Narrative work! What on earth?

Conceps and methods
Preface

A story can be told in many ways. Stories give insight into the how, what and why of life, and help to bring memories to the fore. This book represents the efforts of a group of students to fill the narrative gaps they encountered in their research on lecturers’ experiences with narrative research and narrative methods.

While many lecturers already use narrative methods and research, they are not always aware that they are doing so. Furthermore, it appears that lecturers would like to gain more knowledge and experience in the use of narrative methods and research. Many lecturers are curious about these fields, but some are sceptical. With this book, the students aim to cultivate lecturers’ knowledge about and experience with narrative methods and research in a playful way.

In the first part, we clarify the concepts involved. Subsequently, we present interactive methods for working with the stories that are collected. These methods are designed to bring individuals’ stories to the fore and foster understanding of them. To this end, the reader is invited to give meaning to them, to search for the storyline and to identify the plot. Meanwhile, telling your own story provides insight into your thoughts and actions. Working with narrative methods gives the students the opportunity for personal development.

When it comes to narrative research and methods some lecturers still have a way to go. Lecturers agree on the usefulness of studying the meaning of clients’ stories in the social work context. But, most lecturers are unfamiliar with the concepts and methods of narrative research. With this book, we hope to challenge our colleagues as well as their students to give further shape to narrative methods and research within the curriculum.

This book is about the wonderful combination of talking about the past and present, and acting in the here and now! Allow us to surprise you …

Lieselotte, Helga, Elke, Milou and Joshi, your dedication and perseverance have been impressive. We wish you all a bright future full of stories.

Dr Martha van Biene
Dr Meike Heessels
Ir Jidske Kohlmann
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Introduction

This book started as a research project on the use of narrative methods by lecturers of Cultural and Social Development at HAN. In the study, we asked lecturers about their knowledge, experience and perceptions of narrative research and methods. The following seven question patterns emerged, which the lecturers recognised and acknowledged during a transdisciplinary meeting to foster dialogue.

1. How can the use of narrative methods be improved and integrated within the existing HAN curricula?
2. How can the existing knowledge and skills of HAN lecturers with respect to narrative methods be increased?
3. How can the existing knowledge and skills of HAN lecturers with respect to narrative research be increased?
4. How can narrative research be implemented/taught in the existing curricula?
5. How can narrative research be used in creative ways?
6. How can the quality of HAN research be improved?
7. How can students of Social Work at HAN gain sufficient knowledge of general research methods and skills within the available time?

The study showed that lecturers lacked clarity with respect to the broader concepts of narrative methods and narrative research. They indicated that an insightful book defining and explaining the narrative approach would be of use, particularly one that described concrete interactive methods. Due to lecturers’ heavy workloads, the book should be written in an accessible manner and the interactive methods should be straightforward to incorporate into lessons. Furthermore, the lecturers were looking for a link between narrative and creative methods. During the study, we interviewed the chair of the curriculum committee and the manager of the Cultural and Social Development programme. We learned that would also welcome a workbook on narrative methods and research for lecturers.

Therefore, this book is aimed at lecturers and students of social work courses in higher professional education that involve the use of creative methods. We aim to inspire lecturers to elicit narratives from their students using interactive methods and to start working with these narratives. In addition, students and lecturers can use these interactive methods with diverse target groups in their professional field. We have written the book as generally as possible, so that the methods described can be used both for students and for target groups in the field.
The book consists of two parts. In the first part we explain the concepts involved in working with narratives. The second part presents 10 compact, interactive methods for getting started with stories, which can be put into practice immediately. Each method can be modified for different purposes and settings; experimentation is encouraged. For inspiration, therefore, we provide suggestions for variants as well as references to further information. A complete list of sources can be found in the reference list.
Theory

Working and researching in dialogue
This book is about narrative methods and narrative research. The word narrativity derives from the Latin word narrare, which means ‘to tell’. Narratives are present everywhere. They come in the form of fairy tales, drama, drawings, art, history, biography, myths and legends. Narratives can be found at all ages and in all societies. Stories have always played an important role in human life (Ten Holter, 2010). Simply put, a story is a sequence of coherent events. The following questions can usually be asked: How did it start? Then what happened? How did it end? (Bijl, Baars & Schueren, 2002). In the field of narratology, stories are the object of study and the focus is on the way in which these stories are told. Narratives are about biographical events as told by those who experienced them (Van Biene et al., 2008). They often have a time sequence; i.e. the narrator establishes a link between the past, the present and the future. People tell stories from a particular perspective. The narrator takes his or her own position in a story, but positions can also be assigned by others (e.g. the listener) (ibid). In addition to the narrator, narratives also include other parties; for example, a person may speak about their family or neighbours.
Working with narratives

Definition
Working with narratives means working with stories. In working with stories, the narrator and the listener ascribe themselves and the other a place in various contexts. Working with narratives can contribute to the attribution of meaning, identity construction and empowerment among individuals and/or groups.

