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Re-Authoring Conversations

When people consult therapists they tell stories; they speak about the history of the problems, predicaments, or dilemmas that have brought them to therapy, and they provide an account of what led to their decision to seek help. In doing this, people link the events of their lives in sequences that unfold through time according to a theme or plot. These themes often reflect loss, failure, incompetence, hopelessness, or futility. Along with this, people routinely refer to the figures or protagonists that feature in the story, and they share with therapists their conclusions both about the identity of these figures or protagonists and about their motives, intentions, and personal characteristics. Re-authoring conversations invite people to continue to develop and tell stories about their lives, but they also help people to include some of the more neglected but potentially significant events and experiences that are "out of phase" with their dominant storylines. These events and experiences can be considered "unique outcomes" or "exceptions."

It is these unique outcomes or exceptions that provide a starting point for re-authoring conversations. They provide a point of entry to the alternative storylines of people's lives that, at the outset of these conversations, are barely visible. The therapist facilitates the development of these alternative storylines by introducing questions that

encourage people to recruit their lived experience, to stretch their minds, to exercise their imagination, and to employ their meaning-making resources. People become curious about, and fascinated with, previously neglected aspects of their lives and relationships, and as these conversations proceed, these alternative storylines thicken, become more significantly rooted in history, and provide people with a foundation for new initiatives in addressing the problems, predicaments, and dilemmas of their lives.

Liam and Penny

Penny called for an appointment for her son, Liam, age 15, whom she was very concerned about. She'd had these concerns for many years, but they had been significantly exacerbated by events of the last several months. Liam had dropped out of school 4 months ago, had become more withdrawn and rarely emerged from his bedroom, and was now quite noncommunicative and morose. On the day prior to calling for an appointment, Penny had happened across his diary. She initially experienced a dilemma about whether or not to read it, but the magnitude of her concern for him resolved this dilemma for her. Upon reading some recent entries, Penny found her worst fears confirmed. The diary entries were saturated with the theme of suicide—in fact, they suggested that Liam had already made two suicide gestures. She also learned that Liam considered himself to be messed-up and damaged, and that he felt socially and emotionally paralyzed.

Penny was now desperate and had called me on the advice of her general practitioner. She said that she was losing hope for Liam's life. She had hoped that Liam would improve following their escape from his father, a highly abusive man, some 2 years ago. Liam's father had subjected both Liam and Penny to regular assault, and he had been very skilled at controlling both of them and at cutting off any escape routes. Penny explained that she'd tried many times to free herself and her son from this situation, but Liam's father had always managed to circumvent these efforts through acts of intimidation and threats of retribution. These threats of retribution were principally against Liam's life.

Penny described a little of the nightmare that she and Liam had endured, and she talked of the guilt that she harbored over what Liam had gone through during this time. She also spoke of the rising hopes and expectations that she had experienced upon finally escaping the violence of this man. However, to her dismay, things did not improve for Liam as she had expected they would. Liam remained disinterested in life. He had become increasingly isolated and increasingly convinced that the future held nothing for him. He could now see no horizons of possibility in his life.

I said that I would clear a space in my schedule to meet with Liam, and I wondered aloud how Penny might succeed in getting him to see me. Penny said that this would not be easily achieved, as Liam was likely to be resentful about her taking this initiative without consulting him and would be furious with her if he sensed that she had read his diary. When I asked Penny about what she thought the consequences of this fury would be, she predicted that Liam would not surface from his room for a few days, and that even when he did he would only speak to her grudgingly for several more days. She was worried that making this appointment without consulting him would contribute to his negative frame of mind and lessen the chances that he would agree to talk with me. But she was also sure that if she did consult Liam about making an appointment, he would veto the idea.

Penny wanted my thoughts about how she might encourage Liam to attend this appointment. I suggested that she ask him to join her in this meeting with me for her sake. Penny could honestly tell him that she had become increasingly preoccupied with worry about recent developments in his life, and that this preoccupation was now quite pervasive. She could let him know that it was making it virtually impossible for her to concentrate on the tasks that were required of her in her workplace, to engage in any semblance of a social life, and to feel emotionally present in her connections with others. She could also explain that it was interfering with her sleep and her appetite, and that she was now at a crisis point and in desperate need of help.

Penny thought that there was a good chance that Liam would respond to this request by agreeing to come with her to the appointment. By the end of our telephone conversation she had decided to

tell him about reading his diary, explaining that she'd felt driven to do so by these preoccupying concerns. Penny thought that she'd be able to weather the storm provoked by this admission, and she requested an appointment in 4 or 5 days time.

Five days later I met with Penny and Liam. Liam made it clear that he was attending this meeting for his mother's sake, and that he would not have come on his own account. For the present, he'd "agreed to come along for the ride" and would reserve his judgement about the value of this exercise. However, he did confirm that he'd concluded that his life was pointless, that it wasn't worth trying anything, that he was messed up, and that he had no future. Following is a transcript of our conversation, taken from a point about 15 minutes into our first meeting.

Liam: So my mum's told you about what we went through. But it was worse for her than it was for me.

M: It was worse for her than it was for you. In what way?

Liam: He gave me a pretty hard time, but it was more painful for my mother.

M: Were you concerned about what she was being put through?

Liam: What do you think?!

M: Sometimes people get a bit desensitised to violence, and even though it still has a devastating impact on their lives and on the lives of others they become a bit oblivious to this.

Liam: Well, I wasn't oblivious to this. Of course I was concerned about what he was doing to her. It was terrible.

M: Tell me, were you more concerned for yourself or your mother? Or were you concerned about yourself and your mother equally?

Liam: Mum, of course.

M: Penny, does it surprise you to hear this?

Penny: Which part?

M: That through all this time Liam was more concerned for you than he was for himself.

Penny: Well, no. It doesn't surprise me at all.

M: Liam was more concerned for you than he was for himself. What did this suggest to you about what was important to Liam? Or about what was precious to him?

Penny: Well . . . I know we've had our ups and downs, and recently Liam hasn't seemed to want me in his life much. But I have still always known that I was precious to him.

M: How did you know this?

Penny: A mother just knows these things about her son. These are just the things that a mother knows.

M: Are there any stories that you can tell me about Liam's actions that would be a reflection of what was precious to him? Of what he held precious? Are there any stories you can tell me about him that would help me to understand how you knew this about him?

Penny: There's probably lots of things that I could tell you. But I don't really know where to start right now.

M: Any starting point would be fine. If you could think of some story that you could tell me about Liam's actions that reflect the extent to which he held your life precious, that would be helpful to me.

Penny: Okay. Maybe I could start by telling you about something that happened when he must have been, let's see, about 8 years old. It was on a Sunday morning. I distinctly remember that. And his father was hitting me for some reason or other. I always tried to protect Liam from

seeing these things, but it wasn't always possible to do this. Anyway, suddenly I heard glass smashing. This interrupted his father, and we went into the living room and I saw that someone had thrown a rock through the front window. There was broken glass all over the carpet. I looked out the window, and guess who I saw running off down the street? It was Liam. His father took off after him and Liam copped a thrashing for this. I tried to stop it. It was one of those really terrible situations. I felt torn apart by it.

M: Liam distracted his father when he was hitting you?

Penny: Yes, he distracted his father. He did this even though he would have known that he was going to cop a belting for it.

M: Liam, do you remember this?

Liam: Nope.

M: Penny, what sort of step was it that Liam took on that Sunday all of those years ago? How would you name this action of Liam's?

Penny: I don't really know, I haven't thought much about it. I guess that I even tried to put it out of my mind because of what happened to Liam. And because I wasn't able to do anything. It was horrible. I wouldn't be talking about this if you hadn't asked about it.

M: Did Liam's action fit with that sense of pointlessness about life that he was just talking about? Was this an example of Liam just accepting what life was serving up to him?

Penny: No, no. Of course not. There's no way that it fits with that.

M: Okay, so what does it fit with? What might be a good way of naming this action that Liam took in throwing a rock through the window?

Penny: Well, like I said, I haven't really thought about this. But I suppose when I think about it, yes, the word that I would use is that he was "protesting." He was protesting what I was being put through.

M: So "protest" might be a good name for this step.

Penny: Yeah. For sure. This would fit.

M: Liam, can you relate to this way of describing what you did?

Liam: Nope. Not really.

M: Penny, you witnessed Liam protesting what you were being subject to when he was just 8 years old. What did this suggest to you about him? What's your guess about what this reflects in terms of what Liam values?

Penny: It told me that he was a very brave little boy. That he had lots of courage. Now when I think back, it just seems even more amazing to me that he did such a thing.

M: It told you that he was a brave little boy. And what did it say to you about what might be important to him? About what he values?

Penny: Well, I guess it says a lot to me about what was important to him about fairness. Which, when I think about it, is surprising, isn't it, because he'd seen so much that was unfair.

M: So it suggested courage and fairness. Can you relate to what you're hearing, Liam?

Liam: Nope. Not that bit about courage. And not really that stuff about fairness either.

M: Okay. You don't relate to this. Can you see how your mother might have arrived at those conclusions about courage and fairness?

Liam: Well, yeah. I guess so. I suppose I can see how she would get this idea about me.

M: Penny, were you surprised to see that it was Liam running off down the street? Did the action that Liam took on the basis of where he might have stood on fairness surprise you?

Penny: No, of course not. I think that I would have always known this about Liam.

M: How would you have known that?

Penny: It's just another one of the things that a mother knows, I guess!

M: Is there anything that you could tell me about Liam, when he was younger still, that would have confirmed what you knew about him? That would fit with what you understood about how important fairness was to him?

Penny: Okay. Let's see. Well, yes, there is something. Probably lots of things. Liam must have been about 6 and he was in his second semester in first grade at school. There was this development where he started to come home from school ravenous. He was just so hungry. He'd raid the pantry and the fridge. So I'd give him some extra treats for his lunch. This went on for nearly 2 weeks and by the end of this time he was taking a truckload of food to school! So I spoke to his teacher about this. She didn't know what was going on, but she said that she'd put him under observation. Guess what she discovered? You remember, Liam. I told you about this before.

Liam: I don't remember hearing this before.

Penny: What the teacher discovered was that Liam was sitting with three other kids at lunchtime. Two of these kids were very sad because they were missing their mothers. The other kid was being terribly teased and was also

really sad and crying a lot. And what did Liam do? He was sharing his treats with them to make them all feel better.

Liam: I don't remember this.

M: What was it like for you as Liam's mother to hear this about him?

Penny: Mostly I just felt so proud of him for this. So proud of my son that he could do this for these other kids despite all of the heartache we were going through at home.

M: Penny, I'll ask you to paint the scene a bit more for Liam as you drive home after this meeting. Maybe you could describe the lunchroom, tell him what you know about these other kids, remind him about what this teacher looked like. Anything that might help him to remember this.

Penny: Okay, I'd be glad to.

M: What sort of step was this? You told me that you thought Liam felt paralyzed in life. It doesn't sound like this fits with paralysis, or with being messed up.

Penny: No, it's definitely not about that. I'm trying to think of a good word. Let's see. Perhaps rescuing. Yes, I think you could say that he was rescuing these boys.

M: Rescuing these other children. Can you relate to that, Liam?

Liam: I suppose so.

M: Can you think of another name for what you did?

Liam: No. Rescuing will do.

M: Penny, when I asked you about Liam throwing a rock through the window, about what this said about him, you said that it told you about his courage and about what was important to him in terms of fairness. Thinking back on

these events when he was 6 years old, how did this act of rescuing other children shape your picture of him as a person?

Penny: Let's see. Well, I know it said a lot about where he stood on injustice, even as a little boy.

M: About where he stood on injustice. Anything else?

Penny: Like what?

M: Just about anything else that might have been important to him, or about what life was about for him.

Penny: Maybe about the sort of ideas that Liam had about what life should be about. Maybe about the dreams of a little boy. Yeah, that's it. And about how he wouldn't let those dreams go.

M: Liam, I keep asking you the same question. Can you relate to what your mum just said about justice and about the dreams of a little boy?

Liam: Yeah, I guess. I suppose I can. Yeah, I guess it fits.

M: Let me get this clear. Are you saying that you can relate to this bit about justice and about what you thought life should be about? About the dreams of this little boy?

Liam: Yeah. Yeah, I guess so.

M: Just a guess?

Liam: No, not just a guess. It adds up.

M: I'd like to understand how it is that you're able to relate to what you're hearing from your mum about these stories of your history, and about the conclusions that she has reached about who you are in light of these stories.

Liam: Okay.

M: So, the question is: How is it that you are able to relate to what you are hearing? Is there anything that's happened

in your life in more recent years that would fit with what we are learning about you? With what I am hearing about where you stand on what is fair and just, with what your mother is telling me about what's important to you, about the dreams of this little boy?

Liam: I don't know. What do you think, Mum?

Penny: Maybe when you spoke to your cousin Vanessa.

Liam: Yeah. That's probably it.

M: What?

Liam: Well, just before we got away from my dad I told my cousin what I was going through because I thought it was a bit like the same for her. Like, Vanessa's dad is my dad's brother, and he's pretty rough, and I thought that she was probably having a hard time. Anyway, she did tell me about some of the bad things that were happening to her, and it was appalling. She'd never told anybody else.

M: What happened then?

Penny: About 8 months after Liam reached out to her the child-protection people got involved. And this was all because of what Liam did.

M: Your mum's words were that you "reached out" to your cousin. Would this be a good name for this step, or would some other name fit better?

Penny: No, that works. "Reaching out" works.

M: I've learned about actions in rescuing. I've learned about actions that have to do with protest. And I've learned about actions that have to do with reaching out. All of these are part of your history. Putting these actions together, what's this all about?

Liam: What do you mean?

M: If these were all part of a direction in life, or part of a project in life, or a particular pathway that you have been taking in life, what might be a good name for this?

Liam: Well, I suppose . . . Do you mean, well, something like . . . well, like salvaging something. Maybe "salvaging life" or something?

M: Yeah, yeah. Salvaging life.

Liam: Maybe it's more like . . . No, that will do.

M: Okay. It's about salvaging life. Okay, this says a lot to me. Penny, what's your guess about what this suggests to me about what Liam is aspiring to?

Penny: Well, it might be saying something to you about a young man who's had strong beliefs about what's okay and what's not. Maybe it would be saying something to you about a young man who knows something about what makes life worthwhile.

M: Yeah, that fits with my image. Liam?

Liam: I don't know. It's a bit hard for me to . . . Maybe you'd be thinking about that stuff about what Mum said about my dreams and things. You know, what she said.

M: About your dreams about what life should be about?

Liam: Yeah.

M: And about how you held onto those dreams despite everything?

Liam: Yeah, I guess so. I guess that would be it.

M: That fits too. I have a question. The things that we've been learning about you, about what's important to you, about what you've held onto despite what you've been through, about dreams about what life should all be about, about how this is all about salvaging life. If you were able

to keep this knowledge about your life close to you, to draw support from this, what's your guess about what this would make possible for you? What is your guess about what this would make possible for you to do? What steps could you take that would fit with this?

Liam: Phew! That's a big one.

M: Sure it is. But we've got lots of time.

Penny: Maybe you could try contacting that guy Daniel who used to be your friend. You haven't seen him for ages. Daniel's also had some pretty hard times, didn't he?

Liam: Yeah. He's been through a lot.

M: What do you think of Penny's idea about contacting him?

Liam: I reckon I could do this. I could give him a buzz and maybe catch up with him.

M: What sort of step would this be if you took it? Would you say it was a step in rescuing, protesting, or reaching out? Or something else?

Liam: I dunno. Probably reaching out.

Penny: Yeah, it would be an example of that. I know that this boy Daniel is still having a pretty hard time.

M: Penny, if you witnessed Liam taking this step to contact Daniel, what would this suggest to you about his purposes in doing this?

Penny: Maybe something about him wanting to get more connected to his hopes. Yeah, something about picking these hopes up again.

M: How would that be for you, to witness Liam picking up these hopes again?

Penny: Brilliant. Just brilliant.

M: Liam?

Liani: Yeah. She's right. It would have to be about picking up the hopes again.

M: Okay. It would be to pick up the hopes again. I'd like to ask a few questions about what you've been learning about yourself as we've been piecing together the steps that you've been taking in salvaging your life. What do you think this reflects about your plans for your future?

Liam: Well, I guess . . .

Liam did contact Daniel. This was the first of many steps that he subsequently took that were in harmony with the conclusions about his life and his identity that were developed and redeveloped in my conversations with him and his mother. Liam became increasingly engaged in these conversations, and in our fourth meeting he announced that he'd realized that the depression he'd been struggling with for so long was "fake depression." In stating this, he was not implying that he had been "faking it" or that he still didn't have a significant struggle with this depression. Rather, he had reached this understanding on the basis of a realization that he wasn't messed up: "How could you have real depression if you weren't messed up?" Liam went on to say that "even fake depression is pretty bad, but at least you know that you are going to recover from it, and that makes a big difference."

