

What's the Story?

Narrative in youth work and youth studies

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Narrative is now well established as an idea and an approach across the social sciences. It routinely features in reference books and dictionaries not just of anthropology and sociology but of geography, political science, social policy, business and management and it has entered mainstream economic discourse with the publication of Nobel Prize winner Robert Shiller's *Narrative Economics* (2019). Given the interdisciplinary and eclectic nature of **youth studies** it is not surprising that narrative has come to occupy a central place both conceptually and methodologically. Looked at differently, perhaps the particularly fruitful and innovative use of narrative within youth studies has been one of the factors influencing its wider appeal and adoption in the many disciplines and fields with which youth studies interacts and overlaps.

Story and narrative (the terms are commonly used interchangeably) have equally come to the fore in **youth work** as a profession and a practice, as they have in other areas of 'work with people' (community development, education, social care and social work). They now commonly feature in accounts of face-to-face practice, in young people's own creative actions and activism, in evaluation studies and research reports, even in policy papers. In other words story and narrative are being found to have uses in describing and explaining what youth workers do and how they do it; what young people do in and through youth work; what its impact, benefits and outcomes are (i.e. what happens or changes as a result of youth work); what its nature and purpose is at the broader societal level and how it relates to other areas of policy and practice.

Despite this widespread use there is not always or necessarily agreement about what narrative (or story) is or what it 'does'. That may be part of its usefulness and attractiveness. It is certainly a reason to come together to ask '**What's the Story?**', not in the expectation of arriving at an agreed answer but so as to enable a mutually enriching sharing of perspectives, experiences and insights.

Responses, in the form of paper presentations, panel discussions, facilitated conversations and dialogue, interactive workshops and other forms of storytelling are welcome.

In the first instance an expression of interest (250-300 words) should be sent to: youthwork@mu.ie

Deadline for expressions of interest: Friday 3 April 2020. Responses will issue by: Friday 10 April 2020.