What is working with narratives all about?
Stories can be used to convey emotions, feelings, knowledge and insight. Van Rosmalen (1999) suggests that in a narrative reconstruction, you can present yourself as you wish. ‘Reconstruction’ in this context means that by retelling certain events, the narrator is able to give them a new meaning. This narrative reconstruction can help people to move forward in their lives by giving events a new meaning. According to Lohuis, Schilpenoort and Schout (in Dries & Hoffman, 2008), a life story is a subjective construction of reality. When working with narratives, it is important to take the temporal context into account. The description of a situation can never be viewed separately from the past and the future of the person involved (Kloppenburg & Heemelaar, 1999). This approach, also known as constructivism, assumes that people create their own reality based on the subjective selection of personal and social experiences. It is assumed that ‘truths’ can be viewed in various ways and on various levels, and that a single objective reality does not exist. In reading about or practising narrative reconstruction, also keep in mind the differences between cultures. What is seen as strange or foreign in one culture may be perfectly normal in another (Ten Holter, 2010).

According to Dries and Hoffman (2008), stories help linking the present, the past and the future. Through stories, people discover what influence a particular event has had in their life. Stories speak to our subconscious and our intuitions. You can also use imagery to tell a story, asking students or clients to depict the essence of their story in a different way (Dries & Hoffman, 2008). The interactive methods described later suggest a range of creative techniques for this.
Narrative research

Definition
Narrative research is a form of interpretive research. The narrator’s story serves as the starting point from which to analyse events, the way in which the narrator experiences them, and the meaning that the narrator ascribes to them.

How do you conduct narrative research?
In narrative research, the story takes centre stage. Mighelbrink (2007) describes the goal of qualitative research as gaining insight into how people experience and ascribe meaning to reality. It concerns the narrator’s story; his or her signal, question or objective. According to Dries & Hoffman (2008), people are narrative and dialogical beings. By way of stories, people can express themselves, get to know one another and help one another. During dialogues, the events that people have experienced are selected, organised and connected to one another.

One of the key characteristics of narrative research is its focus on the construction of meaning between the researcher and the research subject (Ten Holter, 2010). This relationship is described as a collaborative process. In narrative research, research is not conducted on people but with people.

In conducting research, various steps are taken to progress from a research question to a result. Within the research group Local Service Provision from a Client Perspective, we distinguish eight steps for conducting narrative research (see figure 1).
Figure 1: Narrative research process, Local Service Provision from a Client Perspective (2013).
**Step 1. Research question**
All research starts with a problem or question. This question may be raised by an institution or a private party, or it may arise from a problem that you yourself identify in practice or in the literature.

**Step 2. Study design**
Once you have identified the problem, you set up a study design and choose a particular methodology. Then you reformulate the problem into an objective, a research question and a series of subquestions (Van der Donk & Van Lanen, 2011).

**Step 3. Conducting interviews**
Having established the research questions and methods, you can now arrange the interviews. You start by selecting potential interviewees by way of stratified or purposive sampling (Boeije, 2005; Robson 2011). The issue here is how to represent various manifestations of a phenomenon in your study population. For example, you may want to ensure a balance between men and women, or a spread across all age groups. In narrative research, open interviews are used. This means the interviewer’s main role is to listen and to invite and encourage the participant to tell his or her story, in order to obtain as much information as possible. These interviews are semi-structured, following an interview guide that sets out the objective, the direction and the structure of the interview. The guide also contains a number of questions that serve to elicit more information during the interview; these should be broad, open questions that steer the interview as little as possible (Van Biene et al., 2008).
Step 4. Processing the data
Make sure you gain the interviewee’s consent to record the interview. You can then transcribe the interviews verbatim, including all hesitations, self-corrections, jumbled sentences and emotions. The transcript should be presented to the interviewees to allow them to correct any inaccuracies or make additions; this is also known as a ‘member check’ (Boeije, 2005). You then process these changes into the transcript. Once the interviews have been fully processed, you divide each transcript into fragments. Each time a new topic is broached in the interview, you start a new fragment (Van Biene et al., 2008).

