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Researching Identity Through Narrative Approaches

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This chapter discusses the development of narrative approaches in the study of identity formation and change in educational linguistics. Narrative approaches are promising for examining identity because they allow researchers to study how people position themselves in relation to larger societal structures and macrolevel discourses. Narratives can be analyzed to study identities as they relate to ideological topics such as beliefs and attitudes, and they are especially well suited for identifying the discursive positions that individuals take up in the stories they tell when making sense of their own and others' lives. In educational linguistics, narratives have become increasingly used to understand how people negotiate their identities in classrooms and in their everyday life. The analysis of narrative encompasses both life history autobiographic narratives as well as more interactionally contextualized narratives that take place in educational contexts. Those who are interested in developing an understanding of how people view their own and others' experiences will find narrative analysis a worthwhile undertaking. Researchers who want to investigate the role of narratives in co-constructing experience through collaborative storytelling will also find narrative analysis to be a very useful approach.

Historical Perspectives

From sociology to psychology to education, narratives are now treated as primary data in an increasing number of fields in which positivist traditions have long held sway. This may be due in part to what has been called a "biographical turn" in the social sciences (Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf 2000), or an interest in methods that can uncover the personal and social meanings that are considered to be the basis of people's actions, rather than identifying structural or macrolevel factors as the starting point for analysis. In the social sciences, this has amounted to a paradigm shift that now emphasizes the individual as the primary sense-making agent in the construction of her or his own identity, rather than the end product of larger forces. Of course, how much agency individuals have in shaping their own narratives is itself a topic of inquiry, and many researchers situate their narrative work with a critical eye to the role of social class, race, and gender in interpreting their findings. In addition, researchers have begun paying more attention to their own positionality in the process of collecting the data and interpreting it (Bamberg 2003; Lee and Simon-Maeda 2006). In recent years, narratives have become more prominent in the field of educational linguistics due to increasing interest in the important role that identity has in learning, teaching, and using language in society. Many researchers who have taken ethnographic and case study approaches to their research now find narratives a central part of their analytic toolkit, and the body of research that sets out detailed methods for collecting and analyzing narrative data has grown tremendously in the past decade.

Most accounts of narrative analysis in educational linguistics begin by acknowledging the importance of William Labov's contributions, which involved the analysis of narrative structure in stories that he elicited in interviews with young African American males. Though primarily a variationist who works on sociophonetic data, Labov explored the interviews to counter claims in educational linguistics that African Americans have a "restricted code" (Bernstein 1971), which was argued to lead to the production of less complex narratives compared to those produced by Anglo American English speakers. As an outcome of this work, Labov and Waletzky (1967) proposed a structural model for analyzing narrative chronology, consisting of a basic structure: abstract, orientation, narrative clauses (i.e., complicating action), and coda. Abstract and coda provide a link with the conversational frame, while the orientation section introduces characters and setting. Labov and Waletzky also laid the foundation for the concept of "tellability" (Norrick 1995), which refers to the need for narratives to be newsworthy and about something remarkable rather than mundane. This concept was further elaborated on by Ochs and Capps (2001), who demonstrated that storytelling is a highly interactional process in which narrators and audiences negotiate details and evaluative stances at all stages of the tale. Current approaches that analyze the discourse units that comprise narratives and their relationship to overall story structure tend to build on these scholars' work.

From a rather different angle, many narrative studies produced in the past two decades are driven by post-structuralist viewpoints. The impetus of much of this work is the development of positioning theory, an approach developed by Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990) that examines the types of subject positions, or subjectivities, that people assume in telling stories. They explain that "a subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those who use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the images, metaphors, and storylines that are relevant within that particular discursive practice" (46). Though it might be said that this type of narrative analysis has led to a greater amount of scholarship in educational linguistics, it is clear that many of the scholars working in this tradition borrow tools from more interactional approaches. For example, Higgins (2011a) used Goffman's (1981) framework of footing in combination with positioning theory to analyze how Swahili language learners moved from their role as storytellers to evaluators of actions in stories. An analysis of the learners' discursive moves acted as windows into the learners' positionings and made visible how they aligned with what they narrated as 'Swahili' language and culture.

Perhaps due to the influence of post-structuralist work, narrative analysis has often been subsumed under discourse studies. Hence, deconstruction, the identification of macrolevel discourses and ideologies, and the role of power in language and society are all significant topics for narrative analysts. More recently, the co-construction of identity has taken center stage, and frameworks allowing for the microanalysis of identity, such as conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics, have become highly relevant to the analysis of narratives embedded in conversations and interviews.

