Revisiting the black Jesus
Re-emplotting a narrative through multiple retellings

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This article proposes that close examination of story retellings, both oral and written, can reveal a narrator's attempts to re-emplot a story in various ways. The retellings presented occurred in the context of a teacher education course where, across the semester, Ellie, a white teacher, retold the same story six times. The retellings provided a unique opportunity to add to previous research on retold stories by examining differences and similarities in the six narratives that surfaced issues of culture and race related to teaching. The article also contributes to methods of narrative analysis used to study and compare narrative structure and evaluations across the retellings. Discourse patterns revealed changes in narrative emplotment and evaluation and in the narrator's positioning of herself, a Euro-American teacher, and others, primarily African American students.

Keywords: Narrative, Re-telling, Re-emplotment, Positioning, Whiteness, Race, Teaching, Teacher education


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Ellie's story

Ellie: The first time I walked into the building I taught in, in Finley, there’s a big picture about 16x20 of the whole school. And I immediately notice, of course, how there is absolutely no white faces in the whole thing except teachers. And my first thought was “Oh, I thought this would never bother me. What if it bothers me?” And I turned around and there’s a picture of Jesus in African garb and all the Apostles are African and they’re all in their African huts and they’re all on the plains of Africa and that just bothered the heck out of me. ’Cause I’m like look, “It says right there he’s in Jerusalem. He wasn’t in Africa.” That just drove me nuts and then, um, I was talking to my partner that I ended up teaching with, and this is us right here and one of my classes (pointing to picture in note book).

Mary: That’s when you were doing your [ ]
Ellie: That’s when I was work... [in Finley] [ ]

Mary: In Finley, okay [ ]
Ellie: Yeah, this is one of my classes in Finley and, um, she [my teaching partner] said you know it used to bother me too, but if it makes them feel a closer connection to Christ because they see him like they look, how can that harm anything? And then I just wrote down here in Life magazine there was an article that came out right after that Life Magazine did on Jesus. There were like 15 different pictures of Jesus. The Russian Jesus, the Chinese Jesus, the this Jesus, the that Jesus and it kind of, um, just came out in my mind. So I kind of just jotted that down.

During a graduate literacy course, Ellie, a white teacher, shared this narrative about her first experience of entering a private Catholic school in a predominantly African American section of Finley (a pseudonym for a Midwestern, industrial city). Over a fifteen-week semester Ellie retold this story six times, sometimes in response to an assignment and sometimes by choice. Ellie’s retellings intrigued me because she seemed to be, to borrow a phrase from Chafe (1998), preoccupied with an idea that precipitated the retellings. As Ellie revisited her experience of first entering a predominantly African American school, the story changed with subsequent retellings. This prompted consideration of the following research questions explored in this study: What remained

the same over the course of the retellings? What changed as Ellie revisited her story? What could these changes tell me about Ellie and what she was learning or exploring through her narratives? How did the narratives reflect her understanding of herself and others? In considering these questions, I was influenced by a number of theoretical perspectives as discussed below.

Theoretical perspectives

Culture, race, and narrative in teacher education

A great many scholars of education have noted that in the U.S. while the percentage of white, female, monolingual, middle class teachers continues to rise, there are too few teachers of diverse linguistic, cultural, racial, and ethnic heritages at the same time that children attending schools come from increasingly diverse backgrounds (Nieto, 2002). This is significant because there is often a mismatch between what white teachers like Ellie have experienced in their school and cultural histories and what the children in their classrooms experience. While white educators are often aware that children come to their classrooms with a different set of experiences, white teachers often fail to recognize that our lived histories, that is, our raced, classed, and gendered ways of seeing the world, have implications for “teaching practice – which includes such things as the choice of curriculum materials, student expectations, grading procedures, and assessment techniques…” (McIntyre, pp. 14–15). Cochran-Smith (1995) writes that closer examination of our cultural experiences and positions is something that all teachers should undertake to become aware of our cultural lenses:

In order to learn to teach in a society that is increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, prospective teachers, as well as experienced teachers and teacher educators, need opportunities to examine much of what is usually unexamined in the tightly braided relationships of language, culture, and power in schools and schooling. This kind of examination inevitably begins with our own histories as human beings and as educators; our own experiences as members of particular races, classes, and genders; and as children, parents, and teachers in the world (p. 500).