In the course of our meetings there were many other dimensions to the development of this storyline of Liam's life. In one of these, he experienced his life linked to the stories of his great uncle's life around shared themes, intentions, and values. This great uncle was a man who had played a vitally important role in rescuing Penny from the abuses that she was subject to in her family of birth.

At the eighth and final meeting, I'd been reviewing with Liam many of the initiatives he'd been taking in recent months. Not all of these

had been well received by others. For example, some of Liam's initiatives in reaching out had been rejected by others. Upon inquiring about how he had responded to these rejections and about why they hadn't discouraged further initiatives, Liam said that he was a veteran of rejection, and that, on account of this, there wasn't much new to him to experience in terms of rejection. Further, he said that he was "probably much better equipped to cope with rejection than other kids who were from more normal families and who might not have experienced the rejections that I've been through."

When I asked him about the implications of this for his future, Liam concluded that future rejections were less likely to be a hindrance to him than they might be for many others. This constituted a realization for Liam that was particularly important to him—that he was uniquely abled on account of all that he had been through, rather than disabled. Although we would continue to lament the abuses he'd been subject to for a good part of his life, we were all able to celebrate these conclusions about Liam's uniquely abled status.

The Structure of Re-authoring Conversations

This chapter is about a map for narrative practice that I refer to as "re-authoring conversations map." It has been a mainstay of my therapeutic practice for many years. In the original development of this map I drew significantly from Jerome Bruner's (1986) exploration of the narrative metaphor, specifically from his analysis of literary texts. In this analysis it was his goal to develop further understandings of the meaning-making activities that people engage with in everyday life.

I was drawn to this because I perceived parallels between the activity of writing literary stories and therapeutic practice. It was my perception that just as "great storytelling . . . is about compelling plights that . . . must be set forth with sufficient subjunctivity to allow them to be rewritten by the reader, rewritten so as to allow play for the reader's imagination" (Bruner, 1986, p. 35), effective therapy is about engaging people in the re-authoring of the compelling plights, of their

lives in ways that arouse curiosity about human possibility and in ways that invoke the play of imagination.

In describing the participation of readers in the construction of the storyline of the text, Bruner referred to the "journey" metaphor and to the "mapmaking" analogy. This resonated for me strongly. This metaphor and this analogy seemed clearly pertinent to therapeutic practice. Bruner (1986) made the following observation about the reader's engagement with texts:

. . . as they begin to construct a virtual text of their own, it is as if they were embarking on a journey without maps—and yet, they possess a stock of maps that might give hints, and besides, they know a lot about mapmaking. First impressions of the new terrain are, of course, based on older journeys already taken. In time, the new journey becomes a thing in itself, however much its initial shape was borrowed from the past. (p. 36)

Similarly, when people first engage in therapeutic conversations in which they reconstruct the stories of their lives, it often seems that they are departing from the familiar and embarking on journeys to new destinations without maps. And yet, as this reconstruction gathers pace, it quickly becomes clear that these people are drawing from a stock of maps relevant to journeys already taken, and that they know a lot about mapmaking. In the course of these conversations, the "new journey" becomes a "thing in itself, however much its initial shape was borrowed from the past."

With literary texts, the narrative mode "leads to conclusions not about certainties in an aboriginal (original and objective) world, but about the varying perspectives that can be constructed to make experience comprehensible" (Bruner, 1986, p. 37). Bruner proposed that this contribution to increasing the options available to the reader to render experience comprehensible is the great writer's gift: "The great writer's gift to a reader is to make him a better writer" (Bruner, 1986, p. 5). In a similar vein, in therapeutic contexts the narrative mode can

open space for "varying perspectives that can be constructed to make experience comprehensible," and skillful practice can assist people to have a fuller participation and stronger voice of authorship in the construction of the stories of their lives.

Texts and Dramatic Engagement

According to Bruner (1986):

Stones of literary merit, to be sure, are about events in the real world, but they render that world newly strange, rescue it from obviousness, fill it with gaps that call upon the reader, in Barthes's sense, to become a writer, a composer of a virtual text in response to the actual. In the end it is the reader who must write for himself what he intends to do with the actual text. (p. 24)

Well-structured novels are highly absorbing of the reader. This is because the authors of these novels exercise an array of options in fostering dramatic engagement in the reading of the text. This provides readers with many invitations to contribute to the development of the storyline and to live out the drama of it. For example, well-structured novels have many gaps in the storyline that must be filled in by the reader. Good writers do not spell everything out, and the reader is required to participate in putting two and two together to make four, in bringing together specific events into sequences unfolding across time in the revealing of the plot, and in reconciling this with the underlying theme of the story. Thus, the reader is given the task of developing and reconciling what Frank Kermode (1981) referred to as *sjuzet* (the linear events that make up the plot) and *fab-ula* (the timeless underlying theme) in the "fusion of scandal and miracle."

But it is not just the *sjuzet* and the *fabula* that are further developed and reconciled in the reading of literary texts. Bruner, borrowing significantly from the literary theorists Griemas and Courtes (1976), proposed that stories are principally composed of two landscapes—a

"landscape of action" and a "landscape of consciousness." The landscape of action is the "material" of the story and is composed of the sequence of events that make up the plot (*sjuzet*) and the underlying theme (*fabula*). The landscape of consciousness is composed of "what those involved in the action know, think, or feel, or do not know, think or feel" (Bruner, 1986, p. 14). This landscape features the consciousness of the protagonists of the story and is significantly composed of their reflections on the events of the landscape of action—of their attribution of meaning to these events, of their deductions about the intentions and purposes that are shaping of these events, and of their conclusions about the character and identity of the other protagonists in light of these events. Like the development of the plot of the landscape of action, the development of the landscape of consciousness must be reconciled with the *fabula*, the timeless underlying theme of the story:

In any case the fabula of a story—its timeless underlying theme—seems to be a unity that incorporates at least three constituents. It contains a plight into which characters have fallen as a result of intentions that have gone awry either because of circumstances, of the "character of characters," or most likely of the interaction between the two . . . What gives the story its unity is the manner in which plight, characters, and consciousness interact to yield a structure that has a start, development, and a "sense of ending." (Bruner, 1986, p. 21)

Just as there are gaps in the landscape of action to be filled in by the reader, there are gaps to be filled in the landscape of consciousness. Although this landscape of consciousness is partially developed through the author's representation of the consciousness of the protagonists, and at times through a representation of the author's own consciousness, the reader's contribution to the landscape of consciousness is a significant factor in the unification of the text, and in its thick or rich development.

In entering this landscape of consciousness, the reader attributes a range of intentions and purposes to the actions of the protagonists and reaches conclusions about their character and identity. The term *landscape of consciousness* is apt, for it not only represents the consciousness of the protagonists and of the author of the story, but also is significantly filled out by the reader's consciousness.

Numerous mechanisms are employed by good writers to draw the attention of readers to these gaps in the landscapes of action and consciousness, and to encourage them to step into these gaps with their imagination and lived experience. For example, authors rely significantly on the triggering of presupposition to achieve this. They also take care in the arrangement of these gaps: For instance, good writers ensure the provision of adequate clues and structure the text to invoke the curiosity and fascination of the reader. Good writers arrange these gaps to ensure that they are not so large as to exhaust the reader's meaning-making resources in their efforts to fill them, and not so insignificant as to lose the interest of the reader. It is mechanisms like these that provide the reader with a foundation for dramatic engagement with the text, that give readers "a good workout" in the development of a virtual text that invariably exceeds the actual in significant aspects. Bruner quoted Iser (1978), who employed the term *indeterminacy* to describe this characteristic of the literary text:

. . . it is the element of indeterminacy that evokes the text to communicate with the reader, in the sense that they induce him to participate both in the production and the comprehension of the work's intention, (p. 61)

In summarizing Iser's understanding of the function of this indeterminacy, Bruner (1986) observed that:

It is this "relative indeterminacy of a text" that "allows for a spectrum of actualizations." And so, "literary texts initiate performances of meaning rather than actually formulating meanings themselves." (p. 24)

Texts and Life

I was quite drawn to this dual landscape conception of story structure on account of my interest in the narrative metaphor and in the activity of meaning-making. My interest in the narrative metaphor is founded on the assumption that people give meaning to their experiences of the events of life by taking them into frames of intelligibility, and on the conclusion that it is the structure of narrative that provides the principle frame of intelligibility for acts of meaning-making in everyday life. This assumption is associated with a premise that it is in the trafficking of stories about our own and each others' lives that identity is constructed. The concepts of landscape of action and landscape of consciousness bring specificity to the understanding of people's participation in meaning-making within the context of narrative frames.

In borrowing this dual-landscape conception from literary theory, it is not my intention to propose that life is simply a text. But I do believe, as do many others, parallels can be drawn between the structure of literary texts and the structure of meaning-making in everyday life. The concepts of landscape of action and landscape of consciousness seem relevant to an understanding of people's meaning-making activities in life, of the construction of personal narratives, and of the constitution of people's identity through everyday acts of life. Further, these concepts seem particularly relevant to the therapeutic task, which I believe to be principally about the redevelopment of personal narratives and the reconstruction of identity.

Implications for Practice

Further parallels can be drawn between the structure of literary texts and the structure of therapeutic practice. The authors of texts call the attention of the reader to gaps in the storyline and encourage readers to fill in these gaps by stretching their minds, by exercising their imagination, and by recruiting their lived experience. Rich story development is the outcome. Therapists who prioritize rich story development in their consultations with people do the same. These therapists draw people's attention to gaps in the storylines of their lives—usually these

are gaps in what might be called the "subordinate" storylines of people's lives—and encourage them to fill in these gaps by stretching their minds, exercising their imagination, and recruiting their lived experience. And just as good writers give considerable thought to the arrangement of these gaps, so too do therapists who have a focus on rich story development. These therapists take care in constructing the scaffolding of these gaps, ensuring that they are not so large as to exhaust people's meaning-making resources in their effort to fill in the gaps and not so insignificant as to lose people's interest. The outcome of this is that people experience a good workout in the context of therapeutic conversations and become dramatically engaged with many of the neglected events of their own lives.

I have found these concepts of landscape of action and landscape of consciousness to be invaluable in the development of my practice. They have provided me with a foundation for the refinement and further development of therapeutic conversations that contribute to rich story development, and they have offered a map for the shaping of, and for the charting of, these therapeutic conversations. These are conversations that invariably contribute to the rich development of some of the alternative storylines of people's lives, the traces of which are ever-present in people's expressions of living. In these conversations, people's lives become more evidently multistoric as these traces are identified and thickened. In this chapter I give illustrations of these conversations and reflect on the significance of the concepts of landscape of action and landscape of consciousness in the shaping of them.

In describing the relevance of these concepts to therapeutic practice, I have substituted the term *identity* for *consciousness*. I made this substitution because of the confusion that arose around my use of this term. At times, the mention of consciousness was taken to denote an awareness of injustices. At other times this term was taken to denote the mechanism of the mind that is engaged when making choices. At other times it was taken to denote actions in life that were conscious in contrast to actions that were products of "the unconscious." because of this confusion, I will substitute "landscape of identity" for

"landscape of consciousness" in this chapter, while acknowledging that the term *identity* represents only part of what is intended in the term *consciousness* as it is applied to the analysis of literary texts and as it might be applied to the understanding of rich story development in therapeutic contexts.

Apart from dispelling this confusion, the term *landscape of identity* does have benefit in the emphasis that it gives to the significance of the therapeutic endeavour—it emphasizes the irreducible fact that any renegotiation of the stories of people's lives is also a renegotiation of identity. Awareness of this encourages a fuller engagement on behalf of therapists with the sort of professional ethics that are associated with an acknowledgment of the life-shaping aspects of therapeutic practice and a greater awareness of the responsibility that we have for what we say and do in the name of therapy.

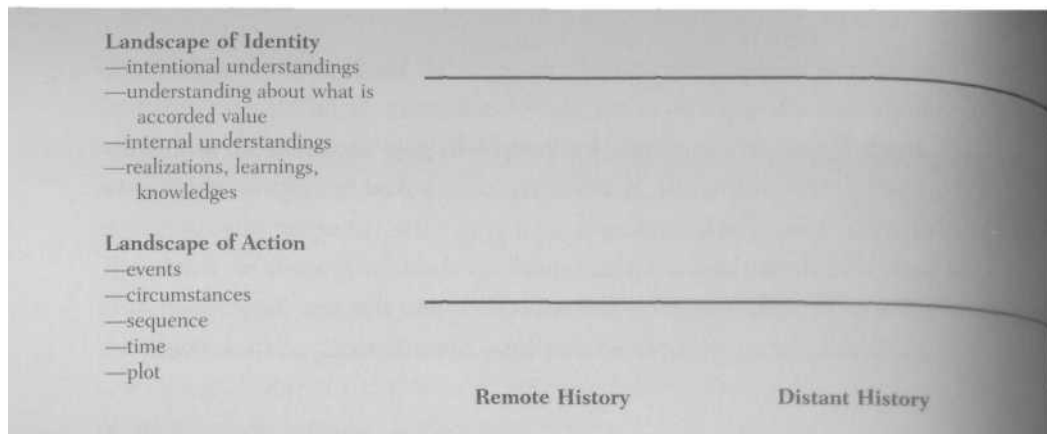
In drawing parallels between the structure of literary texts and the structure of therapeutic practice, I am not proposing that the activity of the author of a literary text and the therapist's role in therapeutic conversations are synonymous. For one thing, the author of a literary text invites the reader to enter into a storyline, the fundamental shape of which is provided by the author. Therapists, on the other hand, are not the originators of the storyline that is developed in the therapeutic conversation. Although they may be acquainted with many possible stories about life (which makes it possible for them to draw people's attention to significant events that stand outside of the dominant storylines), they are not the primary author in the sense that the author of a literary text is. Rather, therapists privilege the voices of the people consulting them in the attribution of meaning to selected events of their lives, in their interpretation of the links between these events and the valued themes of their lives, in their deduction about what this reflects in terms of what is important to them, and in their conclusions about what this suggests about their own and each other's identities. Whereas the author of a literary text is quite centered in the development of the storyline, the therapist is displaced from the center.

To summarize, in therapeutic conversations that are oriented by re-

authoring conversations, the concepts of landscape of action and landscape of identity assist the therapist in building a context in which it becomes possible for people to give meaning to, and draw together into a storyline, many of the overlooked but significant events of their lives. These concepts also guide the therapist in supporting people to derive new conclusions about their lives, many of which will contradict existing deficit-focus conclusions that are associated with the dominant storylines and that have been limiting of their lives.

Mapping the Re-Authored Conversation With Liam and Penny

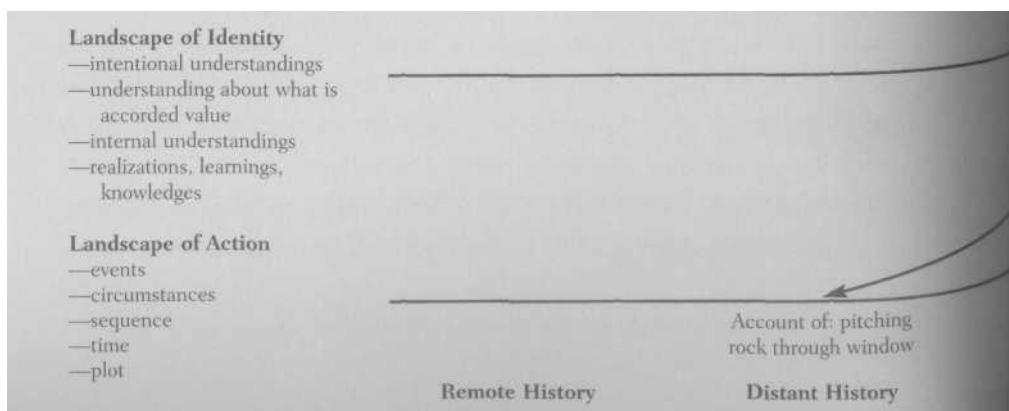
The following review of my conversation with Liam and Penny provides a practical illustration of the therapeutic implications of the concepts of landscape of action and landscape of identity. This review is accompanied by diagrams that chart the therapeutic conversation onto the re-authoring conversations map, which consists of two horizontal timelines—a landscape of action and a landscape of identity (consciousness).

