**Using Michael White's Scaffolding Distance Map
with a Young Man and his Family**
Mark Hayward

This paper addresses the questions:
1. *How can people become more knowledged about their lives, more in touch with those problem solving skills and knowledges that even young people exercise routinely in everyday life.*
2. *How can I render these knowledges visible, significant and relevant so they can form a basis for addressing current predicaments?*
3. *The gap between the familiarity of their problem experience and the not-yet-known of problem solving knowledges - How is this space to be traversed?*
4. *And, in trying to bridge this gap, where should I place my questions? And how should the questions relate to each other?*
I describe my early efforts to interpret and utilise the Scaffolding Distance map. My interpretation is mainly a reproduction of Michael White's ideas, but also contains some distinctions I made when faced with incomplete understandings of White's ideas.

Mark Hayward works as a family therapist in Plymouth, UK, and can be contacted at Erme House, Mount Gould Hospital, Plymouth PL4 7QD, UK. Email mark.hayward@phnt.swest.nhs.uk.

Young people and their parents or carers frequently arrive at the agency in which I work – a child and adolescent mental health service - not knowing what to do. This not knowing may include not knowing what to do about someone, what decision to make, how to respond to an event, what choices to make, how to resolve a dilemma, what to say or do that will make a difference, how to make friends, what kind of person they should be, how to get their parents off their backs, how to get their parents interested in them etc. Of course, if they knew what to do they probably wouldn't be there. Sometimes a young person does not know how to respond to a question I've asked, what I'm talking about or what to say that might keep his parents or myself happy. A shrug or 'I don't know' can be a frequent response. This kind of not knowing can be experienced as a failure to know – they can see themselves as failures to know. This creates a gap between the apparent inadequacy of knowledge they have and the knowledge that seems to be required to solve the predicaments at hand.

I know it can be tempting, as a therapist, to fill this gap with my own knowledge and there are a million small ways to do this, mostly ways which subtly or not so subtly try to align others people lives and understandings with my own. These ways can include giving advice or supporting a particular perspective. Or they may involve giving implicit advice – advice disguised as questions, wonderings or tasks e.g.: "I wonder what would happen if Mr Smith talked more to Mrs Smith about his worries" Or it can include theoretical impositions and interpretations that are not up for debate e.g.: "I wonder if this problem has come about because Mrs Smith's own mother had such a difficult relationship with her". Or: "Research seems to show that children of this young age prefer to be told what to do than asked what they'd like to do."

In describing some hazards of trying to insert my own knowledge into others lives I'm not attempting a 'not-knowing' approach or a neutrality but a clarity about and distinctions between

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what I know and what I don't know. I am an expert on, and have strong views about how to run my life and I have some experience and some ideas about ways to structure therapy sessions but to think this qualifies me to know how others should live is a confusion between my life and theirs.

Offering my own knowledge also risks ignoring young people's knowledge about how to proceed in life. Children's own skills and knowledges are commonly thought to be inadequate or irrelevant to the problems they face when we don't know where to look for such knowledge, how to make it visible, or how to establish it as significant and relevant.

Even quite young children may have considerable knowledge or skills and it's not uncommon for me to hear about skills in, for example, stopping bad dreams ruining sleep, getting yourself going in the morning, building sustaining and repairing friendships, taking turns at things, performing in school settings, scoring a goal against an opposing football team, acting with some confidence but some modesty, keeping themselves looking okay, maintaining a balance between their wishes and the wishes of others, adapting to different roles in different contexts and relationships etc.

I've learned that serious problems try seriously hard to capture a person's sense of self and separate them from recognising such knowledge as significant and relevant to their current dilemmas. Where this is knowledge about actions that have worked for them, decisions that have supported their preferred ways of living, skills that lead to important achievements etc then I know that life can get off course. If it's what people give value to and hold precious in life that draws them forwards in life then a separation from this knowledge can separate them from knowing how to go forward in life.

Helping young people in such difficulties to become more knowledged about their lives so they can get clearer about what they want and how to act in harmony with those values requires a view of their life and relationships that is more than just a view of the problems. This other view requires a kind of altitude where more can be seen, so they can move from the familiar view of their problems to a view where there is more in the picture. This bigger picture makes it possible to see how to proceed in life in ways that might either be regaining previous paths or following new and preferred paths.

In any case it's hard to even get a good view of problems until you have some other place to stand – some place that's not a problem place – and this scaffolding map provides multiple vistas and vantage points for people to survey the territory and adjust their heading so it better fits a preferred track.