Step 5. Coding the data
Once you have divided the interviews into fragments, you can start coding them. The idea here is to identify what and who has been spoken about, and how (Van Biene et al., 2008). The codes may be determined by means of an ‘open’ coding process. This means you first read a number of interviews and try to figure out what they are about. Then you establish a number of codes that are broad enough not to restrict the research or to frame it too early. This way you create a ‘bottom-up’ coding format. In other cases, the codes are predetermined. The research group has a standard coding format that is often used with various modifications. The advantages of this format are that it has been tested, approved and that the format is predetermined yet open enough to let the stories ‘speak for themselves’. Below we explain the system’s categories.

‘What’ categories
These categories relate to the composition of the world that emerges from the narrative: the events, the people, their experiences and mutual relationships. In short, the ‘what’ categories concern the essence of what the interviewee’s comments are about.

‘Who’ categories
The ‘who’ categories indicate the perspective from which the ‘what’ has to be interpreted. Narratives involve an alternation between the primary and the secondary speaker. This results in different levels of language, which can be classed as either ‘internal’ or ‘external’. The internal narrator talks about him- or herself and is the actor in his or her own story. The external narrator speaks on behalf of a broader group of people, for example the family or neighbourhood. In the coding system, you translate this into ‘own’, ‘close relations’ and ‘others’.
‘How’ categories
The ‘how’ categories refer to the way in which a person says something. This may include the interviewee’s opinion about the ‘what’, but also his or her use of language, such as figures of speech. Think in terms of dichotomous pairs like positive/negative, demand/supply or problem/solution; in narratives, both terms of a pair can be applicable simultaneously.

Throughout the coding process, it is crucial that the team members discuss their interpretations of the different codes. This form of peer debriefing contributes to the validity of qualitative research (Robson, 2011: 158). One approach is to have each team member first read and code five fragments and then discuss these with the group. This helps to ensure that the codes mean the same thing for all researchers. This guarantees that the coding is as consistent as possible and that the right fragments are identified in the analysis process.

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**Step 6. Analysing the data**

After all fragments have been coded, you can begin ‘questioning’ the data. This means that you figure out for each subquestion, which codes are useful in answering it, thus using the codes as a sort of formula. By applying the formula and various filters for each question, you uncover the narratives that relate to the subquestion. In establishing the formula, you consider the ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ codes per category. Try not to use too many codes, so as to avoid selecting too many fragments. The codes lend themselves readily to contrasts such as ‘own’ versus ‘close relations’, which allows you to contrast the various perspectives while the rest of the codes remain the same.

Once the narratives for each subquestion have been identified, they can be analysed using the following steps:

- Read the narratives.
- Note down whatever you think is important for each narrative in an associative manner.
- Mark the narratives that speak to you.
- When you have studied all narratives relating to a particular subquestion, summarise your findings in a few sentences. Below your summary, add the quotes that were particularly striking or noteworthy.
Step 7. Discovering patterns
When this is done, discuss all subquestions with the group. This is another moment of peer debriefing (Robson, 2011: 158). Focus on what was particularly striking or noteworthy and what patterns stood out; think of common characteristics, recurrent structures and cultural conventions (Van Biene et al., 2008). Assign someone to take minutes of this meeting, which can then form the input for investigation of the question patterns.

Once you have identified all themes, the next step is to draw up a ‘needs framework’. This involves looking at what the interviewees need, want, require and can contribute per theme. Give every section a catchy title, derived from a quote or recurrent pattern. These then serve as the question patterns (recurrent themes) that are presented to the interviewees during the transdisciplinary dialogue.