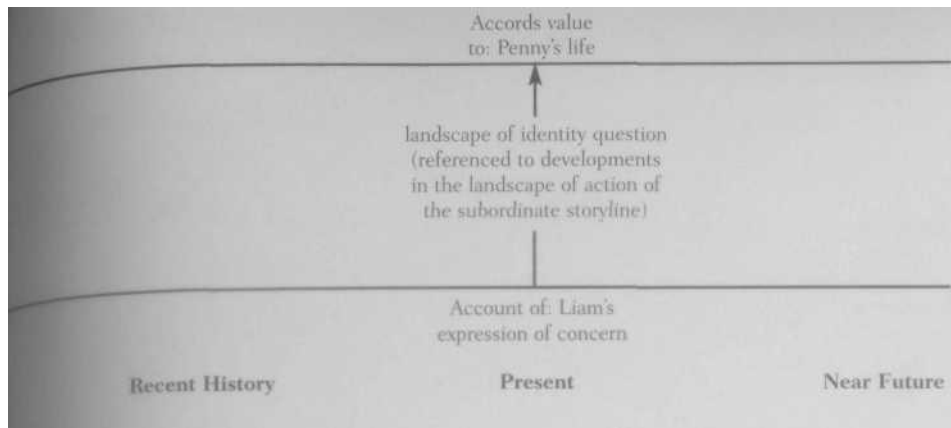


M: (Figure 2.1) Liam was more concerned for you than he was for himself, what did this suggest to you about what was important to Liam? Or about what was precious to him?

Expressions that in some way contradict dominant themes can provide clues to the alternative stories of people's lives. Resignation and the futility of existence were dominant themes in Liam's account of his existence, and yet here Liam expressed significant concern for his mother. I first responded to this contradiction with questions that facilitated the further expression of this concern. I then asked a question that encouraged Penny to reflect on Liam's concerns and to give voice to what this suggested was important to him. This was a landscape of identity question.

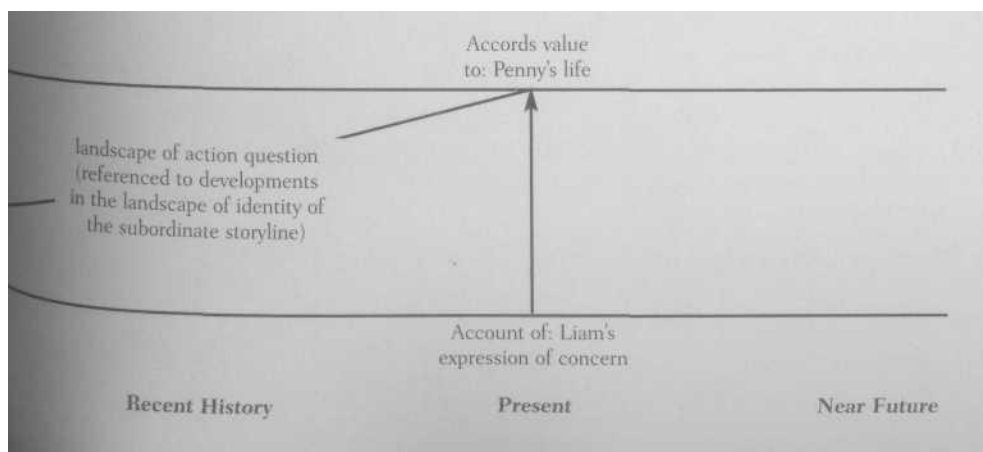
Figure 2.2 Charting Re-Authored Conversations (Liam)

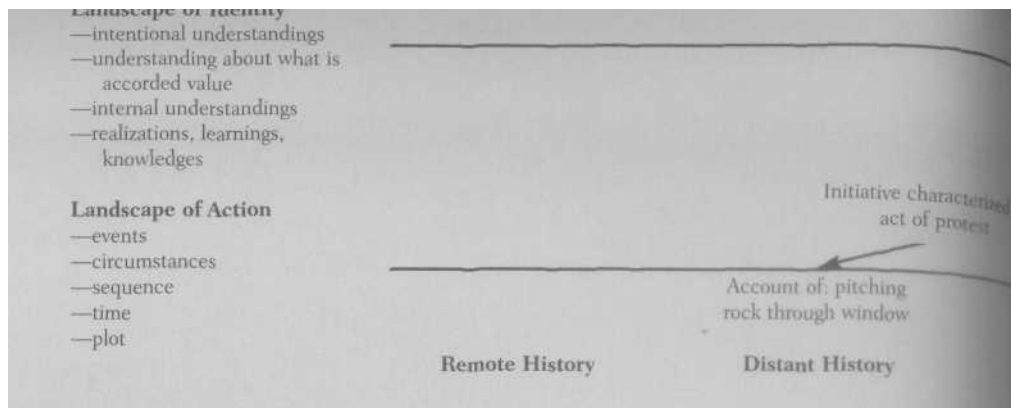




M: (Figure 2.2) Are there any stories that you can tell me about Liam's actions that would be a reflection of what was precious to him? Of what he held precious? Are there any stories you can tell me about him that would help me to understand how you knew this about him?

Penny asserted that Liam's expression of concern reflected the high value that he gave to her life—that he held her precious. This account of what Liam gave value to can be considered a conclusion about identity. In response to this, I asked Penny for a story about Liam's actions that would reflect this conclusion. This was a landscape of action question, as it triggered an account of specific events of Liam's history that exemplified this conclusion about what he gave value to.

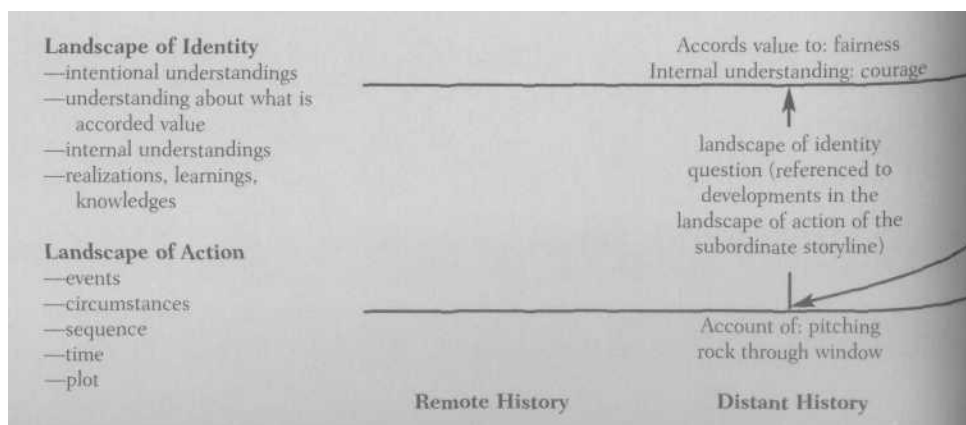


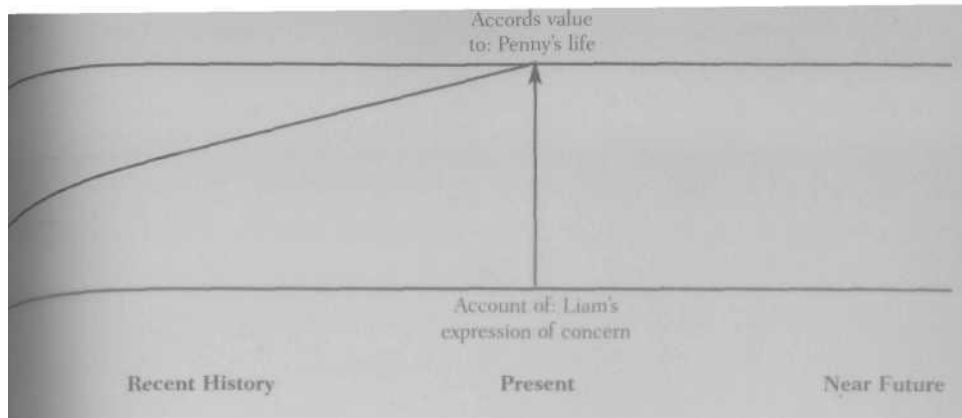


M: (Figure 2.3) Penny, what sort of step was it that Liam took on that Sunday all of those years ago? How would you name this action of Liam's?

Upon hearing the story about Liam's distracting his father by pitching a rock through the window, I asked Penny about what sort of name she would give to this action. Although this event was available to her conscious memory, it hadn't been characterized. My question was the first of several that provided the context for the naming of this action as "protest." This was a landscape of action question about the depiction of a neglected but significant event of Penny and Liam's history.

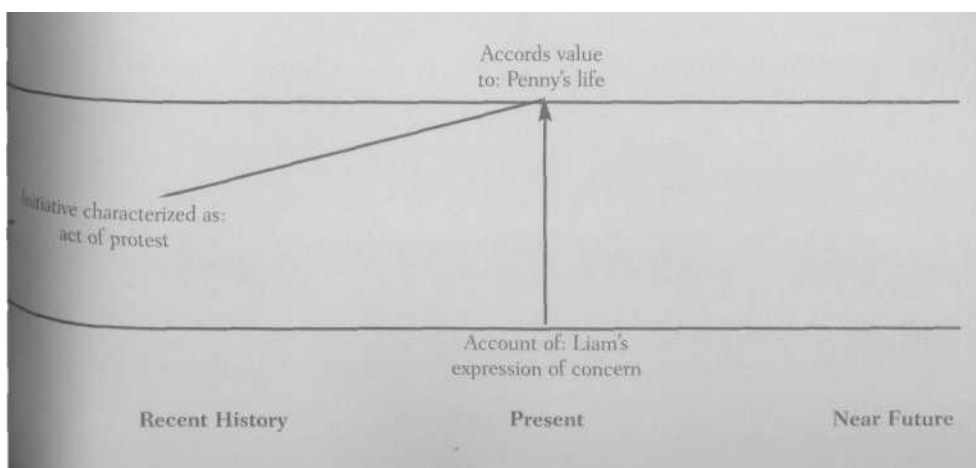
Figure 2.4 Charting Re-Authored Conversations (Liam)

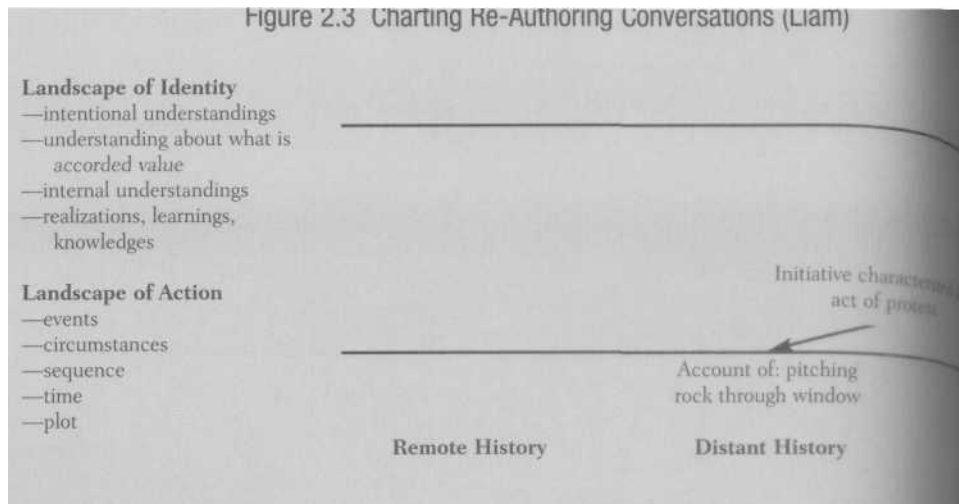




M: (Figure 2.4) Penny, you witnessed Liam protesting what you were being subject to when he was just 8 years old. What did this suggest to you about him? What's your guess about what this reflects in terms of what Liam values?

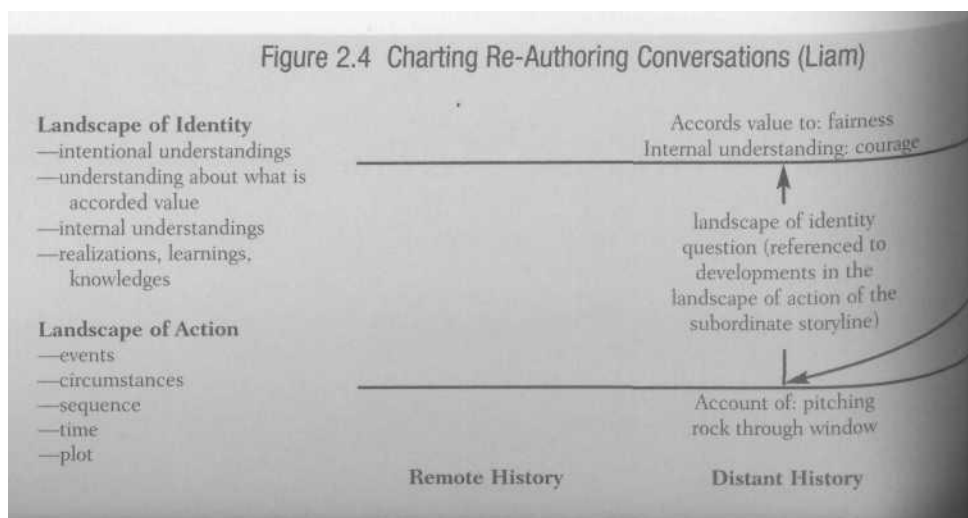
Seven years after the event itself, Liam's act of pitching a rock through the window is defined as "protest." Penny led the way with this naming, and at this time Liam was unable to relate to the meaning that she gave to his action. The question about what this action may have reflected about his personhood and about what he valued was one of several landscape of identity questions that provided a foundation for the verification of his bravery and for the voicing of a conclusion about the importance of fairness to Liam.

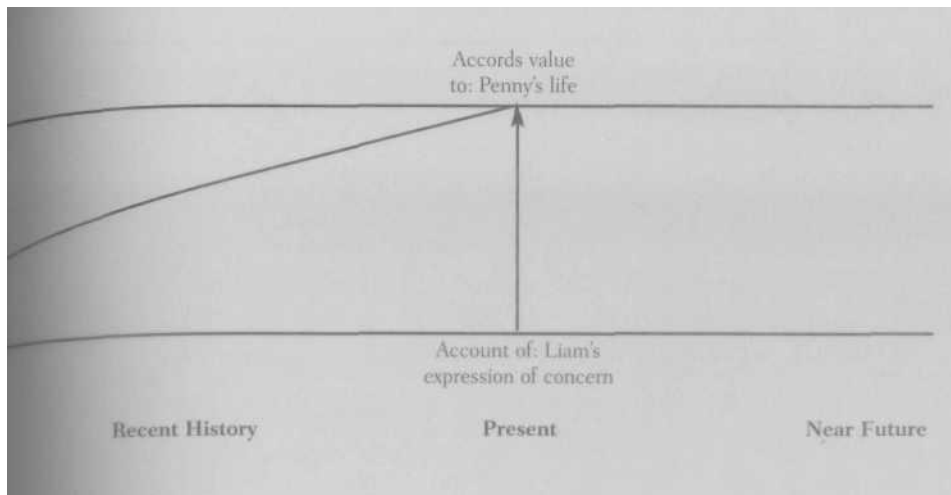




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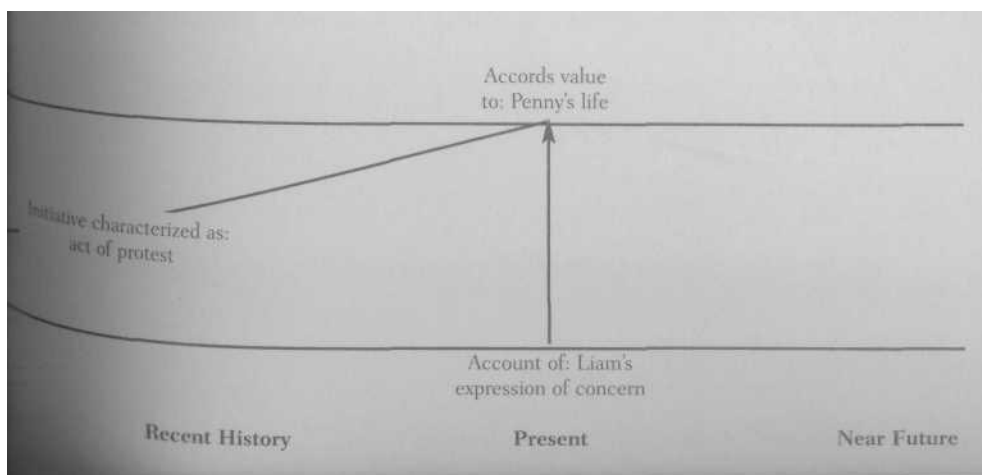
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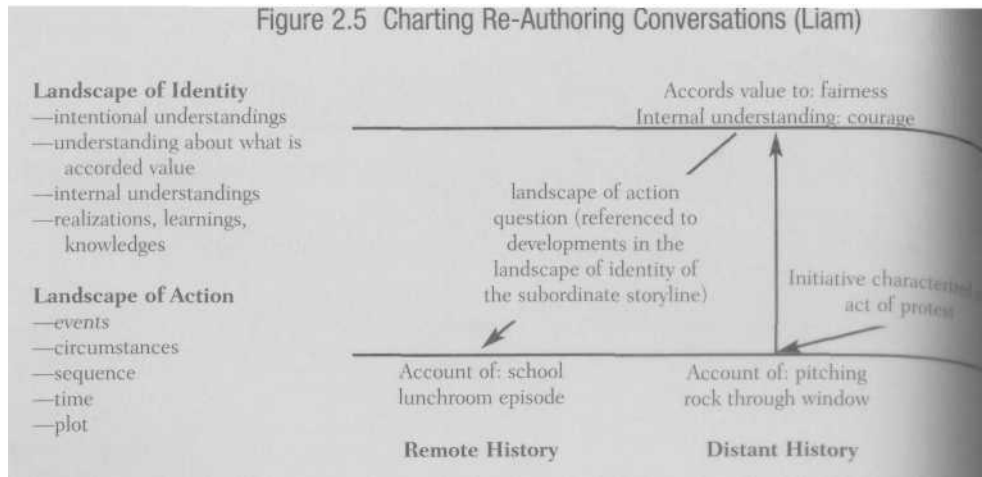




