, field notes and heuristic reflections. Data suggested that the child engaged with the story metaphor and incorporated it into his daily life, suggesting some internalisation of the story message. Bheamadu (2003) provides a reflexive account of her positioning with regard to this heuristic research and with regard to her practice, in addition she provides thick description of the data providing a sense of trustworthiness to the study.

From a review of the literature it would seem that there is some support for the uses of stories in the form of bibliotherapy, cognitive behavioural strategies, psychodynamic and psychoanalytical approaches. Stories have been used for problem-solving (Bheamadu, 2003) and behavioural change (Cook et al, 2004) and more recently as a means to develop *emotional literacy* (Thomas and Killick, 2007). It would seem that stories have the capacity to facilitate emotional development (Thomas and Killick, 2007; Noctor, 2006, Bettelheim, 1975) by fostering awareness and understanding of emotions (Oatley, 1998), promoting affect attunement (Hughes, 2004), empathy and problem-solving (Thomas and Killick, 2007), stories provide the means to make sense of the world (Thomas and Killick, 2007) and equip us with the skills and knowledge to work through emotional dilemmas and difficulties (Noctor, 2006). However, these conclusions are limited by the paucity and disparate nature of research into therapeutic storytelling. Whilst therapeutic storytelling has a history in clinical and folk practice, little has been done to evaluate the ‘common-sense’ notion that stories are helpful, or to discern which approach to therapeutic storytelling is

most helpful and why. However, It is worthy of note that all of these diverse approaches base the effectiveness of therapeutic storytelling on the use of metaphor enabling the client to engage on a symbolic level, and it is this aspect of therapeutic storytelling which I will focus upon in the next section.

## Story processing

The literature indicates that therapeutic storytelling can be conceptualised as a social-cognitive-affective experience intimately linked to emotional growth (Alexander et al, 2001). Stories stimulate our instinctive meaning-making processes and result in the listener making links with their own lives (Alexander et al, 2001; Wolf and Heath, 1992). A rich storytelling session full of stimuli will foster vast opportunities to process a breadth and depth of material.

### **Engaging with stories and “story attachment”**

For stories to be therapeutic they need to resonate, they need to ‘speak to us.’ This creates an interaction between the story content and the context of the listener’s own life. Stories access our inner world because our perception is implicitly filtered through our memories of experiences (Sunderland, 2000; Siegel, 1999). This was also observed by Rosenblatt (1938) who noted that people bring their own meaning to the experience of interpreting a story; the reader/listener and the story interact together to create a unique experience for each individual based upon their own internal world. Trousdale (1989) studied three 8 year old girls who illustrated that their engagement and story processing reflected their own internal world a point also recognised by Despert and Potter (1936) and Bettelheim (1975).

When the story is particularly meaningful for the listener the co-created story is brought to life in everyday activities, beyond the story-listening experience. Alexander et al (2001) refer to this form of engagement as 'story attachment'. Bettelheim (1975) suggested that children are drawn to stories that offer them the opportunity to engage with emotional issues that are pertinent to them, that they become enthralled with tales that resonate and in the process of hearing these tales, often over and over, they can achieve the resolution of internal conflicts.

Alexander et al (2001) studied 32 European-American middle-class families and found that mothers reported 2-8 attachments per child, with an average of 5. Attachments ranged from 3 weeks – 4 years, with an average of 1 year 10 months. Mothers often described the attachments as 'intense' or 'obsessive'. 'Prolonged' attachments, especially in older children, were discouraged. Alexander et al (2001) note the methodological difficulties in studying story attachments which manifest in day to day life and are not necessarily available to the researcher. Whilst story attachment behaviour can be identified, much of the processing related to the attachment is intrapersonal and again not explicitly available to the researcher.

Alexander et al's (2001) data comes from parental diaries, and therefore, as well as the methodological limitations mentioned above, their study also contains the limitations inherent in this method of data collection. However, from a social constructivist perspective, mothers have access to rich contextual detail to augment their observations. Mothers try to make sense of the story attachment by way of their own narrative. Mothers frequently recognized that the stories that their children were attached to had emotional salience for the child. One mother noted that at first she welcomed her child's attachment to "The Lost Mommy Story" but after two weeks

speculated that her illness and “consequent emotional semi-withdrawal” may have been related (Alexander et al, 2001; p.391). One Mother, in Alexander et al’s (2001) study reported that her child “likes to cry along with them (story characters), that’s why I think she definitely puts herself in that spot” (Alexander et al, 2001; p.387). Another mother reported that her daughter asked to watch the “Beauty and the Beast” video when she felt sad and wanted cheering up, consoling or comforting. On one occasion the upset child pleaded “I just want to see ‘Beauty and The Beast,’ to be happy” (Alexander et al, 2001; p. 390).

This study also found that children selected stories that evoked fear, but by repeatedly engaging with the stories the fear subsided and for example, the child went from hiding, to covering their eyes or ears, to enacting the scary parts of the story and then attending to the story intently. Children often re-enacted new versions of the story where ‘bad’ characters were transformed into ‘good’ (Alexander et al, 2001). Alexander et al (2001) noted that there appeared to be a correlation between the child’s apparent internal conflicts evolving and the stories being modified.

The mothers in Alexander et al’s study espoused an ethnographic theory that they believed the children developed attachments to stories which had emotional significance to them and these attachments helped the children manage their emotions. These mothers identified that the children sought an “affective connection to the story” (Alexander et al, 2001; p. 393) which they then use to regulate their own emotional state (Alexander et al, 2001). Alexander et al (2001) highlight the remarkable degree of consensus in this ‘folk theory’ amongst the mothers, and note that these beliefs are also consistent within the academic literature on storytelling.

Sturm's (2001) study of "The 'Storylistening' Trance Experience" expands our understanding of the story listener's engagement with story. Sturm interviewed 22 listeners who had attended storytelling performances. He asked open-ended questions "to elicit a rich description of the listeners' perceptions of the storytelling experience" (Sturm, 2000; p.289). Audio-recordings were transcribed and then "coded for emergent categories" (Sturm, 2000). The two main categories that emerged were "characteristics of the storylistening trance and influences that affect it (Sturm, 2000). Sturm's methodology was based upon the belief that "reported experience is at least similar enough to lived experience to warrant exploration" (Sturm, 2000; p.289).

Participants articulated both the cognitive and emotional elements of story processing and Sturm concludes that "people listening to stories often do enter a qualitatively different state of consciousness" (Sturm, 2000; p. 287); "the normal waking state of consciousness alters dramatically as the story takes on a new dimension; listener's seem to experience the story with remarkable immediacy, engaging in the story's plot and with the story's characters" (Sturm, 2000; p.287).

Sturm (2000) was particularly interested in the 'trance-like' quality of story processing and this state has been described by Lankton and Lankton (1983) as indicated by "pupil dilation, flattened cheeks, increased skin pallor, lack of movement, slowed blink and swallow reflexes, and lowered and slowed respiration" (p.66). Mead (2011), a storyteller, storylistener and writer, contributes to these rare accounts of the listener's experience of storytelling by drawing upon his own experience. Although he is now a professional storyteller, Mead acknowledges his own initial resistance and 'scepticism' with regard to storytelling. He anticipated "the

old hippy storyteller” and “that kind of story” (p.15), but soon noted his engagement and describes his experience of being “transported to that other world” (p.15), his “imagination had taken flight” (p.15). He notices his slow emergence into a relaxed state, his mouth opens, his jaw slackens and his breath becomes deep and slow. He explains his reaction in terms of physiological vibrations that connect us to the storyteller and each other, and back to the memories of our ancestral heritage of communal storytelling (Mead, 2011).

### **Empathic attunement**

Empathy has been described as “the capacity to understand and respond to the unique affective experiences of another person” (Decety and Jackson, 2006; p.54). Empathy can result in a) an effective response to another person; b) a cognitive process of perspective taking; or c) emotional regulation (Decety and Jackson, 2006; p.54). Empathic attunement refers to the intersubjective experience that may be a key factor in the storytelling process facilitating processing on an embodied and experiential level. I will now operationalize the concept of attunement which I highlight as a significant element of both the therapeutic and therapeutic storytelling process:

*Attunement* has been described by Kim Golding (2008) as “an emotional connection between two people in which one person mirrors or matches the vitality and affect of the other” (p.229). Thus if the client is quiet and sad a therapeutic storyteller will select a story and presentation style that matches their affect and will tell the story more quietly and slowly. If the young person is angry the storyteller may engage in a story that expresses the vitality of emotion displayed. The mirroring of affect is conveyed through both verbal and non-verbal responses with an implicit goal of conveying empathy.



Empathic attunement can also be described in neurological terms by referring to the neurodynamics of the process. For example, it appears that “there is strong evidence...(that)people use the same neural circuits for themselves and for others...which paves the way for intersubjective transactions between self and others” (Decety and Jackson, 2006; p.57). It would appear that empathy has both affective and cognitive components, with potential neurophysiological correlates, which could be elicited in varying degrees according to situational and interpersonal cues. It would seem that the storytelling process affords the listener the opportunity to empathically engage with both the storyteller and the story characters through both affective and cognitive processes, and when the listener is engaged in the simulated experiences and affective states of the story characters they are experienced as their own emotions (Oatley, 1999), creating opportunities for new ways of experiencing themselves.

With regard to storytelling empathic attunement refers to attunement by the storyteller toward both the story characters and the audience, and empathic attunement of the listener toward the storyteller and story characters. An experienced storyteller often has an empathic relationship with their story and story characters. Often the story will have personal resonance for the storyteller, and this is why the storyteller has chosen to tell one particular story rather than another. Storytelling is a unique process through which the storyteller communicates on a deeply personal level. Invariably, the story will form part of their ‘voice,’ that is it will depict something of the storyteller’s own world view and therefore their life experience. If a therapist seeks to convey empathy toward another in a therapeutic context, story is a very powerful medium with which to do this, as demonstrated by the use of parables by Jesus and Ghandi, amongst others.

## **Metaphor**

In the literature on therapeutic storytelling there is convergence that suggests that the psychological process underpinning the use of stories in therapy is the role of metaphor which affords the opportunity for therapeutic engagement on a safe, symbolic level (Long, 2012). Sunderland (1997-8) describes metaphor as “atheoretical techniques,” as effective for reframing thinking as they are for aiding unconscious psychodynamic processing. I am now going to discuss the concept of metaphor in more detail. I will then develop this storyline further by discussing some ideas, from the literature, pertaining to the intersubjective therapeutic relationship and how this might relate to storytelling.

Stories appear to stimulate dual processing, that is both linear and logical thinking in the left hemisphere, as well as holistic and abstract thinking in the right hemisphere (McGilchrist, 2009). However, for the purposes of this thesis I have chosen to focus upon right hemispheric processing, suggested by neuropsychologists to be the domain of metaphor, affective stimuli and implicit knowledge.

Metaphor has been described as conveying “an idea in an indirect yet more meaningful way” (Mills and Crowley, 1986; p.7); it is the understanding of one thing in terms of another (Lankton and Lankton, 1989). Children are typically immersed in the world of fantasy through play and through stories; hence, metaphor is a natural language for children (Bheamadu, 2003; Mills and Crowley, 2001; Oaklander, 1978). In addition, metaphor is a gentle and indirect medium which can bypass the defences (Bheamadu, 2003) that the client might consciously or unconsciously hold with regard to traumatic events. Therefore, metaphor facilitates indirect engagement with emotional material through implicit processing in the right hemisphere (McGilchrist,

2009) stimulating emotional processing at a safe distance affording the listener some protection when processing painful events (Dwivedi, 1997).

The following story is offered to illustrate the power of metaphor:

*“Hui Zi is forever using parables” complained the Vizier to the Prince of Lian. “If you were to forbid him to speak in parables then we could deal with the affairs of business more swiftly.”*

*The next day the prince spoke to Hui Zi “Please refrain from using parables, make your meaning clear in a straightforward manner”*

*“Suppose there was a man who did not know what a catapult was” replied Hui Zi “if he asked what it looked like and you told him that it looked just like a catapult, what would he understand of that?”*

*“Nothing of course” answered the prince*

*“But, if you were to tell him that it looked like a bow and that it was made of bamboo, then he might understand better, we compare something a man does not know with something that he does to help him understand the unknown” continued Hui Zi “If I cannot use parables how can I make things clear to you?”*

Adapted from a story re-told by Mills and Crowley (1986; p. 10 ).

Mills and Crowley (2001; 1986) write that the power of the koan (a concise and carefully crafted story based upon Eastern philosophy) (Mills and Crowley, 1986) “lies in its *enigma*, which serves to provoke a deeper quest for knowledge on the part of the student” (p.9). Koans are somewhat similar to riddles. Storyteller Hugh Lupton (2003) suggests that “(L)ife is a bundle of riddles” (Lupton, 2003; p.6) and quotes Alan Garner who has written that “(W)e tell stories to unriddle the world” (Garner in Lupton, 2003; p.7). Lupton develops this statement by suggesting that when things cannot be explained rationally “then the riddle language of story might be able to get us closer to the truth” (p.7). It would seem that riddles are an antidote to the constraints of clarity noted by Barrico (2002); riddles can give ideas a more expansive symbolic existence.

Arguably, metaphor communicates with multi-sensory (Mills and Crowley, 1986) and descriptive detail which facilitates an enhanced and holistic experience of the idea being conveyed. Storyteller Daniel Morden (2003) writes:

“Metaphor presents us with the familiar, but from an unfamiliar standpoint...through imagery. By telling a story instead of explaining a concept we can reach a deeper truth...a deeper meaning than that which words can express directly.”

Daniel Morden (2003; p. 6-7).

Some things in our world are so complex that we can struggle to comprehend them in a fully conscious way, they may defy logic, or we may struggle to ‘put things into words’. The riddle, the koan, fairy tales or ‘wonder tales’ and the metaphor, all invite the listener to go beyond the rational, to a place where the answers lie within, a place of implicit knowing (Mills and Crowley, 2001, 1986). To bring things to the logic of the left brain requires verbalisation which necessitates the reduction of complex ideas into a form that can be expressed through language (Stern, 2004). By necessity this process is reductive and loses a lot of meaning that cannot be expressed verbally and indeed may remain as tacit or implicit knowledge. Stories create a world beyond words.

I conclude that since stories present information to us in symbolic form, they potentially connect us with our implicit, associative and affective domains (McGilchrist, 2009; Stern, 2004; Goleman, 1995) thereby facilitating a symbolic and nonconscious engagement with our affective reality. Thus, symbolic communication such as metaphor, simile, poetry, song, dreams, myth and fable are all described as the language of the heart or the hearts voice. In the next section I will identify some of the ways that storytelling can facilitate the various manifestations of the therapeutic relationship, such as the Working Alliance, the reparative relationship and the intersubjective ‘space between’ created by both the storyteller and listener.

## The relational elements of storytelling and intersubjectivity

There is increasing anecdotal evidence proclaiming the therapeutic potential of stories. They are increasingly recognised as a useful medium to promote **intrapersonal** therapeutic change. However, the premise of this thesis is that this can be enhanced further through the intersubjective context of oral storytelling. A point also recognised by Killick and Frude (2009):

“When a story is ‘told’, as opposed to read off the page or witnessed in a dramatic portrayal, it enters the interpersonal and interactive sphere and this may heighten its emotional impact”

Killick and Frude (2009; p.850).

There is an abundance of literature that identifies the importance of the therapeutic relationship in the therapeutic change process (Duncan, Miller, Wampold and Hubble, 2010; BCPSG, 2007; Horvath, 2005; Yalom, 2002; Lyons-Ruth, 1998). Further, numerous approaches such as attachment-based approaches, relational depth, relational approaches, person-centred and interpersonal psychodynamic approaches all identify the therapeutic relationship as the focus of therapy to varying degrees (BCPSG, 2007; Hughes, 2006; Mearns and Cooper, 2005).

The therapeutic relationship has been conceptualised in numerous ways. Clarkson (2003), and others (Rowan and Jacobs, 2002) have written about the many different types of relationships that may exist at any one time throughout the course of therapy:

- The Working Alliance –refers to negotiating an understanding of therapy such as the nature of the work, the nature of the relationship, and of the tasks, the goals and the boundaries of therapy. It is generally agreed that key components at this level are Rogerian core conditions of warmth, empathy, genuineness, unconditional positive regard and that these elements will help

establish a Working Alliance that promotes collaborative engagement and is fit to withstand ruptures, resistance and other periods of difficulty (Clarkson, 2003). It is recognised that stories can enhance the Working Alliance (Cook et al, 2004).

- Rowan and Jacobs (2002) describe an Instrumental relationship- which refers to the therapist as expert with a functional role within the relationship to impart knowledge or implement techniques. With regard to therapeutic storytelling, this might be represented with a storytelling scenario based upon cognitive behavioural or psycho-educational techniques where the emphasis is to utilise the story metaphor to teach new behaviours (Cook et al, 2004).
- The Counter/transferential relationship refers to the unconscious patterns of relating that are arguably brought into any interpersonal relationship, including the therapeutic relationship (Clarkson, 2003). With regard to storytelling, it is plausible that a listener may perceive the storyteller as a nurturing parental figure.
- The reparative relationship- current studies in Attachment theory espouse the now pervading belief that we are fundamentally relational beings (Cassidy and Shaver, 1999). Drawing upon theories about evolution and anthropology attachment theory identifies us as fundamentally social beings, with a primary motivation to connect to others. Attachment theory also purports that our relationship with our primary caregiver is fundamental to our development of self, and that often clients who come for therapy have distortions in interpersonal relationships along with a poor development of self as a result of an inadequate primary relationship. It is believed that the therapeutic relationship can offer a reparative relationship (Clarkson, 2003; Yalom, 2002), that is an opportunity for the client to be experienced and nurtured through an

attuned relationship which can all too often be deficient in the primary caregiver relationship. If the storyteller is responsive to the listener and selects their style of delivery and the story choice based upon an intuitive attunement to the listener, the listener may experience the storyteller as e.g. 'telling their story' which may give them a sense of being 'heard', 'affectively known' (Schore, 2007) and 'understood'. In addition the listener may gain new insight along with problem-solving opportunities which can create new ways of being for them.

- The Authentic (Person to person) relationship- refers to the real relationship. Relating to the client with genuineness, openness and appropriate self-disclosure, rather than from behind a professional persona (Clarkson, 2003; Rowan and Jacobs, 2002). The authentic relationship would be less likely to happen in storytelling performances where the storyteller may create a persona for the purpose of transporting the listener, however, storytelling can be used within an authentic therapeutic relationship where the therapist can meet the listener with congruence and genuineness with regard to who they are.
- The transpersonal relationship- refers to the spiritual and intersubjective 'space between' (Rowan and Jacobs, 2002) which may include elements of the relationship that might not directly stem from either of the individuals within the relationship but of a phenomenon that might emerge as a product of the mutual encounter. The storytelling process creates a space between; something that arises out of an intersubjective connection between the storyteller, story and listener.

It is hypothesised in this thesis that the story, storyteller and listener can all interact to create something unique for the listener which might not have occurred under any other circumstances for the storyteller even with that same story. Rossi (1972) suggests that the effective metaphor creates a “shared phenomenological reality”, creating a three way empathic relationship between the therapist, listener and story (Mills and Crowley, 1986). This facilitates the listener’s identification with the story and the transformational power of the metaphor (Gordon, 1978). Through this the listener may have an experience of being “affectively known” (Schoore, 2007).

### **Intersubjectivity**

I will now discuss the nature of intersubjectivity as it is portrayed within the literature. Intersubjectivity has been described from a variety of perspectives; for example, Douglass and Moustakas operationalize intersubjectivity thus:

“The concept of intersubjectivity is drawn from existentialism and refers to a communal flow from the depths of oneself to another”

Douglass and Moustakas (1985; p.50).

Phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty (1968) described a reciprocal intertwining where two people impact upon each other. From an attachment perspective, Daniel Stern (2004) described it as a “mutual interpenetration of minds that permits us to say, ‘I know that you know that I know’ or ‘I feel that you feel that I feel’ (p.75) he notes that these moments may be mutual and fleeting (Stern, 2004). Referring to ‘relational depth’ Mearns (1996) describes “one of those *I knew he knew I knew* things- like we were communicating at a lot of different levels at the same time” (p.306). From the perspective of interpersonal neurobiology Dan Siegel (2006) describes it as a state of deep connection in which neural firing in the brain of one person can stimulate similar patterns of neural firing in another creating ‘resonance’ in the other (Siegel,



2006). He states that we are highly receptive to intersubjective communication because it is necessary for emotional regulation and our sense of self (Siegel, 2006). However, it would seem that although it has primacy for us, typically it is a nonconscious process (Lyons-Ruth, 1998). Becoming aware of intersubjective processes requires the development of what Rowan and Jacobs (2002) describe as the 'transpersonal self,' that is an:

“open(ness) to experiences beyond or deep within themselves...This subtle consciousness cannot be 'willed' into existence, but often comes in brief moments...It is synonymous with that form of mystical experience that relies a great deal on symbols and images”

Rowan and Jacobs (2002; p. 71-72).

The intersubjective nature of storytelling is a key focus for this thesis. It provides both a description of the process and potentially an explanation for its effectiveness. Prosody, attunement and a meditative state are key elements that could facilitate the potential for 'moments of meeting' (Stern, 2004) in the intersubjective space. I will describe the intersubjective processes of storytelling further and I will expand upon ways in which stories might facilitate intersubjectivity.

Epstein (1996) suggests that engagement in the intersubjective realm can be enhanced by meditation. Oral storytelling can have similar meditative qualities encouraging focused attention on the story where both storyteller and listener aim to suspend disbelief and logical thought and engage with the story on an affective and experiential level. As described above, stories appear to produce a sense of safety and much of this potentially comes through implicit non-verbal communication. For example, the cadence of the story may affect the listener in similar ways to those in which lullabies reassure an infant. We attend to the prosody of the voice, such as rhythm, force, pitch more acutely than the words being communicated (Porges, 2013; Trevarthen, 1998). Once upon a time, being tuned into nonverbal communication

would have taken precedence as a life-saving skill (Simpson, 1999) and forms the foundations of our attachment behaviour; attuning to the non-verbal communication that lies in-between the words has the power to connect us or disconnect us. The power of prosody to connect was illustrated by Sturm's (2001) participants who indicated a preference for a style of communication that not only matched the story, but also created a sense of familiarity and comfort for the listener.

Affect attunement through storytelling can be enhanced by employing 'call and response' phrases which engender explicit interaction and require a degree of attentiveness between the storyteller and listener. In addition, storytellers often learn their tale as a skeleton of specific phrases (Killick and Frude, 2009) which add to the rhythmicity of the storytelling experience. As storyteller Geoff Mead notes "we literally vibrate or resonate at the same frequency through the complex and delicate mechanism of the inner ear. We are so to speak, on the same wavelength" (2011; p.17). These implicit and prosodic, e.g. rhythmical and tonal, qualities imbue stories with the potential to transport the listener to a place of safety and intersubjective connection.

Typically, when the listener engages in the storytelling process they are metaphorically held within a safe and recognisable story-frame:

- A story-frame comprised of a beginning, middle and conclusion
- A sense of resolution
- 'Good' overcoming 'evil'
- An implicit rhythmical and repetitious quality

As storytellers, Taffy Thomas and Steve Killick highlight, "the **intention** of the storyteller is critical-the storyteller does not wish to traumatise, but to give an

experience that is both exciting and safe and leads to resolution” (Thomas and Killick, 2007; p.29).

The sound of the voice is particularly effective in regulating states of arousal (Porges, 2013, van der Kolk, 2013). Thus, storytelling provides the opportunity to use both verbal and non-verbal communication to dramatic effect. Siegel and Payne Bryson (2011) note:

“Parents know how powerful storytelling can be when it comes to distracting their kids or calming them down”

Siegel and Payne Bryson (2011; p.28).

The prosodic communication contains the affective message (Schore, 2010) and we learn to attune to this form of communication long before we are capable of discerning the verbal content (Siegel, 1999; Stern, 1977). It is thought that this implicit non-verbal-affective information is processed holistically within milliseconds in the right hemisphere (Schore, 2010) and our receptivity to this form of communication remains dominant throughout life, even after further development of the left hemisphere (McGilchrist, 2009).

There has been a growing recognition that ‘something more’ than insight is required to bring about therapeutic change (Lyons-Ruth, 1998; Sander, 1998). Bromberg (2006) and Schore (2007) suggest that it is this intersubjective and experiential opportunity to be ‘affectively known’ and understood that may produce more significant therapeutic change than logical linear interpretations, (Bromberg, 2006; Schore, 2007). Arguably the intersubjective state in therapeutic storytelling provides greater understanding than that obtained at a dialogical level; it is communication at the experiential level such that the client’s plight might be experienced by both the client and therapist on a deep intersubjective level, resulting in the client/listener

feeling affectively known. Similarly the implicit and holistic understanding gained through metaphor combined with the intersubjective experience of storytelling can be greater than that gained through the logical linear interpretation of the words alone.

Hughes (2004) and Schore (2008) describe therapeutic intersubjectivity thus:

“the primary therapeutic experience for both therapist and client. It is an intersubjective experience which involves the active utilization of eye contact, facial expressions, voice prosody, movement, timing, intensity and touch”

Hughes (2004; p. 267).

“As in the developmental attachment context, right brain-to-right brain prosodic communications also act as an essential vehicle of implicit communications within the therapeutic relationship”

Schore and Schore (2008; p.14).

Schore argues that the right brain provides us with the most comprehensive and integrated knowledge of the affective state of the other, transmitted through their bodily communications (Schore and Schore, 2008; Damasio, 1994). As Shaw notes “(p)sychotherapy is an inherently embodied process” (p.271) primarily based upon “unconscious nonverbal affective communications more than conscious verbal cognitive factors as the essential change process of psychotherapy” (Schore and Schore, 2008; p.17). Schore and Schore (2008) continue “the intersubjective work of psychotherapy is not defined by what the therapist does for the patient, or says to the patient (left brain focus). Rather, the key mechanism is *how to be with the patient*, especially during affectively stressful moments (right brain focus)” (p.17). Schore and Schore (2008) conceptualise the process as right to right brain affective communication, which they prioritise above logical left brain interpretations. Such right brain to right brain communication requires the therapist to be in a state of right brain receptivity (Schore and Schore, 2008) for example a state of reverie and

intuition (Marcus, 1997), a state more receptive to free-association (Grabner et al, 2007) with a focus upon holistic features (McGilchrist, 2009; Schore and Schore, 2008) and interoceptive awareness.

Karlen Lyons-Ruth (1998) notes that clients highlight the 'special moments' of authentic interpersonal interaction between client and therapist as important factors within the therapy. Yalom (2002) similarly notes, it is the therapeutic act rather than the therapeutic word that resonates most with the client. Yalom (2002) was referring to 'concrete evidence of caring' (p.39) suggesting that ways of behaving conveyed empathy more significantly than words could. Lyons-Ruth (1998) notes that clients identify these moments as ones in which they experienced a change in their sense of selves, and this was identified as coming about through the relationship.

The theory developed by the Boston Change Process Study Group (2007, 2002, 1998), of which Karlen Lyons-Ruth is part, highlights the two levels upon which the therapeutic change process rests. One is the semantic level and the other, is procedural representation, that is, 'implicit relational knowing,' this is the rule-based knowledge of how to proceed in relationships (Lyons-Ruth, 1998). She describes this as something that is developed through our very early relationships and is continuously available for modification throughout our lifetime (Lyons-Ruth, 1998):

“implicit relational knowing begins to be represented in some yet to be known form long before the availability of language and continues to operate implicitly throughout life. Implicit relational knowing typically operates outside focal attention and conscious experience, without benefit of translation into language. Language is used in the service of this knowing but the implicit knowings governing intimate interactions are not language-based and are not routinely translated into semantic form.”

Lyons-Ruth (1998; p.285).

The BCPSG (2007, 2002, 1998) have worked to conceptualise and highlight the importance of authentic 'moments of meeting' (Stern, 2004) that occur within a 'real relationship' which, they believe, lead to a re-organisation of one's sense of self. Tronick (1998) another member of the Boston Change Process Study Group (2007, 2002, 1998) also notes that 'affective mutual regulation' is necessary "for developmental change" (p.298):

"The "something else with the therapist" becomes part of the patient's having to (re) experience "something else" (or the lack of "something else," or a different "something else") specific to their consciousness of past and current relationships with others. Thus out of the change with the therapist, a therapeutic change is assembled in the patient"

Tronick (1998; p.298).

Through the therapeutic relationship, the client can experience new ways of being and bring into awareness their old dysfunctional patterns. A reorganisation of self can result.

The presence of this "something more" (BCPSG, 2002, 1998) in therapy, something beyond verbal interpretations or reflective insight, is substantiated by the belief that much of the implicit relational knowing (Lyons-Ruth, 1998) occurs in the implicit domain and at an early non-verbal developmental stage (Tronick, 1998), therefore therapy is concerned with much that is pre-verbal and implicit and relational (Masters, 2013) not language-based and not available to explicit memory. The implicit relationship, non-verbal attunement and the subsequent affect regulation, therefore, appears to have primacy in creating a more therapeutic world for the client.

Stories appear to engage us in similar ways to interpersonal relationships; that is, that they connect at an intersubjective level in ways that are implicit and affective.

Over the last two decades there have been an increasing number of studies that suggest that the domain for this area of mental processing is the right hemisphere which nonconsciously maintains a holistic and associative frame. Meanwhile, studies in the therapeutic literature have begun to recognise the impact of implicit relational communication above verbal communication in the therapeutic change process. On the basis of this somewhat diverse literature, I have attempted to assimilate different theories and conclude that the intersubjective storytelling process could be a powerful means to bring about therapeutic change since it maximises key elements of the therapeutic change process. Storytelling can make the most of the intersubjective nature of the storytelling process as well as maximising implicit and symbolic communication through the use of metaphor.

In the next section I will discuss the formative nature of the attachment relationship. I will describe how this early preverbal intersubjective relationship with our primary caregivers is thought to be the means through which we are affectively known, and create our sense of self, our ability to co-regulate and potentially serves as a blueprint for all other interpersonal relationships.

## Attachment

Congruent and attuned prosodic communication forms the basis of the attachment relationship. In the next section I will discuss the theory that the primary attachment relationship is a blueprint, or internal working model, for future interpersonal relationships. I will also discuss more recent research that has developed our understanding of the role that the attachment process plays in co-regulation. In working with young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and understanding of attachment theory and the young person's attachment style is

useful to facilitate the therapeutic relationship and to promote self-regulation in the young person.

Attachment theory highlights the importance of interpersonal behaviours in creating a feeling of safety. I will now discuss Attachment theory, from its history to contemporary theories, as an explanation for the importance of the storytelling relationship.

Attachment Theory was developed by John Bowlby (1969) as an integration of evolutionary, biological and psychological theories. In this section I will briefly discuss Bowlby's theory of Attachment and the ensuing developments. Some of these subsequent elaborations have prioritised the cognitive tasks of attachment, such as 'mentalization' and interpretation (Fonagy, 2004) others in the field focus upon the neurodynamics of the relationship (Schorre and Schore, 2008; Siegel, 1999) and the implicit intersubjective relationship as fundamental rather than a means to an end (BCPSG, 2007, 1998; Siegel and Hartzell, 2003; Stern, 1998; Lyons-Ruth, 1998). These different conceptualisations will be described in more detail below.

Bowlby developed his theory as an alternative to the prevailing psychoanalytical and learning theories that described behaviour in terms of motivational drives to fulfil primal needs such as food. It arose out of repeated studies (Bowlby, 1951) that showed that children that had been deprived of maternal care tended to be aggressive, lacked empathy and have superficial relationships. Bowlby's theory was based upon an evolutionary perspective of attachment behaviour as an adaptive function. He suggested that attachment behaviours increased the likelihood of mother-child proximity, deemed important for maximising physical safety and



survival of the genes. Secondary consequences of the child's proximity to the mother were feeding, learning about the environment and social interaction, but the primary function was biological (Bowlby, 1969).

The attachment system was deemed to provide security (Bowlby, 1969), a "security blanket" (Passman and Erck, 1977) and a "secure base" from which the infant could explore his environment (Ainsworth, 1963). Bowlby's theory was further developed, in collaboration with Mary Ainsworth (1969) resulting in the classification of attachment behaviours (Secure, Avoidant, Ambivalent and Disorganised). This influential classification system arose out of The Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al, 1978). This was an experimental study designed to understand the balance between attachment and exploratory behaviours in a moderately stressful strange situation.