In understanding how we learn, Lev Vygotsky (1986) described how development follows learning and illustrated this through the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. This zone constitutes the area around the known and familiar in which new learnings can easily take place. The importance of scaffolding learning within this zone is common knowledge to many. For example, when my partner and I were trying to teach my son to walk we didn't hold him on our laps – this wouldn't have supported any learning. Neither did we sit him on the other side of the room and call him to us – he would have crawled – both these would have been outside his proximal zone. Instead, and like parents everywhere, we helped him stand in front of us and let him fall into our arms. When he had mastered this we held him one step away until he could take one step and then fall. When he had mastered this we held him two steps away etc. The scaffolding of learning requires each step to fall into this proximal zone. Too small a distance and the task will be mundane. (E.g.: "Could you read me out the shopping list I gave you?") Too big a

distance and the stretch will be impossible - e.g. :"What ideas have you had about how to solve this problem by yourself?" The response might then be a shrug, an: "I don't know", an "If I knew that I wouldn't be here". New learnings have to be far enough away from the known and familiar but not too far.

Vygotsky suggests (1986):
1. Learning is the outcome of social collaboration where a child's learning tasks are supported (or scaffolded) by others (e.g. parents, teachers, older siblings). Likewise with adults, learnings can be much greater where they are supported by others (e.g. driving instructors, college lecturers, therapists)
2. Through supported learning, children can distance themselves from immediate experience. This distancing first shows itself in children chattering to themselves. At about 5/6 years this 'ego-centric' speech goes underground, becoming the language of inner life and the stream of consciousness. This provides us with a sense of self which is, thus, social and relational in its origins.
3. Initially a child will learn to characterise things (e.g. "cow") then collects these characterisations in heaps (e.g. "these are cows, those are dolls"). In this map, questions about characterisation and the collecting of characterisations into heaps figure at **Level 3 – Misnaming** and **Level 4 – Naming.**
4. As the child's distancing skills increase, they can put things together by smaller similarities ("these are brown cows; those dolls have something wrong with them"). Further skills in distancing and reflection allow linking together by yet smaller similarities ("those cows all have calves", these dolls were all owned by my sister before me").
5. With these learnings the child is beginning to establish relations between objects, bringing into relationship past, present and future, actions and effects and the linking of people around common themes. These questions are evident in **Level 5 - bringing things into relationship.**
6. This more complex thinking is a basis for abstracting elements from experience and bringing them into relationship to form concepts. (e.g. from sister = Sophie, to sisterly = a kind of relationship)
7. Concepts take form in words and thinking in concepts only really exists in verbal thinking. Skills in using words as meaning generators are, thus, central tools in concept generation. Questions here are at **Level 6 – Reflections on life and identity.**
8. Constructing concepts means a child can now operate with these concepts at will and as a task might demand. The child has a powerful tool for intervening and shaping their own life. This is the foundation for personal agency and problem solving. The child can now inhabit their own life and can reasonably start taking responsibility for it. These questions are at **Level 7 – Foundations for action** and **Level 8 – Problem solving.**

Michael White has elaborated (2005A) the relevance of these ideas to therapeutic conversations in his proposal that we keep our questions within this Zone of Proximal Development. People can move to higher levels of knowledge when they are only asked to take manageable sized steps from what's known and familiar to them. When someone responds with an: "I don't know", it may be that we are asking them to make impossible leaps of knowledge. Questions provide the scaffolding, the platforms or stages, which break up an impossible jump into a series of smaller steps. Each question can provide a handhold or purchase on unfamiliar knowledges and a resting place from which, with other questions, further ascent is both possible and exciting. With each question only requiring a stretch within arms-reach, access is gained to what was not previously known and these new knowledges are rendered relevant to the problem that brought them to us.

Learning about the Scaffolding Distance Map

When I first heard about this map, in a workshop with Michael White, I struggled to make clear the distinctions between the levels. But I could see that this map:

1. Could provide a practical guide for developing question sequences and structures in therapeutic conversations. It provides places to go to when faced with an "I don't know" so that I can sustain an interviewing path rather than abandon a conversation.
2. Constituted a map of maps, a macro-map that encompassed other maps of narrative practice. I realised I could locate the statement of position map, the re-authoring map, re-membering conversations map, ideas about discerning and developing exceptions etc (see White 2005) on this map. This provided some coherence and integration for other maps.
3. Could be used to 'chart' conversations, so a later review would show the path the conversation took and how it might have been otherwise. Sometimes I will ask a fellow team member to observe me interviewing and chart the progress of the conversation on this map. This has been a telling training tool as the gaps and leaps in my conversation have been revealed!

I loved the idea that questions could be identified as at a particular distance from what was known and familiar (e.g. low-level, medium level, medium high-level etc). This structure enabled me to back-track if I was missing out levels or to recognise when the conversation had leapt levels. However, I found it hard to memorise which questions fitted which level of distance so I looked around for some short catchy level descriptors. Many of the ones I arrived at have come from Michael White's own descriptions of the task at each level. Others I have invented in, I hope, a good 'copying that originates' tradition! (Geertz 1986) Some of my notes from Michael White's workshops were also rather unclear so I wasn't sure where the starting place was or how many levels there were so some further improvisation and invention helped me establish some clarity about my own understanding of this map.

Levels 1 & 2: Making things visible, getting ideas into the frame – particularly non-problem experience, knowledge, skills and achievements that suggest the person is more than a problem.