Some researchers (see Florio-Ruane, 2001; McVee, 2004a) have focused on these concerns by scaffolding teachers’ conversations about culture and cultural identity and issues such as race, gender, and language instruction and

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1. Transcription conventions are explained in the appendix.
use. Others focus on a particular aspect of cultural identity such as whiteness (McIntyre, 1997), and yet others explore these issues through content areas, for example, understandings of diversity and literacy instruction for diverse students (Brock et al., 2003; Xu, 2000). Researchers have explored a number of mechanisms for teachers to carry out self-examination around issues of culture. Those most relevant to this investigation of Elle’s narratives are reading and writing personal narratives, reading multicultural autobiographies, and attending closely to discursive processes, particularly as viewed through sociocultural theory (Nieto, 2002).

A number of scholars explore how white, female teachers construct their own and others’ racial identities through discourse. In her work with white preservice teachers, McIntyre (1997) found that when confronted by issues of race and racism, her white participants were unlikely to take up a critical stance, adopting instead a “culture of niceness” that derailed critique in favor of polite discourse (p. 40). In her work, McIntyre identified a number of discourse moves, for example, evading questions and remaining silent, that she referred to as “white talk” (p. 31). These conversational moves reinforced the lessons that white teachers had internalized through their social interactions. In such instances, narrative discourse can contribute to the reproduction of dominant ideologies about racial minorities (van Dijk, 1993a), such as when a teacher suggests that lack of school success is the student’s fault because of a cultural deficit. Conversational moves reflect the ways that whites are conditioned by society not to see our whiteness, not to explore or consider our own racial backgrounds, and to keep the focus on the Other, “the person of color,” “the minority.” In her investigations, Glazier (2003) uncovered similar strategies among white inservice teachers and white researchers who were discussing multicultural autobiographies. Glazier referred to race and other contentious cultural issues as “hot lava” (p. 76). As hot lava, discussions of race were to be avoided, or if they arose, racial topics were reframed quickly because colorblindness was a valued position. Quoting Toni Morrison (1992), Glazier observed, “the habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful even generous, liberal gesture” (p. 75).

The awareness of deeply sedimented attitudes toward race and of discursive practices that thwart attempts to raise discussions of race and other hot lava topics leads to the question: What are we to do? Frankenberg argues that “in a racially hierarchical society, white women have to repress, avoid, and conceal a great deal in order to maintain a stance of ‘not noticing’ color” (p. 33). The women Frankenberg interviewed felt that their options were limited: “[E]ither one does not have anything to say about race, or one is apt to be deemed ‘racist’ simply by virtue of having something to say” (Frankenberg, 1993: 33). Another option identified by Rosenberg (1997) is to internalize the shame and guilt that we feel about our own white culture that, in turn, drives any meaningful discussion of race even farther away. Clearly, exploring the cultural landscapes fraught with hot lava is dangerous ground where educators run the risk of constructing explorations of culture that are, at best, “trips into the irrelevant or the ‘exotic,’ offering stereotyped information about ethnic groups. At worst, they are silencing, self-effacing experiences of what some of the undergraduates I have met call “Guil 101” (Florio-Ruane, 2001, p. 153).

This brief summation of the research may appear less than sanguine as authors are quite frank about the challenges they faced, and yet, researchers do note that there can be growth and new knowledge construction by teachers as they read, write, and talk about issues of culture. Florio-Ruane (2001) argues for creating a “sense of passionate engagement” through conversation and autobiographical narratives (p. 152). Optimally, such stories can help create a community of engaged learners as teachers narrate their experiences around culture and race and as they consider the experiences of others. Maintaining a critical stance, teachers and teacher educators alike can ask: “Who is served by this story?” “How does this story distort, even as it represents?” (p. 145). Used in this fashion, stories have the potential to catalyze teachers’ creations of alternative texts and interpretations as they consider their own lived histories and the histories of others (McVee, 2004b).