In 1977 Daniel Stern noted in his classic book "The First relationship: Infant and Mother," that the relationship with the primary caregiver becomes the blueprint for future interpersonal relationships, similarly, Bowlby (1980, 1988) conceptualised the attachment relationship as providing an "internal working model" of self and relationships. A caregiver who is available and sensitive provides an infant with its first human reaction which, according to Bowlby (1980) and Stern (1977), becomes an internal representation and guide for future expectations of the carer and others, in addition, caregiver availability becomes internalised in the form of self-appraisal. That is, 'internal working models' are seen as the perceptual filter through which all other interpersonal interactions are construed, and self-understanding constructed (Thompson, 1999). For example, caregiving ideally consists of warm and genuine, attuned communication, conveying a sense of availability, unconditional love and relatedness. The premise of Attachment theory is that through such continued

attuned availability (Bowlby, 1973) and affect mirroring (Fonagy et al, 2002; Stern, 1985) an infant develops their sense of self as worthy of help and support, and by acting with openness and positivity they elicit the desired support which reflects and reinforces their belief about themselves and others (Thompson, 1999).

Winnicott (1967) suggested that misattunement by the caregiver would result in the child being unable to find themselves reflected in the face of the caregiver. Instead they would find the caregiver's own emotional state. As a consequence the infant would then incorporate the caregiver's emotional reaction into their own sense of self as an 'alien self' with potentially dysfunctional consequences.

Fonagy et al (2002) drew upon the work of Bowlby and Winnicott and hypothesised about the cognitive processes that accompany attachment behaviours, suggesting that the mentalization of self and others is an additional evolutionary function of attachment behaviours. Fonagy suggests that "an infant's sense of self emerges from the affective quality of relationship with the primary caregiver" (Fonagy et al, 2002; p.18) through which they develop the ability to reflect on their own actions and those of others, essentially the sense of self evolves through the capacity of the child to interpret the behaviour of others in relation to self, and this determines their sense of self (Fonagy, 2002).

Fonagy suggests that the infant has an emotional state which is perceived by an attuned caregiver who then empathically reflects back an understanding of that emotion, however the caregiver reflects with 'markedness' (Fonagy et al, 2002) that is they reflect a recognition of the emotion, whilst also reflecting that they are not experiencing the same as the infant, Fonagy suggests that the infant identifies and

appreciates this difference and as a result the infant understands and perceives the internal and external world, and their feelings and others as separate, and consequently develop their own sense of self.

Fonagy's reformulation draws upon psychoanalytical theory and incorporates a reinterpretation of the classification of attachment behaviours. Rather than classifying a person in terms of insecure or secure, Fonagy proposes a categorization based upon their capacity to engage in and manage intimate interpersonal relationships, where a relatively good capacity corresponds with the original secure classification, and relatively poor corresponds to the previous categorization of insecure attachment. According to Fonagy (2002) the product of the attachment relationship was not a template or 'an internal working model' for all future relationships as Bowlby and Stern had originally suggested but a mental capacity to manage interpersonal relationships.

Stern (2002) developed his own theory as a result of decades of videoed and live observations of mothers interacting with their infants. He also drew upon a psychoanalytical framework to understand the mother-child behaviours and as a result he classified the attachment system as primarily designed for physical closeness and safety and identified a second, separate, yet complementary motivational system of intersubjective orientation which he conceptualised as a basic need to define, maintain or re-establish self-identity and self-cohesion (Stern, 2002; p. 107).

This area has been developed further through the work of the Boston Change Process Study Group which conceptualised the 'implicit knowing' that arises out of the

intersubjective relationship as a physiological and social/behavioural regulatory system (Bruschweiler-Stern, Harrison, Lyons-Ruth, Morgan, Nahum, Sander, Stern and Tronick, 2007, 1998). What differentiates the conceptualisation of the Boston group is that they identify the relational element, and intersubjectivity, as the place of psychodynamic workings, as opposed to the previous psychoanalytical theories, including Fonagy et al (2002) that focus upon the intrapersonal processing that occurs through the relationship. Thus, Stern and his colleagues place the relationship in a more central position creating a more relational and less deterministic concept of attachment.

Numerous conceptualisations now exist regarding attachment behaviour, the development of the self and affect regulation. The current developments and revisions with regard to attachment theory incorporate the studies that have emerged in 'the decade of the brain' (Schore and Schore, 2008; p.10) in the 1990's and an integration of contemporary theories in related fields. Siegel cites E.O. Wilson (1998) who uses the word 'consilience' as the process of integrating knowledge from different specialised fields "to create a common groundwork of explanations" (Wilson, 1998; p.7) "a unity of knowledge". Current theorists draw upon psychoanalysis, neuroscience, psychiatry, traumatology, paediatrics (Schore and Schore, 2008), evolutionary biology, affective, cognitive and developmental neuroscience, anthropology, communications theory and social psychology (Siegel, 2003). Siegel's (1999) theory of 'interpersonal neurobiology' is the product of such consilient knowledge (Siegel, 2003).

Current theories of neuroscience, including Siegel's interpersonal neurobiology (2003), typically conclude that the nature-nurture debate is an erroneous dichotomy,

and it is now widely accepted that the development of the brain appears to be experience-dependent (Golding, 2008; Siegel, 1999). It appears that the emotional availability of primary caregivers is the most critical factor (Gerhardt, 2004; Emde, 1988). It is thought that a new baby is without the ability to regulate its own emotional state (Gerhardt, 2004). This appears to function at the evolutionary level to facilitate the human capacity to adapt to its environment, and it is this adaptive flexibility that permits the development of an emotional equilibrium which corresponds to its relational environment.

Good interpersonal attunement from the primary caregiver through infancy appears to facilitate the child's understanding of their own emotional world, as well as enhance their ability to regulate their emotional states by soothing and modulating negative states and amplifying positive states (Schore and Schore, 2008; Siegel, 1999). Schore and Schore (2008) describe this attunement as a psychobiological process attuning to "the dynamic shifts in the infant's bodily-based internal states of central and autonomic arousal" (p.11). Such attuned and responsive behaviour from the caregiver can be internalised to enable the child to develop a repertoire to create their own internal equilibrium. Poor responsiveness, abuse or neglect by the primary caregiver appears to leave the child with a raised baseline for arousal (Gerhardt, 2004). A poorly attuned dyad can create an internal state of chaos and fear, and an impairment of self-organization which may be characterised by states of rigidity or chaos, rather than optimising the human capacity for flexibility (Siegel, 1999).

Drawing upon the more recent theories Schore and Schore (2008) conclude that "Attachment experiences are thus imprinted in an internal working model that encodes strategies of affect regulation that act at implicit nonconscious levels" (p.12).

Further, there are growing studies that suggest that attachment behaviours are primarily non-verbal affective and prosodic cues which are visual, auditory and tactile and processed in the right hemisphere (Schoore and Schoore, 2008).

Much of the new neurodynamic research is based upon associations seen from functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) which when combined with split brain studies and other earlier research, produces a picture of what might be occurring at a neurophysiological level. In the main, these studies do not prove causality, but highlight associations which can augment the abstract theoretical constructs which have underpinned much of psychology to date. For example, recent neurodynamic studies support Counselling Psychology's emphasis upon the intersubjective nature of human experiences, including the therapeutic relationship (Strawbridge and Woolfe, 2010). We are social beings. "The brain has evolved as a social organ of the body" (Siegel, 2003), and it would seem that interpersonal connection is fundamental to our very existence, both at the evolutionary level where it is fundamental to our physical survival (Cozolino, 2006), and at the level of the mind where it appears to be fundamental to our psychological wellbeing (Siegel, 2006).

It would seem that therapeutic storytelling can maximise prosodic and affective attachment behaviours which can create a sense of safety within a reparative relationship.

Alexander et al (2001) notes that:

"stories in which the child is strongly invested can serve as powerful tools of emotion regulation within the context of supportive caregiving practices"  
Alexander et al (2001; p. 393).

Further still, stories also have the potential to promote dual mental processing which helps the client develop new ways of thinking about their self.

## Therapeutic interventions with young people

I will now discuss therapeutic interventions with young people. I begin by describing the developmental needs of adolescence and move on to discuss ways in which therapeutic potential can be maximised for young people through creative and relational approaches. I include a brief description of studies that have used stories with young people and discuss the importance of the therapeutic relationship when working with adolescents in particular, especially those with a history of poor attachment relationships.

Therapeutic approaches for young people need to be developmentally appropriate (Norton, 2011). The approach needs to be based upon knowledge of developmental theories pertinent to adolescence, and needs to take into account the young person's own idiosyncratic history and the potential for developmental delays.

The adolescent brain is a 'work in progress', the pre-frontal cortex, the location of executive functioning, is not fully formed until adulthood, and in general the adolescent brain undergoes neural growth and re-organization. The 'decade of the brain' (Schoore and Schoore, 2008; p.10) has suggested that there may be critical periods for neurological developments from the third trimester of pregnancy until around 24 months of age (Gerhardt, 2004), and again in adolescence (Norton, 2011). Studies suggest that it is a period of much creative potential and the provision of an enriched environment involving novel experiences and positive relationships appear

to be essential to facilitate the developmental tasks of adolescence and potentially to promote new neural growth and integration (Norton, 2011).

The therapeutic needs of young people are often complex and co-occurring (Norton, 2011) this therefore makes it difficult to know which issues are most pertinent to the young person at any given time. Garland (1992) identified five stages that preoccupy pre-adolescent boys' groups: pre-affiliation, power-struggle, intimacy, differentiation-cohesion, and separation-termination. In a similar vein Dies (1991) worked with adolescents and suggested "building cohesiveness and trust," "testing the limits," "resolving authority issues," "working on self," and "moving on" as group stage descriptors. Further, working in groups requires the young people to address issues relevant to all interpersonal interactions, such as establishing trust, establishing normative behaviour, struggling with each other, accomplishing things together, as well as issues of loss at the point of closure.

In addition Levy-Warren (2008) notes that today's adolescents are bombarded with media, immersed in a world that bombards them with contact, information and demands leaving them to struggle to manage "a sense of urgency... that is imposed from without" (Levy-Warren, 2008; p.198 ). Today's adolescents need support to learn how to manage this urgency which is compounded by the adolescent developmental need for 'immediacy'. Therapeutics goals are likely to include facilitating self-regulation in the adolescent (Levy-Warren, 2008).

At this time, adolescents are also entering a phase in which they focus less on the traditional, hierarchical attachment relationship with their primary caregivers and instead focus more upon the establishment of affectional bonds of reciprocity



(Golding, 2008). However, their ability to do so potentially rests on the internal working models that have been developed in the initial developmental stages (Golding, 2008; Allen and Land, 1999).

The importance of the therapeutic relationship as a key factor in creating therapeutic change has been repeatedly highlighted over recent decades (Duncan, Miller, Wampold and Hubble, 2010; Horvath, 2005; Horvath and Bedi, 2002), and is of note in working with adolescents (Karver, Handelsman, Fields and Bickman, 2006; Everall and Paulson, 2002). The therapeutic relationship with adolescents often takes atypical forms (Topel and Lachmann, 2007; Everall and Paulson 2002) and the literature includes numerous affective, cognitive and behavioural components that contribute to an effective therapeutic relationship with adolescents (Karver et al, 2006). For example, many would not be as comfortable, as adults are, to sit in a face-to-face position with their therapist, talking across a table with a box of tissues (Topel and Lachmann, 2007). For many this manner of relating falls into a cultural norm which they are at pains to rebuff through counter-culture experiences and 'ways of being'. Face to face 'talking therapy' does not correspond with the cultural norms of adolescents (Topel and Lachmann, 2007) and potentially would be threatening to their process of individuation.

A range of alternative approaches with adolescents have developed, including on-line therapies (Hanley, 2013) and a range of person-centred approaches in which the therapist interacts with the adolescent through whatever medium the adolescent chooses, such as table football (Topel and Lachmann, 2007), soft toys, art, games and puzzles (Dahlgren Daigneault and Tysse Breen, 1998) wilderness therapies, music

therapy, animal assisted therapies (Norton, 2011) and stories (Noctor, 2006; Roberts, 1997).

The literature review did not uncover any studies which reported upon the negative consequences or ineffectiveness of therapeutic storytelling, although, in a textbook on counselling adolescents, Geldard and Geldard (2008) suggest that stories and books are a 'least suitable' medium for late teens or group work but do not expand upon this statement. However, Noctor (2006) and Roberts (1997) successfully used stories with adolescents in group settings, as noted above; and in addition, McCulliss and Chamberlain's (2013) extended review of the literature conclude that bibliotherapy is a successful therapeutic tool for children and adolescents. Whilst caution would be recommended in selecting and applying any therapeutic approach for any client, there was no data to suggest that stories were contraindicated for adolescents, and if used with sensitivity and attunement they appear to have therapeutic effect (Noctor, 2006; Roberts, 1997).

The therapeutic storytelling literature suggests that stories can help foster engagement and develop the therapeutic relationships and Working Alliance (Cook et al, 2004). Cook et al (2004) note that using Cook's Therapeutic Storytelling Technique typically results in "non-existent or quite minimal" resistance (p. 247), it appears that utilising stories provides a potent therapeutic package which keeps the clients focused, "it's just like a little sugar to help the medicine go down easier" (Cook et al, 2004; p.248).

Mills and Crowley (2001, 1986) also highlight the role of the therapist in constructing the therapeutic metaphor which they suggest facilitates a three-way empathic

relationship between the story, therapist and child. A further example of how stories facilitate the therapy and the therapeutic relationship, is provided by Despert and Potter (1936) who noted, in reference to a 10 year old boy who had been angry and destructive throughout his first month in the psychiatric institute, “it was through the use of the story that contact with the boy was achieved” (Despert and Potter, 1936; p.630).

By mediating the therapy through an adolescent-friendly medium the therapist demonstrates ‘being with’ (Rogers, 1967) the young person on their own terms. Different approaches will perceive playing games as serving different functions. For example some therapies view the therapeutic relationship as a means to build a bond with the client to facilitate the therapeutic tasks (Rowan and Jacobs, 2002). On the other hand, interpersonal approaches perceive the therapeutic relationship as the therapy (BCPSG, 2007; Hughes, 2006; Cooper, 2005), and the negotiation of the interpersonal interaction through the activity is deemed to be the therapy in and of itself, where interpersonal and intrapersonal dynamics pertinent to the young person are made manifest, therapeutically negotiated and resolved (Yalom, 2002; Stern, 1998; Oaklander, 1978; Axline, 1969).

Research findings reinforce previous evidence that psychotherapy with young people produces positive effects of respectable magnitude (Weiss et al, 1995). Hedges-Goettl and Tannenbaum (2001) warn that improvement with this client group is slow and not necessarily strictly incremental. For therapy to be effective it needs to offer the young person experiences that provide them with the opportunity to experience a new sense of self (Norton, 2011) “experiences that facilitate empathy, connection, creativity, and wellness” (Norton, 2011; p.2). “These experiences can help them

create a new narrative about their lives, one that is more cohesive, more hopeful and allows them to begin to see themselves in a new place and begin to ‘let the future in’”(Norton, 2011; p.2). Norton notes that enriched and creative therapies are most likely to produce therapeutic progress with adolescents (Norton, 2011), whilst Cozolino (2002) purports that “that any form of psychotherapy is successful to the degree to which it enhances positive experiential change and underlying neural networks, growth and integration” (p315).

As previously noted, adolescence appears to be a period of intense neurological reorganisation (Gerhardt, 2004). Cozolino (2002) suggests that developmental work of neural integration can be enhanced in therapy through the establishment of a safe and trusting relationship and an environment which offers access to new information and new experiences across the sensory, behavioural, emotional and cognitive domains which simultaneously stimulate the areas that require integration, optimising Hebb’s Law that “neurons that fire together wire together” (Siegel, 1999; p.26).

There is a growing body of literature which recognises the importance of working within an attachment-based therapeutic frame with young people (Golding, 2008; Hughes, 2006; Gerhardt, 2004). This literature denotes a shift from traditional therapeutic work with young people which emphasised the provision of therapeutic safety and containment within which the young person could engage in their own intrapsychic catharsis and reparation (Hughes, 2006). In contrast attachment-based therapies appear to facilitate the co-regulation of affect and the co-creation of new meanings, and this may be the basis of effective therapy (Hughes, 2006) and potentially promotes neural integration (Siegel, 2011, 1999).

The biopsychosocial perspective is valuable in therapeutic work in general (Schore and Schore, 2008), and in particular when working with young people who have dysfunctional and chaotic home lives. This perspective fits neatly within a Counselling Psychology framework.

Having laid out a case for using an attachment-based therapeutic approach when working with young people, I propose that stories, provided within such a therapeutic relationship, afford a safe therapeutic space to engage with novel stimuli within an enriched environment which may facilitate neural growth.

### Integration as a function of the therapeutic change process

It appears that implicit, prosodic communication has primacy in creating a sense of interpersonal safety. Once this state is achieved there is the potential for neural integration to establish behaviour change and emotional literacy. Therefore, whilst my primary focus is upon the tacit elements of the intersubjective relationship, I will now operationalize the term of *integration* and explain how it might function in the therapeutic change process as a result of therapeutic storytelling once co-regulation has come about through an attuned intersubjective relationship.

*Integration* refers to the formation of interconnected neurons which create neural networks which are more extensive and more inclusive resulting in the ability to perform increasingly complex tasks (Cozolino, 2002). Cozolino (, 2002) illustrates this with an example about telling a story. He explains that “networks that participated in language, emotion, and memory need to become integrated in order for us to recall and tell an emotionally meaningful story with the proper affect, correct details and appropriate words” (p.21).

Integration as a therapeutic change process has a significant place in the current zeitgeist. I see this as a complementary explanation for the change process and discuss it further here, in terms of the current literature and the study. Siegel (2008, 1999) and Cozolino (2002) highlight the role of integration in the therapeutic change process suggesting that wellbeing comes, in part, as a result of developing new neural pathways to enable executive functioning to manage emotions.

In part, integration refers to a process of linking the sensory data from the body and the emotional limbic system with the pre-frontal cortex, referred to by Dan Siegel (2008) as vertical integration, this is an integration of bottom-up, interoceptive, stimuli with top-down processing. In addition, bi-lateral or hemispheric integration refers to the extension of neural pathways between the implicit right hemisphere and the left hemisphere of the brain. It is suggested that increasing the integration of neural pathways creates a mental state which affords greater flexibility and more coherent functioning (Siegel, 2008).

Dan Siegel (2008) notes the correlation between mental health and coherent and integrated self-narratives. This theory was highlighted through the development of the Adult Attachment Interview (George et al, 1984; Main et al, 1985), which demonstrated that the parent's pattern of recollection with regard to their own childhood correlated with the classification assigned to their own child as a result of the Strange Situation. The key feature of the recollections was not *what* was told but *how* it was told. Siegel (2003) notes that the most robust predictor of a child's attachment to their parent is the coherence of the parent's autobiographical narrative in that they have engaged in a meaning-making process and made sense of their childhood experiences and understand how it effects them in the present.

Integrating neurobiology research and data from his work as a psychiatrist, Dan Siegel (2008) suggests that the state of integration may be impeded by hyper-arousal and the subsequent release of neurochemicals such as cortisol which can flood the amygdala and prevent the integration of visceral and affective information, and implicit memories with meaning-making and reflective processing in the pre-frontal cortex. These sensations remain in a state of disconnection, disintegrated and cannot be brought into awareness and made meaningful, they remain as implicit stimulation that we react to out of awareness, as psychological triggers, and buttons available to be pushed, placing us on the 'low road' (LeDoux, 1996).

The sensitivity of neural structures to toxicity (Siegel, 2001) highlights the importance of relational aspects such as co-regulation and soothing therapeutic interactions which can prevent hyperarousal and flooding of sensitive areas such as the amygdala. As Siegel noted in 1999, the type of interpersonal connection has significant consequences for neural connections. This was also noted by Joan Borysenko (2013) more recently, who suggests that integration can only occur in a place of safety, and this can come about through the co-regulation of emotional states and a safe inter-subjective space.

*Co-regulation* is a term described by psychologist Alan Fogel (1993) as a dynamic process involving the continuous modification of emotions, or affect attunement, between dyadic partners. This regulatory system is now believed to continue throughout life as "implicit intersubjective right brain-to-right brain emotion transacting and regulating mechanisms" (Schoore and Schoore, 2008; p.13) within many different forms of dyadic partnerships.

## Conclusions from the literature

The literature within the field of therapeutic storytelling is disparate, and what exists is primarily descriptive and somewhat diverse in its application of stories within therapy. Mills and Crowley (1986) noted a proliferation of studies exploring the therapeutic use of metaphor and storytelling much of which was based upon employing the therapeutic metaphor or mutual storytelling between therapist and client, typically based upon the work of Gardner (1971). To date, studies that have been done in the area tend to be descriptive depicting an array of different therapeutic storytelling approaches (Harper, 2010; Noctor, 2006; Cook et al, 2004; Bheamadu, 2003; Painter et al, 1999; Carlson and Arthur, 1999; Roberts, 1997; Burnett, 1983; Stirtzinger, 1983; Kagan, 1982). There is support in the literature for the therapeutic use of stories, in the form of bibliotherapy (Pehrsson, 2007; Pardeck, 1990; Russell and Shrodes, 1950), mutual-storytelling (Gardner, 1971), cognitive behavioural strategies (Cook et al, 2004), play therapy (Carlson and Arthur, 1999), creative approaches (Roberts, 1997) and psychoanalytical (Noctor, 2006) approaches.

Therapeutic storytelling seems to have a growing presence within clinical settings, and has been integrated into a broad spectrum of therapeutic approaches. Despite the diversity of approaches, all base the effectiveness of therapeutic storytelling on the use of metaphor enabling the client to engage on a symbolic and nonconscious level (Harper, 2010; Noctor, 2006; Cook et al, 2004; Bheamadu, 2003; Painter et al, 1999; Carlson and Arthur, 1999; Roberts, 1997; Mills and Crowley, 1986; Burnett, 1983; Stirtzinger, 1983; Kagan, 1982). Therefore, stories appear to be a trans-theoretical therapeutic approach.



The literature provides little detail about the client's perspective about how stories are useful. Further, the literature highlights that when client's opinions are canvassed with regard to the efficacy of therapy, then the opinion of clients and therapists typically differ with the client's opinion having greater predictive value (Horvath, 2005).

This thesis aims to expand the existing body of literature by exploring the process of storytelling through a heuristic search to understand the experience of a Storytelling Programme, primarily from my own perspective as researcher, but informed by the perspectives of the 'clients' engaged in the process. As a Community Storyteller I have witnessed the therapeutic effects of story on young people, and in particular those deemed 'hard to reach', therefore, this is the group that I have chosen as participants in this heuristic search. This particular group of clients have also been identified by the study 'Invest to Save: Arts in Health, 2010) which recommend that there should be a focus upon developing projects with 'hard to reach' groups.

# The Study of the Storytelling Programme

## A 'thick description' of the participants

In the following sections I will 'situate the sample' (Ponterotto and Gieger, 2007; p. 413), that is, I will provide 'thick description' (Ponterotto, 2006; Geertz, 1973) to illustrate the context of the Storytelling Programme and something of the lives of the young people who attend Pupil Referral Units. I then proceed to discuss the particular ethical considerations that were pertinent to this vulnerable group of young people.

I have worked with therapeutic stories since my early training as a psychologist in 1996; this has included managing and delivering community projects in England and Scotland. During the timeframe of this research I provided storytelling sessions at a National Trust event in Cumbria, a performance at an arts festival in Edinburgh, sessions in a mainstream school with a group of 'gifted and talented' pupils in Cumbria as well as delivering Storytelling into two Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in a major post-industrial city in the North of England. In one PRU I worked with two (Key Stage 2) classes (7-11 yrs.) and in the other I worked with all 12 pupils in Key Stage 3 (11-14 yrs.) PRU. The KS3 PRU provided the data for this study; however, working on other Storytelling Programmes in different settings facilitated my state of immersion in the storytelling process and all experiences contribute to my own understanding of the process.

For the purpose of this study PRUs were selected because they had responsibility for children who had been excluded from school and were typically deemed 'hard to reach' due to their emotional and behavioural difficulties. In previous storytelling sessions in mainstream schools I had observed that such 'hard to reach' pupils benefitted from storytelling and I wanted to explore further their perception of the process.

The KS3 PRU provided the main focus for the study, and interviews were conducted with five of the KS3 pupils and a member of staff. The particular KS3 PRU was chosen following a pilot study conducted in the KS2 PRU in which the behavioural management regime of 4 staff: 6 pupils was too intrusive to create a therapeutic environment.

I found that the KS3 provision that I already worked in, providing some individual counselling sessions, was more amenable to creating a therapeutic atmosphere. The Head was very psychologically-minded and supportive of the programme, and very keen to support its therapeutic potential in the light of the remit of the PRU, to improve emotional and behavioural issues and facilitate re-integration into mainstream schools. The systemic support was not only key to the effectiveness of the programme, but was key to providing an emotionally holding and supportive environment in which the young people could experience themselves differently and make the necessary emotional changes that they often needed to make (McLoughlin, 2010).

Pupils can be referred to a PRU for a variety of reasons:

- pupils excluded from school on a permanent or fixed-term basis (more than 15 days)

- pregnant schoolgirls and schoolgirl mothers (none were present at this PRU at this point in time)
- anxious and vulnerable pupils
- school refusers, pupils who had phobias and young carers
- pupils unable to attend school for medical reasons
- any pupils moving into the LEA (casual admissions) who are unable to find a school place because of insufficiency of school places within the LEA
- children who, because of entering public care or moving placement, require a change of school place and are unable to gain access to a school place
- asylum seekers and refugees who have no school place
- pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN) whose placements are not yet agreed, and pupils awaiting assessment of SEN.

Ofsted (2005; p.1).

The current Children's Commissioner for England provides some additional contextual information. She writes that "Jack is 168 times more likely than Jill to be permanently excluded from school" (Atkinson, 2013; p.4). She uses this statement to highlight that "Jack" a Black Caribbean boy with moderate special educational needs and eligible for school meals has a much greater probability of being permanently excluded from school compared to Jill, who is white with no special educational needs and from a more affluent family. Jack is then more likely to remain in relative poverty, be unemployed and be in trouble with the police (Atkinson, 2013).

The KS3 Pupil Referral Unit was based in what is referred to as 'one of the largest council estates in Europe'. It was originally designed in the 1920's as a garden-city to rehouse families that over-spilled from the crowded slums of the neighbouring industrial city. Many houses are now privately owned or under the control of Housing Associations. Its town centre was originally built in the 1960's and renovated at the turn of the last millennium. It has many green spaces (parkland and woodland) and is home to the city's only community farm. Whilst this information is provided to develop some context for the storytelling programme and its participants, some of the

young participants travelled in from other parts of the city, however, the demographics were similar.

The young people typically came from single-parent families with low incomes and poor mental health, a number of young people were cared for by grandparents due to the parents inability to cope or because the parent had engaged in a 'new' family unit. Drugs and gang culture were typical topics of conversation as selected by the young people, both as conversations amongst themselves and conversations engaged in with members of staff. Pupils were sent home for breaking rules such as smoking, and little could be done if a young person opted to completely disengage and leave the Unit. It was thought that by engaging the young people in PRU's that were further from their own home, they would find it harder to 'opt-out' of the system and go home. This highlights the degree to which coercion was routinely used within the system to secure the young person's engagement, however, this was in the context of a generally warm and supportive environment created by skilled and caring staff.

### **The participants**

As well as collecting my own reflections on the Storytelling Programme, I also collected reflections from six participants. The participants were 5 young people and their teacher. The five young people were from the group of 12 pupils at the KS3 PRU. They were all given the opportunity to experience a therapeutic storytelling programme over one school term. Instructions were initially given verbally, and repeated over the first few weeks to facilitate non-coercive engagement. At the end of the storytelling programme, prior to the interview the pupils were given an invitation, that was both verbal and written, requesting their formal participation in an interview to evaluate the Storytelling Programme, sufficient 'cooling off time' was

built into this process (See Appendix 1 for Storytelling Programme Procedure in Instructions to Participants). I also made a request to interview the key staff member who had been involved in the Storytelling Programme and this was agreed from the outset.

The nature of the setting dictated that the Pupil Referral Unit saw it as their responsibility to identify suitable participants for the Storytelling Programme. However, the nature of the programme allowed the inclusion criteria to be quite broad. It was expected that the nature of the setting would dictate that the programme would be offered to those who demonstrated optimal inclusion criteria, and briefing sessions were held with PRU staff during the selection process to provide some input about suitable participants. Medication was not a reason for exclusion. The final outcome was that all registered pupils attended the Storytelling Programme.

## Ethical considerations and access

The participants were 5 young people and 1 adult teacher. All were informed of the research verbally, and were provided with a written information sheet in accordance with the guidance offered by the relevant major professional bodies in conducting research with adults and young people e.g. University of Manchester Ethics Committee (2009) and The British Psychological Society (2011).

Pertinent to this research was an awareness of the literature regarding research with “hard to reach” young people (Curtis et al, 2004; Edwards, Kirchin and Huxtable, 2004; Roberts and Indermaur, 2003). I will discuss this literature in the following section in relation to the issue of agency, consent, selection/participation, ground rules and storage of research data.

## **Conducting research with “hard to reach” young people**

The issue of informed consent in qualitative research is complex due to the unstructured nature of the research process. This issue is even more complicated for participants who are young people and part of a school system. Further still, socially excluded people can be “hard to reach” both emotionally and practically, they are a group with very little agency in their lives and having been excluded from many aspects of society they continue indirectly to exclude themselves. Curtis et al (2004) noted that pupils who are excluded from school are less likely to be given a voice in research. Therefore, it seems to be a moral and ethical responsibility that in choosing to carry out research with this group that care needs to be taken to facilitate the agency of such participants, acknowledging that amongst the obstacles is that the research participants may have limited access to conceptual tools to enable them to formulate theories about their experience (Stiles, 1993).

Whilst my aim was to facilitate as much agency as possible within the Storytelling Programme, the pupil’s agency was restricted by a general tendency in their lives to have adults dictate the agenda to them, especially in a school setting. In addition, the pupils’ had restricted expectations of classroom-based activities, and frequently they sought direction. It would appear that these young people, who potentially had not had access to different forms of self-expression, needed to experience a greater array of stimuli and modelling from which they could draw.

Further, to enhance the process of empowerment of the research (Stiles, 1993) I resisted the temptation to interpret the work of the young participants and instead promoted a more collaborative meaning-making process in accordance with my person-centred practice and the epistemological underpinnings of this study.

A further issue of concern was the ability to gain informed consent. Qualitative research is frequently a dynamic exploratory process where change is inevitable (Elliott and Williams, 2007) such research “unfolds as fieldwork unfolds” (Patton, 1997, p.61) and flexibility and adaptability is important in order that the process remains fluid and inclusive. Therefore, in consenting to participate there are inevitable limitations as to how informed we can be about a therapeutic process which we have yet to experience (West and Byrne, 2009). Process consent is an attempt to acknowledge and reduce these difficulties.

In this research consent was achieved from the outset, where as much information as possible was shared with the participants, in an accessible way, both verbal and written. The consent process continued throughout and then again at the end of the research. That is that the participants fully understood that they were entitled to withdraw at any point and were kept aware of that throughout the research process (West and Byrne, 2009). The pupils’ understanding was that they were free to opt-in or out of the Storytelling Programme at any point. They understood that the programme formed part of my University studies and this was discussed in detail prior to and during the reflective interviews with the 5 young people. They also knew that they could request to withdraw their comments and drawings at any point during the subsequent ‘write-up year’.

That said, it is debatable as to how free participants who are part of the school system can be to opt-in or out of sessions provided within an educational establishment setting. Typically participants may be asked to engage in the group in a way that limits their ability to decline the opportunity, especially if it is seen as part of the curriculum of the Unit or as an obligation as part of their behavioural management



regime, and therefore part of their duty to attend if they wish to re-join mainstream. In this research care was taken to help the Pupil Referral Unit staff understand the need for participation to be free from constraints, coercion or rewards.

In previous storytelling workshops that I had conducted the presence of Unit staff had an impact upon the participants, which both facilitated and hindered pupil agency. As Curtis et al suggest (2004) prior positive relationships with the Unit staff may help the participants engage with the task in hand, however, the Unit staff primarily had a teaching and disciplinary role which in some instances conflicted with the therapeutic role of the storytelling programme. In the Unit in which the research was carried out staff were generally able to appreciate the different tone set in the storytelling sessions and in general staff worked to optimise the pupils' agency within the Storytelling Programme and research process.