LEVEL 1 – Problem experience
This level relates to the known and familiar problem experiences. These will commonly be the problem stories that people tell, their history, effects, causes etc. Further renderings of these stories may not be helpful but questions like: "Could you tell me about the problems?" would invite them if I felt these problems had been inadequately understood or acknowledged. Frequently, people talk easily about those known and familiar problems for example: "Well, as I told the previous therapist, Sarah can't seem to keep friends as she's so jealous" and these conversations can talk up the problems, so I keep a keen ear for…

LEVEL 2 – Exceptional experience
This level relates to exceptions or unique outcomes, experiences that stand apart from problem experience, times that could not be predicted by the dominant problem story. E.g.: "I've heard about the problem of friendlessness but could you tell me a little more about Sarah's interest in others that makes friendlessness a problem?" One exception does not make a new story of course and a careful exploration of the appearances of exceptions may be required to make a strong enough platform for these ideas to be characterised or named. Without supporting examples, namings or identity claims are vulnerable to counter-claims that might suggest more negative conclusions e.g.: "She's only interested in others for her own ends".

Levels 3, 4, 5 & 6: Rendering exceptional experience significant and meaningful. We can do this by characterising these exceptions, i.e. naming them (levels 3 & 4) by putting these characterisations in context (level 5) and attending to how they construct identity and concepts about life(level 6).

LEVEL 3 – Mis-naming
Comparing two things with each other is generally a simpler task than describing just one of them. In this way, mis-naming throws the idea-to-be-named into contrast with the dominant storyline. Typically multi-choice questions, these inquiries describe inadequate or guessed characterisations, namings on trial, a beginning characterisation of more adequate descriptions. An example of a question in this level might be: "Would you call Sarah's interest in others a 'caring' a 'sensitivity' a 'longing' or what?" These questions begin to discern what it is by clarifying what it is not.

LEVEL 4 – Naming
Naming is basic meaning making. When something is characterised it becomes tangible – not vague, not general and not everywhere. This characterisation establishes a theme, clarifies what we're really dealing with here. For example: "So, a 'longing for partnership' would be what you'd call Sarah's interest in others?" Sarah's different expressions of interest in others are put together (thinking in heaps) to provide a basis for meaning making about her intentions.

LEVEL 5 – Bringing things into relationship
Questions in this level bring what has been named in Level 4 into relationship with other things and are about context, foundations and effects, other linked developments, and so on. Linking what's named to events before or after, places the development in history. I can, for example, ask about the history of Sarah's longing for partnership, what effects this had had on her life and the lives of others, whether such a longing is also present in other contexts of Sarah's life (e.g. in work, community), the conditions that best promote partnership, and so on. Locating the named development as part of a congruent history, or part of wider developments, gives an elevated view of how exceptional experiences fit within a different story of Sarah's life. This is thinking in chronological chains of events, and actions reflecting certain purposes.

Conversations can also 'go horizontal' by drawing in other figures/voices who can speak about the issues and the identities of people involved. These figures contribute to the making of meaning as they provide relational contexts for the linking of shared themes. These re-membering conversations (White 1997) describe the influence of one person on another and allow other voices to contribute to their knowledges of life and constructions of identity. For example: "Sarah, who from your life might be most pleased by what you're trying to achieve here?" Further 'horizontal' questions like "What values might you and your friend share about partnership or collaboration that would give rise to such pleasure?" or "What might it have been like for your friend to experience your strong interest in what she was interested in?" are really reflections on identity, and belong in:

LEVEL 6 – Reflections on Life and Identity
By reflecting on life and identity it becomes possible to begin to locate developments that stand outside problem experience in the context of preferred ways of living, values held, and beliefs a person stands for. I might invite others to join me in this area with a question like: "What might these examples of Sarah's longing for partnership say about the kind of things she's committed to

in life?" Or: "What does Sarah's long history of community action say about the kind of direction she's steering her life in?"

As ideas about life are articulated, the person can further distance themselves from immediate experience; reflect on their life from this different territory. This is thinking in concepts and provides a basis for acts of personal agency (level 7).

Levels 7 & 8: Clarifying the relevance of the person's knowledges to the person's predicaments. We can do this by establishing people's preferred ways of living out what they give value to.

LEVEL 7 – Foundations for action
To provide foundations for action, questions in this area elicit personal agency. Questions link preferred identity descriptions, and how previous or preferred paths might be rejoined or continued, to possible future actions. For example: "Sarah, if you keep your commitment to partnership and friendship close to your heart, how might this help you know what to do with your neighbours?"

LEVEL 8 – Problem solving
Knowledges and skills in problem solving require prediction and anticipation. We cannot take responsibility for our lives, intervene in, or shape our lives until we can problem-solve. Questions in this area might include: "If the voice of jealousy rises in your ear when you're out in a group, how might you prevent this threat dead-ending your efforts to create more meaningful partnerships?"

Having outlined my version of the different levels of a scaffolding distance map, I will now illustrate my use of this in my conversations with Andy and his family.