This exploration of the narratives shared by Elle, or by other teachers, is a complicated matter as is noted by McCarthy (2003) as he cautions researchers against presenting racism as something that can be “diagnosed and eliminated” (p. 129). In a critical review of five studies of whiteness in teacher education, McCarthy argues in favor of examining a particular type of experience. Critical for the lack of attention to what he calls “profound moments of displacement” (p. 129) related to race, class, and gender, McCarthy asks, “What does it mean for the privileged to feel alienated? Are white teachers necessarily always privileged? Or, is there a much more complicated story yet to be excavated?” (p. 129). In an intriguing study involving intellectual, cultural, and physical displacement, Brock et al. (2003) explored the responses of white middle class teachers to multicultural narratives and to multicultural literacy research. Brock and her colleagues taught the first half of a graduate course in the U.S. and the second half in Costa Rica. Teachers within the course experienced differing forms and degrees of displacement as they encountered literal
and figurative displacements through narratives, wherein they positioned and repositioned themselves with regard to their teaching, ethnicity, class, and language use. This suggests there is merit in further examination of the disruptions of cultural borders, including whiteness, through narrative. In analyzing Ellie’s stories about her position as a white novice teacher entering an African American school, I explore what happens when a “privileged” white, female teacher uses multiple narrative retellings to revisit an experience of racial displacement.

Narrative retellings, emplotment, and evaluation

Exploration of Ellie’s retellings can contribute to research on retold stories (Chafe, 1998; Norrick, 1998, 2000) as there is very limited literature on one speaker repeating a story over time in conversational settings (Norrick, 1998) and because retellings have been a neglected area of study (Chafe, 1998). Although Ellie’s narratives are comprised of both written and conversation-based retellings, a point that I will address later, there is much to be learned by looking across the multiple renditions of Ellie’s stories. Chafe and Norrick have both found that retold stories can remain strikingly similar, even to the extent that retold stories may include verbatim passages. Although stories often remain the same in relation to key events portrayed, Norrick (1998) found that narrators do make changes during narrative performances to adapt to the local context, for example, for various audiences and purposes. In considering what a narrator chooses to represent about her experiences and in exploring the language variations across multiple representations of that experience, Chafe (1998) argues that retellings are “unique windows on the mind” (p. 284).

Polkinghorne (1995) has theorized that narratives, as a view of our inner selves, represent “human activity as purposeful engagement in the world” (p. 5). Such narratives are configured through thematic elements as they pertain to plot. Polkinghorne (1991) refers to emplotment as the act of configuring events “into a whole by ‘grasping them together’ and directing them toward a conclusion or ending; emplotment transforms a list or sequence of disconnected events into a unified story with a point or theme” (p. 141). As we narrate life experiences, we configure events, giving new meaning to those experiences and constructing and redefining the Self. Polkinghorne writes that major life events, for example, birth, adolescence, marriage, or death, can disrupt the already existing story and interpretation (emplotment) that an individual is constructing and can cause a person to experience anxiety and internal conflict. Others have argued that crossing cultural boundaries can also disrupt the stories we are constructing about ourselves (see Clifford, 1988; Florio-Ruane, 1997, 2001; Rosaldo, 1993) causing us to re-empplot or re-interpret our experiences.

Although Polkinghorne uses the terms “plot” and “empplotment,” these labels are meant to convey much more than a mere linear sequencing of events. The purposes of emplotment are sense-making and interpretation, two particularly important functions of narrative in educational settings. Emplotment and re-empplotment is a dialectical process between the events being recalled and the theme or purpose of the story. Changes in narrative, such as additional details or commentary, are not simply embellishments but hold forth the possibility of reflecting movement in how a narrator positions the Self (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & van Langenhove, 1991, 1999). In an educational context, these changes hold forth the potential of glimpsing and documenting aspects of the narrator’s learning around issues of culture—for example, race—as she narrates events, articulates interpretations, and reveals how she positions herself and others.

In such an approach to learning, discourse plays a foundational role because “stories of narrative self-identity must be embedded in and constructed out of a person’s particular cultural environment—that is, the specific vocabulary and grammar of its language, its ‘stock of working historical conventions,’ and the pattern of its belief and value systems” (Polkinghorne, p. 144). Although Polkinghorne alludes to the importance of discourse, he has been criticized for inadequately addressing the role of discourse and narrative interaction (Bamberg, 1991; Wortham 2001). As Bamberg has observed, “[E]vents are not only given form due to their relationship to the theme or plot, but at the same time due to the language that is spoken and the discourse that is generated” (p. 157). Here, discourse refers to more than “vocabulary and grammar” but also to the “working conventions” with their patterns of “belief and value systems.” Discourse is saying or writing “the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes. Thus what is important is not language, and surely not grammar, but saying (writing)—doing—being—valuing—believing combinations” (Gee, 1989, emphasis in the original, p. 6).