Ground rules were already established within the PRU structure and these were kept in mind throughout. As Storyteller/ researcher I had the responsibility to maintain a safe and respectful space where the participants could engage at a safe and appropriate level, with particular awareness of the emotional depth within the group context. Although the therapeutic process can bring about deep change, it does not require much personal self-disclosure, much of the work is discussed through the characters and issues are discussed as universal concerns (Clarkson and Phillips, 2006).

The participants were given weekly access to individual (one-to-one) debriefing sessions to ensure that any difficult deeper issues that they might want to bring could be dealt with and contained in a safe therapeutic space. This would be a typical

format for running groups, for example, Hedges-Goettl and Tannenbaum (2001) note group sessions can facilitate the learning of interpersonal skills and individual therapy can provide a focus for intrapersonal needs (Hedges-Goettl and Tannenbaum, 2001). Participants would have been referred to other agencies for additional support should this have been deemed necessary.

Participation in the reflective interviews was negotiated directly between me and the young people. There were some minor requests by staff that they comply but I was clear to enable full agency within the open-ended interview session with permission to leave at whatever point they chose to. Given the complexities discussed above I chose not to record any interviews. Nor did I want to make verbatim notes. Instead I worked to foster an atmosphere of transparency and collaboration framing the interview as an attempt to understand how helpful, or not, storytelling was to these particular pupils. I explained that the interview data would help me understand if, and how, stories might be usefully used with young people in the future.

Research and therapeutic material was stored according to the appropriate professional guidelines with regard to security and confidentiality, and anonymised from the outset. In addition the research material was about the participants' evaluation of the Therapeutic Storytelling process and not about any therapeutic content.

## Supervision and self-care

Etherington (2004) recommends supervision and personal therapy as key elements of the qualitative research process since self-understanding and self-growth will occur as part of the heuristic discovery. With this in mind, and in fulfilment of course

requirements, I attended weekly personal therapy and clinical supervision sessions throughout the research process. I also received regular support and supervision from two Academic Supervisors within the University of Manchester, School of Education, which included attending group supervision for Doctoral students in related disciplines. The group proved to be a great support and facilitated my own awareness of that which remained tacit with regard to myself as a researcher, storyteller and therapist on the same project and in the same setting. In addition the reflective and creative nature of the work and journal writing was somewhat cathartic, and, somewhat in keeping with the heuristic process, I found myself enhancing my reflective skills through a parallel process in my personal life. This led me to explore and develop further my skills in meditation and mindfulness at a point which was analogous to my research requirements.

Sue Jennings (2004) raises the issue that as therapist we come into contact with material that “provoke memories and feelings, and even dreams” (p.23). She recommends the keeping of a notebook to record and process our own personal journey. “The more you can understand the impact a story has made on you, the more you will understand about yourself and storytelling” (Jennings, 2004; p.33). The heuristic research process has engaged me in a deep journey that has involved aspects of philosophical discovery in both my professional and personal life. Making time for this discovery and bringing it into awareness through creative, reflective and compassionate processes has been essential.

# The Storytelling Programme Procedure

A whole school approach is recommended in current literature as best practice to promote inclusion and wellbeing (Atkinson, 2013)) and this was adopted for the KS3 Storytelling Programme. All twelve pupils attended in total and most members of staff were incorporated into the programme in some form. The participants were split into 2 groups by the staff team and I met with both groups each week over the 12 week term. The Storytelling day looked like this:

Breakfast approximately 20 minutes

First session with first half of group approximately 40 minutes

First session with second half of group 40 minutes

Break approximately 20 minutes

Second session with first half of group approximately 40 minutes

Second session with second half of group approximately 40 minutes

Lunchtime approximately 30 minutes

My presence in the PRU was for four hours each day that I attended. The day began with a breakfast break, included a break-time after both groups had participated in one 40 minute storytelling session, and then a lunch break after both groups had participated in a second 40 minute storytelling session. I was present for all breaks, as was customary in the PRU where the general ethos encouraged staff and pupils to have breaks together. There was no staff room or outdoor space for the pupils to spend their break-time and so all breaks consisted of communal gatherings of both staff and pupils with a degree of informality within a structure where the teachers still clearly set the rules and maintained the boundaries.

At the beginning of each storytelling session I told a story, selected on the basis of what I 'felt' was most appropriate to help the group on the basis of what I knew about them as a group, and as individuals (Perrow, 2008). The stories were chosen to provide opportunities for the symbolic processing and contained release of heightened emotions (Sunderland, 2000; Carlson and Arthur, 1999; Russell and Shrodes, 1950) which the young people may have been experiencing as a sequelae to trauma (Gerhardt, 2004; Siegel, 1999; Van der Kolk, et al 1996), and in particular focused upon aspects of "emotional Intelligence" as identified by Bar-On (1997) (e.g. problem solving, impulse control, interpersonal relationships, empathy).

A key source of stories was *Telling Tales: Storytelling as Emotional Literacy* (Killick and Thomas, 2007). Stories were used to facilitate aspects of social and emotional learning by for example, having the opportunity to empathise with key characters that might be similar to them or experimenting with a problem solving approach to 'solve' the dilemmas of the protagonist (Heath et al, 2005; Sunderland, 2000).

I wanted the story processing to remain individual to each listener (Bheamadu, 2003). In my work as a Community Storyteller I had seen responses to stories come 'as if from nowhere' suggesting that processing was unique and implicit, therefore I did not want to directly engage the young people in explicitly processing the stories in the group (Carlson and Arthur, 1999; Roberts, 1997). I was guided by a belief underpinned by person-centred theory that the listener would take from the story what they needed for growth (Carlson and Arthur, 1999). The therapeutic needs of the young people always took precedence over the research process (Sunderland, 2000).

The primary outlet for creative processing of the stories was shoe boxes which the young people were invited to transform into something that was personally meaningful (Jennings, 2004; Roberts, 1997). I might have also proposed the use of masks (Jennings, 2004) but this was something that the PRU had recently worked with through input with artists or drama teachers. Other creative suggestions and worksheets were also offered (Jennings, 2004; Roberts, 1997), as well as blank sheets of paper of various sizes (A1-A4). The young people were also invited to tell their own fictional and autogenic stories (Thomas and Killick, 2007; Jennings, 2004) and if they chose to discuss any particular story this was facilitated (Sunderland, 2000).

See Appendix 4 for the list of stories told.

# Data Collection

In this section I will clarify my data sources and explain my data collection process in practice and provide the theoretical rationale for my decision. I will begin with a story to convey something of the essence of my experience of being immersed within the Storytelling Programme at the KS3 PRU.

## *The Watermelon*

*A traveller was crossing a broad and barren plain. He'd been travelling since morning and now he was hot, tired and hungry. He watched the sun setting towards the mountains in the west and began wondering where he might find a place to rest and somewhere to sleep that evening.*

*He reached the edge of the plain and gazed down over a deep valley. Far in the distance he could just make out a distant village, smoke from the chimneys curling lazily into the evening sky.*

*He urged his horse down the switchback track to the valley floor. He was already anticipating an ice cold drink to quench his thirst, the taste of local delicacies, and good companionship...*

*...when he arrived in the village he was greeted by chaos, villagers running this way and that, panicking about a monster in a field.*

*The traveller arrived at the centre of all the commotion and found a watermelon, true it was a HUGE watermelon, but still just a watermelon in the middle of the field.*

*"It's a watermelon" he told those nearest to him, but this just frightened them more, and they grew angry with him. "It's a monster!" shouted the villagers "It's a watermelon" replied the traveller with a grin.*

*"It's a monster!" shouted the villagers "and it's going to attack"*

*"It's a watermelon!" shouted the traveller in frustration, "Just a water..." but before he could finish the sentence the villagers shouted so loudly that his horse took fright and ran him out of the village.*

*A short while later, as darkness was just falling, an old Crone entered the village, she too was met with chaos, villagers running in the streets, some beckoning to her to "take care", "keep out of the way it's going to attack".*

*The Old Crone made her way in the direction that the villagers were swarming, they reached the field at the end of the village and there in the darkness the Old Crone could make out a huge bulbous mass of darkness, upon which the moon glinted on its shiny surface.*

*The villagers turned to the Old Crone, "Can you help us with the monster", "it's a huge fierce monster and it's going to attack"*

*"I can see that it's fierce and huge" said the Old Crone "get me the biggest knife that you could find and then I can help you"*

*A knife was found and the Old Crone took it and chopped at the monster watermelon. Chunks of the fresh juicy fruit flew everywhere along with its black seeds.*

*The villagers rejoiced and lifted up the Old Crone and carried her off to the village hall where a party was soon under way. The villagers asked the Old Crone to stay, and she stayed awhile, listening to the stories of the villagers, learning about what they had to say about their lives, their history, their culture. In time she began to understand a little of these people and in time they learned a little from her as they listened to her stories; they learnt the difference between a monster, a watermelon and a monster watermelon.*

*In the fullness of time the little black seeds grew into a field of ripe and juicy watermelons and the Old Crone taught the villagers how to tend their watermelons.*

*The time came for the Old Crone to leave the village, but other visitors travelled from far and wide to see the renowned fruits of this village. The village and its watermelons continue to prosper to this day.*

Adapted from a story by Nick Owen (2001; p.145).

### **Heuristic data**

In heuristic inquiry data is defined as “that which extends understanding or adds richness to the knowing of the phenomenon in question” (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; p.48). I collected and analysed data according to the heuristic methodology described by Moustakas (1990) to gain a rich, detailed understanding about the experience of all participants in the programme (the pupils, the teachers and myself as researcher and storyteller). Heuristic research explicitly acknowledges the involvement of the researcher (Hiles, 2001) and essentially focuses upon the indwelling (Polanyi, 1958) of the researcher as they focus upon their own ‘lived experience’ and strive for an empathic indwelling in the experiences of the researched (Rogers, 1985).

The data set consisted of interviews from five pupils and one member of staff, along with my own reflective notes as researcher and storyteller immersed in the heuristic



process of researching Storytelling. These strands are described in more detail below:

### **Summary of Data Collection Points:**

1. My reflections as researcher and storyteller immersed in the introspective heuristic process of researching storytelling (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 2001, 1990). These reflections were informed by all of the therapeutic storytelling work that I was engaged in, and in particular was a response to the creative and verbal and non-verbal responses of individual participants provided during each session and by the group as a whole.
2. I interviewed the main teacher 'J'.
3. I facilitated a reflective dialogue (Moustakas, 2001) with 5 of the 12 participants who attended a Storytelling Programme at the KS3 PRU in which they were asked to describe their own 'lived experience' of the storytelling programme (Creswell, 1998, Moustakas, 2001).

Illustrations, art and metaphor are amongst the diverse array of techniques deemed suitable as a means for heuristic exploration (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). The following techniques were systematically incorporated into the reflective dialogue sessions to encourage thoughts, feelings and images to spontaneously unfold (Moustakas, 2001):

- I used the squiggle test (Winnicott, 1986) to create spontaneous illustrations during the 'interview' session which I deemed to have some bearing on the storytelling sessions under discussion
- I asked them to point to an emoticon to illustrate their feelings of the storytelling programme

- I asked them to rate the impact of the Storytelling Programme using the Child Outcome Rating Scale (Duncan, Miller and Sparks, 2003)
- I took photographs and photocopies of their creative processing

Descriptions of the above are included as part of the individual depictions. Consent was obtained (see Appendix 2) for copies of some of the data to be included in appendix 4.

### **Reflective journal**

Throughout the summer term the experience of immersion in the world of storytelling was naturally intensified as I ran two storytelling programmes with up to twenty-four children, alongside facilitating a storytelling programme for staff personal development groups, and using stories for one-to-one therapy. In addition I continued some work as a community storyteller and I presented my research in a number of settings, such as University conferences, and storytelling groups. For about 6 months I was fully immersed in stories, storytelling and the literature around storytelling.

Much tacit knowledge lay in these storytelling experiences. Recent neuropsychology studies suggest that our experiential self has primacy and that much occurs within ourselves and in our interactions with others before we can consciously know of it. As Rogers' notes "experiential knowledge...cannot be communicated directly" (Rogers, 1985; p.8.) Understanding of the 'lived experience' requires a reflective practice to bring what may lie outside of consciousness into awareness (Dilthey, 1894; cited by Ponterotto, 2005). Coppin and Nelson (2005) describe how nothing should be dismissed as random, meaningless or inconsequential "(i)t is essential to inquire of any event, person, dream, emotion, image, mood, thought, insight, or

fascination, 'What might this have to do with my work?' The answer may be 'nothing.' But the question needs to be asked nonetheless" (Coppin and Nelson, 2005; p.101).

Within psychology and psychoanalysis we have a long history of mindfully applying a reflective or introspective gaze. Over a hundred years ago, in 1890, William James wrote:

"The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will . . . . An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about.'

James (1890). Cited by Bush (2011; p.185).

James' description bears a resemblance to 'reflective practice' as defined by Moon (1999) as "the kind of thinking that consists in turning a subject over in the mind and giving it serious thought" (Moon, 1999; p.12.) Introspection, or reflective practice, has been developed further with the work of Schon (1983) who highlighted it as a method to encourage reflective awareness about our own practice to promote subsequent learning. He delineated two forms: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Jasper (2005) noted that it allowed us to explore practice, develop analytical and critical thinking skills and the ability to connect disparate ideas. Schon (1983) describes the process of making links between the literature and the real world as professional artistry.

Mindfulness is described by Christopher and Maris (2010) as "a type of awareness that entails being fully conscious of present-moment experience and attending to

thoughts, emotions, and sensations as they arise without judgment and with equanimity” (Christopher and Maris, 2010 p.115). It is an attempt to decrease the impact of prior-experiences upon our perception so that we attempt to engage and experience the event or interaction in the ‘now’ through the sensory information presented to us in the present moment of the experience (Siegel, 2007). In “The Mindful Brain” Siegel (2007) identifies the essential dimensions of mindful learning as openness to novelty, alertness to distinction, context sensitivity, multiple perspectives, and present orientation.

There has been a growing acceptance of contemplative epistemology, or meditative knowing in the practice of research (Bush, 2011). Jasper (2005) asserts that reflective practice should be recognised as a legitimate and deliberate strategy to enhance the research process. Introspective, meditative and reflective search are all methods recommended by Moustakas (2001).

In accordance with heuristic practice my own reflective process was documented in my reflective journal and forms part of the data set. To be true to the heuristic process my reflective journal has to have primacy in that it represents my internal frame of reference (Sela-Smith, 2002; Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). However, I believe that it is important to express the participants’ responses without interpretation, as far as possible. In addition, I acknowledge that the views of others can be a source of corroboration of my felt-sense and alert me to tacit knowledge or ‘possible areas of resistance’ (Sela-Smith, 2002; p. 78).

## **Interviews**

At the end of the programme, five of the young people and one member of staff were available to meet with me for a more detailed reflective interview to gain a greater understanding of their particular feelings, thoughts and responses about the Storytelling Programme; this essentially fulfilled the practice of routine evaluation. Of the 12 KS3 pupils who engaged in the Storytelling Programme, three had moved on to other geographical locations or other programmes, two were not keen to be interviewed and given the vulnerability of their status with a potential 'Statement of Special Educational Needs' I was mindful to make a simple request for the interview but not to be coercive (Haverkamp, 2005). Two pupils were absent on the day of the scheduled interview, therefore five were available and willing to be interviewed.

The interview with the teacher consisted of a brief unstructured interview which was initiated by me with "could you tell me something about your perception of the Storytelling Programme, and comment upon what was helpful to the pupils and what were the limitations of the programme?" The teacher's comments and other responses made throughout the programme were captured in an individual depiction (see Findings).

Interviews with the pupils were designed to enable the young person's own self-report of the experience (Hamama, 2009), facilitated by a variety of interactive activities as listed above. The multi-media methods of participation offered to the participants assisted the young people to communicate through media which were more familiar to them and afforded them the opportunity for both verbal and symbolic expression (Barker and Weller, 2003; Christensen and James, 2000).

As outlined earlier, I believed that much of the therapeutic change would occur implicitly, (Stern, 1998) and therefore I needed to find ways to access this tacit information in non-intrusive ways with minimal directivity. I referred to play therapy techniques for this purpose. For the purpose of the reflective interview I utilised Winnicott's famous 'squiggle game'. This is a drawing game, with limited structure, which aims to provide an opportunity for free expression on the part of the young person. In addition it is a turn-taking game which helps build rapport and break down some of the inherent barriers between researcher and participant. The technique was based upon the young person and me taking it in turns to complete a picture from a mark that I initiated, and then I engaged them in dialogue about what they had drawn. The technique is based upon Winnicott's (1986) theory that play and creativity gives opportunities for the internal world of the young person to be made manifest. This technique was introduced as a result of the young people typically displaying difficulty in articulating their tacit feelings and thoughts and was used within the constructivist framework of this study to facilitate a meaning-making process about the young person's internal emotional experience of the storytelling programme (Hamama, 2009). Emoticons (symbols which convey emotions) and the Outcome Rating Scale were all used on the basis of the same rationale, that they could provide potential symbolic representations of the participants' inner world.

Client opinion can be useful in understanding elements of the helping process (Macdonald 2001). There is a growing body of data which not only supports the young person's ability to offer reliable data through self-reports but also demonstrates greater validity than other sources such as teachers or parents (Hamama, 2009). Alderson and Morrow (2004) also argue for the competence of child participants to be recognised and harnessed. Whilst I chose not to audio record

the interviews, I made a note of statements that the young people made and read these statements back to each participant to ensure that I had captured the essence of their meaning. I also shared other thoughts and observations that I had noted in my reflective journal to 'member check' my perspective. This mixed method of data collection was in accordance with the empowering epistemology of this study (Stiles, 1993).

The participants increasingly exercised their 'voice' (Humphreys, 2006) and their agency throughout the Storytelling Programme, and as they did so they revealed more of their internal world. My responsiveness to their manifested behaviour became an implicitly dynamic process of mutual interactions that co-created the Storytelling Programme. I wanted to elicit the spontaneous contributions of the participants (Despert and Potter, 1936, Axline, 1964) which would be more indicative of their implicit and idiosyncratic processing. I aimed to document this interactive experience in its most basic form and resisted the temptation to interpret either within the sessions or when analysing the data. Sunderland (2000) warns of the implicit assumptions that we may make when observing a young person's creative expression, and she suggests that this can be reduced if we ask clarifying questions of the young person. Hughes (2006) uses the term 'Curiosity' which he describes as wondering with a child about their expression. Stiles (1993) cites Perlz' (1969) choice of 'What?' questions rather than 'Why?' questions, suggesting that 'what?' questions "elicit material of which clients have direct knowledge and often call forth stories, which may be more subtle than 'half-baked theories' (Stiles, 1993).

Despite being aware that a client's history is important or "a crucial source of information for child psychotherapists" (Likierman, 2008) I purposely decided not to

look at the participants' background so that I was not presupposing certain tendencies and 'looking for' certain issues to be made manifest in the participants creations. I think this position has both advantages and disadvantages in that I was less likely to make my own projections into the data about what I thought I could see, but on the other hand I may have missed seeing something that the participants were expressing which may have stood out had I known of some existing themes for them. On balance I am satisfied with my choice not to be alerted to information which might have resulted in distortions. The therapeutic needs of the young people always had primacy.



# Data Analysis

*Close your eyes and relax. Imagine you are going on a treasure hunt inside your head. Your head is full of lots of little pathways, tunnels and tracks, and they lead to all kinds of different rooms. There are spacious attic rooms with rows of skylight windows which allow the sunshine to flood in, which is great because around the walls of this room are bookshelves stacked with books of all imaginable things. Here you can quickly find the answer to all kinds of questions that you might ask yourself.*

*You take the spiral staircase down to a collection of rooms which are useful for when you feel hungry, or need to rest or sleep. You spend a short time here exploring, until you find another spiral staircase which you walk down to find a huge storeroom filled with boxes and cupboards crammed with all sorts of almost unimaginable oddities, a potpourri of knick-knacks.*

*You delve into the boxes and in one of them you find a pair of glasses. You put the glasses on, these are magic glasses, they provide light and magnification wherever you look, and now that you have put them on you begin to see things differently, more clearly, you find things that belong to you that you had forgotten about, you see things that you have never seen before. After you have searched through lots of the boxes and cupboards, you decide to rest in a comfy chair.*

*As you sit there, resting, you sink into the deep feather-filled pillows; you feel very relaxed and peaceful and drift off to sleep. While you sleep you dream dreams full of fascinating images and journeys where you make more amazing discoveries.*

*After a while of resting and dreaming, you wake up and find yourself back in the room that you are now sitting in, you wiggle your fingers and toes, stretch this way and that, and smile.*

Adapted from exercises by Marneta Viegas (2004) and Siegel and Bryson (2011).

The heuristic stages of data analysis have been laid out in detail earlier in the thesis, particularly in the methodology section above. Here I will re-visit the data analysis stages according to Moustakas' guidelines (1990), before developing a reflective narrative about the analysis in practice. Further expansion of the analysis stages will be described and presented, linked to the findings, in the Discussion section below, as is fitting within the constructivist paradigm (Ponterotto and Gieger, 2007).

These data were collected, organised and synthesised using the heuristic reflective stages of immersion, incubation, illumination and explication. Full explication can

only occur if the experience is one's own. Therefore data from staff and pupils was additional data to inform my own reflections and develop the scope of my knowledge (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985). To engage fully in the heuristic self-search I had to search for my own embodied and symbolic, tacit, pre-verbal knowledge (Sela-Smith, 2002); indwelling and self-searching formed the basis of this stage (Moustakas, 1990).

Participants' data were organised for each participant allowing core themes to be elucidated and a depiction of each participant and their experience to be compiled. This depiction included stories, photographs of creations and drawings along with some records of conversations that were recorded post-session in my reflective journal along with data that emerged from the reflective interviews. These depictions are illustrated in the Findings section, with accompanying records located in the Appendix 4.

Participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the depictions that were already developing (Stiles, 1993) as a result of three months of the Storytelling Programme, and this formed part of the reflective dialogue session. This process, of generating individual depictions, was repeated with each participant, and once completed the process of immersion through to explication was repeated on these data as a whole to develop a composite depiction for the group (Moustakas, 1990; Douglass and Moustakas, 1985).

Next, the data was interwoven (Huber and Whalen, 1999) resulting in a creative synthesis which aimed to be "...a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world

or phenomena under analysis” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, pp.2-3). I chose to present a story to represent the composite depiction, rather than reduce the individual depictions into a composite whole which felt too reductionist and would have lost the uniqueness of the young participants’ contributions. This decision and process is described in more detail in the Composite Depiction section.

### **Reflections on the analysis process**

The stages of data collection and data analysis were repeated, occurring through an iterative process, and included engagement with the relevant literature. Stiles (1993) identified this process of iteration as good research practice. The process required me to experience repeated states of immersion in the Storytelling Programme at the point of delivery; these periods were in essence periods of data collection and were recorded in my reflective journal. I would then naturally have periods away from direct data collection which provided periods of incubation which at times resulted in illuminations about the data collected thus far. These states of immersion in the data, incubation and illumination were naturally repeated, on a weekly basis, throughout the twelve week programme. The data analysis also occurred naturally within this framework, similar to the way ‘data’ in therapy is analysed through the application of clinical technique. This enabled provisional depictions to emerge spontaneously. With each successive re-entry into the Storytelling Programme these depictions were confirmed, revised, expanded and developed in accordance with data arising out of the new experience of immersion into both the Storytelling Programme and the data, as would occur in therapy (Hiles, 2001). I aimed to hold the depictions tentatively throughout the iterative process to permit new illuminations to break through.

Once the Storytelling Programme was complete, the state of immersion, incubation and explication took on a new form, with the iterative re-visiting of the data that had occurred on a weekly basis, now occurring over a longer timeframe. Whilst significant life events and family demands resulted in prolonged periods of forced withdrawal from the data analysis process, this was somewhat timely with a sense that the data had provided all the information that I needed and that I was now spontaneously entering into the final stages of incubation (Sela-Smith, 2002). The periods of incubation were natural and necessary periods where I felt less intense, but no less passionate, about the storytelling process, and enabled me to return to the data with a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 2001). Feeling less intense about certain aspects of the storytelling process allowed me to move in and out of my research more freely, moving between states of immersion and retreat (Humphrey, 2006) keeping my focus broad and remaining open to the new insights that could be gained from this bigger and much more complex picture that was emerging.

The state of incubation facilitated spontaneous periods of illumination and explication where tacit knowledge broke through into awareness and developed a more holistic notion of the experience incorporating hitherto unseen dimensions (Moustakas, 1990). Acknowledging dream content is encouraged in Heuristic research. Whilst I was not aware of dreams that pertained to the study, at this time I would make habitual use of periods of pre-dawn, reflective and meditative space when ideas would become more crystallised or links made between previously detached entities (Moustakas, 2001). These new links resulted in new literature searches that essentially were based upon a snowballing technique where illuminations guided the literature search (Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 2001)).

## Trustworthiness

### *The Pot of Dirt*

*So it was time for the Mayor to retire, but how to find a successor? That was the problem. So the mayor went to visit the old hen wife, the wise woman who lived on the edge of town and she told him just what to do.*

*The following day he sent messengers throughout the town asking all those wanting the job of mayor to come to assemble outside his grand house.*

*The mayor walked throughout the crowd and gave two sunflower seeds to each person who had assembled, including 'our Jack'. Now Jack was a young lad who quite liked the idea of being mayor and he listened hard to what the mayor had to say. The mayor told them all to go home, plant the seeds in a pot and return in one month with their plants. The new mayor would be the person that had tended these seeds and produced the biggest and best sunflower.*

*Jack ran home and planted his seeds in an old plant pot of his father's. He tended his pot well, giving it water and sunshine, but nothing grew. Each day he eagerly awaited a green shoot to appear, but nothing!*

*When the month was up Jack had no plant to show for his efforts, just his pot of dirt. Well he nearly wasn't going to go back to the mayor but his mum told him to give it a try as he'd done his best, "Go and see".*

*Feeling forlorn Jack went off to meet the mayor. When he arrived there were lots of people gathered with pots of huge yellow sunflowers. The mayor came and walked amongst the crowd admiring the sunflowers, but when he came to Jack he stopped. The mayor looked Jack in the eye and declared him the new mayor. "But what of all those people with beautiful flowers? I only have a pot of dirt". "Ah" said the mayor, "everyone had the same seeds, sunflower seeds that had been boiled so that they could not grow."*

*Jack had told the truth of what had happened...warts and all.*

Adapted from (Thomas and Killick, 2007; p.48).

I will now discuss the concept of 'Trustworthiness' (Morrow, 2007; Shenton, 2004).

Trustworthiness is to some extent paradigm-bound (Morrow, 2007) with terms such as validity and reliability being more suitable for research conducted within a quantitative paradigm rather than qualitative. Accordingly, alternative criteria to assess the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research have been developed from within the qualitative paradigm (Tracy, 2010; Morrow, 2005; Malterud, 2001;

Stiles, 1999, 1993; Elliott et al, 1999). Tracy's (2010) Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research is a comprehensive list incorporating much that has gone before, therefore I will draw upon Tracy's criteria of a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence to provide a framework to conceptualise trustworthiness below. In addition I will make links to Morrow's (2005) criteria for the evaluation of constructivist research. *Ethical considerations* and *contributions to knowledge* are also noted by Tracy (2010) in her list but these are addressed elsewhere in this thesis.

Tracy's (2010) criterion of a *Worthy topic*, is similar to Morrow's (2005) criterion of Social Validity and can range from research questions arising from 'disciplinary priorities' to research questions which have personal significance, but essentially have a 'that's interesting' response rather than confirming existing assumptions. It could be argued that this study arises out of disciplinary priorities with regard to the field of storytelling and the field of counselling psychology, both of which are endeavouring to search for greater understanding about what works and how. For example, Harris and Pattinson (2004) note that clinicians have a responsibility to undertake research that furthers our understanding of effective therapeutic approaches for addressing young people's difficult behaviour.

Tracy (2010) identifies *Rigor* as measured by the use of sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical constructs and data collection and analyses processes. It also requires a sufficient and appropriate sample that is contextualised. Further, the researcher needs to have spent sufficient time in the field and collected

adequate contextualised data. I evidence my efforts to meet this criterion in previous sections of the thesis.

Douglass and Moustakas (1985) note that heuristic research is inherently valid to the extent that it arises out of authentic self-processes, and to the degree that the iterative process of data analysis reveals the same essences with the same degree of plausibility. The purpose is not to create generalizations but to access the embedded world view that resides in the tacit domain (Sela-Smith, 2002), as Sela-Smith (2002) notes “the question of true or false is not applicable here” (Sela-Smith, 2002; p.60).

### *Credibility*

Both Morrow (2007) and Tracy (2010) highlight that qualitative research gains a level of honesty through effective self-reflexive disclosure. Tracy (2010) noted that good qualitative research consists of a credible and sincere account that incorporates self-reflexivity and transparency with regard to methods and challenges and includes thick descriptive detail (Ponterotto, 2006; Geertz, 1973). Trustworthiness comes from a disciplined approach to understanding and communicating the participant’s experience with the aim of presenting ‘voices’ and realities that are plausible and ring true (Tracy, 2010). In this research it would have been ideal to have recorded the participants’ reflective interviews to provide a more disciplined approach to communicating the participants’ responses. However, for ethical reasons I chose not to do this with the young people due to my perception of their vulnerability. Instead I chose to make notes within the reflective interview as a means of capturing their responses. Key statements were noted and these were reflected back to the participants to ensure that I had captured the essence of what they were saying. In addition, other aspects of my observations, as noted in my Reflective Journal were

shared with the participants to ensure that my observations of the participants' experience were transparent and matched the perception of the individual participants.

Credibility can be achieved through triangulation, crystallization and thick description (Tracy, 2010). Thick description is the layering and interweaving of different aspects of the experience to enable the researcher, and reader, to gain a greater sense of the phenomenon and the research process, it is more than surface facts, it is "detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience. In thick description, "the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (Denzin, 1989; p.83). Crystallization has the intention of opening up and developing meaning through the collection of multiple voices and data through a variety of methods (Tracy, 2010). Qualitative research strives for such 'richness' or 'abundance' of detail in preference to the precision of quantitative methods (Tracy, 2010). In this thesis I have strived for thick description and a crystallization of data, that is, that data provides a myriad of contextualised perspectives rather than aiming for convergence as with triangulation. This is more in-keeping with the constructivist paradigm.

In reference to reflexivity and multi-voices Gergen and Gergen (2000) note that different voices are found between people, but also within each person, including the researcher. In addition Gergen and Gergen (2000) note that even in their attempts at multi-vocality and reflexivity, the researcher is typically the author and co-ordinator



of all voices “and thus serves as the ultimate arbiter of inclusion, emphasis, and integration” (Gergen and Gergen, 2000; p.5).

I have to acknowledge that my own voice inevitably dominates this thesis, I need to acknowledge that in placing myself as the central filter, in the heuristic ‘internal search to know,’ I become Gergen and Gergen’s (2005) “ultimate arbiter of inclusion, emphasis and integration” (p.5). However, within this I have attempted to preserve the participants’ responses in their original form, as far as is possible. Yet again though, it is important to acknowledge that each the participants’ responses and my interpretation of all data represents one of many perspectives and one of many voices, or narratives, that could have been presented here. The selection of this narrative over others has been explained at the outset of this thesis, in that I decided that the chosen narrative stayed truer to the research question and to the heuristic process of a heuristic search to know something of the intersubjective storytelling experience through myself.

*Sincerity* (Tracy, 2010) is an essential component, marked by honesty and transparency. As previously mentioned, reflexivity refers to the researcher’s self-awareness of their positioning with regard to the study, and to their agency within that awareness (Rennie, 2004). A major element of this reflexivity is that the researcher holds a position of “curious, not knowing” (Anderson and Gerhart, 2007), however, the heuristic researcher is required to have an intimate involvement, a direct experience, of the phenomena being researched (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic methodology is a search for the essence of phenomena, for the quality and meaning of the experience (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985), with the belief that the researcher’s immersion and indwelling is crucial to accessing an understanding of their own

experience and those of the participants. On the basis of this premise the reflexive process is not a search for self-understanding which can then be 'bracketed' by the researcher as suggested by Lukiv (2006) on the contrary a reflexive description of self can elucidate the researcher's position within the research and inform and enhance their understanding of the research process and how they may inadvertently privilege their own perspective above that of the participants (Finlay, 2008; Wertz, 2005).

*Meaningful coherence* refers to the interconnection of the research design, data collection and data analysis within the research framework and stated aims of the study. That is, that the findings relate to the research question and are adequately interconnected with the appropriate literature (Tracy, 2010). Another element of coherence suggested by Morrow (2005) is that constructivist research ought to demonstrate a coherent integration of theory and practice.