Step 8. Transdisciplinary dialogue
To increase the validity of the question patterns, the interviewees are invited to take part in a transdisciplinary meeting. During this meeting, the ‘needs frameworks’ are presented and the interviewees are asked whether the patterns seem familiar. In addition, subgroups are formed to identify initiatives that stem from each question pattern, what contributions the different parties could make, and what the resulting actions should be. After this meeting, the conclusions can be finalised and used to develop a product, action or intervention.
Working with dialogues

Working with dialogues means working at a personal level. You start a dialogue and keep the dialogue going. In this context, the listener is equal to the narrator (Van Biene, 2005). It is of vital importance that the participants do not feel pressured, and that everyone has the same opportunities to discuss and question one another’s ideas (Dixon, 1998). Every contribution is taken seriously and accepted as meaningful. Multiple dialogues arise when various stories come to the fore alongside one another during your search for solutions to a question. When people tell their stories, certain ways of thinking and acting emerge. The key objective is to identify the question underlying the question (Van Biene, 2005). If this is achieved, dialogues can help to change an individual’s present thoughts and actions.

To investigate the underlying question, it is important to continue asking questions to get to the very core of the matter. Use questions like: ‘What do you mean by that?’ ‘What did you experience?’ ‘How did things go in this situation?’ The aim is not to end up in a debate (Van Biene, 2005). Dialogues are not about who is speaking the truth, but how the other’s situation can be viewed from different perspectives. Rather than trying to convince the other of your view, you try to understand their view. The aim is to arrive at shared insight, which can form a basis for new directions and common goals.

Keep in mind that in a dialogue, listening is just as important as talking (Van Biene, 2005). Listen to the people around you and show engagement in the theme being discussed. You can do this by adopting an active listening attitude, in which you summarize to check whether you have really understood what the other is saying.
A dialogue is different from a discussion (Van Biene, 2005). A dialogue calls for different skills and triggers different emotions. Using the following examples you can figure out for yourself whether you are a dialogue or a discussion type. If you tend to say things like ‘yes, it could be, if …’, then dialogues are for you. On the other hand, if you often find yourself saying ‘yes, but …’, ‘that can’t be, because …’ or ‘I think that …’ then you are more of a discussion type. In the client–professional relationship, the dialogue is the most appropriate approach (see figure 2).

In working with narratives and conducting narrative research, the dialogue is a tool used to uncover the interviewee’s story, and to search for personal meanings and solutions.

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<th>DIALOGUE</th>
<th>DISCUSSION</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Conversation between two people</td>
<td>- Yes, but ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Search for the question underlying the question</td>
<td>- I think that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ask more and more questions</td>
<td>- Impose one’s own opinion</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Try to learn something from the other</td>
<td>- Want to be right</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Facilitate the other in telling their story, instead of filling it in for them</td>
<td>- Stick to your own views</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Gain new knowledge</td>
<td>- Maintain existing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bring to light the other’s qualities</td>
<td>- Go on the defensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It could be, if ...</td>
<td>That can’t be, because ...</td>
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*Figure 2: Dialogue versus discussion (Van Biene, 2005)*

In a dialogue, the aim is not to change the other, but to learn from one another. Differences in views are respected, recognised and acknowledged, and are seen as enriching the dialogue. The goal is to figure out how to deal constructively with the differences observed. The question is not who is right, but how everyone can use the insights gained to move forwards.

The participants are not trying to convince one another; instead, they are mutually seeking the right information, meaningful interpretations, clear insights, appropriate conclusions and the best choices. A dialogue is about gaining a better understanding of one another’s views and dealing with challenges to one’s own views, with the ultimate aim of reaching shared insights that can serve as the basis for common goals (Van Biene, 2005).
Interactive methods

On bringing stories to light
Interactive methods

*On bringing stories to light*

On the following pages you will find 10 interactive methods. These methods can be applied in the classroom, in practice or for personal development. Each method serves as an invitation to bring people’s stories to light in creative ways. The stories that emerge can then be used for work or research purposes.

- Writing a life story
- Drawing the future
Photo elicitation

Making a treasure map

Inspiration cards

Musical stories

Bringing back memories

Playing with associations

Life-size

Open interview
Writing a life story
Describing an inner journey
Describing an inner journey

Writing a life story helps people to give themselves a voice. They can identify ways to further develop their talents, dreams and ambitions. As a narrative approach, writing a life story can be a stepping stone to the narrator’s future, as it helps defining a career path or broadening your personal vision (De Lange, 2000; Van Stekelenburg, 2008). By writing down your life story, you get a clear picture of what you have achieved and where you now stand.

You can use the following steps to write your life story.

Step 1: Make sure you write from your own point of view.
Step 2: Start by describing the different phases in your life to date. Include both the pleasant and not so pleasant aspects, and pay extra attention to memories that stick out in your mind.
Step 3: Give meaning to your life story. Choose three or four moments that have been the most important for you. Identify who your heroes are, and why.
Step 4: Once you have written your story down, read it back carefully. What stands out? What insights have you gained? Ask yourself how a particular insight could help you in the future.