Andy and his family

I met Andy, his parents and maternal grandparents after he was admitted to our in-patient unit from another adolescent unit. This followed an incident where he barricaded himself in the loft, kicked the ladder away, wrapped the electric cable from the hanging light around his neck and said he was going to jump. This excerpt comes from the first family meeting with John, Doris, Heather, Chas and Andy. Andy has been meeting with another therapist who has suggested some techniques for diminishing the bad dreams he experiences.
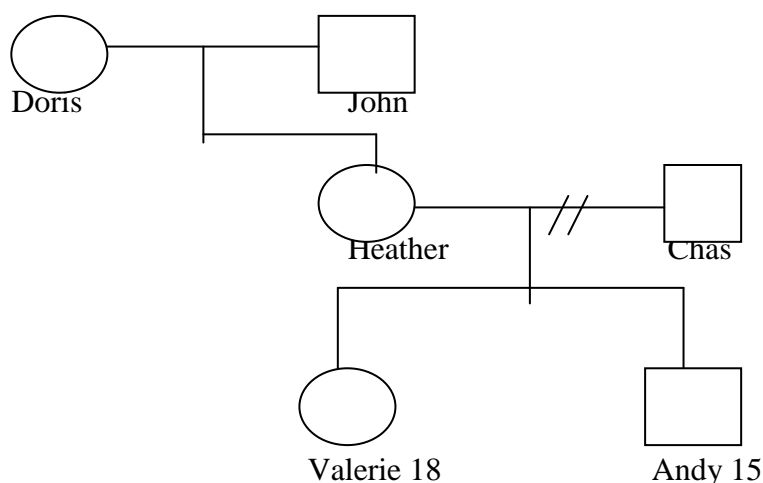
Andy: I've tried what the other therapist suggested but the dreams keep on coming back…*[Level 1 – problem experience]*
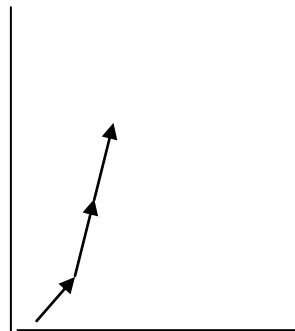**Chas: At least you've tried** *[Level 2 – exceptional experience]*
Mark: Is it significant for you that Andy's tried? *[Level 4 – finding out whether "trying" has significance as a name]*
Chas: Yes it is, I think Andy can be a bit of a tryer. *[Level 6 – Reflections on life and identity]*

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Rapid rises up the levels may be unsustainable without sufficient examples of exceptional experience. Otherwise someone might simply counter: "This event is very unusual" or "It's just because he thought there'd be something in it for him" etc. Multiple examples provide a stronger platform for future steps. So…

Mark: Do any of you have any examples of things Andy's been doing lately that show he's a tryer?
John: … Before, if you were driving along and got in a queue he'd say "Let's go home" but the other day this happened and he took it, he waited, he was fine, normally he'd get hassled, this time he controlled himself. [*Level 2 – Exceptional experience*]
Mark: Is this a step forward for you Andy? *[Inviting Andy to evaluate events in line with his preferences for his life is a Level 6 question – Reflections on Life. However Andy declined this invitation and returned me to Level 2.)*

Andy: There was that time at Blockbuster DVD's, I couldn't decide what I wanted so I walked out. In the past I'd have stressed out, got aggressive, banged doors…[*Level 2 – Exceptional experience*]

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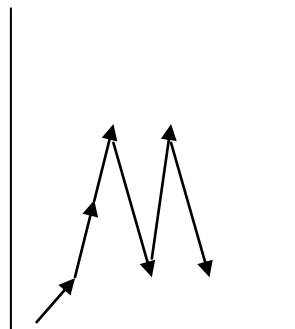
These examples offer considerable support to Chas's claim that Andy is a 'Tryer', so I return to naming, hoping that we may now establish something more durable:

Mark: If you could put a name to all these things you've been doing – the walking out at Blockbuster's, the trying, the waiting and controlling yourself, what kind of name would you give them all? *[Level 4 – naming]*
Andy:Dunno

[This question was too much of a stretch so I drop down to Mis-naming:]
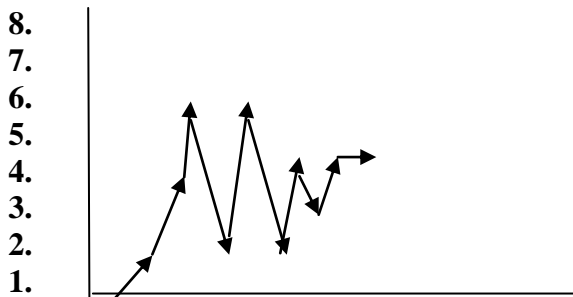
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Mark: Well, would it be like…'getting more grown up' or 'maturity' or 'taking more control of your life'… [*Level 3 – Mis-naming*]
Chas: To me it's like self-control [*Level 4 – Naming*]