To achieve *resonance* (Tracy, 2010) the rhetoric and presentation of a qualitative report needs to be creatively intertwined with the thesis content. A richly descriptive, evocative, transparent and reflexive account can inform and facilitate the reader's engagement and understanding of the study and enhance their own potential immersion in the process, optimising the potential for the thesis content to resonate with the audience.

Whilst I privilege my own meaning-making process within the Discussion and within my reflective journal, I have attempted to present the findings in the most direct form possible. I have been mindful to minimise interpretation and to provide sufficient contextual information to facilitate the readers own sense of the participants'

experience (Gergen and Gergen, 2000). Qualitative research does not strive for generalizability but for a rich and transparent reflexive account and data trail to allow the reader to assess the coherence of the final account (Stiles, 1993).

I have elected to pursue this study through heuristic methodology as outlined by Moustakas (1990) and therefore it is valid that my own reflective experience has substantial representation in the Findings and that this forms the body of the Discussion section. Whilst I hope to have avoided the potential banality of the subjective stance suggested by Gergen and Gergen (2000), my own perspective resulting from my own immersion in the storytelling process provides a valid and rich lens to view the storytelling process.

# Discussion of Findings

## Individual depictions

I will now present the individual depictions of the five young participants, who agreed to be interviewed, and the main teacher who participated in the Storytelling Programme. I also include an individual depiction of myself as researcher/storyteller. Individual depictions are used as exemplary portraits with the intention of keeping the individuals intact and fully alive (Moustakas, 2001) so as to avoid a reductive process.

In the following Individual Depictions the nicknames were derived through the storytelling relationship. The names were developed by me as a nickname that exemplified the characteristics that each young person displayed in response to the Storytelling Programme. The nicknames were used by me with the young people in one-to-one interactions and known only to each of them and not the group as a whole, therefore in using them here they add a further symbolic and personal dimension capturing something of the essence of the individual depictions as a direct legacy of the Storytelling Programme, yet my use of them here maintains anonymity.

### **Wise-man's (Wm) individual depiction**

One young person was nicknamed the Wise-man for the wisdom that he expressed in his post-story discussions. Wise-man told me that storytelling "teaches you about stuff, teaches you never to feel bad about yourself". He transformed my two 'squiggle game circles' into the cheeks of a boy (representing himself) "touching the moon" with himself standing on it and "holding the world in the other hand" (see Appendix 4). "Sometimes the stories were funny...like the story about 'The Sheep thieves'...he

got all the credit...even when you've done the worst thing in your life you can still turn it around, and if you carry on bad things are going to happen to you".

The 'Sheep thieves' (see Appendix 5 for full story) is about two brothers who are sheep thieves, one night they are caught and branded with the initials ST. One brother continues to do the same; since he is now branded a sheep thief he may as well act like a sheep thief. The other brother decides to move away. He enters a village where the villagers decide that the ST branded upon his forehead means that he is a Saint, and so he is treated accordingly and acts accordingly.

During sessions Wise-man commented that "Stories are good, helpful", "You think about things you don't know and then you go 'oh yeah'." On occasions he remarked "Who wants to take the easy road? You want adventures." Wise-man also commented "It's all about teamwork, sometimes you need help in life, it's not always about being independent", "not everything has to be perfect". All of these comments reflect understanding that came from stories. Wise-man, "loved, loved, loved" the sessions, "seriously I LOVED it" and his comment about how he felt about himself as a result of these sessions was "off the scale...seriously...over there!" Wise-man felt that the stories had morals and he liked this. He identified "The Cracked pot" story (see Appendix 5 for full story) and commented "Just because someone has things better than you then it didn't mean you were worthless and not supposed to be here", poverty in both absolute and relative terms were an issue for Wise-man, he was from a refugee family and had arrived with nothing.

Wise-man also commented that “I could talk to you about stuff that I couldn’t say to any old teacher.” “The stories were about things that were relevant”, “Most of the things that I wanted to talk about were in your stories”.

### **Story Girl’s (SG) individual depiction**

Story Girl attended the PRU because she had moved up North to live with her grandparents. Her mother had continued living in the South with her new partner and new baby. Whilst Story Girl was in the PRU she received a lot of attention for her ‘odd’ behaviour where she seemed to switch off, or dissociate at times, this resulted in a varied intellectual performance. She had been referred to the Educational Psychologist for an assessment of her learning needs, and also had sessions with a trainee art therapist (Reflective Journal).

Story Girl enjoyed taking on the role of class storyteller and often spontaneously made the suggestion that she would retell the story to anyone who had missed the story, or to the class as a whole (Reflective Journal). Story Girl said that “it felt good to tell my own stories” adding “it was a tough group I could tell they wasn’t listening but I didn’t mind” (SG Reflective Interview). The class were surprisingly patient and respectful of her need to tell stories and remained quiet as she slowly ambled through her own version of the story, often getting ‘lost’ or adding new twists as she told it (Reflective Journal).

Her themes centred round loss (Reflective Journal). Story Girl completed the Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS) (Duncan, Miller and Sparks, 2003) and displayed the lowest sense of self-worth of all of her peers, and indicated that her family was a particular cause of distress and dissatisfaction for her. In her stories people were

married off, murdered and died as a result of cold interpersonal interactions of indifference. In one example a daughter was married off for chocolate, the daughter was unhappy with the marriage and the mother responded with “oh well, better luck next time” Relationships were depicted as inconsequential, a means to an end (Reflective Journal).

Story Girl found the sessions relaxing and enjoyed listening to the stories, telling her own stories and creating things. She remarked that the stories were “relaxing when you’ve got anger problems...or just for anyone really”. She commented that stories were good for people who go mad, for people who get really angry and want to start kicking off and everything, “if they have something bad on their mind they might forget about it and chill out”. She “liked all the stories and how (I) told them”, but she didn’t like stories that were too long “like 20 minutes”. She felt that she had learnt to be more kind and respectful by listening to stories, “when you listen to stories you fade away and think about stuff, what’s right or wrong.” She felt that stories could be of some help with problems but “if you’re having problems you don’t want to be listening to stories for that long”. She also added that storytelling was good for people that could not read, “takes the pressure off their performance” and could “Help him/her with their reading”. Story Girl was particularly keen that Storytelling Programmes be offered to more and more young people in both Pupil Referral Units and Vulnerable Units, and across mainstream SG (Reflective Interview). Her “Squiggle” remained a collection of disparate fairly indiscernible squiggles, some hearts, flowers, stars and a face could be identified along with the words “Don’t” and “What” (see Appendix 4). As well as creating stories on large A1 sheets which she recounted to the class, Story Girl’s creations consisted of a shoebox which was simple with a pink heart on the lid with the words “Being me”, and she filled her box by

copying ideas from other people or re-using left over items from other people's creations. Story Girl did not offer a story choice, but one particular story with which she engaged with deeply was the Sheep Thieves (Reflective Journal).

### **Leaf's (Lf) individual depiction**

Leaf's interview responses consisted of brief truncated answers. In response to a request to tell me something about her experience of the Storytelling Programme she answered that it had made her feel "happy", and that the stories had been "useful", that she had "felt better about herself" (Lf Reflective Interview). She transformed my 'squiggle circles' into a person or a flower, she didn't know which, then it was "a happy person". Essentially it was a 'stick-like drawing with a smiley face with no further elaboration to express anything about her thoughts or feelings... a 'smiley stick-person/flower' in the middle of a blank page.

Leaf interestingly never acquired a nickname throughout the project. She transformed her shoe box substantially aided by a teaching assistant. The assistant decorated the box for her, finding suitable pictures and shapes, under the guidance of Leaf. Her box was decorated with a heart and a smiley face and she asked to have a slit cut in the top of the box so that things could be posted into the box, the box remained empty (Reflective Journal).

Leaf's favourite story was "Nick's Tale" (See Appendix 5) (Lf Reflective Interview). This is the story of a young man who didn't have a story to tell because he could not find anything interesting to say about himself.



## **Riddlemaster's (Rm) individual depiction**

Through the use of riddle stories and shorter riddle puzzles Riddlemaster took up a central position in the group and commanded the attention of the teachers who attempted to solve his riddles. Riddlemaster frequently got the better of his teachers having been able to solve the puzzle himself, he engaged with teachers who were unable to find the solution. He expressed immense pleasure and pride at this newly identified skill (Reflective Journal). Riddlemaster was given a partial blank drawing page which asked of him: "To whom would you give a trophy and what would it look like?" Riddlemaster completed the picture by drawing a trophy with the word 'Riddlemaster' forming the trophy which he would give to himself (see Appendix 4). The Riddlemaster commented that "the stories had helped him feel better about himself." His Gran, whom he lived with, was currently seeking more intensive therapeutic/psychiatric help, in the Riddlemaster's words she felt that "he had gone down a bad road". The storytelling sessions had provided him with the opportunity to learn new skills "figuring out riddles", he had found the riddles "confusing" but it was "a good confused" (Reflective Journal). Staff had acknowledged his improved behaviour (Reflective Journal), he himself commented that the sessions had "made (him) more focused". He had noticed that the "stories occupied my mind", but he could not identify an attachment to any particular story but he could remember his favourite riddle (Rm Reflective Interview). When asked to complete "The Squiggle game", where I had drawn two circles, the Riddlemaster made the circles into clouds and linked the clouds with a rainbow. His rainbow was very simple without elaboration (see Appendix 4).

Riddlemaster's favourite riddle was based upon a verbal play upon words and so cannot be represented here as text. Instead I present another that he enjoyed.

### *Riddle Me This*

*A beggar had a brother who lived in Spain but the brother had no brother, please explain.*

From Thomas and Killick (2007; p.120)

Answer at the end of the Creative Synthesis.

#### **Bike Guy's (BG) individual depiction**

For Bike Guy the main focus of the Pupil Referral Unit schedule was his bike maintenance sessions, however, frequently he chose to attend the Storytelling programme (Reflective Journal). He commented that the Storytelling Programme had helped him feel better about himself, "helped with school, helped me like art and making stuff, yeah cos I know I can build stuff". He identified "Diarmuid and Grania" (see Appendix 5) as his favourite tale and illustrated his understanding by discussing how "(the characters) emotions got in the way of their friendship", in discussing this, Bike Guy gave a sense that this aspect of the story really resonated with him. He commented that the story was "good because it makes you think about what could happen in life if you don't trust your friends. When you need them they won't be there for you because you weren't there for them" (BG Reflective Interview). Bike Guy transformed my two 'squiggle circles' into two heads and drew two limbless and featureless people (see Appendix 4), one had a bubble with question marks above his head, and two other bubbles, a speech bubble which said "Y should I help you" accompanied by a thought bubble "He lied to me once". The other character had blood dripping from him and pooling on the floor, he had a speech bubble "Sorry" and a thought bubble "I regret ☹". Bike Guy also referred to another story that he liked, that of "Gelert", he had heard this story before, the teacher had told this story to this class on a previous occasion but the pupils were still keen to hear it again when I came to tell it (Reflective Journal). Bike Guy had heard it before but "had forgotten about it", now he was re-engaged with it and commented that it made him think "that

you should never react before you know what's actually happened" (BG Reflective Interview).

Bike Guy was the quietest participant in the sessions (Reflective Journal). The stories that caught his attention and remained in his mind were those of angry outbursts and turbulent relationships, of regret and loss (Reflective Journal). He commented that stories helped you to understand "what could happen in life, what to look out for and that there's a reason for everything that happens" (BG Reflective Interview). Bike Guy stated that creating something from his shoe box was "interesting cos you can put what you like in it and store memories in it"... "it helps you to look ahead" (BG Reflective Interview). Bike Guy initially took all of the shiny, sparkly stickers and decorated his box with them; the following week he removed them all and decorated his box with a bike (Reflective Journal).

Both "Diarmuid and Grania" and "Gelert" are stories about regret. The protagonists react with strong emotions to what they perceive as injustice, this only brings greater pain and loved ones are lost.

### **The individual depiction of staff**

*"If a learner can't learn in the way a teacher teaches, the teacher needs to learn to teach in the way the learner learns"*

*Patricia Latorre in The Magic of Metaphor, Owen (2001; p. 150).*

Or in the words of Winnie the Pooh:

*"If the person you are talking to doesn't appear to be listening, be patient. It may simply be that he has a small piece of fluff in his ear."*

A. A. Milne (1994).

The main staff member spontaneously invited all of the teachers to view the work of the young people. All staff were impressed with the different facets of personality

that had been revealed through some of the creative pieces. Staff noted that pupil behaviours revealed in the storytelling sessions were in contrast to the disruptive behaviours being expressed elsewhere (Reflective Journal).

The main teacher articulated that she could see that the sessions were “very beneficial”, “extremely useful” and “had a very effective impact”. ‘J’ largely put the effectiveness of the storytelling sessions down to my “calming influence” and my “pragmatic” and “flexible” approach which she felt fitted well with the group dynamics. ‘J’ felt that she had learnt from my child-centred, integrative approach and noted that when sessions needed to be altered that I did not see this as a set-back or disaster but as a learning curve which created resilience in the process (J Reflective Interview).

Comments made by the Deputy Head of the Key Stage 3 provision for the City complements J’s reflections. She described my approach as “calm, nurturing and positively focused” which included supporting staff “in looking for positive strategies to engage pupils and better understand their needs.” The Deputy Head noted that persistence and reliability built up trust between me and the pupils (Reflective Journal).

### **Storyteller/researcher’s individual depiction**

I began this research as a storyteller and therapist, with the aim to understand something of the therapeutic storytelling process. I wanted to understand how the young people made sense of their own experience of a therapeutic storytelling process. It soon became evident that whilst the stories were connecting with the young people, a primary factor in the process was the way in which my ‘way of being’

(Rogers, 1980) as an empathic therapeutic storyteller connected with the young people.

I approached the opportunity to engage with the young people with enthusiasm and a belief in them and the therapeutic potential of storytelling. At times the early sessions felt emotionally chaotic, filled with tensions and unknown trigger points, there was a palpable sense of anxiety rather than anger, and it felt like the young people 'challenged me to prove myself'. I conceptualise these feelings as an intersubjective state. From a psychodynamic perspective these experiences can be identified as countertransference, that is, that I felt the feelings that were being intersubjectively expressed by the young people. Identifying these feelings as belonging to the young people rather than my own anxiety can be supported by three processes. Firstly, these feelings were not experienced by me prior to, or following, any of the sessions and were only experienced within the sessions. Secondly, these tensions and anxieties subsided within each session and over the course of the Storytelling Programme as a result of my active attempts to attune to the young people, and thirdly, my behaviour was labelled as 'calming' by the teacher (J Reflective Interview), and the young people concluded that they had found the Storytelling Programme calming and relaxing (SG Reflective Interview).

My experience was that a lot of anxiety existed within the PRU amongst the young people and the staff, and that by recognising this and offering a calming presence in response to this produced an experience of attunement and containment for the young people and staff. I did not verbally reassure the young people, but acknowledged their anxieties through non-verbal empathic reflections which allowed the young people and the teacher, J, to feel understood (Reflective Journal).

The process of attunement through my 'way of being' (Rogers, 1980) and through the stories selected became an intuitive process for me and during this period I was also drawn to develop my practice of compassion-focused mindfulness which I feel supported me in this very intense process of containing the needs of so many distressed people. Throughout this experience I felt that the purpose of the Storytelling Programme was to soothe' and 'normalize' the young people's affective states, providing them with a safe space within which they could process the stories. On several occasions when there had been flashpoint incidents that had occurred outside of the session, in previous classes or break-time, the pupils were able to be soothed and were able to achieve co-regulation of their emotions with the help of a calm storytelling approach. On one occasion I engaged with a young pupil who had got into a disagreement during the break, I used emoticons (representations of emotions through symbol) to engage him with his feelings and display empathic attunement. The young boy pointed to an angry red face to express how he was feeling, and after I told him some stories that I felt would address his affective state, he spontaneously chose to select another face indicating that he was now feeling happier. Sommers-Flannagan and Sommers-Flannagan (1997) note that an increase in positive affect indicates an effective storytelling approach.

#### Ofsted visit and staff stress

Ofsted visits and job insecurity pervaded the environment at the PRU. Staff stress was clearly an issue which undermined their ability to work to their full potential in a very demanding environment, this resulted, at times, in staff taking the 'low road' (LeDoux, 1996)), that is responding non-consciously and reactively to stressful triggers which tapped into their own sensitivities and insecurities. The 'low road' has a destabilising effect, resulting in an inability to maintain executive functioning such

as problem solving and reflective thinking; instead responses are emotionally reactive (Siegel, 2003).

Systemic stressors resulted in staff behaving in reactive ways, therefore, the behaviour of staff did not always model the reflective behaviour that they were trying to promote in the young people, and on occasions, staff behaviour mirrored that of the young people. The reactive responses of staff had consequences that impacted upon the pupils.

#### Powerlessness and loss

It appeared that a sense of powerlessness permeated the lives of the young people. Both at home and in school, and on the streets in unofficial clubs and street gangs, there were expectations of 'desired behaviour'. This was illustrated by an incident when one of the pupils experienced prolonged teasing for wearing the wrong kind of trainers, or comments from teachers about appropriate behaviour or dress (Reflective Journal). Further, a sense of disempowerment was illustrated in a discussion with one young person who did not know why he was living with his grandparents rather than his own mother; in addition, he was now waiting to attend a psychotherapy clinic for the assessment of his behaviour, which his grandmother felt was problematic (Rm Reflective Interview).

Another contextual issue was loss. It was my sense that staff and pupils became accustomed to the experience of loss both in their own personal life and at the PRUs. Pupils were transferred in and out of the Unit on a regular basis, with limited or no chance to say goodbye, and at the same time staff were uncomfortable about raising the issue of loss with the pupils. It felt like the pupils and teachers had to defend

against the impact of the loss (taken from Reflective Journal). However, denial is a defensive strategy which can lead to increased stress and burnout.

When the KS2 pupils showed concern about the stories of loss and death the teachers understandably attempted to protect the pupils or to reassure me that it was dealt with in the course of the school routine. However, despite initial anxieties, pupils were very focused upon the stories of death and loss. On one occasion, in the KS2 PRU, one pupil said that they did not want to hear stories about death. I acknowledged her anxieties and wondered if she would like to remain at the back of the room and if she felt the need to leave she could at any time. Within a very short space of time, the young eleven year old moved closer toward me until she sat directly in front of me, and not only did she listen with great attention, along with her peers, she proceeded to create a memorial for a dead relative and one for a relative (her older brother) who was still living but who she feared might die in the internal conflict of her African homeland (Reflective Journal).

In addition, a powerful session took place when I responded to the regular losses that we were all experiencing as a group at the KS3 PRU. For a number of consecutive weeks numerous young people had been transferred out of the Unit suddenly, for a variety of reasons, such as being moved to a different service, or being moved out of the area. The absence of these pupils was tangible for me. I had 'held them in mind' and reflected upon stories that would be suitable for them. Two of the pupils had been particularly disruptive within the Unit, yet calmly engaged within the storytelling sessions, which was clearly very reinforcing for me as a practitioner.



It seemed that I was the only person aware of and acknowledging the absence of these pupils. Staff tended to dismiss or minimise the impact of the changes; “that’s just what happens, we have no control over it, it can happen overnight.” In response, I prepared some stories that featured ‘loss;’ but I also requested that I facilitate a whole school session that acknowledged the loss that I felt we were all experiencing. Staff were slightly dismissive of the feasibility of having all the pupils together, they believed that pupils would not be able to focus if they were altogether for an extended period, and the need for such a session was minimised, stating that they already dealt with pupil transitions, however, they permitted me to facilitate it. It is worthy of note that little confidence was placed in the capacity of the young people to remain focused or emotionally contained, this resulted in staff behaviours being preventative or reactive. From a psychological perspective this style of management would convey a lack of confidence in the young people’s ability to manage their own emotions.

All pupils and staff members attended the ‘loss’ session, except for Story Girl who was told that she had to attend an art therapy session. One member of staff had to leave the session early to attend to other duties. On hearing the post-session discussion, at break time, both regretted missing parts of the session and felt that they had missed something interesting, which reflected the ‘buzz’ that had been generated by the impact of the session. The feedback that I was given was that the staff felt that it had been really valuable and that they had not experienced anything like that previously.

I introduced the session by recognising the loss of the pupils that had recently left the Unit; I acknowledged my own feelings about their absence and shared with the group what I proposed to do to acknowledge the loss that I was feeling. I told the group that

I intended to send the pupils some stories that I had selected for them. This was taken up by J who suggested that those who wanted to could put something in the box that they had been making in the storytelling sessions, and that this could be sent on to them.

*"How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard."*  
Winnie-the-Pooh: The complete collection of stories and poems by A. A. Milne (1994).

The session was developed into a wider discussion about losses that both staff and pupils had experienced. Discussions were particularly focused around the pupils that had come and gone in the Unit, and one member of staff was tearful as he recounted the number of young people that he had grown attached to.

One young person, Riddlemaster, spoke of his acute sense of loss when he left the Unit on a previous occasion; his unprocessed loss appeared to have negatively impacted upon his transition to mainstream. In addition, the teachers were able to talk about those who had left and the impact that individual pupils had made on the staff, they also spoke of the hopes and memories that they had of the pupils present (Reflective Journal).

In the subsequent storytelling session, I told stories about loss and death and this appeared to have a profound impact upon the participants, who chose to sit quite close for this storytelling episode. Despite teachers' concerns about telling stories of death and loss, pupils displayed marked signs of being deeply engaged with these stories. Loss appeared to be a clearly articulated repetitive theme for Story Girl who frequently depicted themes of traumatic loss in her stories and illustrations. Aspects of her story processing was evidenced through detailed and descriptive illustrations,

story plots and storytelling which frequently occurred after stories had been told (taken from Reflective Journal) (Sunderland, 2000).

I had identified 'loss' as having a significant, yet tacit, presence in the lives of the young people and the staff within the Unit. In attuning to this a powerful experience was created in which the young people and staff could feel 'understood' and in bringing the issue into everyone's awareness enabled the participants to make sense of their affective experiences. I had attuned to my own 'felt sense' Gendlin (1962) of what lay unacknowledged and unprocessed; I had sensed a need and had begun the initial stages of addressing this need with the group.

#### Summary of storyteller/researcher's findings

It seemed that potentially the lives of many of these young people provided limited experiences of an 'other' being attuned to them and their needs. It may be that the experience within the Storytelling Programme may have been significant on this basis alone. In contrast to typical everyday experiences, my main objective was to strive for attunement with these young people, illustrated by my choice of story and activity, and in my 'way of being' with each of the young people, as individuals and as a group. I promoted a facilitative and collaborative environment to provide the pupils with an opportunity that they did not typically experience (McLoughlin, 2010).

My initial focus had been on the power of stories, and how they could be a useful therapeutic and relational medium. During the research process my emphasis shifted from 'therapy through stories' to viewing the therapeutic relationship as the main focus and stories facilitating both this and intrapersonal therapeutic change. This is a subtle and elusive difference which can essentially be described with the metaphor of

a tree, in that initially I thought that the tree trunk were the stories and storytelling, allowing the relationship to form through the stories. Whereas I began to perceive the tree trunk to be the therapist's 'way of being,' establishing a solid yet flexible trunk which can reach out through its storied branches to connect with another. The interpersonal interaction becomes the conduit for the story process and provides a solid and flexible core foundation for the communication and processing of stories and for the subsequent therapeutic change process.

In this study, I conveyed compassion and empathy for characters who were troubled by similar difficulties as the pupils. I normalised feelings of anger and jealousy, and dealt with feelings of poor self-worth through compassionate metaphors. This enabled the pupils to hear messages of empathy and compassion indirectly. Typically clients of similar backgrounds to the pupils have very low self-esteem and would dismiss attempts by others to convey compassion and empathy directly toward them because expressions of compassion could be experienced as too threatening and difficult to trust. In addition, they may experience themselves as unworthy. However, it would seem that through indirect and symbolic means, stories can convey a message of compassion that can be more easily heard or felt.

## **Composite Depiction**

The composite depiction seeks to re-integrate the individual depictions with knowledge discovered in the tacit dimension to re-create a holistic depiction of the experience (Moustakas, 2001), a depiction that has a universal quality, pertaining to the whole group. In creating the composite depiction it is necessary to ensure that data is acquired from a richly contextualised and appropriate data group (Tracy, 2010). My aim was to convey something of a nuanced understanding of the

participants' comments based upon something more than the words uttered, based upon 12 weeks of a shared experience and a shared sense of knowing which cannot easily be 'evidenced' here. This is not a search for a generalised truth but an attempt to represent a crystallization (Tracy, 2010) of this particular experience of therapeutic storytelling.

In creating a composite depiction I felt the potential to be pulled into identifying commonalities and ran the risk of reducing the unique experiences of the individuals to themes. Heeding the words of Rogers (1966) it felt appropriate to stay true to the individual and unique subjective experiences of the young people as presented above. Instead, in this section I offer further clarification of my own experience and offer the Soul Bird story to lightly suggest a sense of something, which may have been experienced by all participants. To have painted a bigger composite depiction would have potentially drawn me into the realm of the Creative Synthesis, creating repetition, or pulled me into interpretation and reduction, which I have tried to minimise, or at least left for the 'Discussion'. Ultimately, after much processing, incubation and illumination, I have a felt sense that the appropriate action at this stage is to stay true to the unique experiences of the individual participants, as if they were unique and individual characters in a story, rather than present a storyline or story plot in which the individual characteristics, actions and motives were lost. Therefore, I present a framework within which the individual depictions might be held to give a sense of an aspect of the storytelling experience.

I present the Soul Bird, a text written by Michal Snunit (1998) which, as a result of incubation, I feel represents an aspect of the experience described by the young people, the staff member, and felt by myself. That is that, for all participants, the

Storytelling Programme appeared to bring into awareness different aspects of ourselves; that through the Storytelling Programme we found, and unlocked, 'new drawers' within us, releasing and celebrating new aspects of ourselves.

The Storytelling Programme opened up a unique drawer within each individual, as described through the individual depictions. Both my own individual depiction, and that of the staff member, focused upon the experience of the Storytelling Programme for the young people, as witnessed by us; however, the staff member also revealed an aspect of her own ability to nurture the young people which had been given fresh vigour through her experience of working with me with stories. For myself, the reflection regarding my sense of calm was a significant reflection that I had never experienced previously. Not only did the process clearly identify a quality that was within me, not previously known to me, but it made manifest a quality that I could now draw upon when needed, or keep central in my personal and professional life. Perhaps, in this respect, the experience was also similar for the young people.

### *The Soul Bird*

*Deep down inside, lives the soul  
No-one has seen it but we all know it's there.*

*Inside the soul there's a bird standing on one foot.  
This is the soul bird and it feels everything that we feel*

*When someone hurts our feelings, the soul bird runs round and round in pain.  
When someone loves us it hops up and down*

*When someone calls our name, it listens carefully to hear what kind of call it is.*

*When someone is angry with us, it curls itself into a ball and is silent and sad.*

*And when someone hugs us, the soul bird, deep down inside, grows and grows  
until it almost fills us.  
That's how good it feels when someone hugs us.*

*The soul bird has drawers inside itself, only the soul bird can open the drawers with its own special key.*

*There's a draw for being happy, and one for being sad, one for being hopeful and one for feeling hopeless, one for hating and one for being loved.*

*Sometimes you can tell the soul bird which draw to open and sometimes it decides all by itself, like when it decides to open the talking draw when you just want to be quiet.*

*A bird who feels bad will open the drawers that make you feel bad, and a bird who feels happy will open the drawers that make you feel happy.*

*Most important is to listen to the soul bird when it calls us, when it wants to tell us about ourselves, about the feelings that are locked up inside the drawers.*

*Some of us hear it nearly all the time, some almost never, and some of us hear it only once in a lifetime.*

*It's a good idea to try to listen to the soul bird deep down inside us once in a while.*

*Adapted from Michal Snunit The Soul Bird (1998).*

## **Creative Synthesis**

The unconscious psyche is profoundly creative, communicating knowledge through somatic states (symptoms, sickness, sensation), imaginal experiences (fantasy images, intuitions, dreams, meditations), mental insights (ideas, obsessions, delusions, thoughts), and metaphysical or transpersonal experiences (synchronicities, visionary experiences, altered states of mind)(Selig and Davidson, 2013). I decided to create a story that could represent the experience of the Storytelling Programme, as articulated by the young participants and felt by me. My aim is that the Creative Synthesis creates resonance for the reader through a creative representation which is evocative of the Storytelling Programme experience (Tracy, 2010).

## *The Dwarves' Quest*

*Once upon a time, long, long ago, it was not your time but it was our time. The young wily dwarves searched for the answer to riddles. Long ago, they had been exiled by their wicked step-mother, left in the Dark Woods to live out their days. Only the riddle answers might release them from their plight.*

*There they were forced to spend their days in the scary and lonely woods, hidden from the common gaze of humans. But their hearts yearned for the light, and they yearned to live in peace, somewhere where they could belong.*

*The twisted branches of the trees threw shapes into the darkness; to the weary minds of the young dwarves the dark shadowy limbs became monsters, witches and beasts. The hearts and minds of the young dwarves were constricted with fear and anxiety. They spent their nights jumping and screaming in fright as they mined for the gems and precious metals held within the earth, all the time hoping to find the riddle answers.*

*Their work was perilous and their journey fraught with risk. They could become lost forever within the heart of the Dark Wood. Perhaps it was their destiny to dig deeper, mining the depths of the earth, digging in the darkest places that ordinary humans feared to go.*

*One stormy night, they came to the house of the old hen woman. She welcomed them in, and they warmed themselves by the fire. She told stories to them and they listened, and as they peered into the fire they saw the stories come to life in the flames.*

*They listened to the old hen wife's stories and they told her the stories within them. Her stories wrapped them in a comforting hug and drove away their fears.*

*They fell asleep by the fireside, and in their dreams they heard the stories of the old hen woman, and then the stories began to change into songs of the nixie, the water spirit. They dreamt of lying by the water's edge listening to her sweet songs as she recounted adventures past and adventures yet to come.*

*Eventually, the sun began its' journey across the sky bringing dawn to the wood and to the hen wife's cottage. The dwarves stirred and one by one they went outside to the stream that ran close by; they went to refresh themselves in the cool morning waters. One by one they each peered into the stream, to rinse the sleep from their minds. Memories of the nixie came back to them; they searched for her in the water, and caught sight of their own reflection.*

*And as they glimpsed their faces in the shimmering waters they saw themselves anew; and as they looked at their reflections they felt as if they could see the water nixie looking back into their faces with compassion and understanding,*



*and as they gazed at her eyes within their own, she saw herself within them and she too saw herself anew.*

*The young dwarf folk stayed awhile, allowing transformations undreamt of to take place. And one by one the dwarves began to dance in the morning light, and as they danced, the nixie watched, and her admiration for their courage and their vitality grew. They had felt the rhythms of their own dance stir within them, and a new song stirred within her.*

*The sun rose higher and dappled rays illuminated the Dark Woods. The young dwarves followed the sunlit paths and soon they were out onto pastures new, the Dark Woods far behind them. The smallest of the dwarves danced along carrying the world in his hands, another chased after a rainbow, whilst a third reached for the moon, a small group danced in circles holding hands, whilst some ran to the mountain tops, and others cartwheeled amongst the gambolling lambs.*

*The answer to the riddle had lain within them. They had glimpsed it, and now they danced ...on and on they danced ...*

## **Post script: answers to riddles**

The Beggar is a female

What is it that every woman wants?

The traditional answer to the riddle is to say that “every woman wants her own way” which is an overly simplistic statement which can easily be misconstrued.

Whilst this riddle and answer may have been a nascent feminist statement, I think the answer pertains to ‘what does anyone want?’ and as a result of this research I feel that this study has revealed with a considerable degree of lucidity, that everyone, especially the ‘hard to reach’ young pupils that I worked with simply want to be listened to, heard and understood. They want to feel attunement. To be unconditionally loved for whom they are. They want to experience the core conditions in relationship with another. They want to be psychologically ‘held’, attuned to, and through this process they can flourish.

# Discussion in the light of the RQ

In this section I complement the expanded understanding gained from the study with new literature which unfolded throughout the research process (McLeod, 2000; Moustakas, 1990). This design and structure is congruent with the opinions of current writers in the field of qualitative research (McLeod, 2009) where the findings reveal new insights and open up further paths of enquiry.

The aim of this research was to understand the therapeutic process of storytelling. My understanding comes from my own immersion in a Storytelling Programme, as researcher and therapeutic storyteller. The study design provided opportunities for the crystallization of data (Tracy, 2010), that is, that rather than aiming for convergence between all data sources, my aim was to open up “a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue” (Tracy, 2010, p.844). The crystallization process illuminated areas of the storytelling process of which I was previously either unaware or only tacitly aware and provided me with a rich sense of how storytelling has the potential for diverse therapeutic change.