Learning outcomes
- Increase your capacity for reflection.
- Commit your feelings and thoughts to paper.
- Reflect on the phases of your life in the past, present and future.
- Think about who serves as an example for you.
- Take yourself seriously by doing something with your insights.

Requirements
- Computer or pen and paper

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- Take yourself seriously by doing something with your insights.

Requirements
- Computer or pen and paper
* Variant
You can also write your life story based on personal items, such as bags, books, jewellery, clothes or shoes. By introducing objects in the dialogue stories are elicited though people’s particular associations with the objects (Collier in Samuels, 2004). Use the following steps:

Step 1: Identify the personal items you want to use; for example, your shoes. Try to remember all the shoes you have had.
Step 2: Describe the shoes in chronological order, from oldest to newest.
Step 3: Now for every pair of shoes, try to describe the period in which you used them. Do you remember how old you were? Who played a role in your life then? What did you enjoy or not enjoy about this period?
Step 4: Have you kept certain shoes that you no longer use? Why is that?
Step 5: Which shoes are your least preferred, and why? Which episodes in your life do you associate these shoes with?
Step 6: Which shoes do you most like to use, and why? Which episodes in your life do you associate these shoes with?
Drawing the future
Give your future shape and colour
This method gives participants the opportunity to give shape to their personal goals. The drawing they make paints a picture of their future. To this end, the following questions are useful to keep in mind: ‘What has changed?’, ‘What do these changes look like?’ and ‘What do you want?’

**Learning outcomes**

**For participants:**
- Identify and put into words your desires and needs.
- Tap into and utilise one’s own power.

**For facilitators:**
- Facilitate rather than influence the participants.

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**Requirements**

- Paper
- Pencils, pens and chalk
- Scissors (optional)

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**Step 1:** Decide on a theme or let the participants choose their own theme. What should their images of the future be about? The more concrete the situation, the more useful the narratives you elicit will be.

**Step 2:** Give the participants free reign to create their drawing. The focus should be on their ideas, desires and needs. You can encourage or guide them, but try not to influence them.

**Step 3:** Discuss the drawing. What does the participant see in the drawing? What meaning does the participant give to the different elements?
* Variant
This variant is based on ‘Signs of Safety’, also known as the ‘Three Houses’ method (Rozeboom & Timmer, 2012). The drawing exercise is divided into four steps, with a predetermined theme.

Step 1: The first drawing is about safety. What does the participant consider to be safe? This could be anything – whatever the participant comes up with. Who is present with respect to the theme? Where are they and what are they doing?

Step 2: The second drawing is about ‘non-safety’ in the context of the theme. Again, they key here is to address whatever the participant comes up with. What does the participant consider to be unsafe? Who is present, where are they, and what are they doing?

Step 3: The final drawing is about the future. What does the participant want in the future with respect to the theme? Again, consider the individual’s environment and the people in it.

Step 4: Discuss the three drawings with the participant in line with the principles of dialogue (see figure 2). Focus on the participant’s story. You will find that the drawings help to bring the participant’s perceptions to the fore.
Photo elicitation
The power of pictures to elicit narratives
Learning outcomes

- Learn to utilise the power of the other.
- Understand what the other considers important.
- Discover people’s underlying desires and needs and discuss them in dialogue.

Requirements

- Camera with memory card
- Photo printer and photo paper

Pictures can be used in interviews to stimulate the respondents’ memory (Clark-Ibañez, 2004; Samuels 2004). The use of pictures enables dialogue on taboo subjects, as interviewer and respondent both focus on the pictures, relieving the strain of being questioned directly (Collier, 1957: 849). When the researcher introduces the images, it is called photo elicitation (Vanderveen, 2008). But, the researcher can also ask respondents to take pictures themselves, this method is called photovoice (Ibid.). For example, the respondents can be asked to take pictures of their own living environment (Royers & De Ree, 2003). You can use this method with individuals or groups, using the following steps.

Step 1: **Decide on a theme.** As the facilitator you can choose this in advance, or decide on it jointly with the participants.

Step 2: **Have the participants take photos based on this theme.**

Step 3: **Ask the participants to tell a story with their photos.** The idea is to consider what associations and meanings the photos evoke. The participant’s own experiences take centre stage (see figure 2 on the principles of dialogue versus discussion).