Mark: Does "self-control" fit for you Andy?
Andy: It's just learning to take responsibility [*Level 4 – Naming*]

With the exceptional experiences named there's a more solid foundation for other questions - but Andy's ahead of me:

Andy: I've planned out what I want to do when I get older…I've been thinking about it. [*Level 6&7– this response reveals Andy as a planner and thinker about future action*]
**Mark: Is that also to do with taking responsibility?** [*Level 4 – naming*]
Andy: I think that's learning to help myself. The more I think about it the more I'm happier. If I want to do something I think about how I'd really want to do it when I'm older – then I'm happier [*Level 5 – bringing things into relationship*] **as I've got something to look forward to when I'm older.**
Mark: I wonder what this says about what you're out for in life, what direction you're trying to steer your life in, where

you're going in life? [*Level 6 – Reflections on life*]
Andy: I can sort myself out because if I thought I had nothing to look forward to I just wouldn't bother trying but as I know what I want to do I'm trying, I'm helping myself. [*Level 8 – problem solving*]

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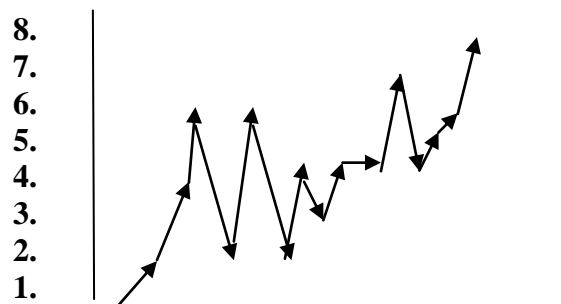
With the middle levels reinforced, Andy anticipates a problem (thinking he might have nothing to look forward to) and provides a solution – trying, helping himself. The initial thinly described 'trying' has been loaded with significance and proves relevant to the problem at hand.
I'm anxious to support Andy's plans for his future so I invite him to name them – i.e. render them significant and meaningful:

Mark: Is this like a goal or a dream or an ambition…? *[Level 3- mis-naming]*
Heather: He wants to be rich, have a Mini Cooper…[*This could be a preferred identity description – Level 6, but seemed to be said in the same way one might say "He wants to win the lottery, he wants it all on a plate" so it seemed more like Level 1 – problem experience*]
Mark: But is it more like a hope or dream or ambition? *[Not taking up Heather's comment, but repeating my question is, I reckon, a therapeutic mistake. She might reasonably have felt I was ignoring her.]*

Andy: It wouldn't be a dream, but something to look forward to, something like a goal. *[Andy stops briefly at Level 3 – mis-naming before going to Naming]*

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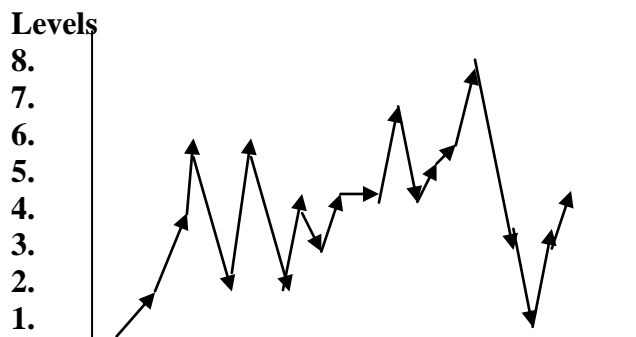
Not taking up or even acknowledging Heather's comment was a mistake as it risks separating her from the discussion. In hindsight it would have been better to have acknowledged her comment and return to her later to ask what she might call what Andy was doing. Alternatively I could have asked her a question like: "What possibilities might Andy miss out on if he were just to acquire a Mini-Cooper or become rich without having to try?"

Mark: What do you think Chas of what your son's been achieving with these steps and with this goal?
Chas: I'm very proud of him
Mark: What are you proud of Chas?
Chas: The fact that he seems to have a focus in his life. We used to walk for hours and I gathered that he didn't know what he wanted to do with his life. And then we got to talking… and I suggested something and "Ah maybe that's not a bad idea" he said. *[Bringing things into relationship –Level 5]*
**Mark: So that talk might have set something going?**

Chas: I don't know, I'd like to think maybe it prodded things in a general direction.
Mark: What difference did that talk make to you Andy?
Andy: It made me feel a bit better…Before I didn't have a clue about what I wanted to do but the talk made me think about it…that's when I started getting a few more ideas.
Chas: When I was Andy's age I wanted to be a carpenter but didn't get the grades. I want Andy to make something of himself.