These crystallized illuminations informed my navigation through the literature as I searched for an understanding of the intersubjective process of therapeutic storytelling. I present some of this understanding here, and include reflective comments by the participants to create ‘thick description’ (Ponterotto, 2006; Geertz, 1973). This is then interwoven with the literature facilitating the constructivist practice of comparative and iterative analysis and creating a more coherent and fluid narrative (Ponterotto and Grieger, 2007). I will now present the two main findings here in brief, before expanding upon them below.

This thesis posed the Research Question “What are participants’ reflections on their experience of a Storytelling Programme?” The following findings were elicited from the reflections of all participants, including myself as researcher/facilitator, The initial finding was that the storytelling process was calming. This was clearly evident throughout the delivery of the Storytelling Programme (Reflective Journal) and was reiterated by the pupils and key staff member ‘J’ (Reflective Interviews). From a clinical perspective it appeared that it provided a calm space in which heightened and dysregulated emotions could be psychologically ‘held’ and contained (Reflective Journal).

The second finding, which was illustrated by the participants’ reflective interviews, was that within the calm and safe therapeutic ‘space,’ provided by the Storytelling Programme, the young people could engage in reflective thinking. The type of reflective thinking appeared to be quite philosophical at times, with a meaning-making function where the young people appeared to strive to make sense of their life experiences and ‘problems of living.’ Comments made by the young people in the reflective interviews suggested that the reflective thinking produced changes with regard to the young people’s understanding of themselves and others. These changes could be conceptualised as ‘developing emotional literacy’ or ‘new personal narratives’.

## The relational dynamics of storytelling

The calming effect of storytelling was the most significant finding, in that it was reflected by all participants and was the most tangible finding for me as reflective-research practitioner. Therefore, I sought to review the literature to discover theoretical explanations to answer the second part of the Research Question: “What

can these reflections add to our understanding of the process of therapeutic storytelling?" Knowledge gained through this process suggested that the intersubjective storytelling process could be understood from several different theoretical perspectives, for example, from a humanistic/Rogarian perspective, attachment and psychodynamic perspectives, as well as from an interpersonal neuropsychology perspective which incorporates psychodynamic and attachment theories. Throughout the discussion I have interwoven these different yet complementary theories. This interweaving acknowledges the relativist underpinnings to psychological theories and presents them in the form of a crystallization of theories about the therapeutic storytelling process. I will now discuss the findings with regard to the relational dynamics of storytelling in the light of the literature.

From very early on in the Storytelling Programme I became aware of the need for calm in the Pupil Referral Unit and I became aware of the sense of calm that could be achieved through the storytelling process. Responding to this need intuitively became the main focus of the Storytelling Programme (Reflective Journal). The main teacher 'J' reflected that she felt that my presence had resulted in a "calming influence" (J Reflective Interview) and it would seem that the young people found the stories "relaxing when you've got anger problems...or just for anyone really" (SG Reflective Interview). Story Girl continued, they were good for 'chilling-out,' and taking your mind off things when you want to 'kick-off' (SG Reflective Interview). Leaf claimed that the storytelling had made her "feel happy" and she made the squiggle game into a smiling flower/stick-person (Lf Reflective Interview and Reflective Journal). On several occasions, participants, who were initially angry and distraught, were quickly and easily calmed with stories, and pupils, labelled

'disruptive' by education staff, demonstrated calm behaviour in the sessions, and often sat with their head on their arms, quietly listening to stories (Reflective Journal).

The Deputy Head of the KS3 Units highlighted beneficial aspects of my practice as "calm, nurturing and positively focused," "persisten(t) and reliab(le)" (Reflective Journal). Persistence and reliability are complementary elements to create a state of calm; in psychodynamic terminology these characteristics would be conceptualised as necessary characteristics of the therapist to create a state of containment and psychological 'holding'.

I had already experienced the calming effect of the storytelling process in my community practice, so that in itself was not surprising, however, the power of my presence as a storyteller engaged all of the young people, even when they were together in a group, and further, my presence had a calming effect upon staff members too (Reflective Journal). From a Person-Centred perspective I would frame my approach as incorporating Rogerian core conditions of Unconditional Positive Regard, Empathy and Genuineness (1980, 1956, 1951) which enabled the young people to experience themselves in alternative ways to the labels that they metaphorically wore, such as 'excluded' 'angry' 'difficult' and 'failing.' These core conditions were 'necessary' but not 'sufficient.'

Primarily, it seemed that a combination of the core conditions and a careful selection of stories may have helped the young people experience themselves differently, and further, facilitated the development of new personal narratives through a process of meaning-making which developed their emotional literacy. By attuning to them, and

containing their intense emotions, potentially the storytelling process provided a framework within which they could attune to themselves and in so doing, learn to regulate their emotions to achieve calmer states which could then facilitate greater understanding of themselves.

The Storytelling Programme became a place of safety and soothing within which they had opportunities to process their emotions, learn new behaviours and develop new thinking. Whilst pupils in this study demonstrated changes at a semantic and relational level, I posit that the relational changes had primacy. Over the last decade or so, there has been an increase in literature which purport that the relational dynamics of therapy have primacy over semantic changes. This literature has primarily been based upon substantial case studies from the psychoanalytical field (BCPSG, 2008, 2007, 2002, 1998; Stern, 2004) and neuropsychological studies which have extended contemporary understanding of attachment theory (Schoore, 2010, 2008, 2005).

The findings from this current study potentially illustrate the impact of relational dynamics such as attunement and the subsequent implicit co-regulation. The findings suggest that this stage may have been a precursor to the explicit and significant cognitive changes that took place. As Tronick and Weinberg (1997) note unless young people with poor affect regulation can be helped to experience co-regulation “they are at the mercy of these states” (p. 56) and do not have the capacity to engage in changes at a cognitive level, for example utilising executive functioning to develop their emotional literacy.

This study echoes the literature that suggests that the implicit therapeutic relationship has primacy over cognitive insight in producing therapeutic change (Schore and Schore, 2008; BCPSG, 2007; Milton, 2001; Lyons-Ruth, 1998). The stories had a demonstrable effect upon the young pupils, as did some of the creative approaches, however, the co-regulation that emerged as a result of my way of being through the storytelling process (J Reflective Interview) provided the opportunity for the pupils to achieve a state of calm, and experience themselves in a new way (BCPSG, 2007; Cozolino and Sprokay, 2006; Lyons-Ruth, 1998). This conclusion was articulated by the main member of staff 'J' who was a participant of the Storytelling Programme throughout. She suggested that the effectiveness of the Storytelling Programme, in the main, resulted from my "calming influence" which she felt "had a very effective impact." In addition to this she identified my 'flexibility' in 'wearing five different hats' in my attempt to attune to the young people and 'meet' them where they were (J Reflective Interview).

Stern et al of the Boston Change Process Study Group (BCPSG, 2008; 2007) have intensively researched the intersubjective nature of the therapeutic relationship from a psychoanalytical perspective. Stern notes that:

"Of particular importance is the "moment of meeting," in which the participants interact in a way that creates a new implicit, intersubjective understanding of their relationship and permits a new "way-of-being-with-the-other." ... "We view "moments of meeting" as the key element in bringing about change in implicit knowledge, just as interpretations are thought to be the key element in bringing about change in explicit knowledge"

Stern (1998; p.300).



From a neurodynamic perspective, Cozolino and Sprokay (2006) also endorse this view, stating that effective therapy comes about through an attuned therapeutic relationship that provides safety and the co-regulation of emotion, whilst engaging the client in therapeutic activities that stimulate feeling and self-reflection. Extrapolating this theory to this study, it could be argued that once the pupils had achieved a state of calm, they could then engage in processing and integrating new information gained from the story stimuli to develop further their new personal narrative as young people who could be, amongst other things, calm, focused and philosophical. It is a common sense understanding that we can engage in new learning once we are calmer, and there is now growing data from fMRI's that show associations between increased stress and the shutting down of neuropsychological pathways within the cortex, the area thought to be associated with executive functioning and new learning (Siegel, 1999). These neurophysiological and psychoanalytical studies potentially offer explanations for the behavioural change experienced by the participants of this study.

### “Calming influence”: Containment and attunement

*“When someone you love is wedged in a doorway and must wait to get thin enough to get out, read him a sustaining book, such as would help and comfort.”*

A. A. Milne (1994). Cited by Fergus Hogan (1998; p.20).

The ability for a storyteller and stories to produce calm, hints at the intersubjective nature of storytelling. Rogers (1966) describes the therapeutic relationship as an “intimate, close, mutual and subjective relationship” (p.198). The findings, as captured through my reflective journal and the reflective interviews, suggest that the Storytelling Programme had a ‘calming influence’ upon all participants. In addition there were comments that supported the premise that storytelling can facilitate an intersubjective process of attunement. This is perhaps illustrated by Wise-man’s

reflection that “most of the things that I wanted to talk about were in your stories” (Wm: extract from Reflective Interview) which possibly indicates his experience of me attuning to his needs, through the Storytelling Programme.

I will now discuss the concepts of *containment* and *attunement* to facilitate greater understanding of how my role as storyteller developed throughout the course of the Storytelling Programme.

*Containment* (Bion, 1970) is a psychodynamic theoretical construct to describe a process in which another person’s emotional state is too much for them to bear. As a result they feel overwhelmed and they are left with anxieties and distress that are implicitly or explicitly expressed to another, in order that the other might offer reassurance or support them in managing what is disorganised, meaningless and unbearable; the ‘other’ metaphorically ‘holds’ and ‘contains’ the disorganised distress in a calm and integrated manner which implicitly conveys that all is manageable, which then allows the client to experience it so. The psychodynamic belief is that eventually the person can learn to internalise this emotional regulatory process themselves through the process of containment. Hamilton explains it thus:

“When children have strong affects that threaten to overwhelm them, they externalize their distress. The parent takes in the projected feeling...contains it, modulates it, gives it meaning, and returns the transformed affect in the form of holding, a meaningful comment, or some other communication”

Hamilton (1992; p. xiii).

Winnie-the-Pooh explains it so:

*“It is more fun to talk with someone who doesn't use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like “What about lunch?”*

Winnie-the-Pooh: The complete collection of stories and poems by A. A. Milne (1994).

Tronick and Weinberg (1997) develop the concept of containment further:

“When infants are not in homeostatic balance or are emotionally dysregulated (e.g., they are distressed), they are at the mercy of these states. Until these states are brought under control, infants must devote all their regulatory resources to reorganizing them. While infants are doing that, they can do nothing else”

Tronick and Weinberg (1997; p. 56).

*Attunement* is a term used in many theories to describe a process of noticing the emotional state of another, attending to both the verbal and non-verbal communication, and empathising with the experience of the other. This recognition and empathy can be communicated verbally or through an embodied state with non-verbal communication. The ‘other’ (i.e. the young person) experiences this as being ‘heard,’ respected, accepted and listened to. This creates the opportunity for the co-regulation of emotion where the young person can feel soothed and validated. In addition attunement can help the young person develop their awareness of their own internal state as well as their cognitions. This encourages a stance of curiosity and meaning-making toward their own feelings and cognitions helping them to recognise their feelings as valid and fostering emotional literacy and psychological integration.

The attuned relational way of being was illustrated by the young people enjoying my presence; and my availability for them. They liked me to sit beside them whilst they worked, and sometimes they chose to simply come and sit beside me, whilst I engaged with another pupil. Some of the young people had greater capacity to express themselves; but whilst some were happy to discuss their creative responses, others found it hard to articulate their feelings, as can be typical of young people with disorganised attachment or poor interpersonal and verbal skills (Topel and Lachmann, 2007; Tysse Breen and Dahlgren Daigneault, 1998). With the less articulate young people psychological contact was more implicitly relational and came about through my ‘doing’ and ‘being’ rather than the verbal content of what I

said (Reflective Journal). Yalom (2002) noted that clients highlight the importance of the therapeutic acts more so than the words.

I responded to the young people with persistence and reliability, in a manner that calmly attuned to and validated their experience (Reflective Journal). In so doing, I facilitated a space in which the young people could come into new 'ways of being' (Reflective Interviews and Reflective Journal). PRU pupils often come from dysfunctional families with sub-optimal primary relationships creating insecure and often discordant attachment relationships (McLoughlin, 2010). Often these families have histories of trans-generational abuse and neglect with little experience of calming activities and interactions. The young person is filled with intense emotions, such as anger, grief and anxiety, which they struggle to articulate and contain. Often the young people have limited behavioural options available to them, and can only express themselves physically in chaotic and unpredictable ways or verbalisations such as "F off" which result in their being experienced and labelled as 'wild' (McLoughlin, 2010). For the young person who has lacked the experience of a 'soothing' adult, 'the other' is often experienced as threatening and unpredictable, often prompting the young person to respond with aggression (Topel and Lachmann, 2007). They run the risk of this expectation of threat becoming real as their defensive aggression, their readiness for fight, flight or freeze, may be met with anger or frustration from carers, teaching staff and other professionals.

Calm engagement in a mutual activity with acute attunement to the defensive, disorganised or approach-avoidant ways of relating will help the clinician to foster a non-threatening relationship with distressed young people (Topel and Lachmann, 2007). This will facilitate a co-regulated state, which, in time, they can begin to

internalise as a different way of being. Topel and Lachmann (2007) describe patterns of 'chase and dodge' enacted throughout the therapy with aggressive, yet frightened adolescents, who both desire yet fear relational engagement. This was perhaps illustrated by Winnie, who typically resisted my direct interactions with her, yet followed me around whilst I worked with others, and also engaged well through the indirect medium of story (Reflective Journal).

Winnie was an example of two or three pupils who had been identified as particularly disruptive and unlikely to engage in the Storytelling Programme. Yet they engaged well, demonstrating engagement by listening to the stories with intent, and even hushed and quietened other pupils who spoke during the storytelling. Pupils who typically displayed aggressive behaviour did not do so, within the storytelling sessions and these pupils typically made significant creative contributions within the sessions (Reflective Journal).

Staff had acknowledged the improved behaviour that Riddlemaster, displayed both in and outside of the storytelling sessions (Reflective Journal). He, himself, commented that the sessions had "made (him) more focused". He had noticed that the "stories occupied my mind" (Rm Reflective Interview). Spy Guy, who had been causing great concern as a result of his street-gang activities, created a modern, minimalist-chic apartment within his shoe box, displaying previously unseen qualities of his own 'containment' (Reflective Journal). Winnie, who was frequently disruptive in many of her classes, listened intently to stories and meekly asked for tales of 'Winnie-the-Pooh' (Reflective Journal).

Winnie didn't get herself excluded from sessions, as was typical for her, and continued to engage with the symbolic images which depicted feelings. On one occasion she selected big red faces which expressed anger and other red coloured depictions of emotions and expressed herself by sticking stickers on me and her classmates (Reflective Journal). Winnie and Nat King Cole listened intently, whenever a story was told, and asked for more. They were also the pupils most likely to want to engage in a dialogue about what had happened in the story and how they thought the story could be different. On several occasions they asked to stay in the storytelling session when the groups swapped over, and this was facilitated. Even though they did not necessarily produce anything in the sessions the staff allowed them to stay, and they often just sat with me, whilst I worked with other pupils. At times other pupils also asked to stay in the extended session, or even over break-time (Reflective Journal). Sommers-Flannagan and Sommers-Flannagan (1997) note that a desire to attend and cooperate in sessions, along with a decrease in the 'targeted behaviour' indicates the positive effect of the therapeutic technique.

I suggest that much of the change in behaviour can be understood in terms of my empathic attunement to the needs of the young people, that they felt 'heard' and that my calm presence created a calming influence, through a co-regulating dyad, which allowed them to be experienced as something other than their typical dysregulated state (Creative Journal). One thing that was clearly expressed by the young people is that they knew the behaviour that was required of them by the Unit staff, but they had difficulty producing it, potentially because they had difficulty containing and regulating themselves. It would seem that the findings echo the literature that recommends relational approaches with young people with emotional and

behavioural difficulties (Golding, 2008; Hughes, 2006, Gerhardt, 2004), and that co-regulation may have primacy (Hughes, 2006; Gerhardt, 2004)

### **Intersubjectivity**

Much of this research relates to subtle and implicit subjective and intersubjective experiences between each of the young people and me as a storyteller, sometimes these interactions or 'moments of meeting' (Stern, 2004) occurred through my 'way of being' and sometimes they occurred through the story. Both the stories and my 'way of being' were intertwined, in that I was never simply me, or a psychologist, or a therapist, but 'the storyteller,' and the stories were never just a story, but something communicated from me to them, the stories were an opportunity for me to convey the core conditions, to convey that I had 'heard' them, an opportunity to display empathic understanding, and through the storytelling process the young people could engage with different levels of interpersonal and intrapersonal experience (Reflective Journal).

In a dialogue with Martin Buber, Carl Rogers describes entering into a therapeutic relationship "as a subjective person, not as a scrutinizer, not as a scientist" (2000, 1957; p.48). Rogers goes on to clarify with Buber that he does not see the client as "a sick person" but as "a *person*" and that if he were to view the client as a sick person "I'm not going to be of as much help as I might be" (p.49). In this dialogue with Buber he describes change as occurring as a result of "a real meeting of persons in which it was experienced the same on both sides" (p.53). This 'way of being' was the essence of my presence in the classroom. I did not enter a class of 'disruptive young people,' and I did not go armed with strategies to manage all eventualities I simply went as

'me' and met them as unique individuals, I could feel their vulnerabilities and met them with care and understanding (Reflective Journal).

For some theorists, the intersubjective space is a state of fusion (Budgell, 1995; Mahrer, 1983) whilst for others it is a space for resonance between the client and therapist (Rowan and Jacobs, 2002; Hart, 1997; Sprinkle, 1985), this latter description is not unlike descriptions given by storytellers who describe responding to that which resonates between the audience and storyteller. It has been described as a space where images (Samuels, 1989; Sprinkle, 1985) and feelings (Rowan and Jacobs, 2002) have greater currency than words. In this intersubjective space stories came to me spontaneously within the sessions (Reflective Journal), as storytellers would say 'stories that needed to be told' perhaps.

### **'Secondary intersubjectivity'**

Topel and Lachmann (2007) noted that adolescents are often represented as sullen and dismissive, which is typically interpreted as a sign of disrespect. However, if a young person has experienced poor early attachment relationships, they will have experienced a lack of opportunities for intersubjective eye contact and may experience this form of eye contact as threatening. Therefore, therapeutic interventions based around a shared activity between two people with the focus upon an object, without sustained eye contact provides the young person with the opportunity for a safe experience of 'secondary intersubjectivity' (Trevarthen, 1998); this is a typical experience of infancy created between a child and their caregiver through play.



In the therapeutic environment 'secondary intersubjectivity' can occur through a range of activities, such as board games, creative projects, playing cards or playing pool. The players are not required to look at each other, but the activity provides shared engagement, attunement and an opportunity for 'moments of meeting' (Stern, 2004) and enables eye contact and mutual gaze to occur and develop at the young person's pace. Early experiences of this kind of secondary intersubjectivity or joint attention (Baron-Cohn, 1995) seem to have been absent for many clients. This form of interaction allows the young person to experience an increasing sense of safety through a non-threatening experience. Interestingly storytelling permits the young person to focus upon the storyteller, and if the storyteller is sensitively attuned they will ensure that their focus is modulated in accordance with the needs of each young person, thereby creating a safe storytelling experience in which the young person holds the power to scrutinise the storyteller but not vice-versa (Reflective Journal).

Personal accounts from Sturm's (2000) participants illustrate this point. One participant noted that storytelling experiences provided the opportunity to feel free of scrutiny or judgement, whilst another participant reflected on the storytelling experience as a "magic circle that's cast around, so that lets us off the hook and we can just relax," she extends the description of her experience noting that it is "very nonthreatening ... the attention is not called to us, the audience," and so "we're made safe immediately" (Sturm, 2000; p.297).

### **Systemic working with young people with disorganised attachment styles**

The pervasive need for containment was the first key issue and identifiable need that I became acutely aware of during this study (Reflective Journal). I had anticipated my main role to be storyteller and facilitator of the pupils' personal development and had

not anticipated the systemic needs of the Unit as a whole, nor had I envisaged the calming effects of my presence which rippled throughout the larger staff/pupil group. The significant need for containment at a systemic level was palpable and dominated my experience as I acknowledged my roles as both psychologist and storyteller (Reflective Journal).

The staff participant cited my way of being as creating a 'calming influence' which enabled the young people to manifest behaviours and emotional states which were not typically displayed by the pupils (J Reflective Interview). The Deputy Head of the provision noted my reliability, persistence, calm and nurturing way of being (Reflective Journal). My understanding of what was happening within the Storytelling Programme is that my presence, my way of being (Rogers, 1980), was providing a contained space, in which the young people were more able to engage with other aspects of themselves. Since I was establishing a psychological 'holding' environment, the young people could feel calmer and safer which in turn freed up the internal resources that they would typically employ to manage their heightened states of arousal. These internal resources could then be employed, within a safe and conducive environment, to engage in meeting other needs, for example, engaging in a meaning-making process about their problems of living through story (Reflective Journal).

My calm, reliable and flexible approach (J Reflective Interview) in the face of disruptions and chaos (Marlberg, 2008; McLoughlin, 2010) can be conceptualised as my endeavour to attune to the emotional state of the young people, communicating with them implicitly through activities and stories, to best meet their needs (Reflective Journal). Important clinical skills were listening without judgement

(McLoughlin, 2010), responding empathically and demonstrating 'Unconditional Positive Regard' (Rogers, 1967) toward the pupils and staff (Reflective Journal).

*"Just because an animal is large, it doesn't mean he doesn't want kindness; however big Tigger seems to be, remember that he wants as much kindness as Roo."*

Winnie-the-Pooh: The complete collection of stories and poems by A. A. Milne (1994).

Theories of containment enabled me to observe interactions and behaviours, including my own, through a systemic and psychodynamic lens. I held in mind the bigger picture and where necessary, employed 'concentric circles of containment' (McLoughlin, 2010) around different groupings of pupils, as a class, dyads, or within the unit as a whole. In addition there was a need to have circles of containment around the staff team or different mixes of staff and pupils, and around the unit as a whole (Reflective Journal).

Further, in uncontained and chaotic systems it becomes necessary to hold the therapeutic frame within one's own mind (Jackson, 2009) since it cannot be put in place through set therapeutic session times in a therapeutic setting, but instead therapeutic interactions take place spontaneously in brief therapeutic encounters, possibly in the corridor or at break, as brief and fragmentary passing interactions (Reflective Journal). McLoughlin (2010) notes that the containing framework in settings such as PRU's "only reveals itself in the therapist's clear, calm and receptive attitude, rather than a reliance on a stable and consistent external setting" (p.235), containment comes through 'a way of being'.

I always strived to be mindful and compassionate and to hold a therapeutic frame in mind (Reflective Journal) (McLoughlin, 2010). McLoughlin (2010) suggests that this "conveys an emotionally containing state of mind which can be trusted to exert at

least a measure of a beneficial effect on the most chaotic of settings and situations” (p.235). Music and Hall (2008) also echo the notion of holding a therapeutic mindset. For example, staff stress and anxiety occurred, as a result of an Ofsted visit, and this filtered down to the pupils as the stress of this event placed staff on the ‘low road’ (LeDoux, 1996). Similarly, there was a spiralling relationship in how pupil anxiety fostered anxiety in staff and vice versa. In addition, as mentioned above, pupils were moved at short notice without preparation, staff had become so immune to this state of affairs that they neglected to address the impact of this loss upon staff and pupils. There was an additional, pervasive experience of stress, a sense of powerlessness and frustration, and a lack of decision-making power (McLoughlin, 2010), with insecure job status. By maintaining a therapeutic mindset and by extending my calm presence, and psychological understanding beyond the storytelling situation I could effect a change in attitude and atmosphere. I could address some of the staff anxieties with empathic listening, problem solving, or even with humour (Reflective Journal).

Having an awareness of the significance of systemic factors facilitated greater understanding of the impact of stress, distress and anxiety (McLoughlin, 2010). In addition, there was a very real understanding of the role that psychologists can play as critical social theorists (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998) in addressing social injustice and systemic inequities and in using psychological theory to provide understanding for some of the behaviours and stressors (McLoughlin, 2010; Jackson 2009, 2008, 2005, 2002) that both staff and pupils experience. McLoughlin (2010), Jackson (2009, 2008, 2005, 2002) and Gardiner (2002) highlight the need for staff supervision with regard to the systemic dynamics that may be represented and enacted as a result of the efforts to meet the needs of those with poor and disorganised attachment experiences.

## Emotional literacy and new personal narratives.

My approach to the pupils was to provide them with genuine and empathic verbal and non-verbal interactions combined with stories and creative approaches, through which they might indirectly engage with their intense emotions (Reflective Journal). This had similarities to approaches used by Bheamadu (2003) and Roberts (1997) who combined stories with creative, expressive approaches, and Carlson (Carlson and Arthur, 1999) who combined a person-centred therapy approach with stories. Storytelling, within a school, rather than therapeutic setting, potentially resulted in a less stigmatising therapeutic programme for the young people to engage with, accentuating the non-judgemental and non-labelling tone of the Storytelling Programme. This emphasis was illustrated by the pupils referring to me as ‘the Storyteller’ or ‘the story woman’ rather than as a psychologist or therapist, in addition, the pupils referred to themselves in terms of potentialities rather than deficiencies as the programme progressed (Reflective Journal).

I will now discuss some of the potentialities that the young people described in their reflective interviews. The young people noted that “stories are good, helpful” (Wm Reflective Interview) and “help you feel better about yourself” (Rm Reflective Interview) and showed signs of having developed new, more positive personal narratives (Reflective Journal and Reflective Interviews of Wm, SG, Rm, BG). I will link their reflections with contemporary literature to create hypotheses about the storytelling process.

## **“Stories are good, helpful”**

The main teacher who participated throughout the Storytelling Programme concluded that the programme was “very beneficial,” “extremely useful” and had “a very effective impact” (J Reflective Interview). Leaf thought that the stories were “useful” (Lf Reflective Interview). The Storytelling Programme had helped Bike-Guy “with school, helped me like art and making stuff, yeah ‘cos I know I can build stuff” (BG Reflective Interview), “loved, loved, loved” the sessions, “seriously I LOVED it” (Wm Reflective Interview).

Stories appeared to engage the young people in philosophical thinking and meaning-making processes as illustrated by Bike Guy who concluded that “there’s a reason for everything that happens” (BG Reflective Interview) and Wise-man who mused “who wants to take the easy road? You want adventures” (Wm Reflective Interview) and “sometimes you need help in life” (Wm Reflective Interview).

### *Maybe*

*There was once an old and wise farmer who lived with his son. They managed to earn a reasonable living and had a happy life, and all seemed to be well, until one day their horse ran off.*

*The neighbours heard and came to commiserate at their loss*

*“What a disaster” exclaimed the people.*

*“Maybe it is and maybe it isn’t” declared the old farmer.*

*A few days later their horse returned and brought with it a herd of wild horses the farmer’s son decided to keep a fine stallion and sell the others.*

*“What a blessing!” declared the neighbours.*

*“Maybe it is and maybe it isn’t” declared the old farmer.*

*A few days later whilst riding the wild stallion the son fell off and broke his leg*

*“What a disaster!” exclaimed the neighbours.*

*“Maybe it is and maybe it isn’t” declared the old farmer.*

*Not long after the King’s men came to gather all the fit and able young men to go and fight for their country, but the young son could not go because of his broken leg.*

*“What a blessing!” exclaimed the neighbours*

*“Maybe it is and maybe it isn’t” declared the old farmer ...*

Adapted from various sources including Thomas and Killick (2007) and Hoff (1992).

Riddles gave Riddlemaster a “good confused” (Rm Reflective Interview). Wise-man noted that storytelling “teaches you about stuff” (Wm Reflective Interview). “Even when you’ve done the worst thing in your life you can still turn it around...and if you carry on bad things are going to happen” (Wm Reflective Interview). Wise-man felt that the stories had morals and he liked this, “the stories were about things that were relevant” (Wm Reflective Interview). Story Girl commented that “when you listen to stories you fade away and think about stuff, what’s right or wrong” (SG Reflective Interview).

Riddlemaster depicted a rainbow which linked two clouds (Rm Squiggle Game/Reflective Interview), which was possibly symbolic of a desire for, or a sense of connection, which was at times expressed by the young people sitting or standing close to me (Reflective Journal). In other ways too, it seemed that the Storytelling Programme provided a positive experience of being with others. This was illustrated by Story Girl who engaged fully in the storytelling process and frequently elected to tell her own story (Reflective Journal). Story Girl concluded that “it felt good to tell my own stories” (SG Reflective Interview). The group were very patient as Story Girl told meandering, and at times, disconnected tales which appeared to be the story that I had told, elaborately and dramatically interwoven with her own inner world (Reflective Journal).

### **Self-reflection**

Story Girl felt that she had learnt to be more respectful and kind by listening to stories (SG Reflective Interview). Wise-man commented that “it’s all about teamwork, sometimes you need help in life; it’s not always about being independent” (Wm: Reflective Interview). Wise-man noted, “most of the things that I wanted to talk

about were in your stories,” “you think about things you don’t know and then you go ‘oh yeah’” (Wm Reflective Interview). He continued “I could talk to you about stuff that I couldn’t say to any old teacher” (Wm Reflective Interview). Wise-man realised that “not everything has to be perfect” (Wm Reflective Interview) and the Riddlemaster experienced a “good confused” which had made him “more focused” and had “occupied (his) mind” (Rm Reflective Interview).

Bike Guy learnt that “(the characters) emotions got in the way of their friendship” and that it was “good because it makes you think about what could happen in life if you don’t trust your friends. When you need them they won’t be there for you because you weren’t there for them” and “that you should never react before you know what’s actually happened” (BG Reflective Interview).

### **“Feel better about yourself”**

Stories have been shown to increase self-esteem (Helm Meade, 2001; Tysse Breen and Dahlgren Daigneault; Burnett, 1983), develop and improve ‘sense of self’ (Bheamadu, 2003; Carlson and Arthur, 1999) and model validation and acceptance of the young person (Carlson and Arthur, 1999). Compassion for the plight of the protagonist can be communicated through the therapist’s tone and attitude, and, if the young person identifies with the protagonist, the empathy and compassion can be extended to them vicariously.

With this in mind, I used several stories with the purpose of providing opportunities for the young people to re-evaluate their personal qualities (The House Thief, Silly Jack, The Cracked Pot) (Reflective Journal). I tell the Cracked Pot story frequently, in its simplicity it never fails to elicit a compassionate response toward the poor pot



which has so many cracks that it leaks water everywhere. Perfect Peter Pot nags away, criticising the Cracked Pot. The Cracked Pot internalises the criticisms and asks that the old woman discard it and get another just like Perfect Peter Pot, but the old woman recognises the virtue in both the pots, even in the nagging Perfect Peter Pot that brings home the water for her needs, and the Cracked Pot that has watered the flowers along the path and made them grow, bringing beauty to the old woman and all those who walked the path. The Cracked Pot hadn't been so good at doing what was expected of it, but it had brought joy to the old woman's life because of its apparent deficiencies.

### *Duke Huan and the Marsh Goblin*

*Once when Duke Huan was passing by the marsh, a goblin appeared in the road before him. The Duke turned to Kuan Chung "Do you see anything in the road ahead of us?"*

*"I see nothing" Kuan Chung replied.*

*The Duke thought that he must be losing his mind and on returning home he took to his bed, by now he was rambling incoherently about goblins.*

*Doctors and wise-men were called from all around; "Do goblins exist?" asked the Duke.*

*One of the wise men described all kinds of goblins, including ones that lived in the woods, in the streams, in the low-lands and those that lived by the marshes.*

*The Duke asked the wise-man to describe those that lived by the marshes; immediately the Duke recognised what he had seen. He jumped out of bed and never felt better, his illness and worries had been transformed.*

Adapted from Benjamin Hoff's *The Te of Piglet* (1992; p. 172).

Wise-man enthusiastically proclaimed that storytelling "teaches you never to feel bad about yourself...just because someone has things better than you then it didn't mean you were worthless and not supposed to be here" (Wm Reflective Interview). Stories also helped Leaf "feel better about herself" and had helped her feel 'happy' (Lf Reflective Interview). Riddlemaster commented similarly that "stories had helped him feel better about himself" (Rm Reflective Interview). He had created a Riddlemaster trophy for himself to celebrate his newly discovered skill (Appendix 4). Wise-man's comment about how he felt about himself as a result of these sessions

was “off the scale...seriously...over there!” (Wm Reflective Interview). Wise-man depicted himself touching the moon and holding the world in his hand (Wm Reflective Interview; Squiggle Game).