Core Issues and Key Findings

Narrative research has long been used by scholars interested in studying identity from a variety of perspectives, in large part because of the ontological understandings that have come to underpin

this approach (Riessman 1993). Of special appeal to identity scholars is the assumption that narratives are meaning-making devices enabling people to lend coherence to their lived experiences (Bruner 2002). Narrators are understood to wield their voices and hence enact their agency and, in so doing, adopt evaluative stances about people, expectations, and worldly conditions. Narratives are also acknowledged to be located within their social, cultural, and historical contexts and, as such, are viewed as being impacted upon by macrolevel or conventional storylines (Pavlenko 1998). These intricate associations make their evaluative function even more salient as narrators are able to construct particular relationships between themselves and their social orders, often by reproducing or critiquing existing relationships of power and knowledge (Peterson and Langellier 2006). Narratives are thus sites wherein nuanced, highly contextualized, multiple, and often conflicted identities are constructed.

A substantial body of early narrative-based work within educational settings in the United States was concerned with the interconnections between ethnic and sociocultural identities of students and their narrative styles, with attention to educational implications. Jim Gee's early work (e.g., 1985, 1986, 1989) analyzed oral narratives of African American and Caucasian students using ethnopoetics to highlight the close interconnections between features of their stories and their sociocultural backgrounds. Concerned that mainstream educators would disregard African American children's narrative styles, Gee focused on identifying the narrative structures of the African American children's narratives vis-à-vis Caucasian children's narratives. Similarly, Sarah Michaels (1981) and Courtney Cazden (1988) contributed to understandings of minority schoolchildren's interactional styles through their analyses of oral narratives taking place during routine classrooms such as 'sharing time.' These researchers aimed not only to document the different narrative structures, but also to draw attention to the ways that the minority students' narratives were potentially less valued among Anglo teachers, with the implication that the students would suffer academically. While later studies complexified their findings, this research has led to the dilemma of whether minority children must be asked to abandon their own narrative styles and to acquire an 'essayist,' mainstream narrative style in order to succeed in school. As Gee (1989, 109) points out, this may be difficult, if not unethical, as narrative style is part of one's identity, and is "connected with a culture's mode of expression, presentation of self, and way of making sense" of the world. Adding a more positive perspective, Poveda's (2002) more recent study of a Romani child set in Spain showed that the student's 'different' narrative style encouraged the teacher to engage more with the student and led the other students to participate more as well. This work on oral narratives has emphasized the need for educators to be knowledgeable of the close connections between verbal styles and social identities and the challenges students face when asked to emulate mainstream discourse styles both at the personal and pedagogical levels.

Beyond interactional styles in classrooms, narratives have also provided insights into the ways that school-aged students identify with different groups and networks. Here, researchers have combined the analysis of narratives with understandings of students' sociocultural and interactional contexts to understand how students produce and reproduce social identities in their schools and in larger society. To illustrate, Moore (2006) analyzed narratives of British students to examine how hierarchies of 'townies' and 'populars' functioned within girls' social networks, paying attention to how certain girls were named and took up the rights to tell stories in multiparty research interviews. Similarly, in a study exploring racial ideologies in California, Bucholtz (2011) analyzed Caucasian youths' stories about racial fear, reverse discrimination, and fight stories, which reproduced Black/White racial binaries. In addition to comparing the stories with her own ethnographic

observations, which did not find evidence of racialized violence or intimidation, Bucholtz critically examined her own role in the construction of racial categories in the interviews she carried out.

Narrative-based research within education has encompassed teacher identities as well (see also Martel and Wang, this volume). One strand of such work has examined the identity construction of in-service teachers in classroom interactions. Juzwik and Ives (2010) adopted a multi-layered short story dialogic approach to analyze teacher identity as it was constructed in a short story the teacher narrated within a classroom activity. Theorizing the dynamic, emergent, and interactional nature of teacher identity, the study showed how the “teacher’s identifying narrative performance as well as teacher-student interactions and relationships come to be mediated by a variety of small-scale contextual and interactional factors” (58). Moving beyond classroom interactions, other approaches have highlighted the importance of providing spaces for teachers to narrate their professional experiences and identities. For example, McKinney and Giorgis (2009) analyzed the autobiographies of literacy specialists working in schools to examine how their identities as writers and as teachers of writing were negotiated and performed. An offshoot of teacher identity research has examined the narratives for pre-service teacher education. One illustration of this work is Alvine (2001), which used reflective literacy autobiographies of trainee teachers to examine the interconnections between their personal knowledge and the theoretical knowledge of their teacher education courses; the trainees then utilized the autobiographies to formulate compellingly integrated and grounded beliefs about teaching and learning.