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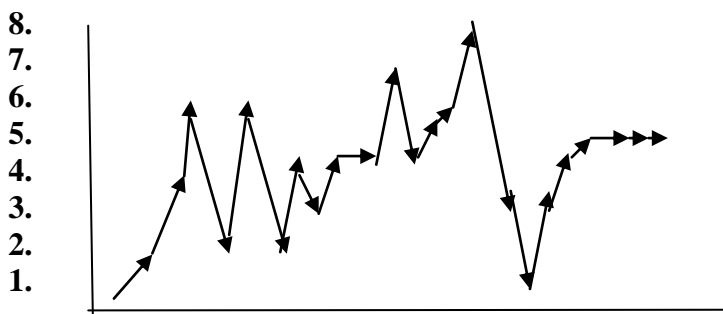
This is extended conversation at Level 5 – Bringing things into relationship. We get to understand ways that Andy is influenced by his father and the history of his father's purposes in helping his son. Exploring the contributions that others have made to Andy's ideas is proving to be fruitful.

Mark: Have other people also contributed to these steps you've been taking Andy, as well as your dad? *[Level 5]*

Andy: Well…my sister a bit. One time I was saying to her "What should I be?" She said "Try your hardest to get your grades and don't just think there's nothing you want to do and not try your hardest". That helped me. Before I thought I'd just work in HMV *[a record store]* **but when I think about it I want a good life, I want money and everything** and do proper things and that's why I try my hardest.*[Level 7 – foundations for action]*

Mark: What kind of relationship do you have with your sister that means you'd go to her and then take notice of her ideas? *[Level 5]*

Andy: Well she's the kind of person who'd listen. She would actually sit down and talk to me. *[Level 6 – Reflection on Identity]*
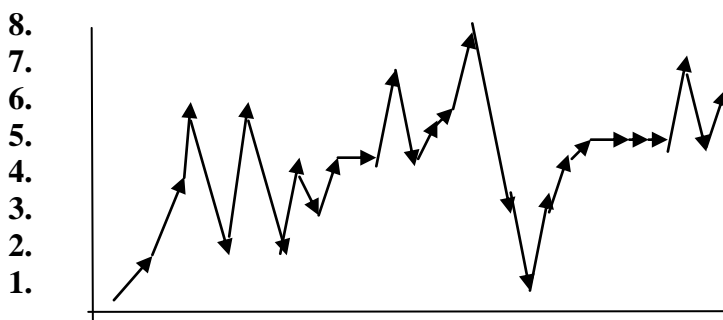
I'm pleased to implicate Valerie in Andy's life and look for detail about the quality or nature of this relationship which might speak richly about both their identities:

Mark: Does she appreciate you as a brother too?
(Laughter)
Chas: That's stumped everyone that question! What sort of question is that?
Heather: They're very close

Mark: Well what is it about Andy that means she'd want to sit down and listen to him?
John: They're just very close.
Heather: They're very close

This conversation has been dead-ended by a question that stumped them, naturalistic understandings that imply brothers and sisters are naturally close, rather than closeness being an achievement related to purposes, skill and knowledge and my refusal to concede to this view! At this point I feel like I'm nowhere on the map. I decide to persist further:

Mark: What do you think she appreciates about him?
Andy: I'm protective.*[Level 6 – Identity description]* When she didn't come back until 1am I was worried sick *[Level 2 – Exceptional experience]*
Heather: He does that to me – when I go shopping it's "Have you got someone to go with?" or "I'll go with you" or "Are you going to be OK in the house on your own? *[Level 2]*

Mark: Where does it come from, this protectiveness? *[Level 5 - Bringing things into relationship]*
John: Well it goes right back to his granddad probably
Mark: Are you talking about yourself here John? (Laughter) Have you been strong on protectiveness all your life John?
John: It all stems back to your childhood. What you don't have, you want your children to have.

Mark: You didn't experience much protectiveness as a child?
John: No, I was adopted. But now, family is family.
Mark: So did you decide, John, to take up more protectiveness with your family?

John: I don't think I gave it conscious thought, just a normal reaction.
Doris: I always had the feeling about you John that it's about blood. Adopted is not the same. I think he did it from that.
Mark: Is that right John?
John: It never came to mind

For a while we were developing a story of John and Andy's protectiveness. Andy's and Heather's examples contribute strongly to the durability of this identity description and Doris's comments suggest history and purpose in John's position of protectiveness. However we return to naturalistic understandings that make it hard to elicit personal agency behind John's acts of protectiveness. With a kind of desperation, I cast around for a way forward:

Mark: Has anyone else had a sense that there came a point in their life when they got a goal together and that had been helpful for them? *[Level 5 – Bringing things into relationship]*
Doris: Valerie, she originally wanted to go to art college but it wasn't for her, but then she was offered a trainee management and said "I'm going to make it work Mum"