### *Hui-tse's Useless Tree*

*Hui-tse said to Chuang-tse “I have a large tree which is useless because it's all gnarled and its limbs and trunk are crooked. No woodcutter could make use of it. Chuang-tse replied “A cat is stealthy, it creeps up on its prey and it is nimble when it leaps, yet whilst it concentrates it can easily be caught by a net. While a bull is strong and solid and would rip a net to shreds, but it can't catch a mouse like the cat can. You think your tree is useless only because you can't see its value. You could rest under its shade, shelter from the rain but instead you want to make it into timber.”*

Adapted from Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* (1982; p. 40).

### **Hope**

Sommers-Flannagan and Sommers-Flannagan (1997) suggest that as a result of effective therapeutic storytelling clients experience increased hope for positive change. Sue Jennings (2004) expands upon this idea explaining that “(s)stories can help children find that second road, and to understand that, somewhere along the line, there can be a change in direction. It is possible to find a new signpost” (p.29). That stories instilled hope was illustrated by Wise-man, “even when you've done the worst thing in your life you can still turn it around” (Wm Reflective Interview).

Riddlemaster's rainbow which stretches from one cloud to another might be symbolic of a hope or wish for the possibility of a positive connection, a relational attachment (Reflective Journal). Bike Guy thought that creating his box helped him learn that he could make something and was useful for storing memories and other things in it and that “it helps you to look ahead” (BG Reflective Interview).

## **Empowerment**

“It felt good to tell my own stories” declared Story Girl (SG Reflective Interview), and this sense of empowerment seemed to be echoed by others too. Pupils were very keen to read or retell the stories that I had told to their classmates, and participants engaged enthusiastically in sharing personal anecdotes (Reflective Journal). Riddlemaster commanded the attention of teachers, requesting that they solve his riddles, even a passing teacher, walking in the corridor, was engaged in his process (Reflective Journal).

Pupils told stories of winning races, and having gadgets that bestowed special powers, and of conquering fears and winning or surviving scary situations (Reflective Journal). Wise-man represented himself as touching the moon and holding the world in the other hand (Wm Reflective Interview; Squiggle Game) which arguably expressed his sense of empowerment gained from the Storytelling Programme (Reflective Journal).

The pupils acquired new personal narratives (Reflective Interviews and Reflective Journal). They acquired positive and powerful nicknames based upon new found skills e.g. Wise-man, Story Girl and Riddlemaster (Reflective Journal). Staff noted that they expressed positive and creative aspects of themselves which was in contrast to the disruptive behaviour displayed elsewhere (Reflective Journal). It would appear that the findings suggest that listening to stories within a calm and contained environment might facilitate new ways of thinking and experiencing. Comments from the young people are suggestive of the processing of inner conflicts, resolution and ‘new ways of being.’ The young people had a new sense of themselves (reflective Interviews).

It would seem that storytelling is a successful approach which can gently facilitate emotional literacy. This was illustrated by Wise-man who displayed remarkable philosophical wisdom which surprised even him (Reflective Journal). He found the reflection of this aspect of himself to be almost unbelievable, and it had been hitherto unseen by either his teachers or himself (Reflective Journal). His raised self-esteem was reflected in his comment about how he felt about himself, as a result of the Storytelling Programme “off the scale...seriously...over there!” (Wm Reflective Interview).

The Riddlemaster commented that the stories had helped him feel better about himself (Rm Reflective Interview); this was at a time when his grandmother, with whom he lived, was seeking psychiatric or psychological help from a nearby clinic because “he had gone down a bad road” (Rm Reflective Interview). This young person had been rejected by his mother and experienced two periods of exclusion from the mainstream school system (Reflective Journal). In his squiggle game he drew a rainbow stretching from one cloud to another (Rm Squiggle Game; Reflective Interview), which is potentially expressive of a positive forecast, or possibly displays something about ‘connection’ (Reflective Journal). He also drew a Riddlemaster trophy for himself (Appendix 4). He too, was surprised to have found a new found skill at solving riddles, a skill that the teachers had not been aware of, prior to the programme (Reflective Journal).

There were numerous examples of the young people gaining a new sense of their self (Reflective Journal and Reflective Interviews). That is they developed new personal narratives which reflected a more positive and hopeful sense of self (Reflective Interviews). Their descriptions indicated that they had developed and internalised a

greater capacity for reflection, particularly self-reflection, and a language through which they could articulate their feelings (Reflective Journal). Difficulties with language and verbal expression are a significant issue with young people and if not correctly identified, these difficulties can result in the young people being labelled as 'difficult' as a result of poor verbal skills (Sanger et al, 2001), yet language skill typically is not a focus of most interventions with 'difficult' adolescents (Schofield, 2012). The literacy element of stories can promote learning in this area. Stories appeared to provide some of the pupils a language and philosophical framework which could guide their ability to understand and negotiate their world through a medium which allowed them to express themselves, and be heard.

## Stories as a trans-theoretical medium

At the start of this thesis I state that, based upon a review of the literature, it is possible to conclude that stories are trans-theoretical and can be utilised for cognitive behavioural problem solving (Geldard and Geldard, 2008; Cook et al, 2004;) and psychodynamic catharsis (Noctor, 2006; Sunderland, 2000; Bettelheim, 1975; Russell and Shrodes, 1950; Despert and Potter, 1936). However, explicit in my research design was my own belief that traditional tales told without direct discussion about the content was essentially the most appropriate method to optimise the therapeutic process. My belief in traditional tales stemmed from my practice and training in storytelling with the Scottish Storytelling Centre and Emerson College and from my reading of seminal texts on therapeutic storytelling such as Bettelheim (1975) and Estes (1992). It was a belief based upon the potential for stories to stimulate implicit right hemispheric processing and work at the level of "*a recovered deep structure of meaning*" (Mills and Crowley, 2001, 1986). My belief was that traditional tales were potentially more subtle and complex, affording indirect access to personally

meaningful material which could be engaged with, in the safe and non-threatening context of stories (Larkin and Zahourek, 1988; Larkin, 1978).

Whilst I could appreciate the power of a co-created story that had personal resonance for the client I questioned how a therapist-created metaphor could have the subtle, complexity of a traditional tale that had become implicitly layered in time. However, through the heuristic process, illumination occurred which enabled me to bring focused attention to this belief and examine it in the light of the Storytelling Programme and the current literature. As a result of the experiential practice, within this study, I was more able to identify the potential of different story forms to complement different therapeutic approaches. That said, the tales told in this study were traditional in origin, and it is still my belief that providing rich detail and complexity with regard to the metaphoric content allows the client to connect with the story through their own idiosyncratic processing.

In this study, the young people appeared to process the stories implicitly in the main, as suggested by story attachments that were only revealed in the reflective interview (e.g. Bike Guy's attachment to "Diarmuid and Grania", the very first tale told twelve weeks earlier). The young people appeared to engage with the stories and journeyed with the story characters "unconsciously learn(ing) about their own emotions, experiences and feelings to help them make sense of what has happened to them" (Dowling, 2013; p.12). In addition, some of the young people clearly engaged in processing which was both implicit and explicit. For example, Story Girl enjoyed translating the story into her own version of events through drawings, illustrations and an annotated plot-line and through telling her own stories to the class, also, some of the pupils asked questions about the story content and wanted to discuss their own

interpretation (Reflective Journal). These processes clearly involved both implicit and explicit story processing.

The study highlights the value of integrating a range of therapeutic storytelling approaches to meet the individual needs of the pupils. The findings suggest that stories can stimulate different forms of mental processing. They appear to engage executive functioning, which is thought to take place in the pre-frontal cortex, as well as engaging the subcortical emotional limbic system, along with implicit and autobiographical memory, which is thought to predominantly occur in the right hemisphere, through the medium of metaphor (McGilchrist, 2009; Thomas and Killick, 2007; Mills and Crowley, 1986). In addition stories facilitate engagement with an attuned other, as well as providing rich imagery, through which the listener has the potential to achieve catharsis, resolution and new ways of thinking and being (Killick and Frude, 2009). In my attempts to respond to the individual needs of each of the young people it became evident that storytelling could be utilised in different ways and as noted by Sunderland (1997-1998) served as a trans-theoretical therapeutic medium.

### **The capacity of stories to produce therapeutic change**

Therapeutic change is potentially a broad concept which can be assessed from many different theoretical perspectives, including cognitive functioning, integration, behavioural change, increased emotional literacy, decreased need for medication, return to work or school, symptomatic improvement, increased sense of wellbeing, as well as accomplishing the client's own therapeutic goals. Whilst I did not have an explicit brief to meet any specific therapeutic goals there was an implicit understanding that I might 'help' the young people by bringing about a change in

their situation. The remit of the PRU was to get them back into mainstream or into an alternative provision where they could be productive (Reflective Journal).

My implicit intention was to provide them with an experience in which they could feel 'good enough' an experience of being 'heard' and respected rather than rejected, something similar to Bohart's 'empathic workspace' (2000; p.140) that is the creation of a therapeutic space in which to "spread out their problem, explore it, and find their own solutions" (p.141). The simple design of the Storytelling Programme and minimal therapeutic goals came about as a result of the community work that I had previously carried out, where my presence as a storyteller was enough to create observable positive changes in troubled and distressed young people. However, I would place greater emphasis on the relational component of therapy than Bohart does, I would suggest that the relational element of the storytelling process is more than interpersonal learning on a behavioural or cognitive level, but instead encompasses a much more affective and intersubjective experience of 'moments of meeting' (Stern, 2004) with a co-regulating dyad which creates the safe space within which the young person can then "spread out their problem, explore it, and find their own solutions" (Bohart, 2000; p.141).

The second part of the Research Question "What can (the participants') reflections add to our understanding of the process of therapeutic storytelling?" An inevitable challenge of this research was to access what potentially existed as tacit information about the therapeutic storytelling process that was unknowingly held by all participants (West, 2010). The young people could not discern whether it was the stories or me that was the effective element of the Storytelling Programme. Yet



whilst it was difficult to elucidate the elements of the change process, the change was recognisable within themselves, and observable by staff.

I have attempted to augment the findings with the literature to develop further my understanding of what was occurring through the storytelling process. It would appear that storytelling has the potential to create intersubjective 'moments of meeting' (Stern, 2004) which may facilitate the therapeutic change process. I suggest that oral storytelling creates an intersubjective process that can foster states of dyadic co-regulation and feelings of well-being. Through both the relational storytelling process and the story content the listener has the potential to develop more coherent personal narratives of the kind that have been identified as possible indicators of resilience and wellbeing (Siegel, 1999). In addition, stories may also optimise neural integration, that is, in promoting enhanced intersubjective interactions, stories appear to create the type of co-regulation which supports the engagement of the pre-frontal cortex (Borysenko, 2013; Schore and Schore, 2008; Cozolino, 2002). It seems that once the listener has achieved a state of emotional regulation, that is a state of calm and a feeling of safety, they are more able to engage in therapeutic work (Borysenko, 2013; Cozolino, 2002) through stories which provide sufficient stimulation to develop "problem-solving, reasoning skills and wisdom... (and) help link action and consequences in a safe way" (Thomas and Killick, 2007; p. 11). In neuropsychological terms, having soothed the emotional limbic region, stories can engage the listener in the pre-frontal cortex or executive functioning and integration, as Joan Borysenko (2013) describes it, once calmed the pre-frontal cortex is better able to 'come on-line'.

This study echoes the literature that suggests that something more than insight is needed (Lyons-Ruth, 1998). It would appear that insight is not necessarily the primary need of dysregulated adolescents, but rather an experiential opportunity to be soothed; for example, this can come about through the prosody and other intersubjective elements of the storytelling process. Drawing upon attachment theory it could be hypothesised that the storylistener 'finds themselves' both 'in the story' and 'through the intersubjective relationship' via which they are 'met' 'seen' and/or 'heard.' If they can find themselves anew, they have the potential to discover a new sense of self, through the safe and implicit dyadic relationship (Hughes, 2006).

# Conclusion

This study led to a new, revised and expanded understanding of the storytelling process which resulted in self-transformation at a personal and professional level (Sela-Smith, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). Engaging in the heuristic process has been empowering (Stiles, 1993). In addition the study contributes to knowledge in the fields of Counselling Psychology, storytelling, heuristic methodology, and the therapeutic change process.

As a psychologist, community storyteller and now researcher, I have witnessed the dramatic therapeutic effect of stories. Pupils from Pupil Referral Units attended the storytelling programme and concluded that stories and the storyteller's style of engagement were key ingredients in their change process. Conclusions from the literature suggest that much of the effectiveness of stories stems from their metaphorical content which facilitates right-hemisphere processing of traumatic material through symbolic form (Harper, 2010; Noctor, 2006; Cooke et al, 2004; Bheamadu, 2003; Painter et al, 1999; Carlson and Arthur, 1999; Roberts, 1997; Mills and Crowley, 1986; Burnett, 1983; Stirtzinger, 1983; Kagan, 1982). This permits the client to maintain some emotional distance from the trauma, whilst stimulating the processing of associated affect. Conclusions from this study augment these findings and also expand upon current thinking about the storytelling process. Augmenting data from this study, with the current literature on the therapeutic process of change (BCPSG, 2008, 2007, 2002; Stern, 2004; Bohart, 2000) I suggest that the storytelling process may foster an interpersonal relationship which has the potential for co-regulation or soothing. Once this state of calm has been achieved the listener can engage in cognitive tasks such as the development of emotional literacy (Borysenko,

2013; Cozolino, 2002).

Further, as an intersubjective medium, storytelling provides a relationship at a safe distance, which is particularly useful with young people who have insecure attachment styles (Golding, 2008; Hughes, 2006, 2006). Attuned engagement between a storyteller, the audience and a story provides an attuned and empathic three-way relationship (Mills and Crowley, 1986). This affords the opportunity for a co-regulated dyadic relationship with 'hard to reach' young people labelled as emotionally and behaviourally difficult (Golding, 2008; Hughes, 2006, 2004). McLoughlin's (2010) comment became apparent; he noted that it was difficult to count on "an overall positive outcome of a particular clinical intervention...Instead, it was important to value each constructive and meaningful clinical encounter as important in its own right" (p.237). In an environment which is relatively uncontained, "(a) moment of emotionally containing contact with the child or family or indeed with the staff group was noteworthy...they ran counter to mutual attack or cutting off from painful experiences" (McLoughlin, 2010; p.237). Such positive encounters were achieved through my presence as a storyteller.

### **The way of the storyteller**

I have endeavoured to heed the warnings within the literature that "(t)here is little evidence that specific techniques or procedures have specific effects in most cases" (Bohart, 2000; p.128) similarly noted by Asay and Lambert (1999) that "(f)or those convinced of the singular abilities of their models and related interventions, the results have been disappointing" (p.39), "(t)ypically, there is little or no difference between therapies and techniques" (p.40). However, the paucity of evidence to support any particular approach above others may stem from epistemological

limitations which fail to detect different therapeutic outcomes (Asay and Lambert, 1999) or that have prioritised a research focus on techniques and approaches over an explication of the clinician's personal attributes (W. West, personal communication, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

I suggest here that storytelling can be a trans-theoretical medium to meet the pluralistic needs of clients, in that stories can be sufficiently complex and multi-faceted to offer varied opportunities to achieve both explicit and implicit goals. I suggest that the storytelling process, in particular, the 'way of being' of the storyteller, provides an opportunity for the client to engage with the implicit nurturing and somewhat 'magical' elements of the storytelling process, which facilitates transportation into a safe and trusting therapeutic relationship (Killick and Frude, 2009), and within this, stories can be employed within diverse approaches (Sunderland, 1997-8), to achieve a variety of goals, through the symbolic processing of metaphor (Mills and Crowley, 1986). Therefore, therapeutic storytelling can be used to respond to the call from Cooper and McLeod (2011) and Yalom (2002) to create an effective individualised and relational approach to therapy.

### **An integrative theory-driven approach with young people**

I believe that this thesis presents tentative suggestions about the psychological, neuropsychological and physiological processes which may occur through the storytelling encounter. This thesis integrates ideas from a breadth of current research on the human 'mind' in its broadest sense. This includes therapeutic literature, including psychodynamic and contemporary attachment theories, developmental and humanistic approaches to working with adolescents, common factors findings and interpersonal neurobiology as well as related disciplines such as

literature, education and philosophy, to create an integrative theory-driven approach to storytelling-work with young people.

It would appear, from this study, that an approach that uses story, whilst placing the intersubjective relationship as central, has the potential to promote substantial therapeutic change. This was demonstrated as greater reflective capacity, self-esteem and new personal narratives. It is hoped that the positive interactions achieved through the Storytelling Programme can be seeds that will germinate for these young people. To use the metaphor of the Soul Bird, the young people have now found drawers within themselves that they did not know about before, and as a result of the Storytelling Programme, they now know where to find these drawers and how to open them. The programme appeared to facilitate new positive narratives for all participants, including me, but these narratives stand as one of many narratives that we all have within us (Gergen, 2008). Gergen notes “(s)ome relations leave residues that are well practised, while others leave but little whispers of possibility” (Gergen, 2008; p.4). If insufficiently nurtured, the new narratives may potentially wither.

One of the significant benefits of applying a therapeutic mind-set to a storytelling programme is that it can be an implicitly non-pathologising approach. In every sense, it is an approach that meets the young person where they are, in terms of relational attunement and in terms of going to meet them in their classroom rather than requiring them to come to a therapy room, which may have significant negative and pathologising connotations for the young person. As Riddlemaster commented, he had been referred by his Nan to a local clinic because he had “gone down a bad road” (Rm Reflective Interview).

## **Future directions**

Although the study has revealed the significance of the relational aspect of the Storytelling Programme, the programme was in essence a social and emotional literacy programme, and as noted by Neil Humphrey (Hanley, Humphrey, Lennie; 2013) how counselling services fit into the Social and Emotional Aspect of Learning government initiative (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007) requires further investigation. This study gives an example of how this can work, but still begs the question of how additional one-to-one support might complement the programme, and who might be suitable to deliver that. For example, knowledge of psychodynamic and systemic perspectives is recommended to understand the relational complexities of delivering both individual and group work in an already uncontained setting. I would suggest that external psychodynamic or systemic supervision would be an essential component of such practice to provide an overarching perspective on the dynamics of the system, whilst holding in mind the individual/s within the therapeutic process. As Sinitsky (2010) notes an emphasis upon systemic factors is integral to working with young people.

Despite these complexities, there appears to be a distinct advantage to developing a therapeutic system which lies outside traditional mental health routes such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. In the case of these young people in Pupil Referral Units, traditional mental health routes may be experienced by the young people as individualising, stigmatising and pathologising. The Storytelling Programme is noteworthy in its effect, but it cannot eradicate the struggles that these young people endure on a daily basis. The young people, rejected from mainstream, and often rejected by their families require more than a twelve week storytelling programme to address their sense of rejection and emotional dysregulation. Society

needs to embrace these young people through policies that are more inclusive of different intelligences (Gardner, 1989), policies which are underpinned by contemporary Attachment Theory and an understanding of the sequelae of developmental trauma (Gerhardt, 2004; Sunderland, 2000), rather than policies which compound the sense of rejection that these young people feel.

### **The hope of the young people**

Whilst much of this thesis focuses upon the storytelling process as a therapeutic technique, and within that, the therapeutic relationship as a significant element of the therapy, it is important to hold in mind the importance of the client factors in creating therapeutic change (Bohart, 2000; Asay and Lambert, 1999). One of the things that I have learnt about the young people that I worked with was their courageous attempts to be heard, and their capacities for self-healing (Bohart, 2000). It is easy to identify these young people with a label that reduces their 'problems of living' to emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is easy to feel stuck and experience the pervasive state of helplessness which lies at the heart of much of their distress (Winnicott, 1965). However, as a result of this study, one significant illumination was the hope that still remained within these young people, lying within them like a dormant seed waiting for the conditions in which their own capacity for self-healing could be mobilized (Bohart, 2000). They still had dreams and they were fighting to be heard and to be given the chance to achieve those dreams. What struck me most was that whilst we may struggle to face the challenges that these young people present, that we can be overwhelmed by the enormity of the task; they themselves remained vigilant, not just vigilant for familiar signs of threat, but also vigilant for opportunities to fulfil their potential and to 'become' their real and true selves (Rogers, 1967).



All of the young people hoped that similar storytelling programmes could be developed and delivered to provide more young people the opportunity to engage with stories. The Storytelling Programme provided core and arguably ‘necessary conditions’ (Rogers, 1956) to create a therapeutic relationship which intrinsically provided a safe space in which the client could begin to experience themselves differently and mobilize their own self-healing capacities such as hope, optimism and intrinsic intelligence (Bohart, 2000) or as Rogers (1957) described it getting to “the very aspect that can most be trusted to be constructive or to tend toward socialization or toward development of better interpersonal relationships” (Rogers, 1957; p.58).

I will end this thesis with one last story. This is a traditional English story that dates back centuries. There are many versions of this story which are told by renowned English storytellers, and many other forms found throughout the world including Georgia, Brazil and the Middle East. A version of this story can be found in versions of the Arabian Nights and it forms the backbone to the Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*. The version that I present here is my own adaptation.

### *The Pedlar’s Dream*

*John Chapman woke in the night. He’d had that dream again, the dream that niggled and nagged, the one that left him feeling unsettled with his life. He liked his life as a Pedlar. He travelled the Westmorland and Cumberland fells selling his wares, exchanging stories and gossip for a roof over his head. But this dream niggled and nagged, and nagged and niggled, and left him dreaming about something more. In his dream an apparition came to him and enticed him to seek his fortune. “Go to London and there you will learn the secret of your fortune” said the ghostly visitor.*

*Night after night the vision came to him and on this particular night it had visited him three times.*

*The niggles and nags grew stronger and before John knew what he was doing he had packed up all of his remaining wares, and his last bits of food, and he left, with his dog in tow.*

*He set off with his dog along the old pack horse routes, up and over Honister pass, the horses and carts loaded with the rocks of the slate mines passing him in the other direction; he was forced to rest many times up Hard Knott and surveyed the view as he rested at the old roman fort. On and on he travelled, the journey was hard but his dream pulled him onward.*

*Eventually after many days he reached London. He had sold all of his wares, and there he stood upon London Bridge, in exactly the spot that the apparition had told him to wait, and he waited and he waited and he waited.*

*All day long he stood, waiting for a sign of his treasure.*

*Night time came and he curled up with his dog, and waited still.*

*For three days and three nights John Chapman and his dog waited, and on the morning after his third night, even he was beginning to give up hope.*

*"It's time we went home" he told his dog.*

*But just as he was leaving a shopkeeper approached him. He was from the pawnbroker's next to where John had been standing, waiting.*

*"Oy you, what you doing? Up to no good? I've seen you there standing, loitering, you haven't moved for three days and three nights. Why? What are you waiting for?"*

*And John told him his story.*

*"Ha Ha Ha" laughed the shopkeeper, you're even worse than I thought, wasting your time on account of a dream. Let me tell you, I have a dream most nights, and in that dream I too have an apparition come to me, and he tells me that there's a chest of gold lying under an old oak tree, between a pedlar's cottage and a church. It even tells me the name of the pedlar, and the place where he lives. But do you think I go travelling across the country, do you think I go travelling to Cumbria in search of John Chapman of Heaning Misset? You've no sense lad, now get yourself home and do some proper work." And the pawnbroker turned his back on John and walked back to his shop, laughing at what he thought was John Chapman's naivety.*

*And as for John, he and his dog fair flew back to Heaning Misset to seek his treasure.*

*Ah ha! Who'd have thought that it was right under his nose all the time, Following his dream to seek his fortune had brought him right back to himself.*

## Contribution to academic knowledge and professional practice

Tracy (2010) notes that qualitative research needs to make a significant contribution to the field in terms of its conceptual and theoretical contribution. She notes that the topic of research should be relevant, timely, significant and interesting (Tracy, 2010).

I will now outline the way in which this thesis presents a timely and original contribution to knowledge in the field of qualitative research practice, therapeutic storytelling literature and the role of Counselling Psychology.

### **A contribution to qualitative research practice**

This thesis adds to the growing body of qualitative research in the field of Counselling Psychology. Morrow (2007) notes that Counselling Psychology is at the forefront of the call to increase the methodological diversity within psychology, and both Morrow (2007) and Ponterotto (2005) have noted the increasing use of qualitative methodologies in Counselling Psychology where the paradigms of qualitative methods are recognised as particularly apposite for the study of the complexities of human experience and the associated clinical practice (Morrow, 2007). As McLeod (2001) notes many practitioners identify the potential in qualitative methods.

Further, it adds to the body of heuristic research, a method which is highly apposite for the study of clinical practice due to the similarities of heuristic methods and the therapeutic process (Hiles, 2001). As an in-depth qualitative study, this research adds to our understanding of the therapeutic process, as illuminated through the medium of therapeutic storytelling.

As I allude to above, my experience of undertaking heuristic research engaged me in processes similar to those that I engage with in my clinical practice. As a result of the immersion in these simultaneous processes I came to view Sela-Smith's (2002) critique of Moustakas' (1990) heuristic research methodology from a clinical perspective. As a consequence, I offer an alternative understanding of heuristic

methodology, more in-keeping with Moustakas' own understanding, which adds to the academic discussion about the practice of heuristic methodology.

### **A contribution to the therapeutic storytelling literature**

From the literature search and review that I have done to date research on storytelling is limited. Much of it concentrates on the cognitive processing of stories (Alexander, Miller and Hengst2001). Research into therapeutic storytelling has tended to be quantitative or qualitative approaches such as Grounded Theory or case-study designs, which have looked at the use of metaphor and its connection to the personal stories of the clients (Smith and Celano, 2000). Studies have not had a design and focus which includes the experience of the researcher/storyteller and participants and typically the focus has been upon the individual processing of stories rather than a design which acknowledges the interactive nature of the storytelling process. As a result of the heuristic research design, this thesis has illuminated aspects of the intersubjective storytelling process which have tended to be overlooked.

### **The role of Counselling Psychology in working with young people**

The research is timely, in that it addresses the concern of Harris and Pattison (2004), that clinicians working with young children have a responsibility to engage in research to contribute to our understanding of the therapeutic strategies that are effective in combating difficult behaviour. Further still, it adds to the growing research that identifies a role for Counselling Psychology in working with young people (Hanley, Humphrey, Lennie, 2013; Riha, 2010; Sinitsky, 2010). More specifically it provides a therapeutic framework for working with young people excluded from mainstream as a result of their emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The study provides an evaluation of the use of a Storytelling Programme in order to develop service provision based upon potentialities rather than a deficiency model, which is pertinent to the role of Counselling Psychologists.

Annie Riha (2010) noted that Counselling Psychology has a role to play in filling the shortfall in services for young people who experience problems with living. Counselling psychology can play an effective role through consultancy and Social Action at the systemic level, by ensuring that these young people can be understood within a psychological and systemic framework. Counselling Psychology can play supportive, training and consultancy roles to a range of professionals who engage with these young people, such as teachers, social workers and the courts. Counselling Psychologists are suitably equipped to provide staff support, stress management and training in attunement and attachment theory to help develop the resources of the staff members, who are so clearly committed to helping these young people.

Systemic changes within the education system are a vital first step to changing the lives of the young people. Counselling Psychology has a significant role to play in developing a general awareness of the needs of these young people, to ensure that they experience attunement, outside of the counselling hour. This can be achieved by working with the parent-child dyad and providing supervision to both the staff and counselling team, thereby providing McLoughlin's (2010) circles of containment.

## Limitations

### **Collection and analysis of data**

In retrospect I would have chosen to record the Teacher's interview to enable me to have provided a transcript, and therefore a more detailed reflection of her opinion. This would have provided richer material for the reader to arrive at their own conclusion, and would have also provided me with richer data to return to during the heuristic analysis.

I chose not to make audio recordings of the young people in accordance with University of Manchester Committee on the Ethics of Research on Human Beings. Within this ethics process it was necessary to justify my decision to choose the particular group of participants that were chosen and to justify the use of any techniques involved. Whilst it would have been ideal to have recorded the young people, as this would have provided me with a richer data set, I feel that the vulnerability of these young people could not justify the potential intrusion of recording them. The participants in this study were chosen because they are typically 'hard to reach,' that is that typical, mainstream service providers struggle to engage these young people due to their high level of defensive behaviour. They were selected for this study because in my experience in the field I had seen that these young people responded well to storytelling. However, whilst I wanted to capture the perspectives of these young people I did not feel that it justified audio recording as their perspective was also captured through other means, and the reflective interview merely served to add to the process of crystallization, rather than forming the main data set. As Denzin (1989) notes:

“...our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared them with us.” Denzin, (1989; p.83).

### **Subjectivity (the role of the researcher/facilitator)**

Viewed from the traditional perspective of positivism, the subjective nature of this study would be deemed a limitation. As noted above, even within the diverse range of qualitative research methods, this research design acknowledges the inherent subjectivity and intersubjectivity of data than for example, phenomenological researchers who strive to ‘bracket off their assumptions’ in an attempt to be “as objective as possible” (Lukiv, 2006). This research did not aim for data that could be generalised but, instead, the research design drew upon heuristics as an authentic self-process (Douglass and Moustakas, 1985) to capture one of many possible understandings (Morrow, 2005) of the storytelling process. In so doing this research design is based upon a social constructivist ontology which ‘embraces subjectivity’ (Morrow, 2005; Patton, 2002). As McLeod (1996) notes,

“From this perspective, any knowledge of the social world that is created-for example, the findings of a research study-is knowledge-from-one perspective, and it is therefore important for the reader, consumer or user of that knowledge to understand that perspective, to be able to take the point-of-view of the investigator into account when appraising the value of an investigation.” (McLeod, 1996; p.312).

In acknowledging this it is particularly important to provide a reflexive account to locate myself within this study to provide the reader with sufficient contextual detail to enable them to assess the trustworthiness of my findings and conclusions. In addition, it is important to acknowledge that researchers who study their own approach find more favourable results than when the two are more clearly delineated (Drisko and Simmons, 2012), therefore, as a researcher/practitioner it is also

important that my findings and conclusions were member checked by the participants, and also by supervisors of the study as part of a validation process whereby the supervisor could assess whether the findings and conclusions 'ring true' (personal correspondence, William West, 2013).

### **Ethical issues**

As with any therapeutic approach, the selection and application ought to be carried out in collaboration with the client, and delivered with a sensitive awareness of the effects of the approach upon the client. The use of a Session Rating Scale could facilitate client feedback with regard to the helpfulness of each session.

With regard to therapeutic storytelling, specific areas of consideration include:

The readiness of the client for that particular approach.

Story material needs to be selected with sensitivity ensuring that the story is suitable for the emotional age, emotional state and presenting issues of the young person.

Limitations to this approach include the availability of a wide range of high quality stories about pertinent therapeutic issues. However, the match between the story and client is important in order that the story displays attunement and is effectively engaged with by the client.

Other key issues are the level of training, skill and experience of the therapist to deliver the particular therapeutic approach, to ensure that the therapeutic process incorporates the story material in a relational manner appropriate to each individual client.



## **Improvements**

Whilst I wanted this particular storytelling programme to be spontaneous in its delivery and design, it would have been interesting to have designed a more structured programme which could have been delivered to different groups of adolescents in different settings, to provide comparative environments and comparative data.

The use of Session Rating Scales at the end of each session, combined with some other form of session record, such as the Squiggle Game, would have provided more regular, systematic records of the young people's experience of the Storytelling Programme.

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## **An invitation to take part in storytelling sessions**

*The therapeutic effects of storytelling are well-known. "Stories are a transformative force in people's lives, provoking self-reflection and change" (Crawford et al, 2004 p.10).*

### **Information Sheet**

#### **The Storytelling Programme**

You have been invited to take part in Storytelling Workshops as part of a research project for the University of Manchester's Doctoral programme in Counselling Psychology. Please take time to read the following information carefully and talk it through with others if you wish. There will be an opportunity for me to go through the information sheet with you and answer any questions you have, contact details are provided at the end of the information sheet. Take some time to think about whether or not you wish you to take part. Thank you for your time.

**The Research:** *How do pupils who attend a Pupil Referral Unit make use of therapeutic storytelling workshops?*

#### **What is the aim of the research?**

The aim of the research is to understand how young people use the sessions for their benefit.

#### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

Pupils will be involved in the project as co-researchers which means that the storytelling programme will be created and researched with their help. The storytelling programme will consist of a 2-3 hour workshop in the morning, to work on a story in different creative ways. In the afternoon you will be given the opportunity for one-to-one sessions to talk about the story or about anything that you found difficult.

You will have the opportunity to develop storytelling skills, learn how to work well in a group and develop self-confidence.

#### **Why have I been asked to participate?**

You have been asked to take part because you currently attend a Pupil Referral Unit. **It is important to remember that this is not a compulsory part of your**

**education.** You do not have to attend the storytelling sessions and can withdraw from the storytelling programme at any time and this will not be looked upon negatively by staff at the Pupil Referral Unit.

**What happens to the data collected?**

The research data will be the comments that you make about how useful you find the storytelling sessions. Some quotes may be used in the writing of the research, but these will not identify you. You will also be given a chance to see a copy of the research write up should you wish to.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

All efforts will be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained according to the safeguards of the University of Manchester regulations on data protection.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind during the storytelling programme?**

Participation in this research is voluntary. You can choose to take part or not and this will not have any negative effect on the education that you receive at the Pupil Referral Unit. It is not a compulsory part of your education, and you can discuss any concerns you may have with the trainee counselling psychologist. If you do agree to take part there will be a number of points where you will have the opportunity to change your mind if you wish. If you sign the consent form but then change your mind at any point during the storytelling programme you can withdraw from the research. **Once again, if you do not want to take part, or choose to withdraw, this will not have any negative effect on your education at the Pupil Referral Unit.**

**What is the duration of the research?**

The storytelling programme will take place for a day each week throughout the summer term.

**Where will the research be conducted?**

The storytelling sessions will take place at the Pupil Referral Unit that you currently attend.

**Will the outcomes of the study be published?**

The outcomes of the study will form part of a University assessment, and there may be further publications in academic journals or at Conferences. As detailed above, in these publications there will be no identifiable information written about you.

**This project has gained ethical approval from the University of Manchester research Ethics Committee.**

## Contact for further information

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Phone : 0161 2758815



## APPENDIX 2

### Consent Form

#### Therapeutic storytelling with young people

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

#### Process Consent for Participants

*I have been told about the storytelling sessions and have the opportunity to try them for myself. I understand what these sessions and this study is for. I have had the chance to think about this and ask any questions.*

*I understand that I can choose to join in with these sessions or not and that I can drop out any time if I choose to do so without giving a reason.*

*I understand that this study forms part of the Nici's University studies and agree that anything I make, say or write and give to Nici as part of the study can be used for her university work(i.e. academic assignment, journal papers). I understand that I can ask for these things back if I change my mind. I understand that there will not be anything within the study that could identify me.*

*I agree to take part in the above therapeutic storytelling programme.*

Printed Name of Research  
participant.....

Signature.....Date.....  
.....

## APPENDIX 3

### **Extracts from reflective journal**

I approach this study as researcher and storyteller finding my way through Storytelling

My persona is as a storyteller and therapist... yet curious about the process when the two become entwined, about what this process is and what it means, and where it can go? How it can be enhanced. I want to see how the stories speak to the young people, what they take away

If we talk about the gift of story, what is the gift?

At this stage I have struggled to find much literature that fully matches my thinking. I relate most to the storytelling literature who describe the intuitive and implicit processes that arise out of storytelling, in contrast to the therapeutic storytelling literature which acknowledges the processing of metaphor but tends to view storytelling in terms of a cognitive-behavioural technique or as an intrapersonal process. The more traditional storytelling literature focuses upon the intersubjective element

I went in expecting to tell stories and process these stories through creative approaches which I would work with in a typical play therapy/expressive therapies style...reflecting what I could see

I will develop stories as story gifts for the listeners to do as they wish...much as they would if they were listeners at a traditional storytelling session...whilst I know that there are techniques to work stories, to get into stories and introspective with ourselves I have chosen to leave this process as pure as possible...unadulterated by my ideas, but will facilitate where possible

### **I had a belief that stories would be sufficient as a story gift**

With a focus on the expression of traumatic material and an absorption of emotional literacy

I first began delivery of the Storytelling Programme at a Key Stage 2 Pupil Referral Unit (KS2 PRU). Initial discussions with the Acting Deputy Head placed the storytelling programme within a very firm school structure of behavioural modification with Time Out and Rewards. This was not a structure that I was used to and did not feel consistent with my own Child-Centred approach. However, I was open to the perspective presented by the school and willing to consider the implementation of the Storytelling Programme within the framework that they suggested.

This initial trial period covered a period of 4 weeks and consisted of a full school day each week. I found that whilst the PRU's behavioural modification approach was

understandable within the context of their remit it was not a conducive framework for the Storytelling Programme, so whilst I continued with the programme for a further 7 weeks I decided that this particular PRU could not offer me the richest setting for the application of my proposed Person-Centred Storytelling Programme. In all I completed a total of 31 hours with the KS2 PRU and reflective notes and service evaluation data from this programme provided an experience and set of comparative data which could be contrasted with my research data from the KS3 PRU. Reflective notes from this pilot study form part of my reflective research journal. Pilot with Mike's group at The Buzz

09.03.12

Began at the KS2 PRU

The session went well; the children achieved very good 'points' from their teachers and TAs for their lively interactions and contributions.

Ax, Kn, Ky, Dy and Lr

Ax contributed his vivid imagination and created and told many stories

Kn retold Jimmy's story for Ax who had missed the story it was full of great detail, evidence that he had taken a lot in

Ky and Dy were affable and made positive contributions

Lr did not want to join in to begin with but tried hard to do so and engaged well

All engaged well including staff

When I arrived through the door Dy was initially in a disturbed state and wanted to go home...apparently having not been given his medication...eventually Tom got him to stay and medication was to be brought to school

Kn was also a little hyper and there was some confusion about whether he had had medication but eventually he settled

Mike talked a great deal about the stories that they had been writing during the week, explaining to me what he had been doing with them

Eventually he handed the class over to me...very slowly

I had barely introduced myself again and reflected on what we might do now that Mike wanted some of the day to include looking at the stories that they had created

He also introduced the idea of the park...I agreed but a city park bordered by main roads is not the place for storytelling, and it was very very cold

I had a lecture from him in the break about structure, not giving them choice because they couldn't handle it and that they were here to learn and get back into mainstream

...need to link emotional literacy with learning and getting back into mainstream

Session 1 group2 -14.05.12 at The KS2 PRU

Sy, Sh, Cd, K, Cs, Ab, Mk

K wrote the names on the board with help from the class and told a story about his cousin's hamster

Sy elected to read a story that I was going to tell...the Soul Bird and then explained it to the class

C Told a story about a dog fight

Sh engaged really intently with the first story, "The chickens and the eagle" but struggled to express ideas about himself on paper

Sh was very angry after break and draw a picture of himself feeling angry, I showed him a variety of faces and symbolic characters expressing emotions and he pointed to the angry face...we talked about feeling angry, and normalised it, and I told the story of Arthur at the battle of Camlan

Shortly afterwards Sh described himself as sad by pointing to a sad expression on the sheets that I had given out

Later still I told "the cracked pot" story and he indicated to me that he wanted to show me that he now felt "happy" by pointing to a "happy face"

Whilst Sh was struggling to engage with the session as a result of feeling angry (He is a Looked after Kid) and is apparently struggling with a lot at the moment...however, he engaged with me...maintained contact verbal and eye, even whilst I engaged with others, and the stories my PCT approach facilitated this

At lunchtime K waved at the window to acknowledge me in a very friendly way...he smiled a lot through the session

During an alliteration game Alex described himself as Angry alex but decorated his box and engaged in conversations about football without any signs of anger or frustration being expressed, just a display of tension...Angry Alex perhaps being a reference to the label that he had acquired for himself, his identity?

02.07.12

Received flowers by way of an apology because I had travelled from Cumbria for a session that was then cancelled...total disregard, not on the part of the teacher who was very apologetic and had been facilitating the sessions of late (a new teacher) but disregard by the Head who hadn't even bothered to inform me.

Sonia did not want a story about death but encouraged to tune in or out, she chose to listen and her and the other kid moved forward so that all were present at the front and we had a discussion about death...death in a nut and the woman who scared death away

Although several of the children had indicated that death was not a subject that they wanted to discuss, and were given the option to opt out, they all gravitated toward the front and engaged intently with the stories, each were able to talk about their favourite death story.

They really enjoy the opportunity to re-tell and tell stories, their own and mine:

Sy read the soul bird story which she loves and asked for a copy

Cs read the 'wolves inside'

It was a very productive session

Cd was quiet and said that he didn't like talking about death but liked the death story

Sy wanted to turn her box into a mausoleum/grave thing for her brother who is not dead, and said that she had angel wings and could visit whenever he wanted her to and could visit when she wanted to

I really enjoy the work at the KS2 PRU, the kids are great but the teachers are quite inflexible and it's difficult to provide a therapeutic environment when staff: pupil ratios are 4:6

As a result of the pilot study experience I decided to approach a Key Stage 3 (KS3) PRU which I had already established relationships with and where I conducted individual counselling sessions with a couple of female pupils.

I began my initial discussion with the head of the KS3 PRU provision, explaining my experience of the KS2 PRU and the need for a more conducive therapeutic environment to more fully facilitate the therapeutic effectiveness of the stories. The Head was very psychologically-minded and supportive of the programme, and very keen to support its therapeutic potential in the light of the remit of the PRU, to improve emotional and behavioural issues and facilitate re-integration into schools.

The Head arranged for me to implement the storytelling intervention into a local KS3, rather than the one that I currently provided therapy for. My 'Placement Educator' and co-facilitator, in terms of the research programme was open to the programme and keen to support me and foster a conducive atmosphere in which we could all learn and develop. This systemic support was not only key to the effectiveness of the programme, but is also key to providing an emotionally holding and supportive environment in which the young people can experience themselves differently and make the necessary emotional changes that they often needed to make (McLoughlin, 2010).

Session 1 KS3 Diarmuid and Grania

There was some interest shown by Winnie and B engaged in a distracted way (approach-avoidance) there was a fleeting sense of connection and interest, but then a sense that that couldn't be held, what would that be like to engage with me, with the stories? A scary unknown? And then unfortunately they were pulled out. Staff reaction was about this being disrespectful...not seeing that perhaps they were managing the best they could, and showing me the difficulty that they had in trying to

connect...the desire to but the pull back to something more familiar...dis it rather than engage with it

Samurai guy and Wise man and storygirl engaged very well with me and the story, Wise man drew his name very elaborately and confidently, Samurai guy drew his name in blocks and engaged with Bike guy in tracing bikes and cars...it quickly and easily became a space for them to express themselves with relatively few constraints

Wise man engaged very well with the story of Diarmuid and Grania. He drew the handsome Diarmuid character, his signature, and talked about his family, facilitated through a genogram

There is a sense that this is going to be very challenging work, both engaging the staff and the pupils, although it is a much more conducive environment than the KS2 Unit but it's challenging.

And requires confidence in spades

### **In session 2 KS3 The sheep thieves also Arthur and Camlann**

Samurai guy/ Spy Guy told his story about his two bikes, one called TJ who wasn't quite as good as the other bike called samurai guy, TJ had not been training for as long as the other

He had worked in a very focused way on his drawings but it seems that he must have been processing something must have been processing in his head because he just spontaneously told his story when tentatively invited to do so

(Samurai guy's stories are often about 2 competing themes, two motor cyclists, two gangs, two teams of spies)

Storygirl tells stories about death and people being cruel and using each other. The mother sold her daughter, the daughter was unhappy and the mother said "oh well better luck next time" they all loved chocolate. Stories tended to have marriages where the women were mean and "used" the men or children. People were discarded, treated like a commodity.

It seems that there's a lack of love in her life...and that seems to be too painful to face...she seems to dissociate...and this may be the behaviour that staff describe as 'N's odd little ways'

Also her ability to tell stories and do her thing even when others are teasing her, she doesn't appear to take it in, like she's dissociating from it

winnie and Nat King Cole and K listened intently to the Arthur and Camalann story and engaged well

K "Why do you want to talk about being angry...that's why I'm here..." I tried to normalise the feelings of anger...its ok to be angry...it's what you do with it!!!

**Many of the young people took the opportunity to express themselves by re-telling the stories that I had just told, or telling autobiographical tales, or riddles.**

**Sometimes the opportunity to re-tell the story that I had told, for the benefit of someone who had missed it, was so eagerly seized upon that I had to negotiate who could tell it, and turn-taking. Interestingly I would say that the most disruptive pupils were the ones who engaged most with the sessions in a very eager and dynamic way, whether this was for the interpersonal opportunities or opportunities for emotional expression and catharsis or in some instances to engage with the problem-solving nature of the stories and engage in some form of discussion about the content as new ways of experiencing or thinking about something.**

Session 4 KS3 The Cracked pot and The Best and The worst in all the world

E. was very quiet in his first session, it was his first day at the PRU, but by the second and third, he had settled in and said that he felt that he had made friends. He was happy to engage with his box and depictions of emotions, he put a variety of emotions on the bottom of the box and a big stick out tongue face on the inside of the box...a powerful representation of hidden emotions on the bottom and how he feels inside and how he would like to express himself but needs to keep inside...perhaps???! And of interest is the impact that this would have had when the staff who all gathered around intrigued by the boxes and would have opened the box of this relatively quiet angelic looking boy and seen the big stick out tongue staring right back at them

Session 5 KS3 Nicks Tale

The Pupils who were typically excluded from sessions ask to be allowed in, such as WINNIE and Nat King Cole, and engage well, if not in the creative activity, then by listening to the story, and wanting some form of closeness and attachment to me and my presence

And once allowed in they made attempts to comply with what was required, whilst they were not completely compliant or engaged, their level of compliance and engagement always maintained a sufficient degree to ensure that they remained in the class and were not excluded from the sessions.

From an attachment perspective WINNIE tried hard to find ways of engaging...putting stickers on us all, sitting with others/me when engaged in tasks...and listened to stories

Even when 'at a loose end' and struggling to engage e.g. WINNIE and others chose to stay and just sat in on the session...it obviously offered something

Some pupils, including those most disruptive, expressed pleasure at seeing 'the storyteller' and whilst some dismissed the notion of stories, they all showed indications of having engaged with the story, even if their non-verbal behaviour did not always indicate such. For example, they wander about the class disregarding the focused activity, but would comment on the story in a questioning or meaningful way.

On occasions when 2 pupils (one from KS2 and one from KS3) chose not to engage with the tasks of selecting emotional symbols, faces, characters etc. to represent themselves or to describe other aspects of themselves. Whilst these two pupils did not want to actively engage in the task, they both indicated verbally and non-verbally that they were feeling angry and pointed to or selected very red and/or angry faces and characters to represent themselves. They wanted to express themselves and made efforts to be heard and seen, and that seemed to be enough, they showed and then walked off...or through continued engagement, sometimes including stories they then indicated that their emotions had changed to something perhaps more comfortable like 'happy' having moved through anger and sadness

On 3 occasions pupils had been distressed prior to the session or during a break time, and they came into the session very visibly distressed, on one occasion throwing tables over, on each occasion the young people concerned were soothed with stories that I selected to attune to what I understood to be the cause of their distress.

There were 12 pupils who were often divided into two groups with little consistency in attendance each week due to some pupils moving onto alternative provision, or moving home, and a series of new pupils joining the groups, and extra-curricular activities such as a cycling project, art therapy and assessment sessions with the Educational Psychologist which 'pulled pupils out of the sessions' from time to time. This lack of consistency on a day to day basis lead to confusion for me and the pupils and this was demonstrated by their frequent questions about where they were supposed to be for sessions.

The staff believed that it was unlikely that the pupils could all be contained effectively in a single session together, or that I could hold their attention sufficiently for an extended session. Some pupils did ask to stay in the session for a longer period of time, sometimes for the whole time period available and this was permitted by the PRU staff, but this request had to be made by the pupils to their academic staff team.

In general staff were very supportive and non-intrusive in the sessions. Occasionally a staff member was a little more directive than I would have been in their 'questioning' of the pupils with regard to their 'process' and occasionally they were more pro-active and directive when bringing the pupils creation to fruition. Despite, these tensions, I was able to assert myself sufficiently to 'hold' the Storytelling Programme in a manner which could facilitate a therapeutic process, which whilst not optimum, was clearly effective for all participants, including staff, pupils and myself.

I found that therapeutic reflections were often difficult...a YP might show me something but didn't necessary want me to reflect it back...but to hold it for them

Sometimes I felt quite helpless in watching the YPs express themselves, as if they presented problems and dilemmas that were overwhelming...e.g. storygirl and relats, the samurai and the reality of life's dilemmas on the streets...how can I begin to know



how that feels or what you can do about a mother who has rejected you...all you could do is quietly hold it

These kids had a lot of pressure on them to perform in 'appropriate ways' I don't want to impose extra pressures on them

Perhaps I could just try to hold what they gave me

And give back something more distant through stories that they could process at arm's length as they so wished

So was this was part of collaborative element...reflections could come in the form of a story that met them where they were at...answered a need

Attachment soon seemed to be the over-arching theme that emerged...their interactions could be understood through attachment theory...teaching emotional literacy was not the issue...a starting point only...as if to say this is what we were doing here...it's about feeling, emotions, expressions of stuff, this is a place where we can look at that stuff if we want to in different ways and on different levels

Attachment theory could inform the way in which they interacted with me, with the stories and with the activities, and with each other

They are often less keen to engage in activities that seemed to have an expectation of performance/ to produce something...perhaps those activities that are more successful are when they are doing something repetitive like covering their boxes, but frequently they want others to be with them and do it for them or with them...hold them/support them whilst they do it

A need for structure? But then they rebel...so more like a need for holding/containment and for them to be able to work within that to meet their needs...some holding parameters that held the activity loosely and the emotional content and the YP's and staff but a freedom of expression within that

Attachment therapy could inform how I interacted with them, by holding what they show me...but not reflecting back with too much intensity...by reflecting back manageability, strength, calm

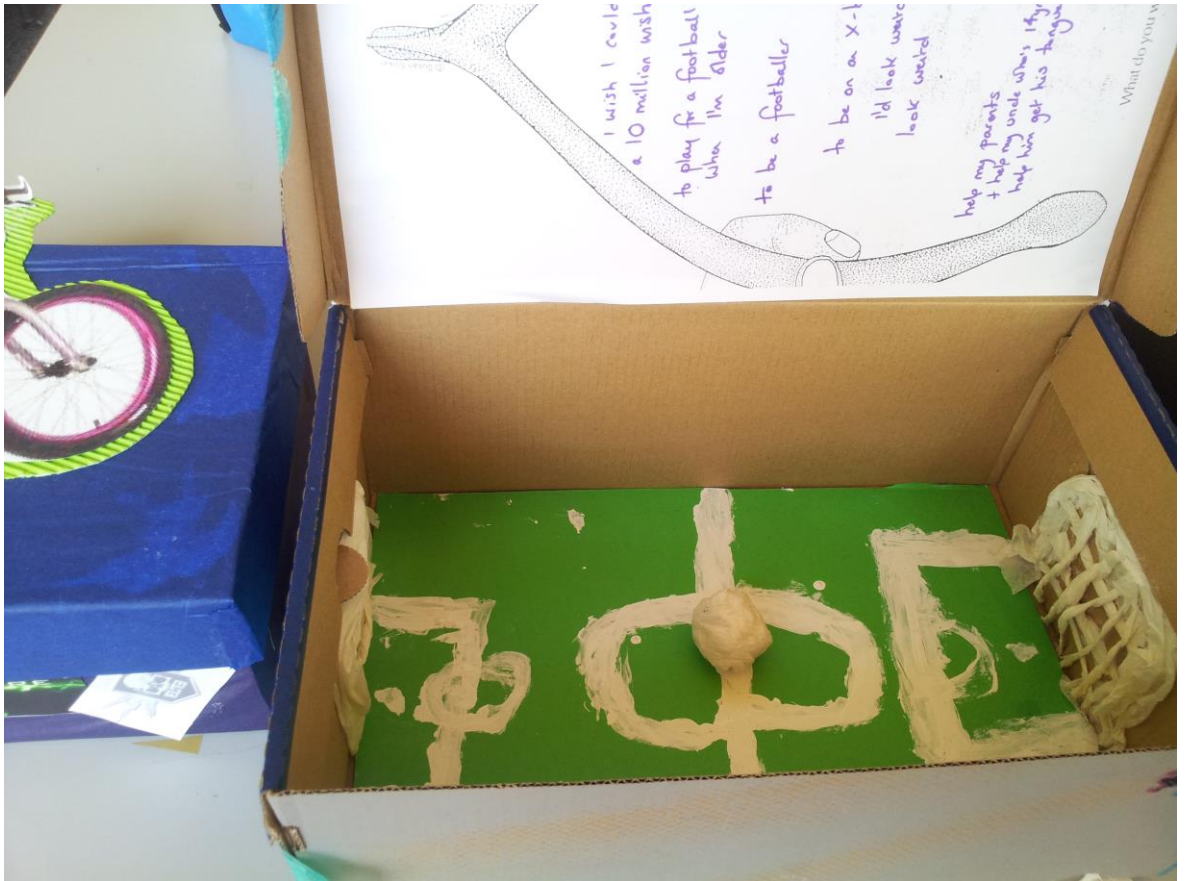
Calmness and relaxation has been key ingredients and reflections about the sessions

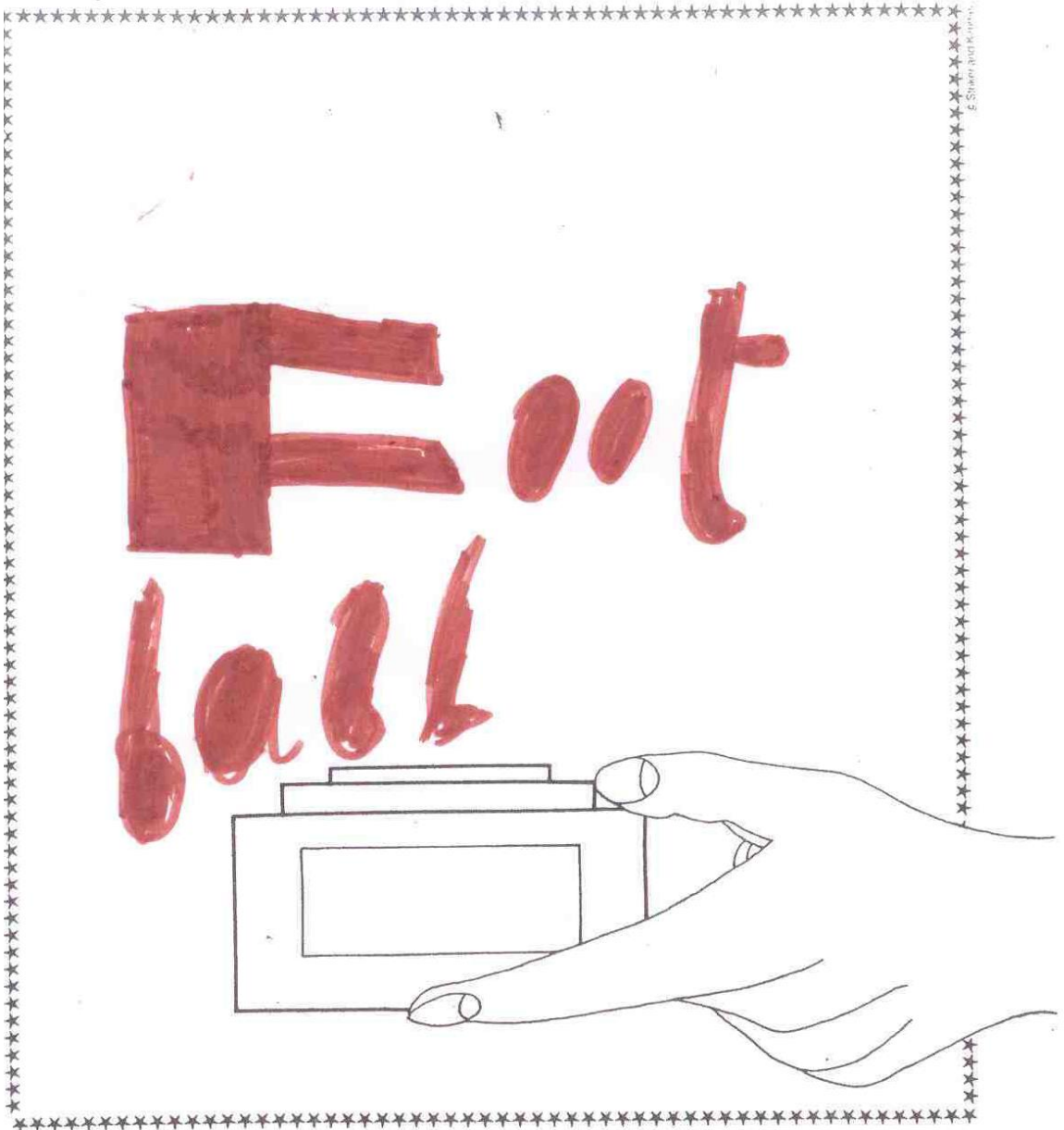
That I seem to have provided a calm holding space where they could begin to process some of their feelings in whatever way was safe to do so

The nurturing nature of the stories were also holding and addressed the attachment needs at a safe distance...but for me to deliver these to the best that I could have required me to be held more than I was...the environment always felt edgy, defensive, and sometimes very challenging...'go on then...prove yourself' despite there being generally genuine encouragement from the kids and the staff

Stories had a visibly soothing and perhaps containing/holding effect when the young people were distraught.

# Wise-man's data (Wm).





**To whom would you give a trophy and what would it look like?**

I wish I could have  
a 10 million wishes.

to play for a football team  
when I'm older

to be a footballer

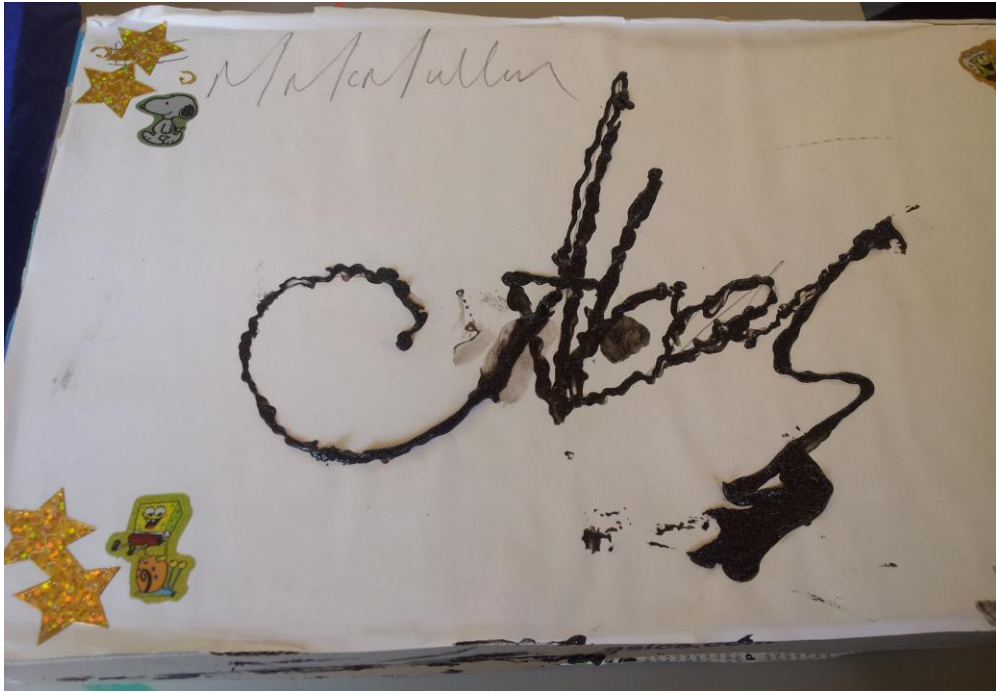
to be on an X-box game

I'd look weird because people  
look weird

help my parents  
+ help my uncle who's 14yr  
help him get his tongue fixed.

What do you wish for?

A-2  
10x190x120mm



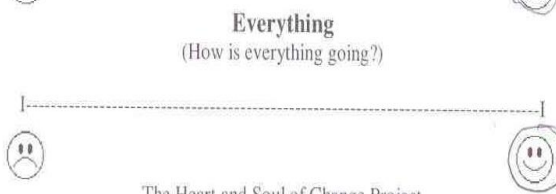
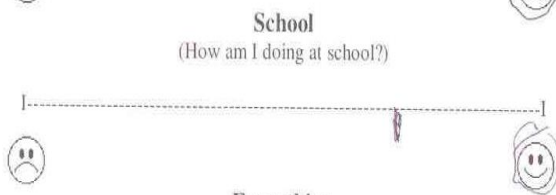
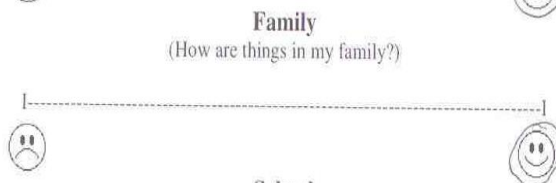
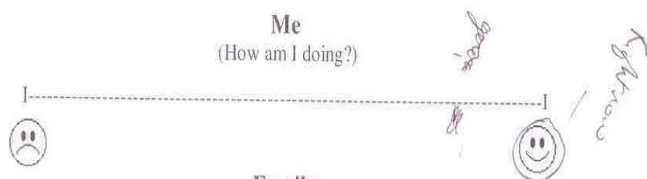
The lid of Wise-man's (Wm) box with gold stars and his 'mark'



## Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS)

Name <u>WM</u> Age (Yrs): _____ Sex: M / F _____ Session # _____ Date: _____ Who is filling out this form? Please check one: Child _____ Caretaker _____ If caretaker, what is your relationship to this child? _____
---

How are you doing? How are things going in your life? Please make a mark on the scale to let us know. The closer to the smiley face, the better things are. The closer to the frowny face, things are not so good. *If you are a caretaker filling out this form, please fill out according to how you think the child is doing.*



The Heart and Soul of Change Project

[www.heartandsoulofchange.com](http://www.heartandsoulofchange.com)

© 2003, Barry L. Duncan, Scott D. Miller, & Jacqueline A. Sparks

"seriously over the line!"

## Wise Man

loved

like the morals of the story

- the cracked

just because some has things better than you didn't mean  
you're worthless + not supposed to be here.

teaches you about stuff

" " to never feel bad about yourself

Funny sometimes. - the Shaplooves

he got all the credit

even you've done the worst thing in your life you can still  
turn it around.

+ if you carry on bad things are going to happen to you

"touch the moon + hold the planet" - picture

the wink face or smile face cos it's really good.

football game "dream"

Storytelling sessions made me feel better about myself

I could talk to you about stuff that I couldn't say to any old teacher

the stories were about things that were relevant

"most of the things that I wanted to talk about were in your stories."

Notes from Wise-man's ( Wm) reflective interview. Above Child Outcome Rating Scale includes comments: "seriously over there. I've loved it"



This picture depicts Wise-man's ( Wm) response to the Squiggle game. I have drawn two circles as a stimulus which Wise-man has transformed into the cheeks of the main figure. Wise-man has then spontaneously developed a detailed illustration beyond my marks. He transformed my two 'squiggle circles' into the cheeks of a boy (representing himself) "touching the moon, with himself standing on it and holding the world in the other hand."



# Story Girl's data



This pertains to Story Girl's reflective interview

## The Storyteller

Can get a bit boring - if stories took 20 mins.  
5-10 mins

liked the stories and the activities

good for people who go mad - really angry + what to start kicking off + enough  
- if they have something bad in their mind  
- they might forget about it - chill out

fun + creative making the box about myself

learnt to be more kind + respectful by listening to stories  
when you're listening to stories you fade away think about stuff  
what's right or wrong, try bit help them with their problems  
if you're having problems you don't want to be listening to stories  
for that long.

"relaxing" instead of worrying about maths + s'thing.

good for people who can't read (take the pressure off performance)  
help him/her with his reading.

felt good to tell my stories - it was a huge gap I could tell they  
weren't listening but I didn't mind.