In attempting to sort out the belief and value systems at play in the emplotment or interpretation of narrative, careful consideration must be given to evaluative comments or “value-orientations” (Bamberg, 1991). These value orientations indicate the significance of events or the narrator’s attitude toward events. How these evaluations are constructed and what is contained within
them is critical because such value-orientations reveal the narrator's "subjective point of view" (Bamberg, 1991, p. 161). A narrator's point of view communicates not only her understanding or evaluation of events, but also her position in these events relative to others. In other words, how we position ourselves and how we position others within our cultural environment is reflected within and constructed by our use of language and our language interactions (Glazer, 2003; Wortham, 2001).

Evaluations, as Polanyi (1985) has acknowledged, are a narrator's attempt to make the "relevance of the telling clear" (p. 13). Drawing on Labov's (1972) work, Polanyi identified three types of "evaluative devices" based on phonology, syntax, and discourse (p. 14). Phonological devices are elements, for example, such as stress, pronunciation, or dialect. Some examples of syntactic devices are comparatives, superlatives, negatives, or complex versus simple sentence structures. Polanyi labels repetition, flashbacks or flashbacks, or reported speech as discourse level elements of a narrative that are used for evaluation.

In sum, examining evaluation reveals how a narrator positions Self and Other and how a narrator interprets her lived experience. This interpretation or employment can change or be re-interpreted over time. Retellings may play an important role in this process of change, leading us to the question: How can we examine changes across Ellie's retellings? And what do these mean in relation to her identity as a white teacher?

Context, participants, and data collection

The data presented here were part of a larger study involving seven Euro-American women from predominantly middle class backgrounds. The context for this research study was a master's literacy course titled, Culture Literacy, and Autobiography (CLA). As a teacher educator with interests in the intersection of narrative, culture, and literacy, I framed the course using earlier work with discussions of multicultural autobiography in teachers' book clubs (Florio-Ruane, 2001; Florio-Ruane, Raphael, Glazer, McVee, & Wallace, 1997) and also work using narrative as a means to explore issues of diversity (e.g., Abt-Perkins & Gomez, 1993). Teachers read articles and research related to literacy and culture (e.g., Dassenbrock, 1992; Ferdman, 1980; Ogbu, 1992; Soliday, 1994). The purpose of the CLA course was to facilitate teachers' understanding and exploration of culture and literacy, particularly through reading and sharing published and personal narratives to further participants' understandings of Self and Other in regard to issues such as race, gender, class, and literacy. As the course instructor I read and responded to all personal narratives in writing and by scaffolding discussion about narratives in face-to-face settings.

As an instance of practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), I acted as both teacher educator and researcher. In addition to the data that would typically be collected within a course by a teacher (e.g., in-class writings, mid-term essays, final projects, journals), I also wrote memos about my class planning and took field notes. As an "observant participant" in the course, I adapted ethnographic techniques (e.g., Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) to my role as a practitioner-researcher. For each class, I collected audio and video tapes that I later cataloged and transcribed.

Clearly, my position as an insider in this setting and my position of authority and power as instructor could potentially confound data collection and interpretation as could my identity as a white, female teacher. While my identity as a white woman and teacher enables me to be sympathetic to Ellie's story and her situation, our backgrounds were different enough for me to achieve a comfortable amount of objectivity. Although at the time of the study, I had spent quite a lot of time teaching and living in urban environments, I grew up in a rural, agricultural, and working class family, whereas Ellie was raised in a middle class suburban setting. To guard against bias, I consulted with outside reviewers about data collection and analysis. Reviewers and a research group provided feedback and criticism of preliminary findings. Additional insight was gained through a follow-up interview where I shared preliminary analyses with Ellie. In discussing my research role, it should be noted that acting as both instructor and researcher also had benefits in that I quickly developed a rapport with students. Moreover, while acting as teacher, I was forced to more carefully consider the educative value or potential of narrative interactions, whereas if acting only as a researcher, I may have been less critical of narrative functions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>week 2</th>
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<th>week 2</th>
<th>week 4</th>
<th>week 11</th>
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<td>Sept. 29</td>
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<td>small</td>
<td>vignette</td>
<td>revised</td>
<td>small</td>
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<td>(written)</td>
<td>group</td>
<td>group</td>
<td>assignment</td>
<td>vignette</td>
<td>group</td>
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<tr>
<td>(oral)</td>
<td>(oral)</td>
<td>(written)</td>
<td>assignment</td>
<td>(written)</td>
<td>(oral)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Timeline of Ellie's narrative retellings across the semester.
I identified six iterations of Ellie’s narrative (three written and three oral) (see Figure 1). Ellie’s retellings came from several sources: her journal, large group discussion, small group discussion, a written narrative vignette assignment, a rewritten vignette, and discussion of the rewritten vignette. Ellie presented the first three iterations of the narrative spontaneously, and she crafted the final three narratives in response to an assignment about a cultural border-crossing experience. Figure 1 presents a chronological timeline for the story retellings across the fifteen-week semester.