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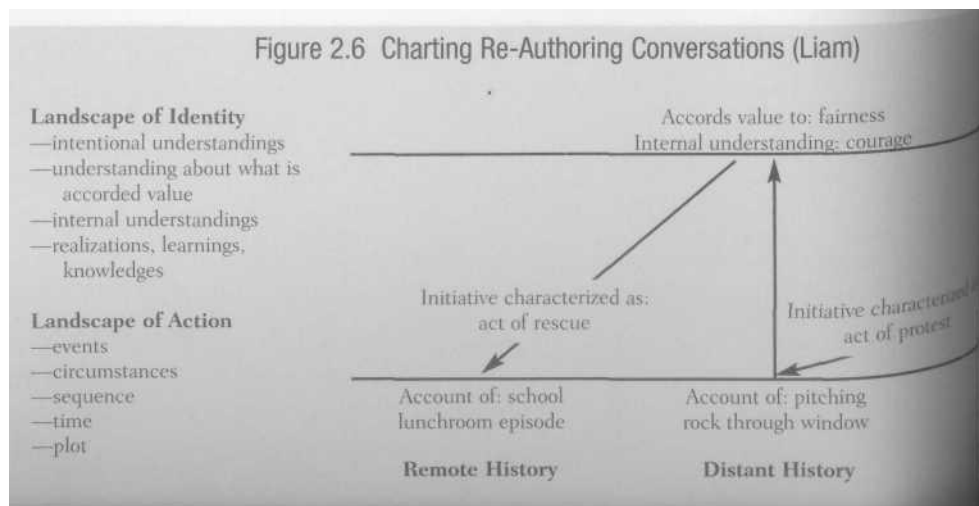
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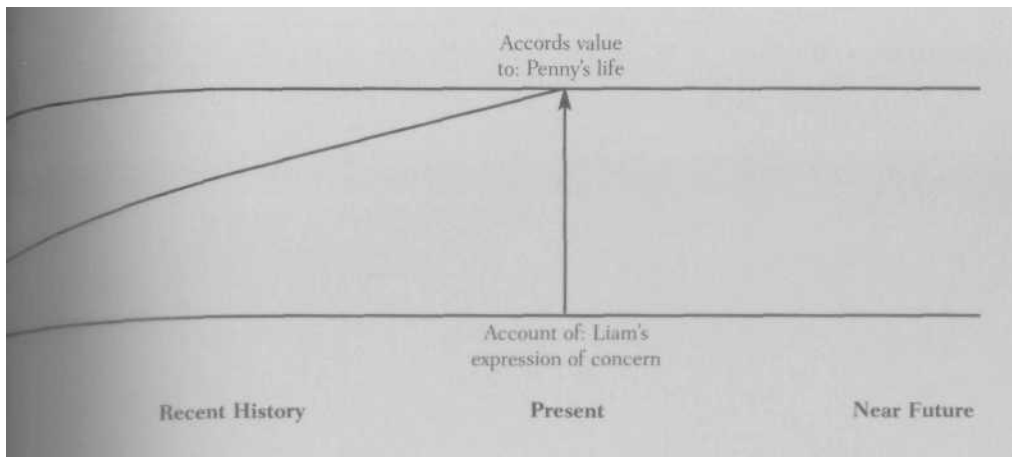




M: (Figure 2.5) Is there anything that you could tell me about Liam, when he was younger still, that would have confirmed what you knew about him? That would fit with what you understood about how important fairness was to him?

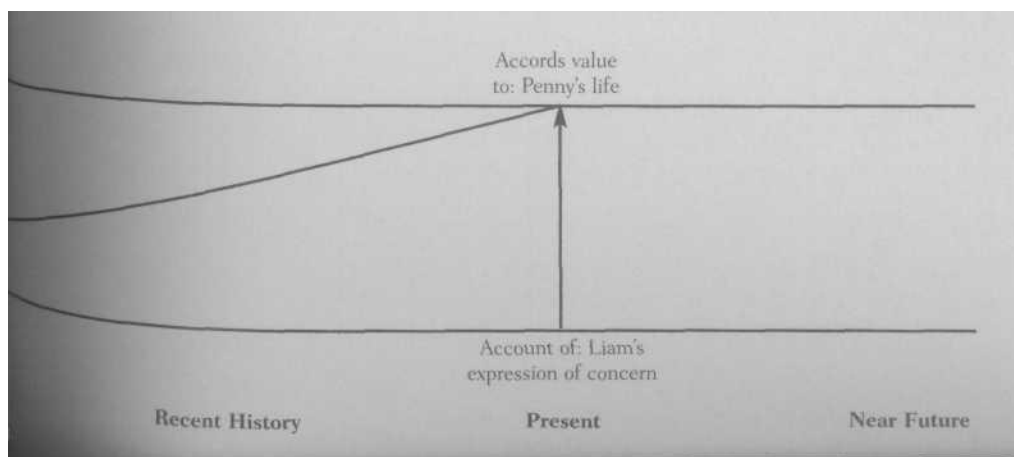
Liam was now more engaged in the development of the subordinate storyline of his life. This was reflected in his willingness to entertain an understanding of how his mother reached these conclusions about his bravery and about the value that he gave to fairness. This question about events in his younger life that might bear out his mother's knowledge about his bravery and his valuing of fairness was a landscape of action question that aroused, in Penny's memory, the story of the school lunchroom.

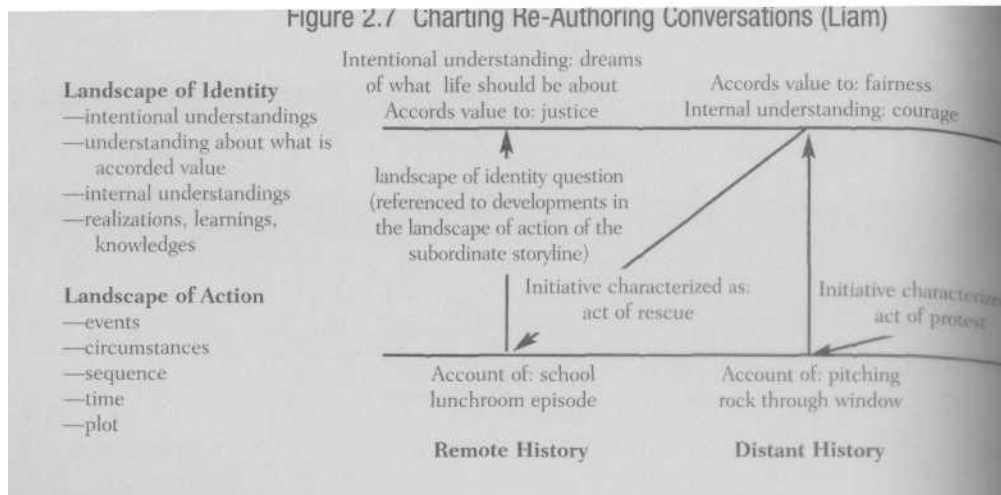




M: (Figure 2.6) What sort of step was this? You told me that you thought Liam felt paralyzed in life. It doesn't sound like this fits with paralysis, or with being messed up.

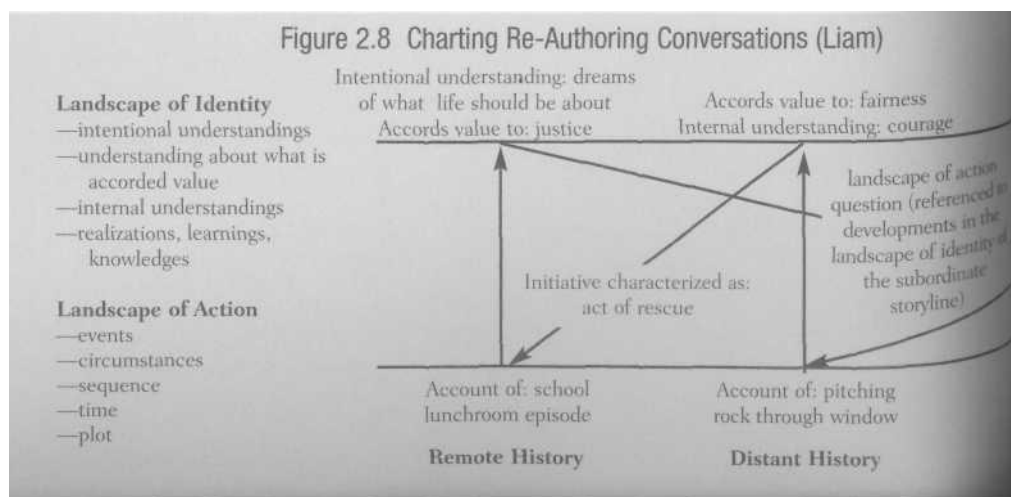
This was a landscape of action question. Penny responded to it by defining Liam's support of other children as acts of "rescue." Liam was now participating more actively in the development of the subordinate storyline, on this occasion more immediately relating to this naming of his 6-year-old actions.

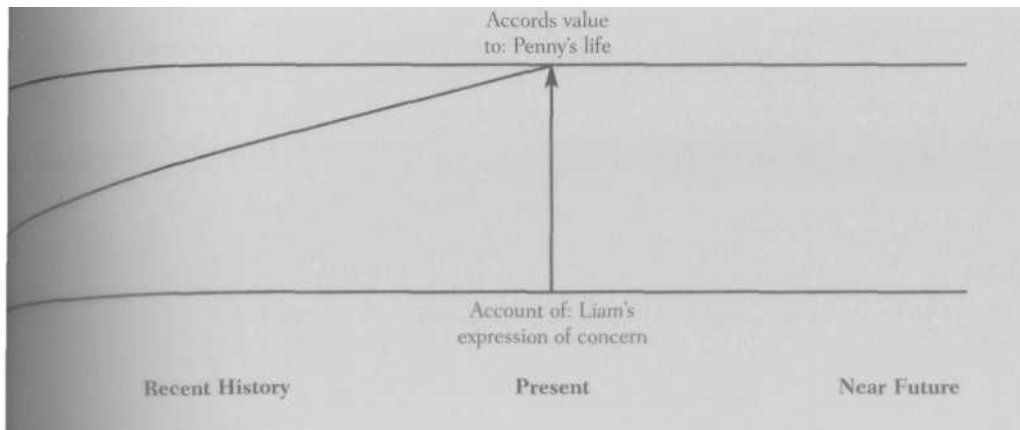




M: (Figure 2.7) Penny, when I asked you about Liam throwing a rock through the window, about what this said about him, you said that it told you about his courage and about what was important to him in terms of fairness. Thinking back on these events when he was 6 years old, how did this act of rescuing other children shape your picture of him as a person?

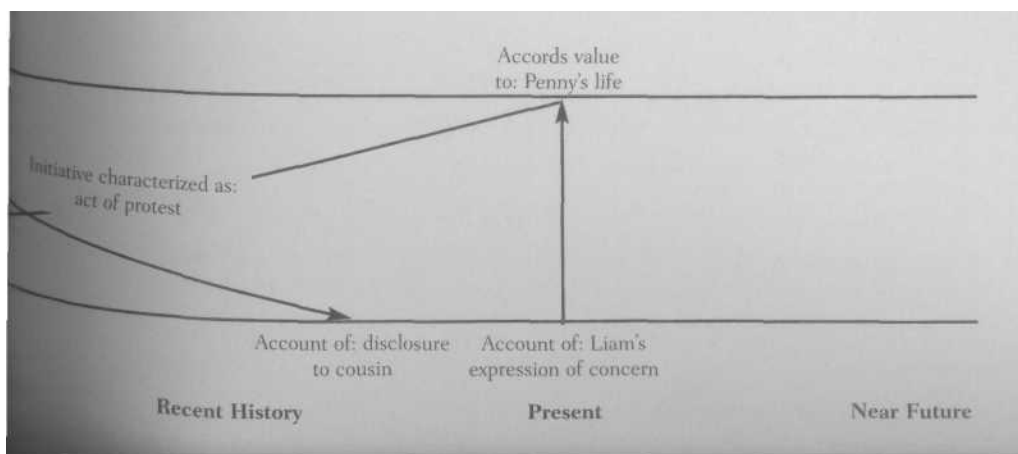
The naming of these 6-year-old actions provided a solid foundation for this question about how this shaped Penny's image of her son. This was a landscape of identity question, and it gave rise to conclusions about Liam's position on justice and his dreams about how life should be. These conclusions were in accord with the emergent storyline and as such were thickening of it. At this point, Liam not only acknowledged that he could relate to these conclusions, but he also actually verified them.

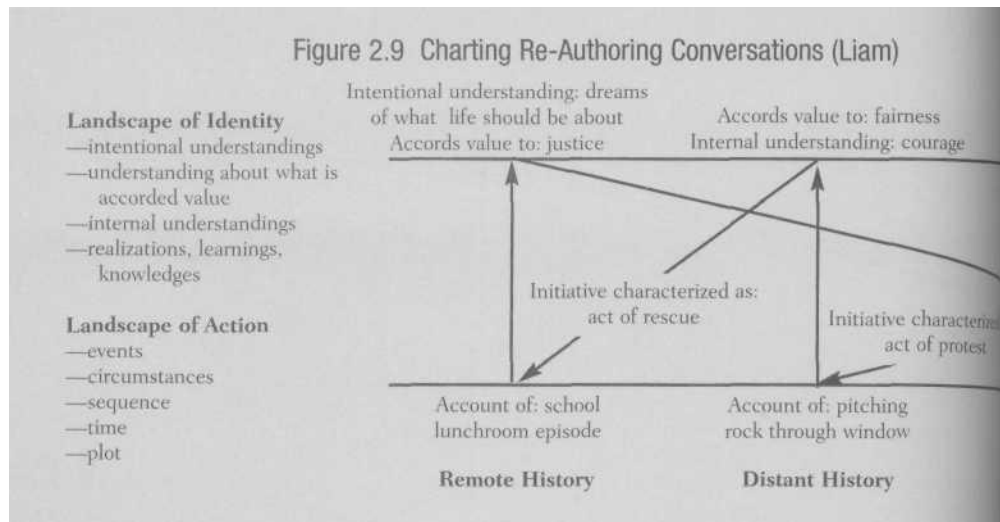




M: (Figure 2.8) So, the question is: How is it that you are able to relate to what you are hearing? Is there anything that's happened in your life in more recent years that would fit with what we are learning about you? With what I am hearing about where you stand on what is fair and just, with what your mother is telling me about what's important to you, about the dreams of this little boy?

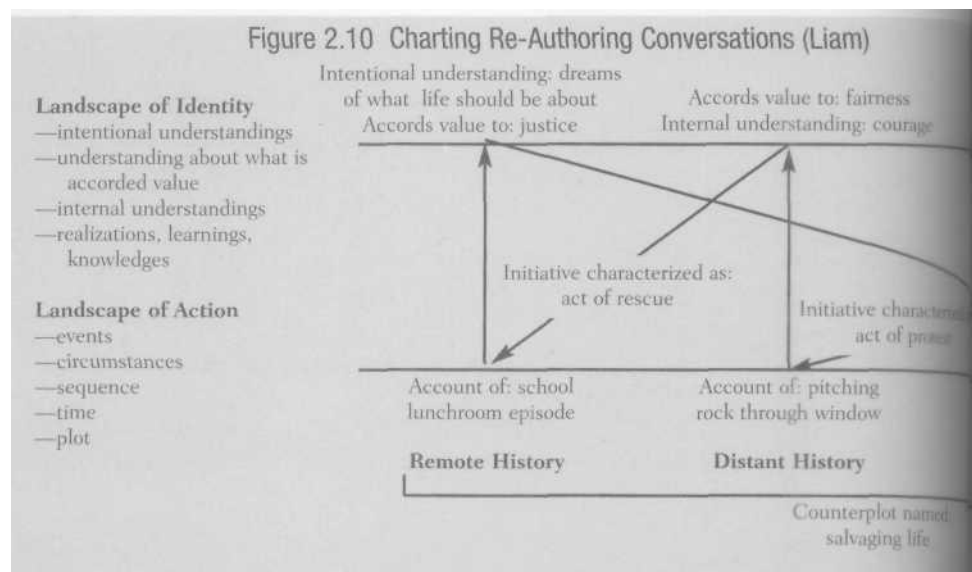
As Liam had now verified positive conclusions about his identity that were not on his map at the outset of the interview, I sensed that the time was ripe to directly consult him in the further development of the subordinate storyline. This question, which was addressed to Liam, encouraged him to review events in more recent history that might exemplify this conclusion about his position on justice. This was a landscape of action question, and it brought to mind the action he took in talking to his cousin about his history of abuse by his father. This initiative was an expression of his concern for her.