Identity research in the teaching and learning of languages has also become a focus in recent years. Because language teacher identity has been addressed extensively by (Martel and Wang this volume), we limit our comments here mostly to language learners. Seminal research in this area began only about two decades ago, and it began with a focus on adult immigrant English language learners. In this research, the learning of a second language has often been treated as going through the stages of deconstruction and de-centering of the self, followed by the reconstruction of one’s identity in the L2 (Norton Peirce 1995; Pavlenko 1998; Pavlenko and Lantolf 2000). Much of this work has adopted a post-structuralist perspective on identity as being unstable, fluid, and dynamic, yet simultaneously grounded in various discourses of gender, age, class, ethnicity, and nationality.

Norton (2000) presents a comprehensive, book-length study of this type, utilizing participant narratives to investigate the limited options that immigrant women from Peru, Poland, and Vietnam faced in Canada as they struggled to engage in second language learning opportunities. Norton analyzed narratives from diaries the women kept as part of a critical ethnography of the women’s lives, and she found that the women’s language learning experiences were affected both by being silenced in a patriarchal society and also by their gendered, raced, and classed experiences. Adding another and more empowered perspective to narrative accounts of immigrants and identity construction, Vitanova (2005) examined how East European immigrants to the US, both men and women, were able to author themselves, using Bakhtinian terminology, in their second language—English, thereby resisting the negative positionings assigned to them because of their second language learner and foreigner status.

Narratives have proven fruitful for better understanding how identities relate to language learning in the late modern era of transnational affiliations and hybrid identity options, as learners have an ever-widening array of ways of thinking about the languages and cultures that they study. Rather than seeing languages as tied to monolithic ‘target’ cultures, studies are showing that learners often

connect their language learning with a range of real, virtual, and imagined communities—only some of which are mother tongue users (Duff 2007; Higgins 2011b). Learners often make stronger friendships with others online, in forms such as fan fiction, where they construct new narratives for each other to read (Black 2009), and through sharing the positionality of ‘language learner’ in study abroad programs (Kinginger 2008). Additionally, migrants and relocated individuals may form their own communities comprised of newcomers, rather than striving to gain access to a community of native speakers. Higgins and Stoker (2011) examined narratives to show how Korean adoptee-returnees in Korea with relatively limited contact with Koreans positioned themselves as rightful speakers of their heritage language. The learners narrated stories where their Koreanness was contested by Korean nationals, and in response, they constructed a third space in which their status as ‘overseas Koreans’ was legitimated, and where their Korean language competence was identified as valid.

As research on language learning and teaching has become more reflective on many levels, narrative research within applied linguistics has grown as researchers both reflect on diverse aspects of using narrative methodologies and use narrative accounts to focus on emergent topics within the field. Lee and Simon-Maeda (2006) interrogated the role that racial identities play in the research practices of two researchers—Asian and White—through their personal narratives. While the latter researcher grappled with issues of positioning, reflexivity, and the tensions inherent in representations of ‘others’, the former tackled the complexities facing a researcher of color attempting to represent ‘her own kind.’ Scholars have also begun to explore how narrative research can reveal the ways in which researchers working within language education negotiate their researcher identities, reduce power differentials between themselves and participants, and encourage teacher collaboration in research projects (Norton and Early 2011). Adding a much-needed international perspective to this growing body of work, Canagarajah (2012) recounted how he successfully “negotiated the differing teaching practices and professional cultures of the periphery and the center in an effort to develop a strategic professional identity” (258). In a globalized world where English has acquired multi-faceted local identities, he highlighted the need for closer communication between these diverse communities and the need to critically use multiple identities to become part of the larger professional discourses and practices of the field.

Research Approaches

In an important article on narratives in applied linguistics, Aneta Pavlenko (2007) writes that in studies on autobiographic narratives, “it is not uncommon to see a summary of participants’ observations, richly interspersed with quotes, presented as analysis” (163). To remedy the lack of analysis present in much of this research, a comprehensive treatment of narrative data needs to involve attention to the content (what is said, i.e., themes), the context (the microcontext of the interview and the macrocontext of the sociopolitical events surrounding the telling), and the form (how the narratives are told discursively). Relatively new ways of looking at narratives not only as stories that convey ‘what happened,’ but also as interactional data in which speakers artfully position themselves and others in discourse have thus emerged. Within the field of orally recounted narratives, what Pavlenko refers to as form was analyzed early on by Labov and Waletzky (1967) in their seminal functional analytical model. Over the past several decades, scholars working from more discourse analytic perspectives, such as Bamberg (1997), Wortham (2001), and Georgakopoulou (2007), have asserted the need to take account of interactional surroundings in

order to recognize the collaborative nature of talk and the particular social actions the narrative carries out in a specific interaction.