Mark: Is Valerie also someone who uses perseverance and sticks at things and is a tryer? *[Level 6 – Identity]*
Doris: Oh yes
Chas: So that's where it's rubbing off from – If she's going out there and achieving it and she's only a couple of years older then I can try it *[Level 5]*
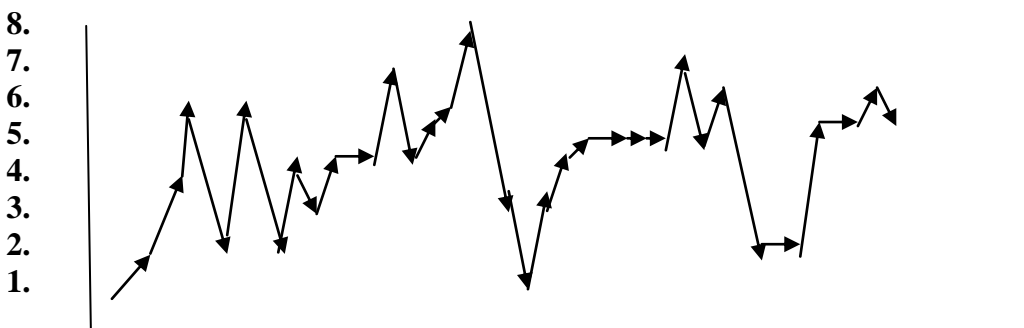
Doris's contributions rescue me and we further link the lives of Valerie and Andy. It's time, I think, to catch up with Andy's view:

Mark: Is this right Andy?
Andy: It's not what I was thinking. I'm just going to try it on my own. *[Level 7-Foundations for Action]* **If it didn't work I'd ask for help** *[Level 8-Problem Solving]*
Andy: I'd like to see how positive I am and how I get on, on my own *[Level 7]*
Heather: It's really nice to hear it
Mark: Are there other things you'd like to try on your own?

Andy: I'd like to find my own jobs, I don't like loads of people saying "do this" or "do that" or "I'll take you there by car". I'd like to try it on my own. *[Level 7]*
Chas: (nodding) Oh, I see, I see (nodding more and leaning forward).
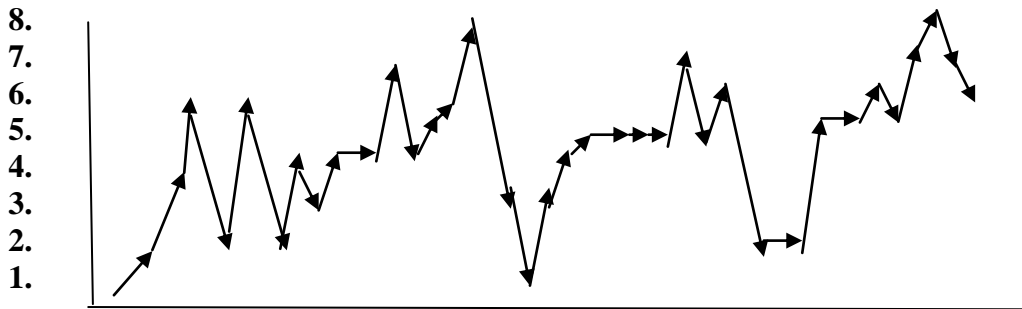**Mark: You're interested in what Andy is saying Chas?**
Chas: Yes, absolutely
Heather: We've never heard this before

Chas: He's incredibly independent all of a sudden *[Level 6 - Identity)*

Heather: It's lovely, it's very good, it's very positive

Andy sets the record straight about his plans and wishes for his life, anticipates problems and suggests solutions. His parents both respond positively and I am reassured that Heather contributes with multiple positive responses even though she hasn't figured in the discussion much at this point. Chas comments on Andy's 'sudden independence' but is it sudden? It may be that Andy has not been conscious of these wishes before, nor given voice to them, but this is probably because his knowledge and other's experiences of him have not been scaffolded. With this scaffolding, the possible to know has become known.

Andy hadn't spoken of these things before – I don't believe anyone knew how much he wanted to try things on his own or how he would come across to others when he spoke in these ways. John wrote to us a few days later, said how pleased all the family were with what Andy said but, like Chas, also said: "Where did these things suddenly come from?" I believe they came from Andy's own knowledge but that this knowledge had been hidden before.

A month later, at the next session, his parents said that in the last few weeks Andy was a different person, more relaxed, mixing more with older people, remembering his Maths, going out more and saving his pocket money. Andy said: "I feel different, like I've grown up". Wanting to render these developments significant and meaningful, I spent time encouraging him to name them in relation to his identity. He suggested he used to be a "hidden-away person" but now he's a "sociable person".

Our two meetings have seemed significant to me but if no connection is made back to the risk of suicide that was behind Andy's hospital admission, questions about the relevance and value of these conversations would be legitimate. So I ask:

Mark: Do you think the kind of developments we've been hearing about will make it more or less likely there'll be another incident like the one in the loft? *[A question that invites him to step from Level 2, Exceptional Experience of the positive developments in the last weeks, to Level 5, bringing these developments into relationship with the future risk of suicide attempts]*
Andy: (Shrugs)

[This question was too great a stretch so I search for a smaller step:]
Mark: Do you think another loft incident would be more likely to happen to a hidden-away person or a sociable person? *[This question requires a much smaller step - from Level 4, Naming, to Level 5, Bringing Things into Relationship]*
Andy: Oh a hidden away person.
Mark: Why?