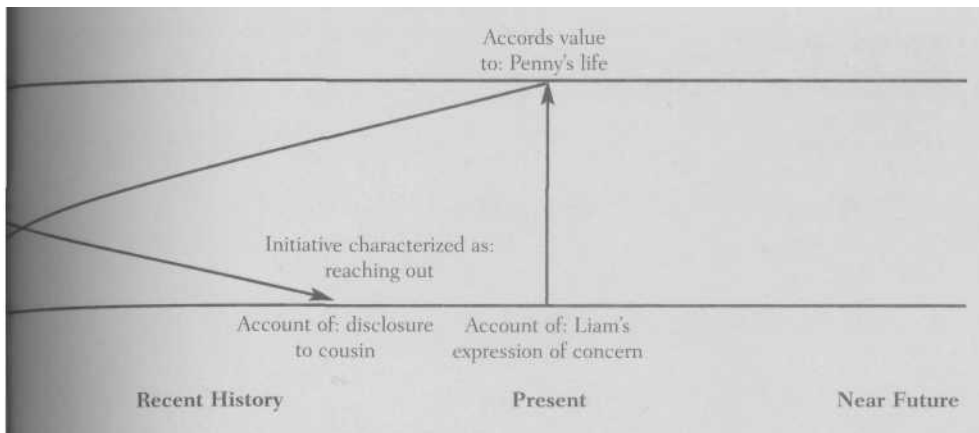




M: (Figure 2.9) Your mum's words were that you "reached out" to your cousin. Would this be a good name for this step, or would some other name fit better?

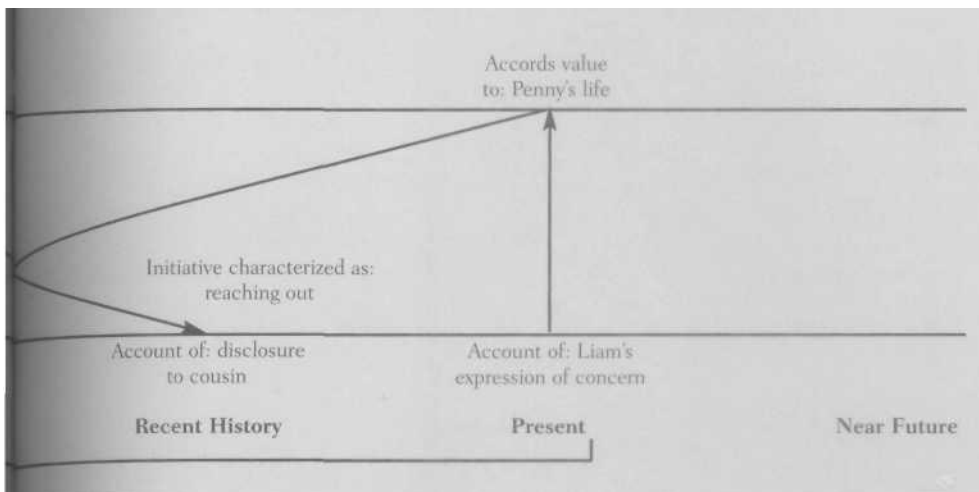
Penny had joined Liam in the recounting of the story about the initiative he took with his cousin, and in the context of this she had named it as an act of "reaching out." This question was a landscape of action question that encouraged Liam to participate in this naming.

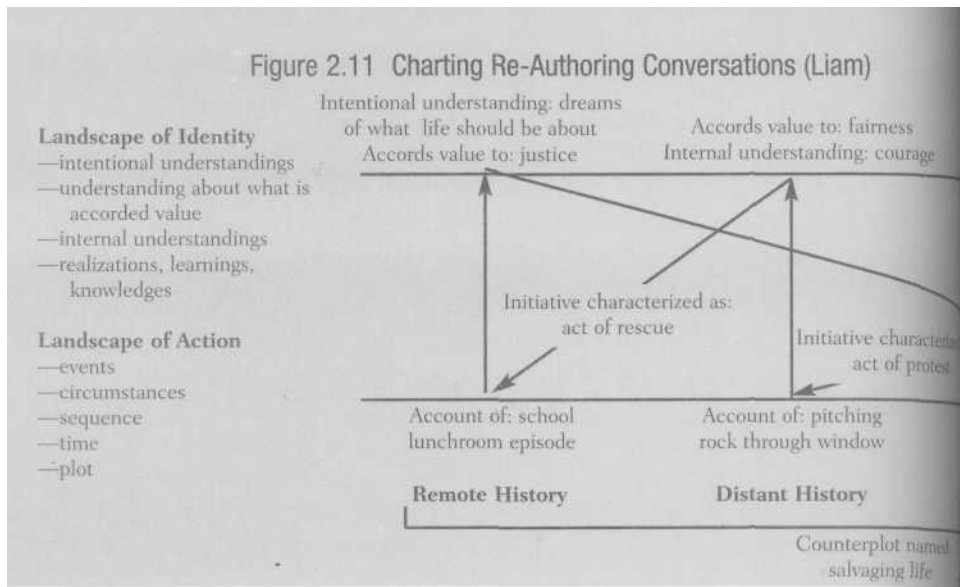




M: (Figure 2.10) I've learned about actions in rescuing. I've learned about actions that have to do with protest. And I've learned about actions that have to do with reaching out. All of these are part of your history. Putting these actions together, what this all about?

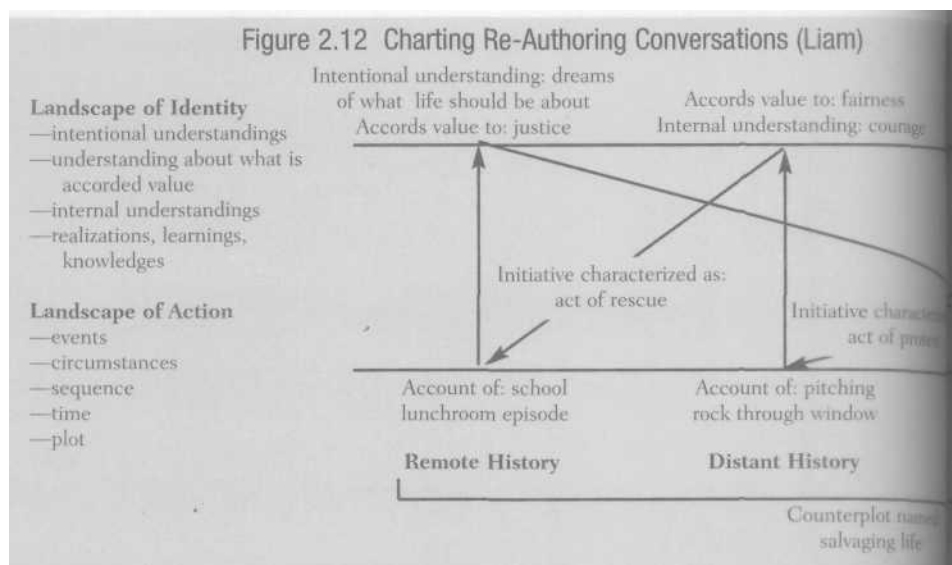
By this time Penny and Liam had recounted several stories about his actions that were congruent with these positive conclusions about his identity. This question was a landscape of action question that encouraged Penny and Liam to link these stories to a theme and that called for a naming of this theme. The "salvaging life" theme that Liam gave voice to constituted a counterplot, as it contrasted significantly with the plot of the dominant storyline: paralysis in life.

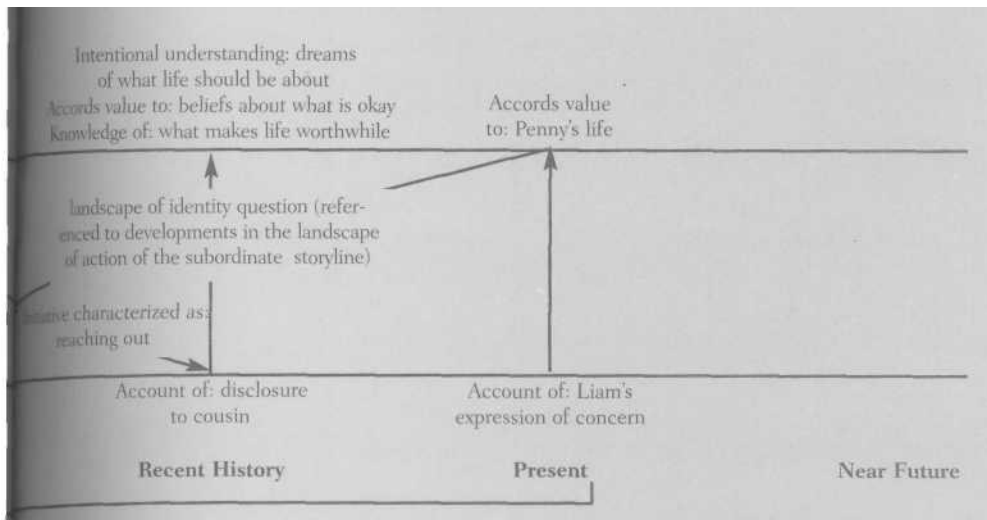




M: (Figure 2.11) Okay. It's about salvaging life. Okay, this says a lot to me. Penny, what's your guess about what this suggests to me about what Liam is aspiring to?

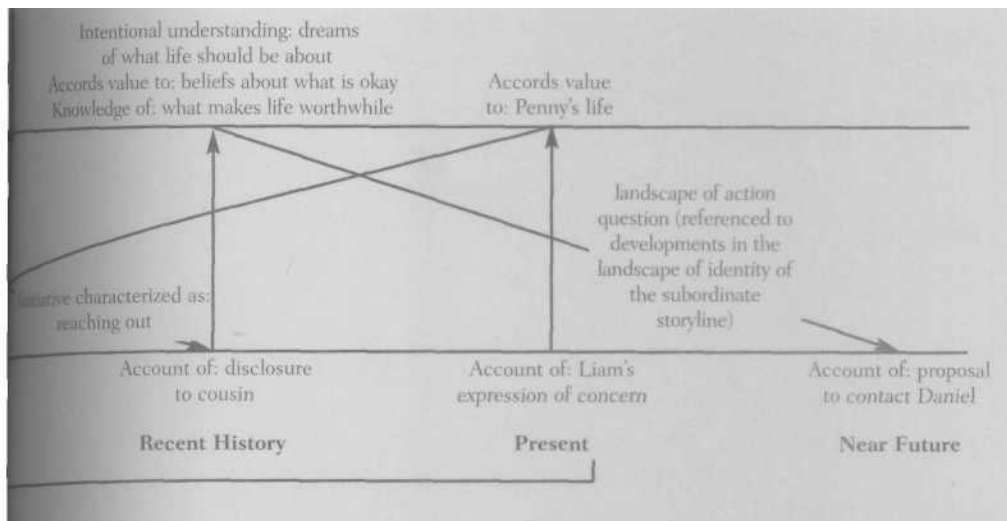
This was a landscape of identity question that encouraged further reflection on the counterplot of Liam's life in the generation of more of the sort of identity conclusions that were emergent in the subordinate storyline development. The response to this question established that Liam had strong beliefs about what is not okay that he had a knowledge about what makes life worthwhile. This allowed his dreams about what life should be about to become more clearly defined.

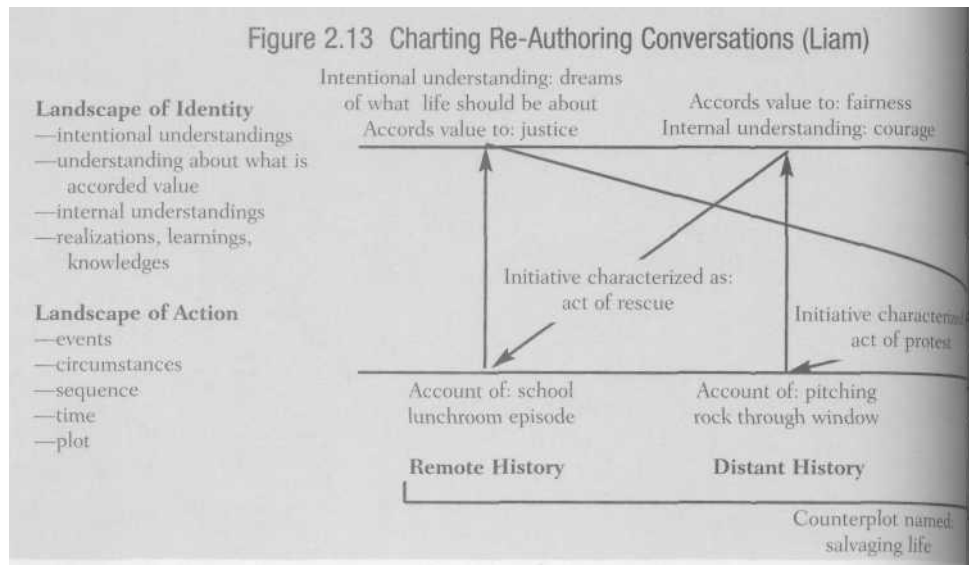




M: (Figure 2.12) That fits too. I have a question. The things that we've been learning about you, about what's important to you, about what you've held onto despite what you've been through, about dreams about what life should all be about, about how this is all about salvaging life. If you were able to keep this knowledge about your life close to you, to draw support from this, what's your guess about what this would make possible for you? What is your guess about what this would make possible for you to do? What steps could you take that would fit with this?

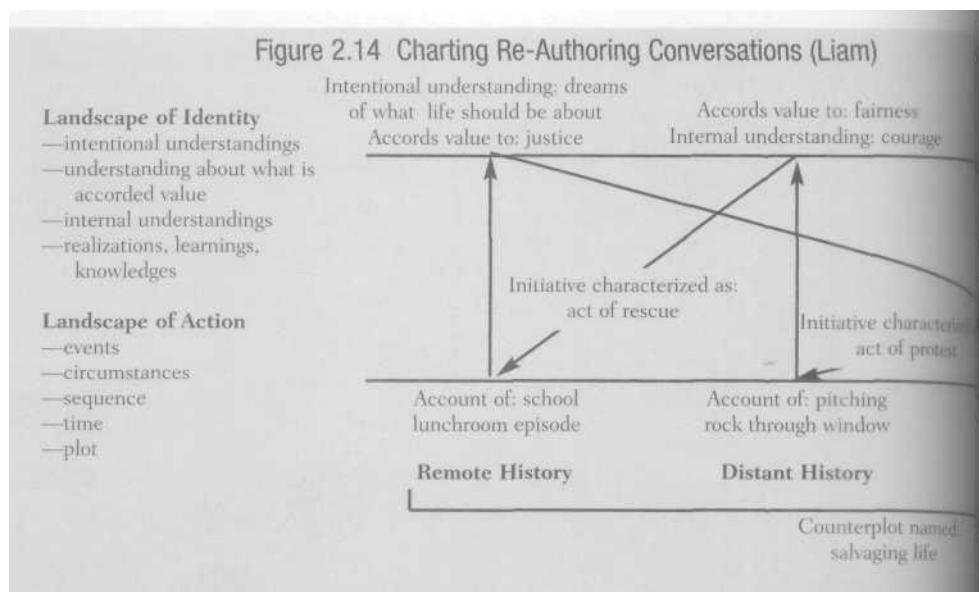
In this question I summarized the identity conclusions that had been named in the course of our conversation, and I invited Liam and Penny to speculate about possibilities for action in his life that would be in harmony with these conclusions. This was a landscape of action question that encouraged the sketching of the subordinate storyline into the near future. In response to this, Liam embraced a proposal to contact Daniel, an old school friend whom he'd not seen for 18 months.