Step 4: **Ask more questions.** Based on the story elicited by the photos, ask further questions about the participant’s experiences, desires, needs and strengths.
* Variant 1
Instead of having the participant take photos on a particular theme, you can use photos the participant already has. The advantage of this is that it helps to elicit stories involving experiences and events from the past. You can encourage the participant to talk about how the past has led to the present, for example by compiling a photo album with old and new photos relating to the theme. This gives rise to possible topics for new dialogues, follow-up steps or research.

* Variant 2
Alternatively, the photos can be replaced by personal belongings. The participant then discusses his or her experiences and perceptions related to particular belongings, and you can examine the significance of the theme for the participant’s past, present and future.

* Variant 3
Another alternative is to use the ‘association cards’ by Dommiss (2007). This set consists of 40 cards with colourful photos, which can serve as inspiration to elicit stories. Note that it is important that the participant chooses his or her own cards.
Making a treasure map
A personal image of reality
Making an artistic treasure map is a good way to visualise your goal. By focusing your attention in this way, you can really give direction to your goal and create a piece of work that embodies your energy and desires. The following steps for making a treasure map are based on Hoefsloot (2007).

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**Learning outcomes**
- Learn to give direction to your life.
- Discover your desires and goals.
- Become aware of the central elements in your life.
- Identify the steps you need to take to realise your desires and goals.

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**Requirements**
- Paper
- Scissors
- Pencils, crayons, markers, paint and brushes
- Magazines (for pictures)

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**Step 1:** Decide on the topic. Focus on one goal that you would love to have realised already, for example having the perfect job.

**Step 2:** Be positive. Positivity in your treasure map is important; don’t use anything that could hold you back from your treasure. The treasure map should show an image of yourself when you have reached your treasure.

**Step 3:** Create the treasure map. You can use paint, pencils, crayons, photos or other images, or a combination of all of them. Only use materials that you think can really represent your treasure.

**Step 4:** Be creative in a way that suits you. You can even take a photo or draw a picture of yourself and work this into your treasure map, so that it is clear that the map is about you and your desires.
* Variant
As an alternative to using the treasure map to formulate a particular goal, you can also map all the treasures that are already present in your life. This exercise will help you to better visualise your life, which in turn can give you more self-confidence. It is a nice way to see what you have already achieved in your life and how rich you actually already are.

Start by choosing a particular topic, a period in your life, or your whole life. Then follow the steps above. Be positive about the experiences that have shaped you and everything that has made you stronger, friendlier, more professional, etc.
Inspiration cards

Your life is what your thoughts make of it
Learning outcomes

○ Develop a creative process.
○ Reflect on your own story and message.
○ Identify what action you will take, how and when.
○ Discover people’s underlying desires and needs and discuss them in dialogue.

Requirements

○ Inspiration cards from De Bruin (2004)

One way of eliciting a narrative is by using the inspiration cards by De Bruin (2004). Each card shows a cheerful picture. One side has an inspiring text like ‘Just being yourself is the best that you can be’, and the other side reads ‘If you were to be completely yourself, what would you do NOW? Do it.’ These cards help to raise awareness of your own habits and patterns, and also provoke inquisitiveness. You gain insight into alternative ways of dealing with your story, what you can do and what your options are (Van Rosmalen, 1999).

The inspiration cards are useful for those moments when you feel you have no inspiration. They will also come in handy when working with a group of students, clients or residents. The steps are as follows:

Step 1: Take the cards out of the box.
Step 2: Arrange them into a fan shape.
Step 3: Have each participant pick a card and read the inspiring message aloud.
Step 4: Encourage each participant to explain the card; i.e. to talk about what feelings and thoughts this message evokes for them.
Step 5: Then have the participant read aloud the back of the card and do the assignment (or have them explain how, where and when they intend to do the assignment).
* Variant 1
As an alternative, you could use the ‘Getting to know you’ game by Gerrickens and Verstege (2008). This allows you to get to know others and elicit stories in a creative way. The game consists of 56 cards with a question and an accompanying colour photo that encourages involvement. The different photos are fun, funny, provocative and inviting.