Much narrative data is collected through interviews with a researcher, with the goal of establishing participants' accounts of their life histories, in which they present big picture perspectives of their past experiences. Such data collection allows researchers to gain a holistic understanding of an individual's experiences, which can shed light on particular research questions. In life-history research, analysis usually focuses on the content and context of the telling, and analysts treat narratives as sense-making devices wherein individuals use stories to craft coherent visions of their past and present. A useful illustration of life-history narrative research is Menard-Warwick's (2005) study, in which she interviewed two Latina immigrants living in California six times. Her analysis of the narratives was set in the context of her larger ethnography and involved her participant-observation over a period of many months in the women's community school ESL classrooms. After an initial coding of themes, she discovered the important concept of intergenerational trajectories, which in turn provided her with a deeper understanding of the connections between the women's engagement with English and Spanish literacies vis-à-vis their own childhood experiences, and as parents of school-aged children.

Life history narratives are also used to examine how narrators might evoke collective remembering (Wertsch 2002)—that is, culturally shared narratives that have been socially constructed across time and reified through frequent retellings. The narration of collective remembering is closely bound to identity construction and can be seen as an example of speakers engaging in microlevel and macrolevel discourses to position themselves with regard to nation-states, ethnic group memberships, and gender identities. Using narratives taken from interviews and language learner diaries, Kinginger (2008) provides clear examples of how larger discourses and shared storylines impact language learners' experiences while studying abroad. Focusing on Americans studying abroad in France, Kinginger (2011) examined the different degrees to which four college-aged women adhered to nationalist storylines of American-French relations, and how much this affected their experiences in a cultural context that was explicitly critical of the United States' military actions in the Middle East. Not surprisingly, such collective remembering often occurs in classroom interaction as well. A stellar example is Juzwik (2009), which explored how students become socialized toward narratives about the Holocaust that follow nationally sanctioned storylines.

A relatively recent but influential contribution to the field of narrative studies is in the form of the distinction between 'big' and 'small' stories. 'Big stories' such as those collected in life history narratives, autobiographies, or stories about life-altering events are mostly elicited by researchers in interviews, as opposed to 'small stories,' which are recounted in everyday interactions (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou 2008; Georgakopoulou 2007). The well-established tradition of collecting big stories normally imposes a list of criteria that determine what can actually be considered a story. So for instance, there is a requirement for a chronological series of events about past experiences, a plot that has a beginning, middle and end, and takes on a particular perspective or voice. In contrast, small stories are interactional tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, and shared events. They can be very brief, as they also capture allusions to previous tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell.

Small stories have been conceptualized as talk-in-interaction, embedded in their discourse environment, collaboratively produced by speakers and listeners (Georgakopoulou 2007). Such an orientation foregrounds the concept of narrative from the interactants' perspectives, and takes a strongly emic perspective of what might be considered a narrative. While Georgakopoulou (2007) draws upon conversation analysis as a useful analytical tool for analysis, she also emphasizes the external contexts that shape the telling of small stories. Because small stories tend to be threaded through interactions and reemerge over the course of time, the concept of inter-narrativity is also important, as the life history of a narrative allows researchers to examine how a narrative is moved in time and space, recycled and reshaped so that it fits each new context of its telling. The analytical orientation of what is accomplished through the tellings of these small stories is that people use them "in their interactive engagements to construct a sense of who they are, while big story research analyzes the stories as representations of world and identities" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008, 382). Small story proponents do not posit a substitution of research on big stories with small ones; rather, they argue that the field of narrative research would be enriched through the inclusion of small stories while their conceptualization and analytical styles could make useful contributions to big story research.