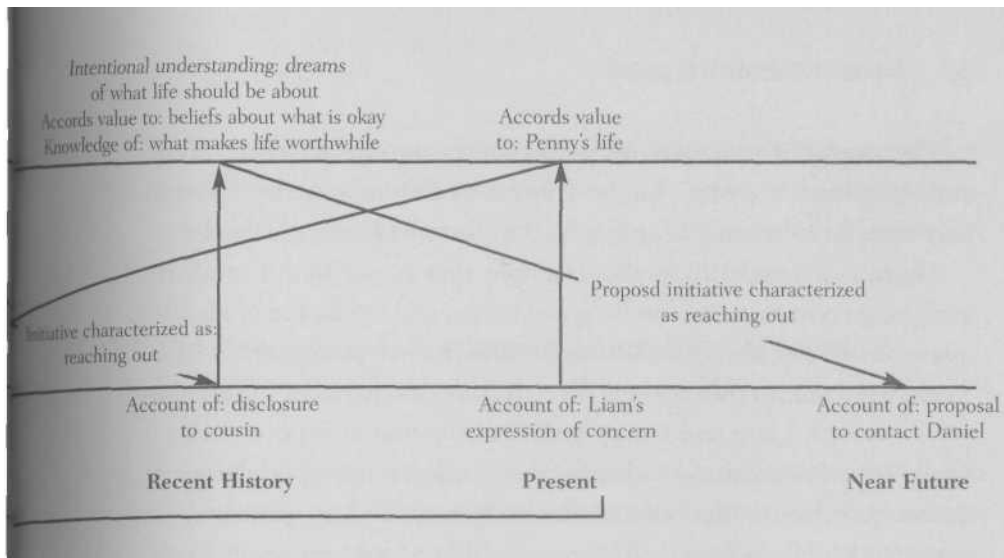




M: (Figure 2.13) What sort of step would this be if you took it? Would you say it was a step in rescuing, protesting, or reaching out? Or something else?

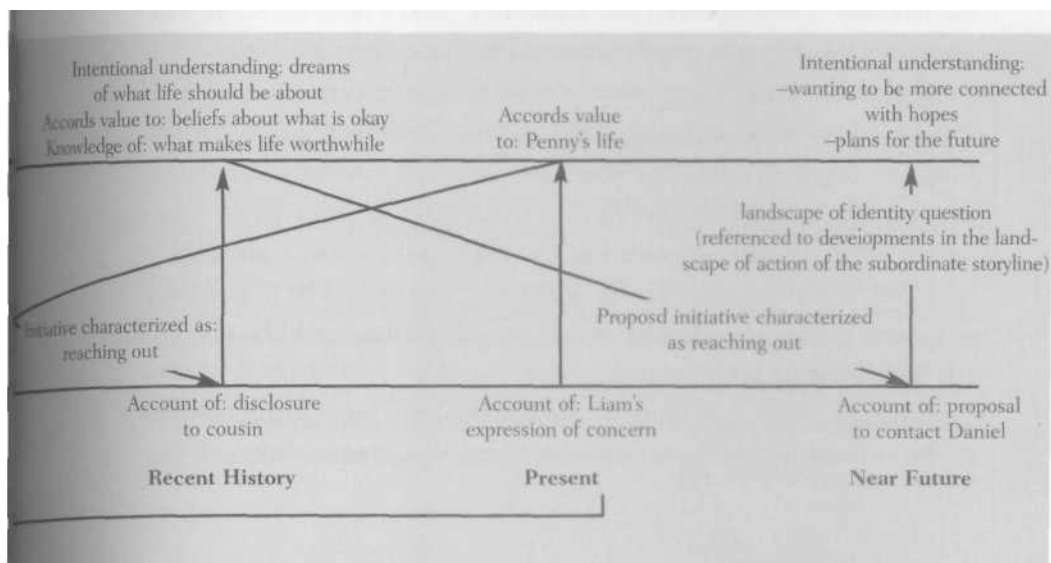
This was a landscape of action question that invited Liam to name the step that Penny had proposed and that he had embraced. This was distinguished as a further step in reaching out.





M: (Figure 2.14) Penny, if you witnessed Liam taking this step to contact Daniel, what would this suggest to you about his purposes in doing this?

This was landscape of identity question that invited reflection on the reaching-out initiative that had been proposed. This question engaged Penny in the generation of more of the sort of positive identity conclusions that characterized the subordinate storyline.



This zigzagging movement through time is characteristic of re-authoring conversations. In the context of this movement, subordinate storylines become deeply rooted in history and are thickened.

There is a regularity in this example that is not found in all re-authoring conversations; landscape of action and landscape of identity questions do not always follow each other in such an orderly fashion. There were many other options for rich story development in this conversation with Liam and Penny, and I believe that at various points it would have been equally viable for me to ask a series of landscape of action questions before another landscape of identity question. For example, I might have asked more questions about precursors to the rock-throwing incident that might have provided an account of the foundations of this action. Perhaps this would have provided another route to the story of the school lunchroom. I might have also initiated an inquiry into the specific links between the lunchroom, rock-throwing, and reaching-out incidents—for example, about how each incident was linked to and might have led to the next—before introducing further landscape of identity questions.

These considerations about some of the other options for rich story development underscore the fact that the options I chose were not *the* correct options, but rather just the ones that seemed most available at the time of this conversation. I did not prepare any of my questions in advance; these questions were responses to Penny and Liam's responses. Had I met with Liam and Penny on a different day, the circumstances would not have been identical, and I have no doubt that the route taken in our conversation would have been different.

Regardless of the route taken, the re-authoring conversations map can be a very helpful guide in the journey of therapeutic conversations, leading to destinations wherein subordinate storylines are richly drawn. For Liam, this provided a foundation of knowledge upon which he could proceed with his life. Liam was now in a position to speculate about actions that he might take that would be in harmony with new theme and identity conclusions and that would be congruent with what he gives value to.

Although I have continued to employ the term *subordinate storyline* in the context of this discussion, as our conversations continued over

several meetings it was clearly apparent that a shift had occurred in this subordinate status. What had previously been a subordinate storyline began to overshadow the initially dominant account of Liam's life.

The Benefits and Purpose of Landscape of Identity Questions

As the subordinate storyline in my therapeutic conversation with Liam and Penny was developed, the landscapes of action and identity supporting it were more richly drawn. With regard to the landscape of action, this was achieved by encouraging Liam and Penny to bring together specific events of his life into a sequence that unfolded across time according to a valued theme. With regard to the landscape of identity, this was achieved by inviting Liam and Penny to be witness to these events, to reflect on them, and to give voice to understandings about Liam's life and identity that were derived from this reflection. In this way, the landscape of identity questions I introduced sparked a heightened state of mental activity in Liam and Penny. Among other things, these landscape of identity questions encouraged:

- Reflections that were expressions of subjectivity (what Liam and Penny thought of these events), of attitude (what Liam and Penny felt about these events), of knowledge (what Liam and Penny learned as an outcome of this reflection), of appearance (what Liam and Penny thought these events showed about each other's lives), and of supposition (what Liam and Penny foresaw with regard to the future)*

* These terms describe specific transformations of actions in literary-text storylines. These actions occur in the landscape of consciousness. These transformations, defined by Todorov (1977), describe states of mental activity of protagonists, which, according to Bruner (1986, p. 30), "thicken the connective web that holds a narrative together in its depiction of both action and consciousness." In the context of therapeutic practice, questions about what people think of particular events ("subjectivity"), about how they feel about particular events ("attitude"), about what they are learning as they reflect on these events ("knowledge"), about what these events show about each other's lives ("appearance"), and about what these events foretell ("supposition") encourage landscape of identity development and a thickening of the subordinate storyline.

- The derivation of intentional understandings (of a range of purposes, goals, plans, aspirations, hopes, and so on) and of understandings that were centred on considerations of value (of belief, principle, conviction, faith, and so on)
- An account of the manner of engagement with these intentional understandings and with these considerations of value (Penny, and, at a later stage, Liam as well, expressed enthusiasm for some of the intentions reflected in his actions, and they were passionate about the values expressed in this)

Another characteristic of landscape of identity questions is the use of the subjunctive stance (Todorov, 1977). This stance is characterized by terms like *as if*, *perhaps*, *maybe*, *might be*, *possibly*, and so on. For example: "What conclusions *could be* arrived at in relation to this?" "What are some of the *possible* understandings of this event?" "What *might* this say about what is important to you?" In my conversation with Liam and Penny, this subjunctive stance displaced the mood of certainty and inevitability that was a pervasive feature of the accounts of life that were given by them at the outset of our conversation. I believe that the subjunctive stance of this inquiry had the effect of loosening the interpretive process in Liam and Penny's minds.

Of all the responses that are invoked by landscape of identity questions, it is the intentional understandings and understandings that are centred on considerations of value that are the most significant with regard to rich story development. In the following section I refer to these together as "intentional state understandings" (following Bruner) and contrast them with the "internal state understandings" about human action that are more routinely part of contemporary life.

Intentional State Understandings Versus Internal State Understandings

In my conversation with Liam and Penny, my landscape of identity questions initially gave rise to internal state understandings of his

actions. These internal state understandings featured conclusions about his "bravery," his "strengths," and his "needs." In these understandings, Liam's actions were interpreted as surface manifestations of specific elements or essences that were considered to be the bedrock of his identity—to be emanating from the center of a "self." However, further questions gave rise to intentional state understandings. Liam's actions were increasingly understood to be shaped by a raft of purposes, values, beliefs, aspirations, hopes, goals, and commitments. These understandings of his actions were not referenced to any concept of an essential self, but instead provided an account of what he was actively and willfully engaging with and embracing in his acts of living. Rather than representing his actions as essences of his identity, these intentional understandings relate to broader considerations of life. The intentional understandings arrived at in these conversations were in harmony with particular themes of life to which Liam and Penny attributed overriding importance. It is these intentional understandings, and understandings that are centred on what people give value to, that are highly significant in rich storyline development.

Internal State Understandings

Internal state understandings portray human action as a surface manifestation of specific elements or essences of a self that is to be "found" at the center of identity. For example, in the context of internal state understandings, human expression might be interpreted as a manifestation of any number of unconscious motives, instincts, needs, desires, drives, dispositions, personality traits, personal properties (like strengths and resources), and so on. According to this tradition of understanding, these elements or essences are universally present to different degrees in the human condition, and life is derived from either the direct expression of these elements or essences or from distortions of these elements and essences. Such distortions are often called "dysfunctions" or "disorders."

These internal state understandings are often associated with ideas about intrapsychic processes that construct an account of the mechanisms by which the elements and essences of the self are trans-

formed into human expression. At the turn of the 20th century, these conceptions of internal states and intrapsychic mechanisms gave rise to a specific concept of the "unconscious mind." This achievement represented the culmination of a number of "modern" and interlinked developments of the preceding century or two, which included:

- The development of humanist notions of the presence of a human "nature" that is considered to be the foundation of personal existence and that is understood to provide the source of human expression.
- The evolution of the concept of a "self" as an essence that is understood to occupy the center of personal identity. Although this idea of a self is a relatively novel idea in the history of the world's cultures, it has been a hugely successful idea and is today quite taken for granted in the West.
- The progressive development, from the 17th century on, of a new system of social control in which "normalizing judgment" steadily displaced moral judgment.*

Over the past century, these internal state understandings of human expression have become pervasive in Western culture—so much so that internal state understanding have achieved a taken-for-granted status in much of the professional and popular psychology of this current era. It is now routinely believed that these elements and essences of the self are ever-present in people's lives, to be discovered

* Michel Foucault, a historian of systems of thought, provided an account of the rise of "modern power" over the past several centuries. He asserted that this has become a principal system of social control in contemporary Western culture. This system of social control incites people to enact "normalizing judgment" on themselves and on others in an effort to reproduce specific norms about life and identity. In other words, *people* become accomplices to a system of social control in which they exercise and act upon judgments about life according to established norms about behavior and identity. According to Foucault, these norms have been principally constructed by the professional disciplines (law, medicine, psychology, and so on). This system of social control has significantly displaced a system of social control that subjects people to moral judgment by representatives of state institutions.

and revealed in the context of personal development and in the context of addressing the problems of living.

Intentional State Understandings

In contrast to internal state conceptions, intentional state conceptions of identity are distinguished by the notion of "personal agency." This notion casts people as active mediators and negotiators of life's meanings and predicaments, both individually and in collaboration with others. It also casts people as the originators of many of the preferred developments of their own lives: People are living out their lives according to intentions that they embrace in the pursuit of what they give value to in life; they are going about the business of actively shaping their existence in their effort to achieve sought-after goals.

According to Bruner (1990), the significance that is assigned to notions of intention and purpose, the weight that is given to notions of values, beliefs, and commitments, and the emphasis that is given to personal agency constitute a theory of mind that is characteristic of a centuries-old tradition of folk psychology:

All cultures have as one of their most powerful constitutive instruments a folk psychology, a set of more or less connected, more or less normative descriptions about how human beings "tick," what our own and other minds are like, what one can expect situated action to be like, what are possible modes of life, how one commits oneself to them, and so on. . . . Coined in derision by the new cognitive scientists for its hospitality toward such intentional states as beliefs, desires, and meanings, the expression of "folk psychology" could not be more appropriate, (pp. 35-36)

According to this definition, people routinely employ folk psychology in making their way through everyday life. People put the intentional state notions of folk psychology into service in their effort to understand their own lives and make sense of the actions of others. The intentional state notions of folk psychology equip people with a

range of notions about what makes people "tick" and provides a foundation for their responses to the actions of others.

The intentional state notions of folk psychology also come to the fore in people's efforts to make out just what it is that is going on in the world more generally. Bruner (1990) illustrated the way that these intentional state understandings shape people's endeavour to come to terms with the unexpected in life, provide a basis for their effort to address obstacles and crises, and make it possible for them to come to terms with a range of predicaments and dilemmas that confront them in everyday life.

Bruner traced the history of the displacement, in professional and popular psychology, of these intentional state understandings about life and identity through the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. In this development, the mind of folk psychology significantly gave way to the "unconscious mind" of the internal state psychologies.

In drawing this distinction between internal state understandings and intentional state understandings, and in privileging the development of intentional state understandings in re-authoring conversations, I am not dismissing internal understandings of life and identity. There are many cherished internal understandings of life that are quite beautiful and that can be seen to have positive consequences. In the context of therapeutic conversations, these understandings can be honored.

However, these internal understandings are unlikely to yield the sort of rich story development that is routinely an outcome of the generation of intentional state understandings. This is because internal understandings tend to:

- Diminish the sense of personal agency (according to internal understandings, people's lives are lived by the elements and essences of the self, not shaped by actions taken under the influence of the intentions and values that one is embracing)

- Be isolating (according to internal understandings, human expression is conceived as one of a singular self, not as an expression of life that is the outcome of the story of one's life being linked with stories of the lives of others around shared and valued themes)
- Discourage diversity (internal understandings are shaped by global norms about life that promote a modern ideal of the "encapsulated self—one that valorizes notions of self-possession, self-containment, self-reliance, and self-actualization)

Re-authoring conversations usually exhibit a drift toward the generation of identity conclusions associated with intentional state understandings, irregardless of the starting conditions. In my re-authoring conversation with Liam and his mother, this drift was accentuated by the shape of my questions, which were biased toward soliciting the more intentional understandings of Liam's actions: "What did this suggest to you about what was important to Liam? Or about what was precious to him?" "What's your guess about what this reflects in terms of what Liam values?" "Thinking back on these events when he was 6 years old, how did this act of rescuing other children shape your picture of him as a person?" "Penny, what's your guess about what this suggests to me about what Liam is aspiring to?" "Penny, if you witnessed Liam taking this step to contact Daniel, what would this suggest to you about his purposes in doing this?" "What do you think this would reflect about your plans for your future?"

To reiterate, this bias toward intentional state conclusions should not suggest that internal state conclusions are wrong or invariably unhelpful. The internal state conclusions that were generated in the earlier part of my conversations with Liam were positive and validating of him. However, it was the intentional state understandings that significantly contributed to a foundation for:

- The development of a sense of his life being joined with the lives of others around shared themes, which was an anathema to his prevailing sense of isolation

- An experience of being knowledgeable about his own life, which was an anathema to his sense of being totally lost when it came to matters of living
- The expression of emotional responses to some of the neglected but significant events of his life, which was an anathema to the flatness of affect that was characteristic of his existence
- Speculation about how his life and his identity might appear to others, which was an anathema to his sense of invisibility
- Supposition that included speculation about actions that might be available to him and that would be harmony with what he gave value to, which was an anathema to his sense of hopelessness and futility
- The expression of his manner of engagement with these intentions and values, which was an anathema to his sense of despondency

Apart from this, the intentional state understandings that were generated in our conversation provided Liam with a sense of personal agency, which was an anathema to his prevailing sense of paralysis. They also provided a foundation for the expansion of a preferred sense of identity that was continuous through his past, present, and future, which was an anathema to his conclusions about being messed up and damaged.