Data analysis

To explore change and congruency across Ellie’s narratives, I used Labov and Waletzky’s (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967) segments of Abstract, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Resolution, and Coda to look at Ellie’s narratives to determine what remained the same over time and what changed. Preliminary analysis using Labov’s categories indicated a striking increase in the number of evaluative statements — “that part of the narrative which reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative [either the telling of it or the events themselves] by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others” (Labov & Waletzky, p. 37). These evaluative clauses appeared to assist in re-plotting the narrative by providing an interpretation, or as Polkinghorne (1991) said a “point or theme” (p. 141) to the story.

Using Labov’s coding system was helpful in revealing increased evaluation, but Ellie’s narratives were much longer than those analyzed by Labov. Several of Ellie’s narratives were shared in conversational settings, whereas in Labov’s research conversational interactions played a minimal role. Using Labov’s approach, it became difficult to analyze the nuanced changes around evaluation across the narratives. Bamberg (1991) acknowledged the problem of analyzing changes in evaluation observing that there is no set way to determine how different kinds of value-orientations are in concert or in conflict and that analysis of evaluation “is far from being fully understood at this point in narrative research” (p. 161). To resolve this dilemma, I turned to Polanyi’s (1985) work on narrative, and I also adopted techniques from other researchers, particularly the work of Tannen (1989) on repetition, to identify conflict and coherence across and within narratives. In addition, I looked for evidence of re-employment by examining story resolutions for how the narrator positioned herself relative to others and whether there was a shift in her positioning over time. These methods are explained more fully as examples are presented in the analysis sections. Since my primary method for data analysis is based on Polanyi’s work, it is described here in detail.

Polanyi (1985) based her analysis on Labov’s original categories; however, she adapted his work and developed her own coding system to examine narratives told in one-on-one settings (e.g., interview) and in conversational settings where speakers jointly constructed a narrative. She also analyzed some longer narratives, which though shorter than many of the narratives I examined, provided a helpful model. Polanyi’s approach demonstrated a “methodology for abstracting from the surface structure of a text those propositions about the storyworld which, if taken together, are the essence of the story as told” (1985, p. 9). This method allowed me to cull the main events and formulate a “core plot” for each narrative in a systematic manner by attending to those events that were most heavily evaluated and to identify flashheads, flashbacks, and non-storyworld talk. This was a necessary step in preparing for cross-narrative analysis that would allow me to look for evidence of re-employment.

Similar to Labov, Polanyi developed an extremely complicated and rigorous coding system where preliminary analysis involved separating the narrative into clauses. Polanyi’s method relied heavily on linguistic markers to indicate main events, descriptive clauses, and evaluation in a narrative, but also allowed for other indicators such as pronounciation, stress, volume, repetition, flashbacks or flashheads, and gestures. As reflected by the linguistic markers, evaluation was “highly-orchestrated” by the narrator (Polanyi, 1985, p. 15). In the following analyses, I have adapted Polanyi’s method as a process involving five steps.