Andy: Well a hidden away person would be lonely and have too much time on his hands.

In this work I was trying to:
1. Pick up and make visible non-problem events and ideas.
2. Render them significant and meaningful through naming them and setting them in contexts of relationship, time and identity.
3. Clarify their relevance to the situation at hand by inviting reflections on what this told us about Andy, seeking ideas about how such a history and identity might be continued through future action, and establishing ways of preventing setbacks.

As these conversations focus on Andy's conscious intentions for his life, it's his own knowledge he's exploring – his agenda is fore-grounded, mine is still present and influential but in the background.

Critique of Session

This was not a great session and it's easy to criticise my practice. For example;
1. I was overly organised by prior information which led to selective attention that had a gender pattern. For example, information about Chas's peripheral position and relative lack of involvement in Andy's life organised me to over-focus on his contributions. Given the way both Chas and Andy's comments fitted my preferred conversational path this also led to a conversation that was primarily between males. This was compounded by me ignoring a comment from Heather which seemed particularly problem-focused.
2. I placed undue reliance on one or two kinds of 'Bringing things into relationship' questions and ignored other possibilities. This surely contributed to some repetition and limited conversational possibilities. I could have, for example, asked about Andy's sense of himself when he does things on his own.

This is not the first time I've gotten into conversational narrows, finding myself focusing primarily on the contributions of those who seem to support my preferred direction! Achieving dexterity with these questions is a hard-acquired skill. But making mental reference to this map at stuck moments has already got me out of conversational dead-ends

Whilst staying conscious of the range of possible questions at each level is a substantial challenge, this map has helped me categorise them in memorable ways. When I don't know where to go I might now think "Where am I on this map?" which makes conscious adjacent levels and possible questions.

And I have included below a sample of the questions and responses and how I think these fitted within the map.

THE POSSIBLE TO KNOW

8. **Problem solving**   **Adam:** If it didn't work I'd ask for help

Anticipation, prediction	**Adam**: If I thought I had nothing to look forward to I just wouldn't bother… that's why I try my hardest
7. **Foundations for action** Personal agency and	**Adam:** I'd like to see how positive I am and how I get on, on my own **Adam:** I want money and everything and do proper things **Adam:** I'm just going to try it on my own
6. **Reflections on Identity and life** Identity conclusions Evaluations, Concepts	**Chris:** I think Adam can be a bit of a tryer **Adam**: She's the kind of person who would listen. **Mark:** Does she appreciate you as a brother too? **Chris:** He's incredibly independent all of a sudden
5. **Bringing things into Relationship**. Context, Foundations, history, effects, Re-membering	**Adam:** She would actually sit down and listen to me **Mark:** So that talk might have set something going? **Mark:** Where does it come from, this protectiveness? **Mark:** Have other people also contributed to these steps you've been taking?
4. **Naming** Basic meaning making	**Adam:** something like a goal… **Chris:** To me it's like self-control **Adam:** It's just learning to take responsibility
3.**Mis-naming** Discerning what it is not – beginning knowledge about what it is	**Mark:** Well, would it be like…getting more grown up or maturity or taking more control of your life… **Mark:** Is this like a goal or a dream or an ambition? **Adam:** It wouldn't be a dream…but…
2. **Exceptional experience** Non-problem experience,	**Heather:** He does that with me- when I go shopping it's have you got someone to go with you" **John:** Before, if you were driving along and got in a queue he'd say "Let's go home" but the other day… **Adam:** There was that time at Blockbuster DVD's…
1. **Problem experience** Problematic everyday experience the dreams keep coming back	**Adam:** I've tried what the other therapist suggested but **Heather**:He wants to be rich, have a Mini-Cooper

T H E   K N O W N   A N D   F A M I L I A R

NOTES
1. If sufficient detail, examples and other voices have contributed to a weaving together of middle and higher levels, a return to problem experience can bounce straight back up. Twice

recently, I have been meeting with couples where, towards the end of the meeting, one person suddenly went down to problem experience but the other person took them straight up to problem solving with an idea developed during the meeting – an idea that would have been unthinkable at the start and to which the first person then agreed.

2. Good conversations are unlikely, in my view, to be charted as a straight line but seem to weave the middle levels together, frequently dipping down to exceptional experience for support and with occasional climbs to the top levels that seem to be initiated by family members rather than myself.

3. This map rises vertically from the ground floor – from those problem stories that are the known and familiar. The different levels contribute to rich story development of those neglected aspects of people's lives that reflect their preferred ways of living. I realise that maps are more commonly associated with traditional male meaning making systems.

4. Maps are, of course, about ways of portraying the territory, possible routes, possible stopping places - they don't fix a destination or impose a course. And like different kinds of maps (e.g. political, economic, agricultural), there are many different ways of depicting territory and possible routes for the traveller.

5. Questions only invite people into responding at specific levels – responses may be at any level. Of course, these responses provide feedback about the speed of travel and the route taken that informs further questions.

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