Landscape of Identity: Filing Cabinets of the Mind

Readers might find it helpful to conceive of the landscape of identity as being composed of "filing cabinets of the mind," each one representing a category of identity that is culturally relevant. In Western culture, this would include internal state categories like unconscious needs, instincts, desires, drives, dispositions, personality traits, personal properties, and so on, as well as intentional state categories like purposes, aspirations, quests, hopes, dreams, visions, values, beliefs,

and commitments. It is into these filing cabinets of the mind that people file a range of conclusions about their own and each other's identities. These identity conclusions determine what significance is given to specific events of people's lives, and they are further developed through reflection on these events and on the themes that these events are part of. All of these conclusions, including those of the internal state categories, significantly influence people's actions; they are shaping of life. Put another way, it is not actually "things" like motives and needs that shape life, but socially constructed conclusions about these things.

Re-authoring conversations provide the context for the generation of many identity conclusions that contradict those associated with the dominant storylines of people's lives. As these conclusions are entered into "the filing cabinets of the mind," they deprive the dominant identity conclusions of the space that they previously occupied and of the influence that they have had in shaping people's existence.

Further Illustrations

Following are two additional accounts of re-authoring conversations. I have not, however, provided a narrative commentary on them. Rather, their inclusion is meant to give readers an opportunity to undertake their own narrative analysis of these therapeutic conversations, and then to refer to my charting of them.

Vivienne

Vivienne, a woman in her early forties, had been referred to me by her general practitioner. This was one of the few referrals that Vivienne had followed through on in recent years, and it had been quite an anxiety-provoking step for her to take. She had invited her partner, Adel, to join her for moral support. At the outset of our first meeting, Vivienne informed me that she was a "long-term sufferer of agoraphobia" and that on account of this she had led a very restricted life. She had also "endured a struggle with eating disorders for 18 years," chiefly with anorexia nervosa and bulimia. I learned that Vivienne had been

resigned to living a highly circumscribed life, but that recently, with her partner's encouragement, had decided to embark on renewed efforts "to get her life free" of the forces that "had for so long blighted it."

By the time of our third interview, Vivienne had developed some familiarity with aspects of her life that had previously been invisible to her. Among other things, she had begun to speak of purposes for her life that contradicted those associated with a reclusive existence, personal tastes that contradicted austerity, and desires that were quite discordant with desires incited by anorexia nervosa. It was on this basis that Vivienne had formulated a relatively bold plan. She had decided to initiate contact with some relatives with whom she'd had little to do through her adult life—two aunts, an uncle, and a cousin—and to invite them to join her and her partner for a picnic. Vivienne had chosen these relatives because she had fond memories of her relationship with them in her childhood.

Vivienne had decided on a picnic for three reasons. First, she had warm memories of picnics as a child. Second, this would be in an open space and in defiance of the lifestyle that she'd been restricted to by her agoraphobia. Third, the idea of a picnic was linked to a plan to publicly take sustenance—Vivienne had not consumed food publicly for over 10 years. It was her hope that the nature of the event, a picnic, and the presence of these relatives would contribute to new impetus to recover her life from agoraphobia and anorexia nervosa. However, she was highly apprehensive about this proposed action and was not at all sure that she would be able to follow through with it.

At the fourth interview, 3 weeks later, I learned that Vivienne had followed through on her plan. The picnic had gone ahead, minus the presence of her cousin, who had been away on vacation. Vivienne announced that she'd not fled the open environment and had succeeded in consuming some food. Not only this, but at the end of this event she had announced that this had been the first occasion in which she had publicly taken sustenance in 10 years, that she had carefully chosen the company that she wished to be in for this step, and that she knew that this would be conducive to her success. Her aunts and uncle had spoken of the sense of honor they experienced in being selected for this and about the pleasure they had taken in being present.

Although this had clearly been an achievement in Vivienne's mind, I was concerned that this might not be sustained against all of the forces that had been so containing of her life. So I began to interview her about this initiative with the hope that it might become even more weighty and be taken into the further development of the subordinate storyline of her life.

M: This was quite some picnic! Vivienne, I think I've got a good understanding of the significance of this achievement. Do you have a name for this step that would give it the recognition it deserves?

Vivienne: I don't think so. I haven't really thought about this. I don't know what name would work.

M: I guess it wouldn't be a name that fits with what's been happening around all of that self-doubt? With what you described as "losing your life"?

Vivienne: No, no. Not in any way. I would say that this was more about self-belief.

M: Self-belief! Do you have any thoughts about what this act of self-belief made possible for you?

Vivienne: What do you mean?

M: Do you have any sense of how this act of self-belief affected your life? Maybe in terms of how you felt about yourself? Maybe in terms of new realizations about your life? In terms of your connection with your aunts and uncle? Anything at all.

Vivienne: Well, I do know one thing, and that is that it brought me closer to my aunts and my uncle. I definitely feel reconnected to my two aunts and my uncle. They were so lovely. Yeah. It brought me closer to them, and closer to Adel too.

M: Part of the outcome of this act of self-belief is that it

reconnected you to people who are important to you. How do you feel about this sort of development?

Vivienne: The only thing I can say is that I'm happy about it, of course.

M: Could you say a little about why you are happy about this? Anything at all that would help me understand why this is important to you?

Vivienne: This might sound a bit strange to you, especially since I have been so disconnected for such a long time. But I really believe that I am a people person, I really am.

M: A people person. Tell me, what sort of things are important to a people person?

Vivienne: Well, let's, see . . .

My questions engaged Vivienne in loading with significance the action she'd taken in organizing the picnic and following through on her plan. However, I predicted that the status of these steps would be tenuous if they were not taken into a storyline of her life. For example, the step could be judged to be a "one-off" initiative, perhaps fortuitous or born of chance, or the outcome of unusual circumstances.

This tenuous status renders such steps vulnerable and unlikely to provide the foundation of enduring change. Therefore, I began to ask some questions to encourage Vivienne to take these steps into a storyline of her life. Initially these were very straightforward landscape of action questions that encouraged her to bring forth the recent history of this act of self-belief: "Do you have any idea of what you might have done to pave the way for this act of self-belief?" "Perhaps you might be able to think of something that helped you to prepare the ground for this?" "Would you reflect on events leading up to this step and talk about any that might have been implicated in this?"

Suddenly we were in a conversation about the events and circumstances leading up to the picnic, and this included the steps that Vivienne had taken to keep her anxiety at bay before calling her rela-

tives about the picnic invitation. This review of the recent history of these steps also contributed to a dramatic rendering of the events of the picnic itself, including the moments of crisis that Vivienne went through in the act of joining others in eating and the action that she took to address these moments of crisis. As these steps were being taken into a sequence of events unfolding through time, I asked Vivienne what name she would give to this development in her life: "I am getting a clearer picture of what led up to this act of self-belief. What are your thoughts about what would be a good overall name for this development? If these steps are part of a course in your life, what would you call this course?" In response to these questions, Vivienne concluded that this was about "reclaiming my life."

At the next meeting our conversations again turned to the events of the picnic, and the time seemed ripe to extend our re-authoring conversation:

M: Vivienne, I had some questions about what these developments in reclaiming your life might say about who you are as a person.

Vivienne: Well . . . I don't know. I really don't think that I've got an answer to that.

M: Perhaps I could ask Adel.

Vivienne: Okay, that's fine.

M: Adel, I would be interested to have your reflections on the picnic event. You might have some thoughts about what Vivienne was drawing upon in taking these steps. Or maybe some thoughts about what sustained her in following through on this. Or you might have some ideas about what this could say about what is important to Vivienne. Anything like this.

Adel: Yeah, actually, I've got quite a few ideas about this. But what comes to me first is that this says a lot about Vivienne's perseverance and willpower.

M: Perseverance and willpower. Vivienne, can you relate to Adel's thoughts on this?

Vivienne: Well, I guess so. But these wouldn't be my words.

M: Do you have some other words?

Vivienne: I can't think of any. But I guess I can connect to what Adel is saying.

M: Okay. Perseverance and willpower aren't your words, but you can connect to them.

Vivienne: Yeah.

M: I'm curious about how it is that you can connect to these words. Have you witnessed anything else happening in your life in recent times that might also be a reflection of perseverance and willpower?

Vivienne: Well . . . I'm trying to think of . . . maybeNo, that's not an example.

Adel: I can think of something. The weekend before last we were talking about what we would do on Saturday afternoon. Michael, we nearly always spend Saturday afternoon together, just the two of us. It's our time. Anyway, I was talking about some gardening that needed to be done, and I remember Vivienne saying something like: "Yes, that is a good idea, but I am a different person, and I have some other ideas." (*turning to Vivienne*) And I don't recall you ever saying anything like that before.

Vivienne: No, I haven't. I'm sure I haven't. I mean I am sure I haven't said anything like that before.

M: This fits with what Adel was saying about perseverance and willpower?

Vivienne: I think it must.

M: I wonder what else this "I'm a different person, and I have other ideas" says about you, or about your relationship with Adel. Do you have any thoughts about this? About what this could reflect about what's important to you? Or about your relationship with Adel?

Vivienne: I guess . . . yeah, I guess that it maybe says that I am valuing myself a bit. Or beginning to at least. Perhaps that I'm not just totally nowhere.

M: You gave your opinion, so . . .

Vivienne: So maybe I am valuing my **opinions more, that** my opinion is worth something at least.

M: Like you have a . . .

Vivienne: Like I have a mind of my own, and I am valuing this more.

M: Adel?

Adel: I agree with this. It has to be about Vivienne valuing her opinions more, about valuing her own mind. I think it is also about where we have got to in our relationship.

M: In what sense?

Adel: The trust, I mean. That Vivienne could trust that she could say this to me.

M: So it's also a reflection of trust in your relationship. Of a relationship of trust?

Vivienne: Yeah, that's true.

M: And trust has always been . . .

Vivienne: I honestly can't think of anything that is more important to me.

M: Apart from Adel, can you think of anyone else who has recognized this perseverance and willpower in you? Or who

has appreciated you valuing your opinions and your mind?
Or who would be aware of the importance of trust to you?

Vivienne: Helen would have. (*Helen was Vivienne's older sister by 4 years. She committed suicide when she was 16 years old. Until that time, she'd done what she could to protect Vivienne from the abuses that she herself was also being subjected to.*)

Adel: Yeah, Helen for sure. From what I know about her at least.

M: Would it be okay if I asked some questions about Helen, and maybe about your relationship with Helen? (I had already learned a little about Helen in my second meeting with Vivienne and Adel.)

Vivienne: This used to be hard for me to talk about, and it might still be. But right now I think it would be okay. No, right now I'd welcome it even if it is hard.

M: If Helen could be here and part of this conversation, and if I asked her to tell me a story about you when you were little, a story about your perseverance and willpower, or about you valuing your opinions, or about the importance of trust to you, what do you reckon we would be hearing?

Vivienne: Helen really looked out for me, and she would probably tell lots of stories.

M: Which one is most present in your mind right now?

Vivienne: She'd probably tell you about some of the trouble I got into at school. I remember that everything was just too much for me and I wasn't really coping with anything. All it took to send me over the top was a mean schoolteacher, and I had this really mean teacher in seventh grade, and one day I just lost it. I went totally wild, and I can't even remember much about what I did, except that I

just tore everything up and wrecked the classroom. But I do remember that I got sent to the principal and had to stand there for what seemed like hours to think about what I'd said and done and about how I would fix it. But I wouldn't agree that I was the one in the wrong. And then suddenly Helen turned up. How she found out about this I don't know, because the senior school was a whole block away. Anyway, she started going for the principal. You know what I mean. Telling the principal where to go and how to manage his teachers, about what a disgrace his school was, and so on. Then she went to hit him, and wow, before long it was like a riot. I'd joined in too, and there were people everywhere all of a sudden and all sorts of things happening, and it seemed to go on forever. We sure got into a lot of bother over this, from my father as well.

M: That's a very moving story.

Adel: Yeah. I haven't heard all of these details before.

Vivienne: It hasn't been in my mind. Maybe I haven't wanted to think about it because things just went from bad to worse after that.

M: What's your guess about what Helen appreciated about you back then?

Vivienne: I don't have to guess. I know that she appreciated how determined I was not to give in.

M: And about your mind?

Vivienne: Yeah. I'm sure she'd say that she appreciated the fact that I had my own mind.

M: What do you think this event might have told Helen about what is important to you, or about what you wanted for your life?

Vivienne: About what I would have wanted? About what's

important to me? Well, I'm thinking about the trust thing. It was so strongly there between the two of us. And maybe the fact that I wouldn't give in. Helen would say that this meant that I was holding onto some fantasy about what life could be.

M: Fantasy? Any other word?

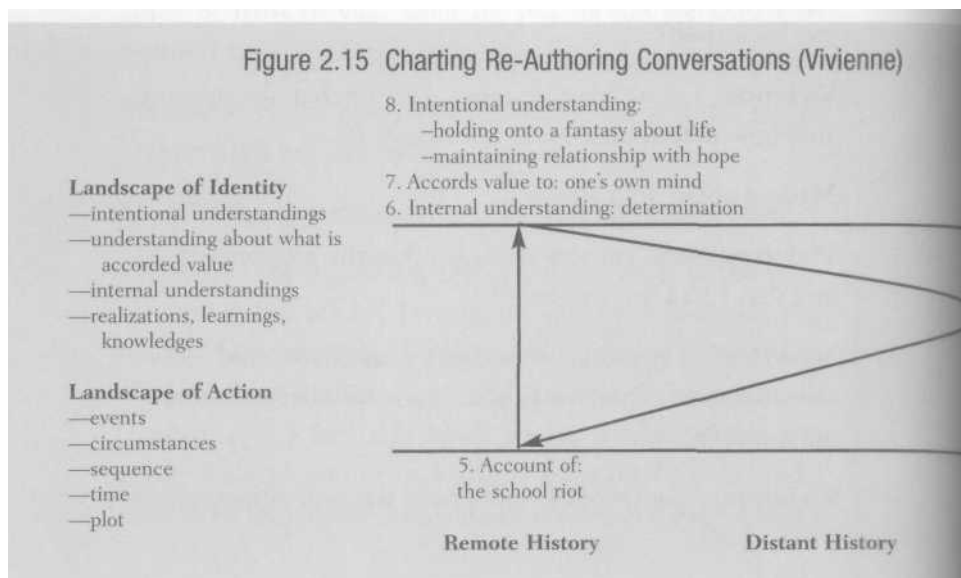
Vivienne: Yeah. "Hope" would be better.

M: Could I ask some questions about that hope?

Vivienne: Sure.

The details about the events surrounding the crisis at school, and about how they might have confirmed some of Helen's conclusions about Vivienne's identity, marked the beginning of a deeply moving remembering conversation. I will not provide the details of this here, as the subject of re-remembering conversations is covered in the next chapter of this book.

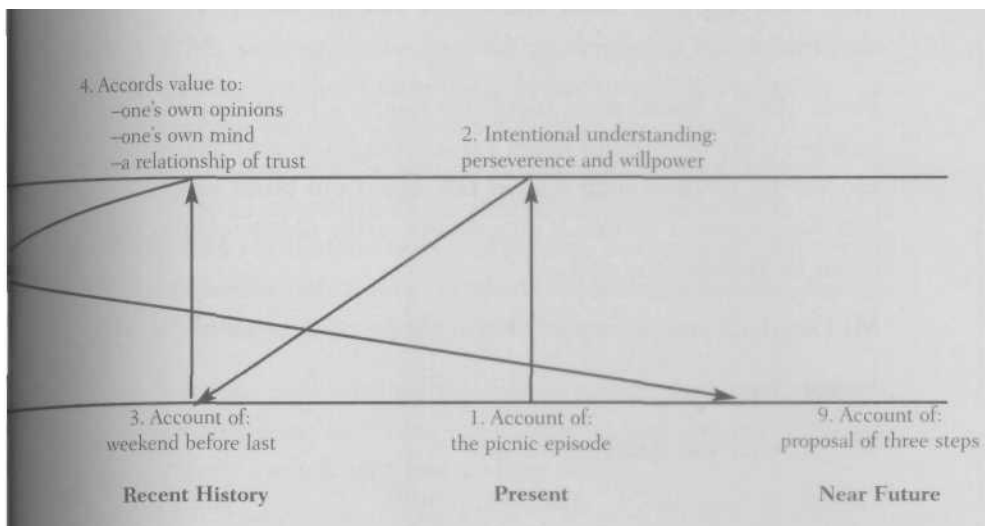
At the end of this conversation, I asked Vivienne to speculate about what might be possible for her if what Helen knew about her identity was more available to her to draw on in taking further steps in the reclaiming her life. I also consulted both Vivienne and Adel about



what circumstances might be arranged that would be favorable to Vivienne's desire to stay in touch with this knowledge about her identity. In response to these questions, Vivienne named three steps that would be congruent with what Helen knew about her, and they both had some thoughts about what would make it possible for Vivienne to keep this knowledge about her identity close to her in the coming weeks. At the next meeting I learned that Vivienne had taken two of these steps.