First, I divided the story into individual clauses or utterances. Then, I separated Main Line Story Events, Crucial Contextualizing Information, and Non-storyworld Talk/Utterances. Main Line Story Events are occurrences that have an “instantaneous” character, as opposed to occurrences that have a “durative or iterative” character (p. 10). Crucial Contextualizing Information includes information and description about “characters, settings, and motivations” that are durative-descriptive, along with habitual, iterative, or noninstantaneous actions and events which are semantically interpreted to be off the main time line” (p. 12). Flashhead and flashback sequences and evaluation are part of the Crucial Contextualizing Information. Non-Storyworld Clauses/Utterances include “um’s,” false starts, parentheticals, and repetition. Comments from other speakers were included as Non-Storyworld Clauses, if their talk was not Crucial Contextualizing Information or a Main Line Event clause. Although Non-
Table 1. Analysis of Ellie’s First Narrative Using Polanyi’s Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative context</th>
<th>Main line events</th>
<th>Crucial contextualizing information</th>
<th>Non-storyworld</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 (written)</td>
<td>I walked in -</td>
<td>Black &amp; white of All students</td>
<td>&quot;I always thought it would never bother me.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(written)</td>
<td></td>
<td>NONE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal entry for</td>
<td>Then behind</td>
<td>Jesus &amp; the 12 Apostles</td>
<td>&quot;I hoped now it wouldn’t.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>me was</td>
<td>dressed in African garb,</td>
<td>&quot;This bothered me.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>another</td>
<td>on the African plains.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>picture:</td>
<td>Jesus lived in the Middle East.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Flash sequences:
1. I talked to my teaching partner about the picture until I talked to my partner. If it makes the kids feel better to see Jesus in a way they can identify with – then so be it.”
2. Incomplete Flash sequence. (Fully developed in later versions)
   - Life Magazine
   - Chinese
   - Russian
   - African
   - female – too far

Note. Evaluation is italicized.

storyworld clauses do not form the “core plot” of a narrative, they are still important, and after breaking down a narrative, I revisited these items in further analysis. In the third and fourth steps I calculated the amount of evaluation for Mainline Story Event clauses and then combined the most heavily evaluated main line events into a core plot. The final step was to look across the texts globally for repetition of words, phrases, clauses, flash sequences, and so on.

In following the steps described above, I created individual charts of all six of Ellie’s narratives. Table 1 provides an example of one narrative chart; I have not included all six charts here due to space limitations. I used the tables to help identify similarities and differences across the retellings.

In choosing to analyze all six of Ellie’s narratives, I conducted a cross-genre analysis including both oral and written narratives. Obviously, there are important differences between the oral and written forms that may raise questions about the feasibility of a cross-genre analysis. A critical difference is the context within which the narrative texts were constructed. A narrator writing alone could potentially shift the form, function, or content of a narrative for an assignment or when speaking to a group. Even the preliminary analysis highlighted some of the ways context shaped the narrative. For example, during the beginning stages of analyzing, I noticed, as have others (see Toolan, 1988), that written narratives aligned closely with Labov’s model. In contrast, spoken narratives were more complicated to analyze because they were constructed in conversational settings where there was opportunity for others to participate, interrupt, and otherwise share in the story and its construction. Another difference was apparent by simply scanning the tables created for each narrative; it was easy to see that written narratives did not contain Non-storyworld talk. This is not surprising given that writers have more opportunity to craft their words and that the immediacy of face-to-face conversation and concern for the “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1959) results in more Non-storyworld talk such as repetition, false starts, and side sequences in oral discourse.

While I recognize that differences exist between the written and oral texts, comparing only like genres is also problematic because it provides a limited view of how Ellie worked to re-employ her narrative within an educational context where writing and discussion were viewed as mediational tools. Examining both spoken and written discourse provided a more detailed picture of how narrative functioned over time and the role it played in how Ellie represented and constructed both Self and Other.

Furthermore, the likelihood of producing trustworthy and rigorous findings can be increased by triangulating across various structural and interpretive aspects of the six narratives. A number of researchers argue against the use of the term triangulation due to its overuse and misapplication (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2002; Janesick, 2000). In particular, it has become typical in educational studies for researchers to approach triangulation with a rather simplistic vision of using three different types of data sources to establish trustworthiness. Given that I am focusing on what changed across Ellie’s retellings, including how Ellie positioned herself and how she re-employed her narrative, I posit that rigor in analysis can also be established by thinking of triangulation in an unconventional manner. In essence, I triangulate across the six narrative retellings as data points, but also between events, action, evaluation, repetition of questions, positions taken up, resolutions, and flash sequences. Another point of triangulation is added where Ellie and I revisit her narratives in a post-course interview.
In the remaining sections below, I present a cross-narrative analysis of quantitative and qualitative changes in Ellie's narratives. After some initial quantitative analysis across all six narratives, I foreground Ellie's first five narratives to examine repetition across resolutions and questions. I then build on this analysis as I examine the sixth and longest narrative that represented the greatest amount of change.