Bamberg and Georgakopoulou's attention to the role of stories, whether big or small, have great importance in discourse-oriented narrative analysis. They highlight the importance of looking beyond the referential aspects of narrative to the interactional elements of the narrative telling, especially the accomplishment of interactive positionings by the narrators and their narrating audiences (Bamberg 1997; Wortham 2001). Narrators may evaluate the contributions of their interlocutors (in the case of interviews), and interviewers themselves can also supply evaluative positioning in the act of co-constructing the interview (Wortham and Gadsden 2006). In short, stories told in oral interviews need to be analyzed as products of the interaction between the teller and the interviewer (Mishler 1986). Therefore, assumptions holding the narrator to be the sole creator of a narrative are debunked because the interviewer's style of questioning, prompts, acknowledgments, encouragements, facilitations, challenges, interruptions, and silences all are viewed as decisively impacting the story that eventually gets told. Narratives can simultaneously perform a multitude of functions, and narrators can communicate propositional information and display evaluations of this information (and of the interaction itself), while also constructing a socially recognizable identity (Koven 2007).

Some researchers have augmented the analysis of narratives, whether big or small, with ethnographic knowledge of their participants' experiences, drawing on observations, document collection, and interviews over an extended period. This can help establish the macrocontext in which the narratives are told (Pavlenko 2007), and it can offer the researcher a deeper understanding of the discourses that shape the narrative tellings. If the goal is to make explanatory links between narratives and specific social phenomenon, such contextual information is crucial to avoid privileging narrative accounts and to instead treat them as social phenomena that need to be further examined (Atkinson and Delamont 2006). The purpose of doing so is not to determine the truth value of narratives, but rather to understand how the stories that people tell are embedded in larger ideological, economic, and political contexts, and hence, are shaped by those forces.

Debates

We will address four points of debate in this section: 1) the distinctions between narrative inquiry and narrative analysis; 2) the relevance of reflection in narratives; 3) the nature and role of context; and 4) researcher reflexivity. Some scholars have found it important to distinguish between narrative analysis and narrative inquiry in their work, which points to a larger debate over what comprises a thorough analysis of narrative data. Within this debate, narrative inquiry is usually described as an approach that focuses more on big stories, asking questions of who, what and why, rather than considering the question of how stories are told. In other words, narrative inquiry values stories for what they can tell us about the teller's self, while narrative analysis is also interested in examining how tellers construct their stories within the context of the here-and-now of the storytelling event and interlocutors. This distinction is generally borne out in research approaches, as ethnographic and case study work in educational linguistics tends to use narrative inquiry, whereas researchers following discourse analytic traditions tend to favor narrative analysis. The two different approaches also have consequences for the presentation of data and the style of research reporting. Many narrative inquiry studies present the voices of the participants in third person synthesis of findings, sometimes inserting illustrative excerpts into the writing. On the other hand, narrative analysis studies include extensive, detailed transcripts and close analysis of the actual voices of the narrators (e.g., Wortham 2001; Sandhu 2014). Despite these apparent differences, there is much to be gained from a synergy between the two approaches, since focusing on how people engage in telling stories sheds light on the various selves that are articulated, and seeing how such stories change in particular interactional contexts allows us to understand more about who and what than may have previously been imagined Georgakopoulou (2006). As already discussed, a three-pronged approach that takes into account the content, context, and form of narratives has been recommended (Pavlenko 2007). Nevertheless, the debates continue because research that addresses questions of how often neglects thematic topics, and narrative work that investigates what and why questions often avoids examining the intricacies of narrative discourse. While there may be cases where a delicate balance between the two is the goal, it is clear from the literature that some research questions are better served with a focus on what questions, while others are best suited for how questions.

While discussing the distinctions between 'big' and 'small' stories previously, we explained the varying understandings of narratives that these two perspectives have adopted. These continue to be a topic of much debate within the field, especially in the way in which they conceptualize reflection and its importance for identity construction. 'Big' stories are valuable because they are removed from the here and now of ongoing social action and thus allow narrators the temporal distance from life events, enabling them to reflect on them and thus assign meaning to lived experience. The self or subjectivity that this process of reflection produces is a larger, more stable and continuous one than that which emerges in everyday experiences. While acknowledging that this larger self is not a "fixed, grandiose, narcissistic, hyper-masculine vision of the Individual," Freeman (2006) argues that "our lives — the movement of our lives, across significant swaths of time — continues to have meaning for many" (135). On the other hand, it can be argued that reflection is present in varying degrees in small stories as well (Bamberg 2006). The question is not the presence or absence or even the quantity or quality of such reflection, but instead, how interpretations are accomplished in and through interaction. In summary, the debate over reflection is whether narratives are based on "internal psychological constructs" or if they are dialogic and discursive artifacts.