Don't call it storytelling these days  
Storytelling games - more activities  
more creative ideas.

ask pupils week before

Use distraction techniques with YPs

"in the middle" face



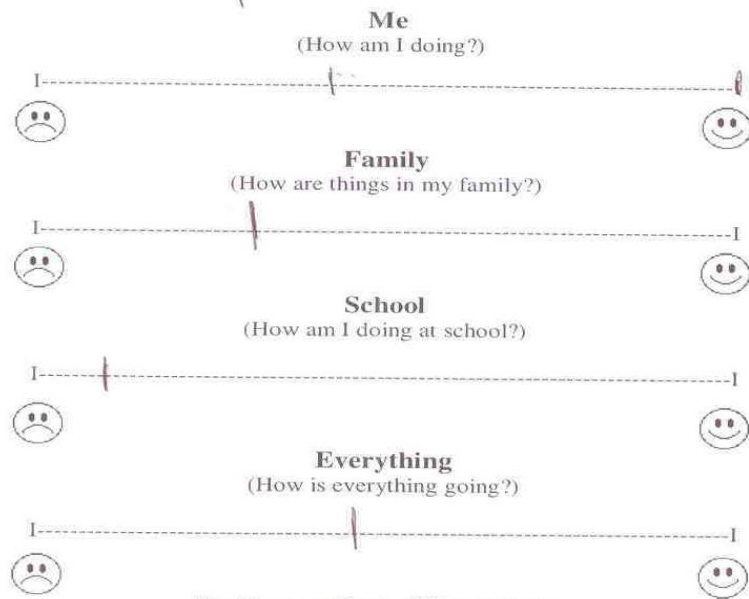
Story Girl's response to the Squiggle game, drawings/doodles during the reflective interview. It is difficult to discern the two squiggles, she has transformed them into two flowers (just into the upper right quadrant).

The Child Outcome Rating Scale named 'N The Storyteller' was completed by Story Girl.

### Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS)

Name N The Storyteller Age (Yrs): \_\_\_\_\_  
Sex: M / F \_\_\_\_\_  
Session # \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Who is filling out this form? Please check one: Child \_\_\_\_\_ Caretaker \_\_\_\_\_  
If caretaker, what is your relationship to this child? \_\_\_\_\_

How are you doing? How are things going in your life? Please make a mark on the scale to let us know. The closer to the smiley face, the better things are. The closer to the frowny face, things are not so good. *If you are a caretaker filling out this form, please fill out according to how you think the child is doing.*



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## Leaf's data



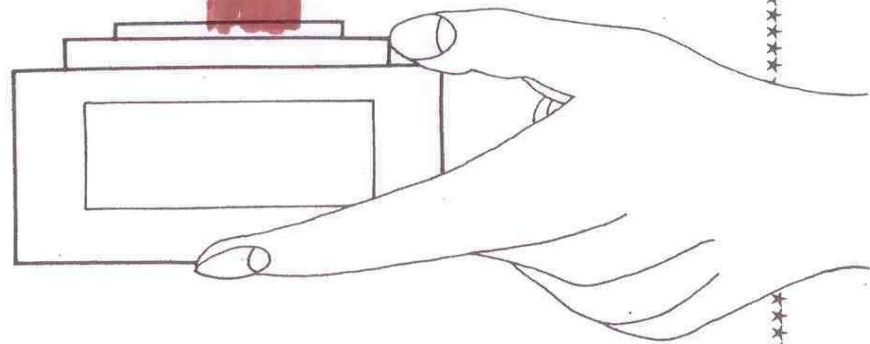
Leaf's box depicting smiley faces, hearts and a slit in the top of the box, 'so that people could put things in.' Leaf was a very passive, yet consistent participant, and her passivity and general receptivity, with minimal expressivity would lead me to interpret Leaf's creation above as depicting her need for people to give her things to augment her poor and fragile sense of self. She presented as someone who had a lot going on, on the surface with a very insubstantial sense of self.



# Riddlemaster's data

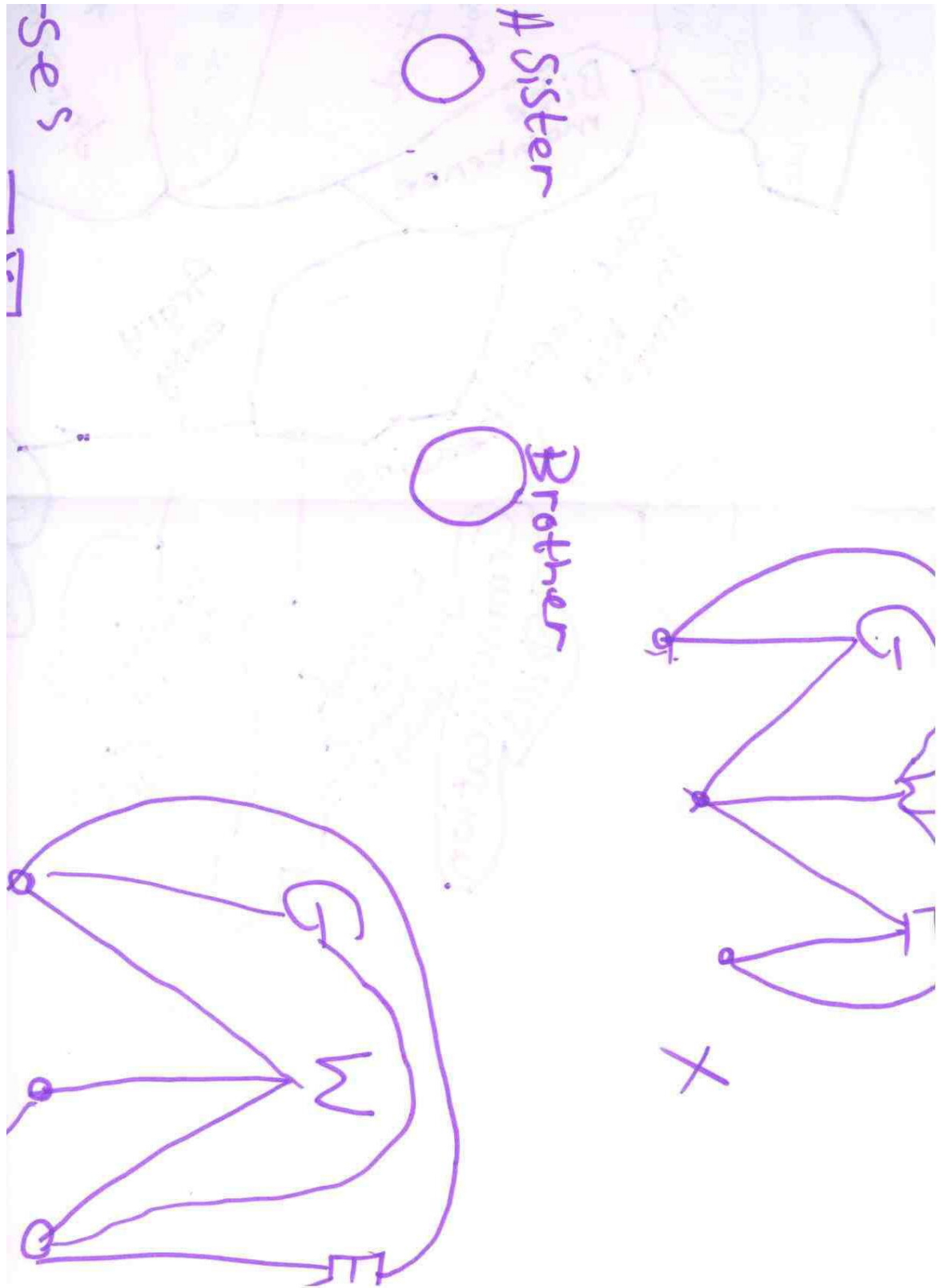
\*\*\*\*\*

RIDDLE  
MASTER

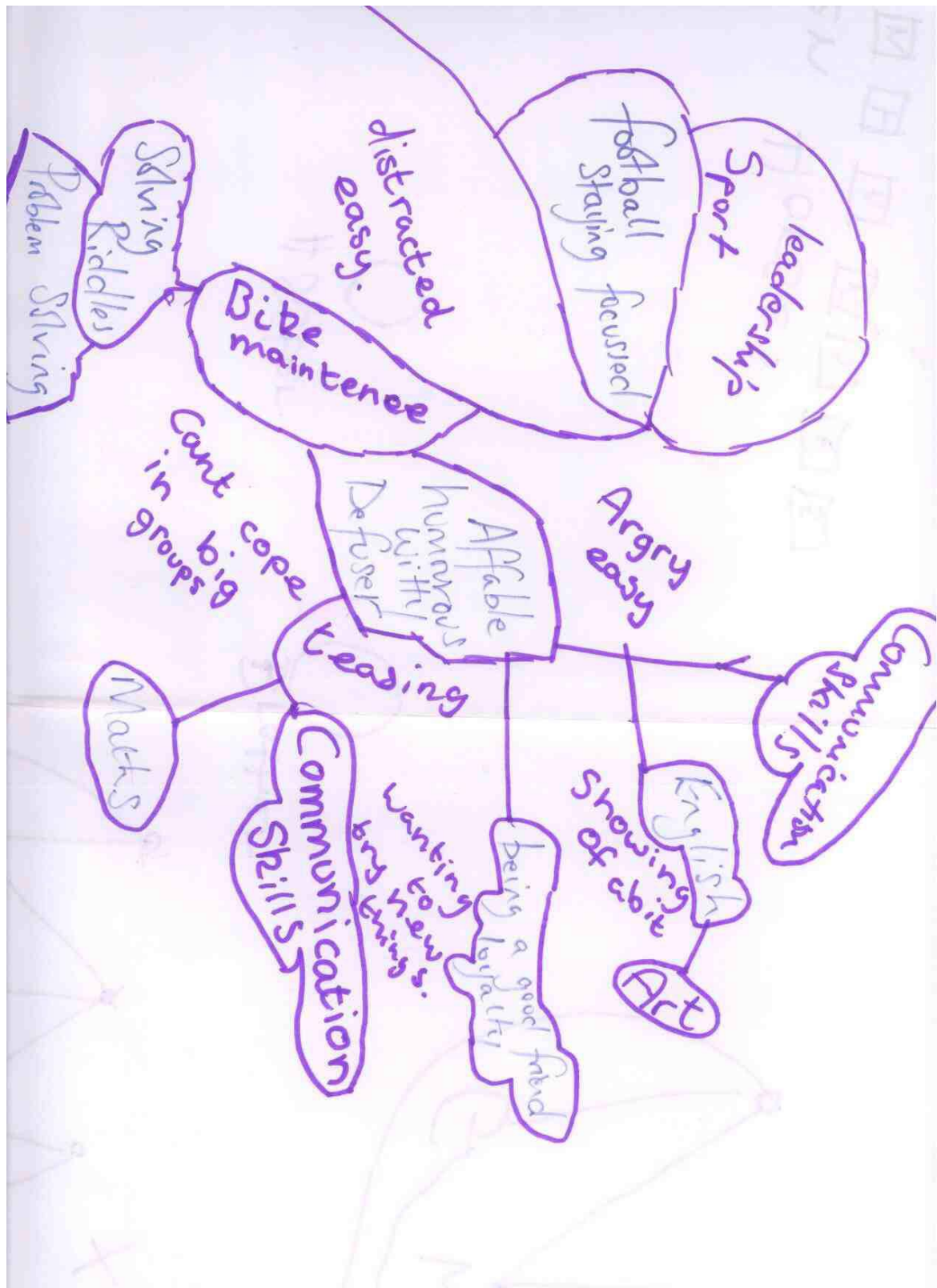


\*\*\*\*\*

**to whom would you give a trophy and  
what would it look like?**



Riddlemaster's attempts to work out a verbal and a visual riddle



A mapping exercise depicting Riddlemaster's developing sense of self







Riddlemaster's box developed early in the Storytelling Programme.

## Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS)



Name RM Age (Yrs): \_\_\_\_\_  
Sex: M / F \_\_\_\_\_  
Session # \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Who is filling out this form? Please check one: Child \_\_\_\_\_ Caretaker \_\_\_\_\_  
If caretaker, what is your relationship to this child? \_\_\_\_\_

How are you doing? How are things going in your life? Please make a mark on the scale to let us know. The closer to the smiley face, the better things are. The closer to the frowny face, things are not so good. *If you are a caretaker filling out this form, please fill out according to how you think the child is doing.*



**Me**  
(How am I doing?)

I-----X-----I  
 



**Family**  
(How are things in my family?)

I-----X-I  
 

**School**  
(How am I doing at school?)

I-----X-----I  
 

**Everything**  
(How is everything going?)

I-----X-----I  
 

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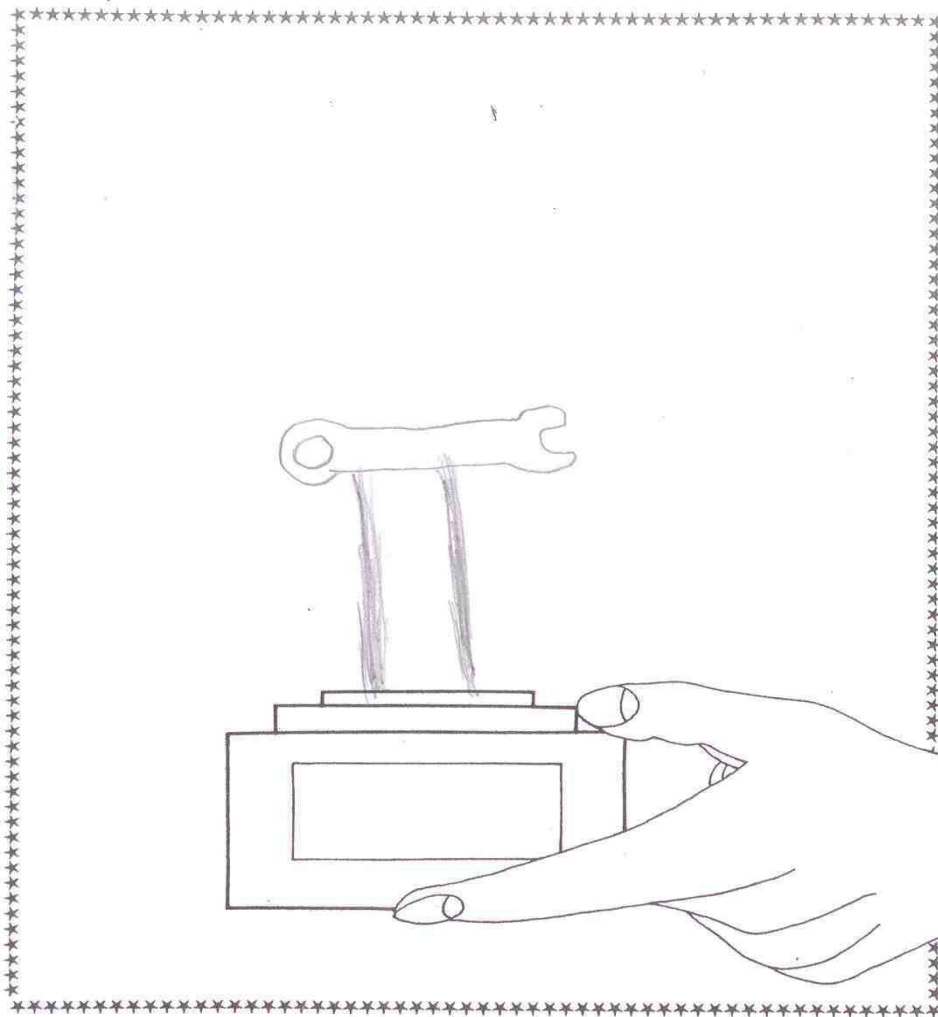
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# Bike Guy's data



Bike Guy's box, created early in the Storytelling Programme



**To whom would you give a trophy and what would it look like?**

Bike Guy depicted a trophy with a spanner on it to symbolise his sense of himself as a 'builder, constructor.' He commented that the Storytelling Programme had helped him feel better about himself, "helped with school, helped me like art and making stuff, yeah cos I know I can build stuff".

BG

'jeal' (felt better about myself)

helped me with school helped me like art + making stuff

jeal cos I know I can build stuff.

Diamond + Coravia (+ the hog thing)

"The way the emotions got in the way of their friendship"  
(Sense of being heard/understood) etc.

"good because it makes you think about what would happen in life  
if you don't trust your friends. when you need them they won't be there  
for you because you weren't there for them."

the wife - never react before you know what's actually happened.

Geist - heard it before but forgot about it.

to understand - what could happen in life what to look out for.

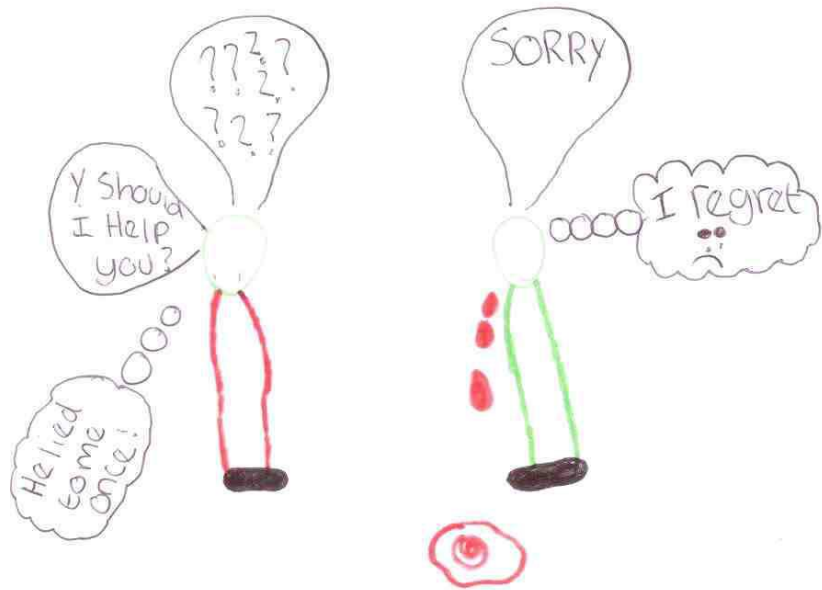
a reason for everything that's happens.

Making the box was interesting cos you put what you like in it  
+ store memories in it

"helps you look ahead"

① hand side 2nd row

# Friendship





## Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS)

Name BG Age (Yrs): \_\_\_\_\_  
Sex: M / F \_\_\_\_\_  
Session # \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Who is filling out this form? Please check one: Child \_\_\_\_\_ Caretaker \_\_\_\_\_  
If caretaker, what is your relationship to this child? \_\_\_\_\_

How are you doing? How are things going in your life? Please make a mark on the scale to let us know. The closer to the smiley face, the better things are. The closer to the frowny face, things are not so good. *If you are a caretaker filling out this form, please fill out according to how you think the child is doing.*

**Me**  
(How am I doing?)



**Family**  
(How are things in my family?)



**School**  
(How am I doing at school?)



**Everything**  
(How is everything going?)



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Although not part of the reflective interview data set; the following is the symbol which one participant placed on the inside of his box. He put a variety of emotions on the outside and the bottom of the box and a big stick out tongue face on the inside of the box...This had the effect that when anyone looked inside the box this is what greeted them. Interestingly all of the teachers were intrigued to look at the box and an ad hoc exhibition occurred, and this is what greeted them:





## Notes of teacher's comments made in the Teacher's reflective interview (J)

JM.

Extrem Dept.

V. beneficial - 'I find it'

No approach - calmy influence - v. effective impact.

Responsiveness - given chance to discuss informally  
eg. loss session.

allowed coop

practical approach

multi-tasking - doing worksheets alongside practical diff

learnt from my approach.

fitted v well - flexible - dynamics of the gp.

Several things planned  
"5 diff hats"

multi-dimensional

child-centred

to get the best out of them

willing to alter approach /

learning curve / not a major disaster

knock backs makes you more resilient - strategies

pushing the rock - not changing - but changing you.

go →  
initially →

"Healthy Schools"

## APPENDIX 5

### **Stories told during the KS3 Storytelling Programme, Summer Term 2012**

**Diarmuid and Grania (Helm Meade, 2001)**

**The Cracked Pot (Thomas and Killick, 2007)**

**The Best and Worst in all the World (Hugh Lupton, 2003)**

**The Sheep Thieves (Thomas and Killick, 2007)**

**Arthur and Camlann (various historical sources)**

**The Chicken and The Eagle (Nick Owen, 2001)**

**The Soul Bird (Michael Snunit, 2000)**

**Nick's Tale adapted from The Man With No Story To Tell (Daniel Morden, The Sleeping King CD)**

**The Snake of Dreams (Hugh Lupton, 2003)**

**The House Thief (Benjamin Hoff, 1982)**

**Gelert (Thomas and Killick, 2007)**

**Death in a Nut (Thomas and Killick, 2007)**

**Outwitting Death (Rosen, downloaded 2012 from Healing Story Alliance)**

**Silly Jack adapted from Silly Simon (Mollie Clarke, 2000)**

## *The Cracked Pot*

*Once there was a woman who lived in a village in India, and like all of her neighbours she had to collect her water from a nearby stream. So every day, without fail, she would load up her two pots onto her shoulders and walk off down the grassy path.*

*As she walked Perfect Peter Pot would start to nag away at the other pot "You're all cracked; you're no good; you can't even do your job properly, water pours out of your cracks and you're half empty by the time you get back. I don't know why she keeps you, she should get rid of you, and get a pot that's perfect and new just like me."*

*The other pot, the cracked pot, just stayed quiet, but inside it was hurt and water spilled out of its cracks.*

*The old woman emptied the pots and put them on the shelf ready for the morning.*

*That night Perfect Peter Pot started again, nag, nag, nag, he just kept nagging at the cracked pot, and the cracked pot just felt worse and worse and worse.*

*Eventually the old woman heard the commotion and came into the kitchen "What's going on here?" she asked*

*The cracked pot began to speak, "Well I just think that you should throw me away, I'm no good, I spill half my water, I'm useless, if you got yourself another perfect pot you wouldn't have to make so many trips to the stream"*

*"Hey, what's all this?" cried the woman "look Perfect Peter Pot is good for collecting water, he's perfect for that, you are not so good at collecting water but just look..." the old woman picked up the cracked pot and went to the door "look" she said "look along the path that we travel every day, look at the ground, the side that I carry Perfect Peter Pot on, it's all dry, but look on the other side, the side that I carry you on, look at all the flowers that you have watered, day after day. Look how much beauty and joy you have brought into my life, and the lives of my neighbours."*

Adapted from Thomas and Killick (2007; p.79).

## *The Sheep Thieves*

*Once upon a time there were a couple of sheep thieves who lived a fairly quiet life up in the fells. As sheep thieves they would creep out under the cover of night to take a sheep or two. Occasionally they would sell a sheep but generally they took one to fill their own bellies, and those of their dear old mother. They didn't want to steal sheep but they couldn't find any work and this was the only way that they knew to make ends meet.*

*But one day they were caught, and it was horrible, they were taken into town to the local blacksmith and the letters ST were scorched into their foreheads with a branding iron. There they were branded for life with the letters ST on their forehead.*

*Well the youngest brother, tired of his ways, decided to pack up what few belongings he had. He said goodbye to his mother and went in search of pastures new. He walked for days and nights, sheltering in cowsheds and fields, and keeping away from villages and towns. But eventually he came across a village in a completely new part of the land and the confidence grew inside him to try and see if he could make a new life for himself here. The people had different accents to those he was used to, but they seemed friendly enough so he thought that he would venture to see if he could have a room for the night and maybe find some work.*

*Well the villagers were friendly, but they still wondered about the newcomer, and in particular they wondered about the ST on his forehead. Nevertheless the local Priest gave him a bed for a night or two and sent him to look for work with the butcher in the village square.*

*The newcomer worked hard and was particularly friendly and helpful to all the villagers, it just happened that the village was a particularly warm and friendly place full of community spirit, and in return for the help that the newcomer received he was more than happy to reciprocate. In time the villagers decided that the ST must stand for 'Saint' and so they treated him as such, and as a result his behaviour became more and more saintly.*

*He lived for many, many years in the village and when the day came for him to leave this earth he was buried in the village church yard as a saint.*

*But what of the other brother? Well he stayed where he was, even after their mother had died of old age. All he knew was the fell side and being a sheep thief and so he continued to steal sheep until the end of his days. He had been branded a sheep thief and lived the life of a sheep thief. But the end of his life came much earlier than for his brother, he was soon caught for stealing sheep and this time he was hanged.*

Adapted from Thomas and Killick (2007; p. 93).

## *Diarmuid and Grania*

*Fionn McCoul was the leader of Ireland's finest band of huntsmen the Fianna  
But Fionn was restless...and lonely  
His druid adviser suggested Grania, King Cormac's daughter would make a fine  
wife...no woman can match her in form, manner or speech...the wedding day was  
set  
But Grania's heart sank when she laid eyes upon the renowned Fionn...  
"No man in his prime, a man around whom old age had begun to settle, it would  
have been more fitting if Fionn had asked for my hand on behalf of one of his  
sons. Fionn is a man shaped by battle"...and she wanted a lover...  
And then Grania laid eyes upon Diarmuid...  
Whoever sets eyes upon Diarmuid would instantly fall in love with him and  
would be satisfied by no other...  
Grania was immediately filled with love and admiration for him...  
From the hair on the top of his head...to the ground beneath his feet and all in  
between, through to his very soul...  
Grania approached Diarmuid declaring her love...  
But Diarmuid declared his loyalty to Fionn "his lord and master"...  
But Grania cast such a spell on him that eventually he was unable to resist the  
love between them*

*Despite learning of the magic that had played its part in the lovers  
embrace...Fionn was overcome with anger and revenge...and pursued the lovers  
for weeks, months and years...at the cost of many a life...  
But as Fionn grew old the bitterness and anger subsided a little and peace was  
agreed*

*After they had lived, estranged but at peace, for some years, Grania requested  
that the peace be truly honoured by a huge feast...  
The preparations were underway for a year  
And the guests (including Fionn) were invited to celebrate for a year and a day,  
And on the last night Diarmuid had a dream which enticed him into the woods of  
the wild boar...Grania was filled with portent and pleaded with him not to  
go...for it had been foretold that Diarmuid would lose his life from a fatal wound  
by a wild boar...*

*Diarmuid found Fionn out on a hunt and accused him of enticing him to his  
death...  
Eventually Diarmuid was struck by a boar and lay at Fionn's feet, the life  
draining out of him  
"Fionn you could save me with your healing hands, go fetch water"  
...but 3 times Fionn went for water, and carried it back in his hands, and 3 times  
the water drained through his fingers just as the life drained out of Diarmuid...by*

*the time Fionn recognised his bitterness it was too late...the life had gone from Diarmuid's body*

*Grania grieved and raged and the warring began again... taken up by Diarmuid's sons*

*But as the years passed and Diarmuid's sons had families of their own, they had better things to strive for, and they knew the futility of revenge...and once more peace settled again over the land*

Adapted from Erica Helm Meade's "The Moon in the Well" (2001; p.48)

### **Working the story**

Stories:

- provide a stimulus for discussion about life's dilemmas
- offer an opportunity to safely and vicariously experience painful emotions
- allow the opportunity to examine **alternative psychological or philosophical perspectives**
- build an emotional vocabulary and develop **emotional awareness**
- **encourage empathy**, exploring the different perspectives of the characters within the story
- **encourage personal integrity and letting go of the past**
- **focus on personal resourcefulness and hope**

Points for Discussion:

This story reminds us of our less than noble/less positive characteristics such as revenge

...discussions can be had about revenge and regrettable actions

How Fionn, Diarmuid and Grania might be feeling

And what of forgiveness...should/could Fionn have forgiven Diarmuid

The years that the grudge/the warring lasts for...

The wasted years?!

The way back out of such a stuck and futile place...is there a way back?

Stories can put traumas and wounds in perspective and focus on personal resourcefulness and hope to create a different story, stories are about positive growth, the phoenix rising from the ashes. Stories acknowledge the wounds but help you move forward.

Fionn has a gift...he could save Diarmuid but the bitterness within him means that he fails to use his gift wisely.

What happens when we give in to negative behaviours, emotions, thoughts?

What would it have been like for Fionn if he had let go of his anger and used his gift with empathy?

Not recognising and utilising personal strengths to turn things around

## *Nick's Tale*

*Not so long ago everyone would have had a story to tell. People didn't sit watching telly or playing computer games like they do now, instead people would gather round and sing songs or tell stories. They would tell stories to pass the time whilst they worked, they would tell stories for fun and just to relax at the end of the day.*

*Nick loved stories...they never stayed in his head though.*

*Now Nick was a nice lad, a hard worker. He was happy just helping with odd jobs here and there. He was always the first to call on to fix the roof, or take the sheep to market, or mend the stone walls. Nick was a big strapping lad and could turn his hand to most things.*

*Well one day he was travelling down over Hartside, having dropped off some new farm machinery for Old Mr Higgins, when he came across a cottage that he hadn't seen before. Night was falling and he wondered whether he would be able to take shelter so he approached the front door. He heard sounds coming from inside, laughter and music...the door was opened and he was welcomed in.*

*Nick found some space to sit on the floor and settled down, the music had stopped and now jokes were being told.*

*And then an old man stood up and commanded everyone's attention.*

*"Tonight!" declared the old man who now stood in front of the fire, "Tonight, we are going to have a competition to see who can tell the best story. The winner, as judged by all those here, will win this silver cup. Now let the stories begin."*

*Nick made himself comfortable and began to listen. The first story was about someone who couldn't tell stories, Nick enjoyed it a lot, it was funny, but he also felt a bit uncomfortable because he knew he couldn't tell stories.*

*Next, a young girl stood up and told one about a man who thought he'd died and then found out he hadn't. Then there was a tale about a cow that lived on the roof of a cottage, the roof was covered in grass so the cow happily spent her days grazing there.*

*Nick was having a great time, until...*

*All eyes were on him... "Your turn" nudged the young woman next to him*

*Nick began to perspire, sweat dripped down the sides of his forehead, and he could feel it rolling down his back, his hands were sticky, and his belly was full of butterflies...*

*"But I don't have a story, and I need the loo" Nick got up and made his way to the door to go outside.*

*“Here, take this thimble with you, behind the house you’ll see a tarn, a small lake, and on the tarn you’ll find a laal (small) boat. Take this thimble and empty out all of the water that’s in the boat, and while you do that I promise you a story will come to you that you will be able to tell”*

*Nick left the cottage and went in search of the tarn and the boat, having first made a stop at the privy.*

*Nick knelt by the boat and began to use the thimble to empty all of the water out. He tired of this though, it was taking ages, and still he had no story to tell. He threw the thimble over his shoulder and began to use his hands but to get into a better position to get more of a handful he decided to get into the boat, now this was no easy matter, Nick was a big strapping lad, known for his strength not his agility, and what’s more the boat was only a tiny little coracle, not the kind of boat for a man like Nic.*

*He placed one foot in the centre of the coracle, and just as he lifted his foot off the ground, he wobbled; and well...Nick slipped, banged his head and fell into the water just on the edge of the shoreline...*

*A short while later a young man passed by*

*“You alright miss?” enquired the young man*

*“Huh? Miss?” queried Nick puzzled by the way the young man addressed him*

*Nick rubbed his head and sat up in the water, he rubbed his head, but his hair felt different, it felt...all soft, not all wirey like it usually did, and it seemed much, much longer...aaagh! It was down to his shoulders, and all blonde and curly and glossy...aaagh! He had women’s hair...and his shoulders were covered in these shiny locks, and frills...he was wearing frills...and he had breasts...and dainty feet... “What’s happened to me?” squeaked Nick as a high pitched girl’s voice came out of his mouth*

*“Dunno Miss, you must’ve bumped your head” replied the young man “What’s your name”*

*“Ugh, Nick” replied Nick, feeling really confused*

*“Well Nick, if you aint feelin’ too good you can come back to my home, I live with me mother and you can stay a while with us until you are feeling better.”*

*Well Nick didn’t know what else he could do, so he agreed.*

*He spent a few days with the young man and his mother, and they all get on really well, Nick got used to being a girl, and quite liked it, and the young man quite liked it too, well he quite liked Nick anyway.*

*Nick just ended up staying, and after a few months the young man asked Nick to marry him, and Nick said yes, and in time they had children, and all was well.*

*One day Nick and his family went for a walk by the tarn, and as Nick passed the old coracle Nick had a strange feeling in his stomach*

*“You go on” he said to his family, “I just want to rest here a while”*



*Nick lay down in the coracle and the coracle rocked and swayed and it overturned and Nick bumped his head and landed in the water.*

*When he had crawled to the water's edge, he sat and rubbed his head, but his hair was no longer glossy and long, and he no longer had breasts and dainty feet...he was back to being strapping, hairy Nic.*

*Nick got up and started to wander and soon he came across the storytelling house, he knocked on the door and was welcomed.*

*Funny but the same person was telling the same story that was being told when he had left to go to the loo. He scratched his head. He turned to everyone and breathlessly told his story... "I've a story to tell and you just won't believe it"*

*And they didn't, but they thought he was the best storyteller around.*

Adapted from Daniel Morden, from an undated, self-published CD