* Variant 2
Another alternative is to use the ‘association cards’ by Dommisse (2007). This set consists of 40 cards with colourful photos showing images of activities, people, animals and culture. You can use the following steps:

Step 1: Spread the cards face up across a table.
Step 2: Have the participants pick out two cards that suit their personality.
Step 3: Get each participant to explain why they chose the card, what story it elicits and what emotion it evokes. If necessary, ask further questions to get them talking.
Musical stories

‘What do people do with music and what does music do with people?’
(Van Remmen, music therapist, no date)
Emotions and music are often linked to one another (Van Kol, 2012). Music evokes different emotions in people, which can often be traced to a particular personal experience. Whether they are religious or not, many people have questions about the meaning of their lives. Music can help to answer such questions. The following steps for using music as a tool are based on Music and Emotion (Dutch Association of Music Therapy [NVvMT], 2009):

**Step 1:** Choose several songs that suit the person or people you will be working with. Keep in mind that music can directly influence, strengthen or change people’s feelings.

**Step 2:** Play one of the songs and ask what emotion it evokes. If a participant says that a particular song does not speak to them and they cannot link an emotion to it, play a different one. You can also ask the participant(s) to bring their own music; that way you immediately create a personal and involved atmosphere.

**Step 3:** Ask the participant to link this emotion to a particular event. Then ask more questions: What is it about this emotion that makes you think of that event? How do you feel about the event? In this way, the music can help the participant to explore this event or life experience.

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**Learning outcomes**
- Elicit people’s stories using music and emotion.
- Experience feelings and put them into words.

**Benodigdheden**
- Music
- CD player

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* Variant 1
There are other musical methods too. You could sing a song together, play a sound game (e.g. make noises with your mouth or instruments) or do a speech test (Haverkort, Van der Lei & Noordam, 2007). What emotions does this elicit in the participant(s)?

* Variant 2
You can also use dance instead of music. The dancer takes up a position somewhere in the room and improvises a dance to music he or she has chosen personally. What emotions does this evoke in the dancer?
Bringing back memories

One person’s memory speaks to the other’s imagination
The ‘Bringing back memories’ method is about finding the hidden elements of stories. When a person repeats a story and you always ask the same type of questions, you end up stuck in one particular part of the story. By asking questions that stimulate the senses, you allow other parts of the story to come to life (Vane, 2003). The following steps are based on the work in Vane (2003).

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**Learning outcomes**
- Elicit memories.
- Get to know yourself better and understand emotions and feelings in the context of memories.
- Discover people’s underlying desires and needs and discuss them in dialogue.

**Requirements**
- Attention
- Questions that stimulate the senses

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**Step 1:** Have the narrator tell a story on a topic of his/her own choosing.

**Step 2:** Elicit narratives by appealing to the person’s senses: smell, taste, sound, temperature, etc. By asking questions that speak to the other’s imagination, you help to call up their mental images.

**Step 3:** Use your imagination to put yourself in the person’s story. Ask about their experiences and perceptions: What were you wearing that day? How were the key people dressed? What kinds of sounds did you hear? What did you eat? By asking what they could see, hear, taste and feel, you help to dig down into their sensory perceptions.
* Variant
The story could also be about the future. This reveals the person’s desires.

Step 1: When you are talking with a colleague, client or student about a particular memory, you can also try to engage their imagination by asking questions like: What would happen if ...? Imagine that ... and so on (Vane, 2003). By doing so, you appeal to their imagination. But make sure the step from reality to fantasy is not too big; they need to be able to picture the situation easily.

Step 2: Ask about the steps the person could take and, together, try to formulate actions that could lead to concrete objectives.
Image 8.
Playing with associations

Every thought is important
Learning outcomes

- Elicit memories.
- Get to know yourself better and understand emotions and feelings in the context of memories.
- Discover people’s underlying desires and needs and discuss them in dialogue.

Requirements

- Ball
- Association words referring to a particular theme

This interactive method serves to stimulate the participants’ associative capacities. Our associative capacity has to do with the fact that we are all constantly engaged in comparing things, deliberating over them and weighing them up. A person’s associative capacity tells us something about their personal values and about the way in which they interact with themselves, others and the environment. It allows us to understand and process what we are actually experiencing. You can work with associations in a playful manner, for example by way of a ball game with a predetermined theme on which the associations are based.