Over a period of 18 months we had many more conversations that contributed to the further development of the landscapes of action and identity of the subordinate storyline characterized by the "reclaiming my life" theme. This took in many of Vivienne's initiatives in challenging the restrictions of agoraphobia and the dictates of anorexia nervosa. At the 18-month follow-up I learned that Vivienne had established a life for herself "out there in the world" from which she was drawing pleasure, and although she still struggled at times with insecurity in open spaces and with "discouraging thoughts" about food and weight, they were no longer preoccupying concerns.

Figure 2.15 shows my charting of the re-authoring conversation with Vivienne and Adel. The up arrows indicate landscape of identity questions and the down arrows indicate landscape of action questions.



David

David, age 11, and his parents, Pauline and Fred, were referred by a social service agency that had had extensive involvement with this family. In response to yet another crisis precipitated by David's actions, Pauline and Fred were close to the conclusion that nothing more could be done to resolve this situation, and they were seriously considering "bailing out"—seeking alternative living arrangements for David, away from the family home. Early in our first meeting there was an opportunity to engage in an externalizing conversation about trouble and its effects on the lives and relationships of these family members. In this conversation Pauline and Fred, and then David as well, spoke fully of their experience of this trouble.

Once this externalizing conversation was well established—when "trouble" was not collapsed so solidly onto David's identity—circumstances were right for the identification of some of the events of his life that contradicted trouble's agenda. In response to my questions about this, Fred told me a story about a recent family visit to the beach. Fred had met an old friend there, and they'd been locked in absorbing reminiscences for some time. Toward the end of this exchange, Fred suddenly became aware of the circumstances that had made this possible—he wasn't constantly being called upon to address the trouble that David usually got into on these occasions.

M: Please say a bit more about why you are telling me about this?

Fred: Well, I hadn't seen Geoff for nearly 20 years, and he'd been my best friend when I was young. The only reason we got to have such a good talk about old times was that David wasn't so much into trouble. This didn't really occur to me until the end.

M: David, do you remember this? This day at the beach?

David: Yep.

M: So, what was going on for you?

David: Dunno.

M: What do you think, Fred? What's your guess about what was going on for David?

Fred: Well, maybe it was just one of those things that come along once in a while. For some reason David was just getting along with everyone. It just seemed to come out of the blue. But it sure was nice.

M: Pauline, what do you think about this?

Pauline: I don't know. I wasn't there at the time.

M: David, on this day at the beach, were you there **for** trouble, or were you there for something else?

David shrugs.

M: (*turning to Fred*) Do you think that David was there for trouble, or do you think that he was there for something else?

Fred: Something else, I guess.

M: Pauline?

Pauline: Yeah. I'd say that. He was there for something else.

M: (*referring to understandings derived in the earlier externalizing conversation*) Let's go back to what we figured out about trouble, about what trouble was out for. To wreck friendships with other kids. To paint a negative picture of David in everybody's eyes, and in his own eyes. To build a bad reputation for him that puts everyone off. To create hardship in David's connection with his mum and dad. To demoralize David's father. To . . .

Fred: Well, obviously it didn't succeed this time, so that's something. But then, it was only for one day, and then-not even a whole day. Just an hour or two.

M: However long it was, if David wasn't there for trouble, what was he doing there?

Fred: Well, I guess what happened is that David just resisted trouble for a while. He must have resisted the trouble.

M: That's your guess. That this was about resistance?

Fred: On this occasion I would say so. Yes, I'd say it fits. But I'd sure like to see more of this.

M: David, does this fit for you? Were you resisting trouble on that day at the beach?

David nods yes.

M: Do you know what your father means by using the word *resistance*?

David shakes his head no.

M: Would you define this for David? Would you spell it out for him?

Fred: Well, its like this David . . .

Fred provided David with an account of what he meant by resistance, which included some practical examples of actions that typified this. It became quickly apparent that David was rather taken with this description. I then asked him if he thought that "resisting trouble" was a reasonable characterization of his actions at the beach, and he didn't hesitate in confirming this. This response led us into a conversation about the actual and potential consequences of this expression of resistance in David's life and in his relationship with his parents and others.

As the events of this recent visit to the beach had now been rendered newly significant, I began to ask questions that I hoped would assist David and his parents in taking these events into a storyline:

M: I'm curious, David. How did you manage to resist trouble at the beach in the way that you did?

David shrugs.

M: Can you think of anything that happened before this that could have prepared the way for you to resist trouble? Can you think of anything that might have helped you get ready to resist trouble?

David shakes his head no.

M: (*turning to Pauline and Fred*) Did you see anything in David's life in the lead-up to this that might have paved the way for him to resist trouble at the beach? Anything that might have given him a foundation for this, that would have helped him to get ready for this?

Pauline: Nothing that I can think of. We have had a hell of a rough ride with David, and it has been even worse over the last year or so. We haven't seen any real smooth patches, if that's what you're looking for.

M: Fred?

Fred: I can't think of anything either. Like I said, it's just one of those things, I guess.

M: So neither of you saw anything that could have prepared you for what David did at the beach?

Pauline: No, not me.

Fred: Nope.

M: David, if no one saw anything, could it be that you secretly got ready to resist trouble, and then just surprised everyone with this?

David shrugs.

M: I am asking you about any secret preparations, because it was a surprise to everyone, wasn't it?

David now grins and nods yes.

M: What does that nod mean, David?

David: It was a secret.

M: Well who would have guessed that?!

Fred: We should have! (*Pauline laughs.*)

M: Okay, David, let us in on the secret. How did you get ready for this? What did you get up to?

David: Well, I . . . um . . . I . . . Actually it was on the Sunday before. I'd got into the worst trouble on Saturday, and I'd got up late.

Pauline: Yeah, that's right. We'd had the police around and everything. It was terrible!

M: Sure doesn't sound good. Back to you, David.

David: It was the Sunday, and I'd got up late, see. And I looked in the mirror in the bathroom, and there I was looking back, and I sure didn't look too good. So, I looked down at the sink, and then up at the mirror again, and said to myself: "Son, you've got to do something about this, your life is going down the drain."

Pauline and Fred look at each other quizzically.

M: And that was the start of it!

David: Yep.

M: That's something! And how did this prepare you for resisting trouble at the beach?

David: Don't know. But it must have.

M: (*turning to Pauline and Fred*) What do you think was the link between what David did on that Sunday morning and what he did in resisting trouble at the beach a week later?

In response to this question, Pauline and Fred began to speculate

about the possible links between these two events. David subsequently confirmed some of this speculation. It was in this speculation, and in David's confirmation, that his actions in resisting trouble at the beach were taken into a sequence of events unfolding across a week's time. These actions at the beach were no longer singular, but had been incorporated into an emergent storyline. With this development, the time seemed ripe for me to ask David to name the associated theme or plot.

M: All right, we're now all getting a little more clarity on these events in David's life. David, I know that for you the word *resistance* is a good word for what you did at the beach. But is there another word that would be a good word for all of this, from what you did on the Sunday morning right up to resisting trouble at the beach? Maybe there is another word for what you were doing for your own life.

David shrugs.

M: This wasn't about going along with trouble. It wasn't about going in trouble's direction, was it?

David: Nope.

M: Well, if it was a different direction, what would be a good name for this direction? Just a guess?

David: Um . . . um . . . it's about, I think it's about making a comeback. That's what I'd say.

M: Making a comeback from trouble. So that's what it is all about!

David: Yeah.

M: (*turning to Fred and Pauline*) Did you know this?

Fred: Sure didn't.

Pauline: Neither did I. This is something that I thought I'd never hear.

M: So, it's a surprise, and because of this my next question might be a bit difficult to answer.

Fred: Okay. Let's have it.

M: What does David's decision to make a comeback say to you about him? Does it affect your picture of him in any way? Or does it suggest something to you about what he really wants for his life?

Pauline: It says something to me about his determination, which I know he's always had. He's really a pretty gritty kid. But the difference is that he had this working for him, not so much against him. Yeah. And not so much against us, either.

M: What are your thoughts on this, Fred?

Fred: Well, I don't know . . . but I'll take a punt on it. It is about David trying for something. I guess trying to make something of his life so that he can get ahead, so that he can have friends, so that he can make something different happen in his life.

M: David, how's that? Do you think that your mum and dad are getting this right about your determination working for you, not against you and them? And what do you think of what your father said about making something of your life?

David: Yep. That's it.

M: What's this like for you? I mean, what's it like for you that your parents are getting things right about you?

David grins.

M: (*turning to Pauline and Fred*) What is it like for the two of you to find that you are getting some things right about David?

Pauline: This is a surprise too. It'd take us a long time to get used to this. But it's good, really good. If only there could be more of it.

Fred: Yeah, I'd say that.

M: I was just wondering whether the developments we've been talking about are totally new in David's life, or whether they can be traced back to other events.

Fred: What are you thinking about?

M: Well, I was wondering whether you could tell me any stories from David's younger life that might fit with this determination and this wish to make something of his life. Or perhaps other stories about secret preparations, or perhaps about making an earlier comeback? Anything like this.

Fred: Hearing you ask this makes me think of a time when he was just a little kid, 5, maybe, or nearly 6 years old. You'd remember, Pauline. I think it was on a Sunday, around lunchtime. I was cooking lunch, and we heard David calling out for us from the street. He was yelling. I thought, what trouble is he in now? So we ran out there, and what did we see? David was riding this enormous two-wheeler bike up the street, swinging all over the place, looking as dangerous as hell. And then what does he do? He lets go of the handle bars and calls out, "Look, no hands!" We were petrified.

Pauline: And we were surprised, too, because we didn't know he could ride a two-wheeler.

M: Secret training?

Pauline: Yeah, secret training again. And a whole lot of determination for something.

David was grinning and clearly enjoying the recounting of this story.

Fred: There was something else about that that we won't go into right now.

M: What's that?

Fred: *(endeavouring to be gracious)* We won't talk about

where the bike came from. It wasn't David's, and he didn't have any friends with bikes like this.

David now looks sheepish but clearly is still delighted with the recounting of this story.

M: David, was it your plan to surprise your parents?

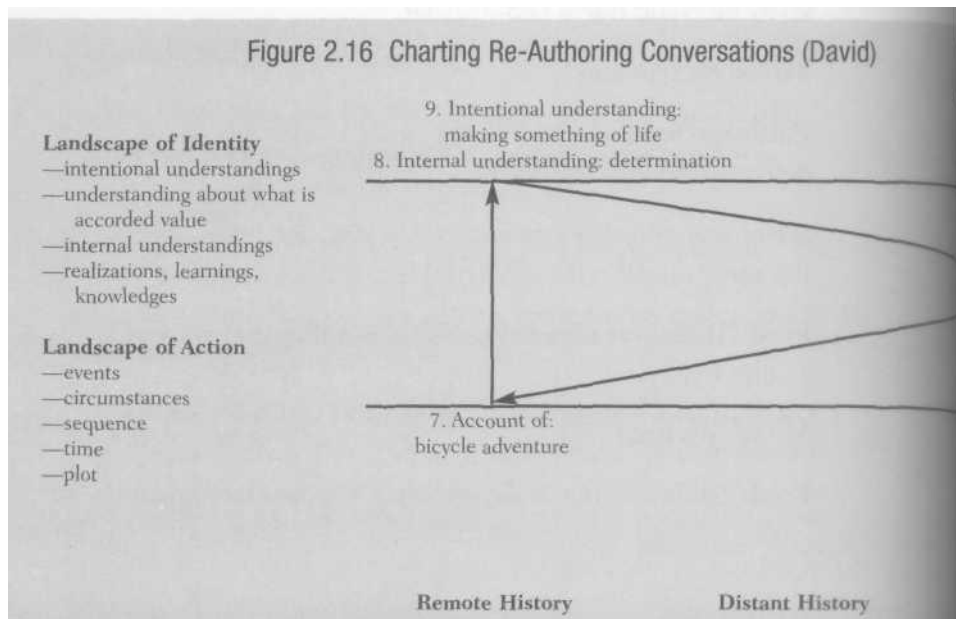
David: I think so.

M: And do you agree with them that this shows how you can get your determination working for you, and that you can make something of your life?

David grins and nods.

M: Okay, let me ask you some more questions about what this says about you, and about how you want your life to be. And I'll ask your mum and dad to help out as we go along.

These questions prompted a conversation that gave rise to several more identity conclusions that contradicted those shaped by all of the trouble that had so closely pursued David's life. These conclusions provided a foundation for questions about more stories of David's life that were confirming of them. David also began to initiate some of this storytelling. Before long I was engaging David and his parents in specula-

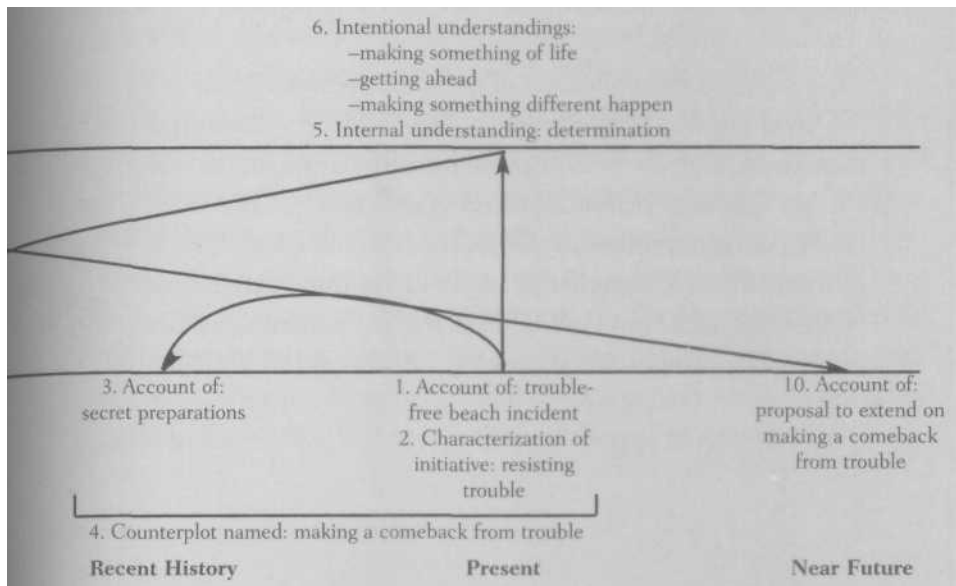


tive conversations about the near future of these developments: "David, if you were going to build on this comeback, if you were going to go further with it after leaving here, what do you reckon your next step could be? And if it is okay with you I will ask your mum and dad to help us out with their ideas. But in the end, it will really be up to you."

With his parent's assistance, David came up with a number of ideas about how to extend his comeback from trouble. He also said that he had some other ideas, but that these were secret. I asked Pauline and Fred for their thoughts about what they might do to provide a good climate for David to get to work on these ideas for extending his comeback from trouble, and then I checked this out with David. I made it clear that I had no expectation whatsoever with regard to David's acting on any of these ideas.

Over a series of meetings, David did extend on these initiatives and succeeded in his comeback from trouble. Along the way, Fred and Pauline took a turn in surprising him—they undertook some quite unexpected and positive actions in ensuring that he had a supportive climate that was favorable to the pursuit of this comeback. At the 6- and 18-month follow-ups, I learned that, apart from a few hiccups, things were working out well for David and his parents.

Figure 2.16 shows my charting of the re-authoring conversation with David and his parents. The up arrows indicate landscape of identity questions and the down and horizontal arrows indicate landscape of action questions.



Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a re-authoring conversations map of narrative practice. This map is founded upon a text analogy that represents stories as composed of a "landscape of action" and a "landscape of consciousness." This re-authoring conversations map provides therapists with a guide for shaping therapeutic conversations that redevelop the subordinate storylines of people's lives. It is the redevelopment of these subordinate storylines that provides people with a foundation to proceed to address their predicaments and problems in ways that are in harmony with the precious themes of their lives. These precious themes become more richly known in the course of re-authoring conversations.

The re-authoring conversations map has been a mainstay of my therapeutic practice for many years. I have never been short on curiosity about the events of life, or on enthusiasm for rich conversations about life. The narrative analysis of story-making has continued to fuel this curiosity and I find that I am ever-more intrigued by life and enthusiastic about therapeutic practice.

In writing this chapter it was my hope to provide a relatively comprehensive account of "the imaginative application of the narrative mode" in therapeutic practice. As I have drawn significantly from the work of Jerome Bruner in developing this map, it seems fitting to close this chapter with the following quote, which captures the sentiment associated with the narrative practices that I have been describing here.

The imaginative application of the narrative mode leads . . . to good stories, gripping drama, believable . . . historical accounts. It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particularities of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place. Joyce thought of the particularities of the story as epiphanies of the ordinary. (Bruner, 1986, p. 13)