Another point of debate that has emerged in narrative work is the role of context in narrative approaches. Narrative scholars have repeatedly emphasized the importance of the context within

which narratives are situated, maintaining that narratives are never recounted in a vacuum but are inextricably embedded in and thus are products of their local environments. Analysis of various levels of positioning in narratives addresses the importance of taking into account the multiple levels of context, including the level of positioning between the researcher and the participants, as well as the level of positioning amongst discourses (Bamberg 1997). However, the extent to which narrative analysts incorporate the ‘world’ of the narratives into their analysis differs significantly (Riessman 2008). Some scholars adopt Mishler’s (1986) understanding of interviews as interactional sites where interactants collaboratively negotiate for and construct meaning. Others include within their analytical lens the shared (or dissimilar) characteristics of the interactants and examine how the racial, linguistic, gendered subjectivities of the interactants impact the narratives that are recounted. Still others adopt an even wider perspective and examine how personal stories of participants are connected to larger social worlds, or Bamberg’s (1997) third level of positioning amongst discourses. There is emerging work that attempts to bridge some of these distinctions. An example is Sandhu (2013), which examines the collaborative production of a narrative told within a research interview and simultaneously attends to how hegemonic societal discourses regarding the value of Hindi or English medium education.

A fourth area of debate is the nature and extent of researcher reflexivity that narrative scholars bring to their work. It has been argued that narrative-based research will be richer if it takes into account the historical and social location, not only of the narrators, but also of the researchers, since both influence the research relationship (Riessman 2002, 37). However, in most narrative studies that examine identity construction, the researcher’s positionality vis-à-vis the participants or in relation to the topic under examination remains absent. This could be because the researchers’ own life experiences are very different from the participants, and because such examinations are not yet commonplace in the literature, and hence, are often underappreciated when undergoing peer review. A compelling explanation is posited by Nelson (2005, 315) who says, “texts in which the researcher’s subjectivity is foregrounded can be perceived as irrelevant, self-indulgent or insufficiently critical.” However, narrative scholars are increasingly becoming cognizant of the added insights that engaging in researcher reflexivity brings to their analysis and are looking at how their racial, professional, linguistic, gendered identities impact diverse elements of the research process, such as the co-construction of narratives, the relationships between them and their participants, and the narrative analysis and interpretations that are made. We would suggest that as more outlets for publication value research that treats the researcher’s positionality as a central feature of analysis, more attention to this last debate will lead to new insights. This is already being done in interview research, where the role of the interviewer is treated as central to the narratives being told (e.g., Miller 2011; Sandhu 2013).

Implications for Education

Narratives can provide a basis for concrete pedagogical materials and activities in classrooms of all kinds. English language classrooms for adult immigrants, for example, can be designed so that students’ narratives act as a bridge in connecting their classroom learning to their lives beyond the classroom walls and in providing a space for student voices to be heard. Writing autobiographic narratives “can be empowering, especially for those to whom the act of naming and framing lived experience in an education context is not necessarily familiar, comfortable, or historically valued” (Nelson 2011, 467). As Menard-Warwick (2006) found in her research with adult learners of English, when learners were given the chance to write in English about their personal histories and

their families, their enthusiasm for learning grew exponentially. Similarly, sharing diary entries gave the learners the opportunity to develop their oral skills and to learn new vocabulary as well Norton (2000). Future research is needed that examines how narratives can be used as a pedagogical resource for teachers working with migrant and minority populations for which culturally relevant materials are lacking.

Narratives have a great deal of potential for practical purposes in the field of teacher education (Barkhuizen and Wette 2004; Johnson 2009). They can offer aspiring or in-service teachers the opportunity to critically reflect on their beliefs and teaching philosophies, and they can be used to assess changes and growth as they experience teacher training. From a sociocultural perspective, narratives can be utilized as the core of professional development activities for teachers as a way of re-envisioning teaching as dialogic mediation. Narratives can help teachers in teacher education programs to ‘externalize’ their understandings of teaching theory and practices and to ‘verbalize’ their thought processes so that they “not only name the theoretical constructs they are exposed to . . . but, through the activity of narrating, . . . begin to use those concepts to make sense of their teaching experiences and to regulate both their thinking and teaching practices” (Johnson and Golombek 2011, 493). Finally, interactional narratives that take place in classrooms can be analyzed as part of self-reflective teaching and learning. Rex and Juzwik (2011) provide a guide that addresses a range of very practical issues, including how to encourage student participation in discussions of difficult topics and how to draw upon cultural differences as resources for all to learn from. Future research that examines the relationship between interactional, classroom-based narratives and their impact on student participation and engagement with learning would be a very exciting direction for future narrative work in education.

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