**Step 1:** Choose a theme. You can decide on this in advance or in consultation with the group. Either way, choose a theme about which you want to know more from the group, and be sure to convey the theme in a visual way. According to Van Rosmalen (1999), visual language helps people to retrieve and share memories, mental pictures and fantasy images. You could portray the theme by means of objects, images or a brief introduction. Make sure the theme is broad enough that everyone can associate it with something.

**Step 2:** Start the game. Have the participants stand in a circle and make sure there is enough room to throw a ball. By throwing and catching the ball, every participant has to actively participate.
Step 3: When a participant catches the ball, he/she calls out a word associated with the theme. The facilitator writes this word on a flipchart.

Step 4: The participant then throws the ball to another participant.

Step 5: Repeat steps 3 and 4 until the group has come up with sufficient words. As the facilitator, you can keep an eye on this and let the participants know when they can stop. If the participants have any more associations, add the words to the list; if not, you can start on a new theme. worden op een nieuw thema.

* Variant
If you don’t have a big enough room to use, you can also play a small-scale version of the game. Sit the participants on chairs in a circle and have them pass on or roll a ball or another object (which, if you wish, can be related to the theme). Again, in this way every group member is invited to participate actively.
Life-size
As big as your own reality
In the assignment ‘Life-size’, the silhouettes of the participants are drawn to scale. They then fill in their silhouette with objects, people, food, text or photos that have a special meaning for them. In this way, each participant literally ‘fills in’ his/her life.

**Step 1:** First, cut out a piece of wallpaper big enough to fit the silhouette of the whole person.

**Step 2:** Have the person lie on the piece of wallpaper and draw his/her silhouette.

**Step 3:** Now the person can fill in the silhouette however they please. Encourage the participants to consider questions like: Who are you? What do you like? Which people/animals/objects are important to you?

**Step 4:** Start a dialogue. Based on the completed silhouette, discuss the person’s world.

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**Learning outcomes**
- Become aware of your life and the people/things that play an important role in it.
- Learn to work with dialogues.

**Requirements**
- Wallpaper
- Pencils, markers, crayons and/or paint
- Brushes
- Scissors
- Magazines

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* Variant
You can also use a piece of clothing belonging to the participant.

Step 1: Have the participant choose a piece of clothing – for example, a shoe – place it on a piece of white paper and draw the silhouette of the item.

Step 2: Ask the participant to write on the shoe everything the shoe has seen and done today.

Step 3: Discuss the events that the participant wrote down.
Open interview

Stories are paramount
An open interview revolves around the ‘human experience’ that is the result of all events in our lives (Van Biene et al., 2008). By way of questions, the interviewer invites the participant to tell his or her story with the aim of collecting data in the form of narratives. These are fragments with a start, an end and a plot, which help us to answer the predetermined research question. Narratives are best elicited by means of open questions (‘Tell me about …’) rather than closed questions (which require only a yes or no answer). As an interviewer, it is important to pay close attention to what the participant is saying. Be sure to follow the principles of dialogue and avoid getting into a debate.

Preparation for an open interview

Step 1: **Consider the question** ‘What is worth exploring when it comes to the interviewee’s social setting, taking into account his or her social, cultural or organisational background?’. 

Step 2: **Draw up an interview guide.**

**Learning outcomes**
- Learn to use an open interview method.
- Work with dialogues.
- Ask open questions – and keep on asking.
- Focus on listening.
- Empower the interviewee.
- Be led by the interviewee’s story.

**Requirements**
- Self-prepared interview guide
- Facilitator
- Interviewees
- Voice recorder
- Video camera (optional)
The interview

Step 1: **Start the interview with an open question.** This may be a broad or a surprising question. But keep in mind that this opening question may not be enough for some participants. The interviewer’s task is to elicit the story without influencing the interviewee too much. Avoid the use of leading questions, but encourage the interviewee by nodding, making the appropriate noises and listening actively.

Step 2: **Start with the opening questions in the interview guide, but if these are not enough, continue to ask further questions to elicit stories from the interviewee.**

Step 3: **Allow the interviewee to tell his/her story.**

Step 4: **Focus on what is actually being said, and explore this narrative in depth.**

* Variant

To start the interview, you can also use a creative medium to elicit the participant’s story. For example, you could present the interview guide in the form of a suitcase filled with objects that represent the topics to be covered in the interview. The story can then be told based on these objects. This variant was inspired by an idea by Van Heuveln (no date), lecturer at HAN University of Applied Sciences.
Image 11.
References


Images


All other images were created by E.C. Bobbink (2012).