Preliminary analysis using quantitative comparisons across narratives

As a preliminary step in the analysis across all six narratives, I scanned the tables of the six narratives to look for changes in the structure. As mentioned, I noted that there was no Non-storyworld talk included in the written narratives. However, there was a striking increase in Crucial Contextualizing Information across the retellings, including an increase in evaluative information. The core events remained essentially the same across the narratives.

To assist in comparison of the six narratives, Table 2 provides a summary of the quantitative changes in the Main Line Events, Crucial Contextualizing Information, and Non-storyworld talk as revealed by the analysis. Across the narratives, the Main Line Events were between three and seven clauses long. Crucial Contextualizing Information (this includes contextualizing information, flash sequences, and evaluation) ranged from seventeen to eighty-eight clauses. Over the course of the retelling, evaluation increased from six lines to fifty-three lines, and as would be expected, the longer oral narratives contained more non-storyworld talk.

Table 2. Summary of Ellie's Narrative Retellings by Number of Clauses per Segment in Narratives #1 Through #6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Main line events</th>
<th>Context. info – CCI, evaluation</th>
<th>Evaluation within CCI &amp; flash sequences</th>
<th>Non-storyworld talk or writing</th>
<th>Total # of clauses in this narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 written</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 oral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 oral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>#4 written</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 rewrite</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 oral</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CCI = Crucial contextualizing information; Flashes = Flash ahead or flash back sequences; Evaluation = Evaluation within flash sequences as well as main narrative

The preliminary analysis of the six narratives and the summary provided in Table 2 show that as Ellie retold her story, she changed it. However, although all categories listed in Table 2 increased over time, this change was more dramatic in some categories than in others. For example, as shown by Table 3, the Main Line Events remain relatively the same across all narratives.

Ellie entered the building. She saw a picture or photographs showing the school population where all the students were black and only the teachers were white. Christ as a black man dressed in African clothing with African disciples, and a Madonna and child, where both mother and child were black. These pictures challenged her.

Table 3. Core Flows Composed of Main Line Events and Flash Sequence Events for Ellie's Six Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Main line events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 (written)</td>
<td>I walked in –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sketch book entry for</td>
<td>There it was – The picture –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paley's White Teacher</td>
<td>Then behind me was another picture:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 (oral)</td>
<td>I talked to my teaching partner about the picture (fs)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large group community share for White Teacher</td>
<td>The first time I walked into the building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 (oral)</td>
<td>And I immediately notice [the picture]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group book club discussion of White Teacher</td>
<td>And I turned around and there’s a picture [of Jesus in African garb]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 (written)</td>
<td>I talked to my teaching partner about the picture (fs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vignette assignment to share with others in class</td>
<td>I saw a Life magazine article with many representations of Jesus (fs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 written</td>
<td>I went [to the interview]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>But then to hear [my teaching partner] talk about it and say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black leaders were trying to prove Jesus was black (fs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My teaching partner talked about the picture (fs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I saw a Life magazine article with many representations of Jesus (fs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 oral</td>
<td>I entered the doors [for my interview]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At that moment, everything I had always prided myself on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>was challenged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>but here I was standing in the hall just about to interview to teach at this school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I entered school on the first day of class (fs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#5</th>
<th>(written)</th>
<th>Rewritten vignette assignment to share with others in class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>(oral)</td>
<td>Small group discussion about revised vignette assignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#5</th>
<th>(written)</th>
<th>Rewritten vignette assignment to share with others in class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I walked [in] the doors, When I entered the building,</td>
<td>As I looked around the other walls, But then I saw it. [photograph]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At that moment, everything I had always prided myself on was challenged. I heard radio talk shows talk about: Was Jesus black? (fs)</td>
<td>I went to school on my first day of teaching (fs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>(oral)</td>
<td>Small group discussion about revised vignette assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but it was about when I went in for the job interview and I walked in and I saw the big picture of the whole student body on the wall. And it really challenged something that had always frustrated me</td>
<td>So I had just honestly never thought about it [and I was just faced with: But, then I was faced with looking at this sea of people Before the interview I talked to the principal on the phone (fs) I heard people on talk shows saying: “Jesus is black” (fs) I saw a Life magazine article with many representations of Jesus (fs).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*fs = Flash sequence

Within the narratives, the challenge posed by the black Jesus and black student population was evaluated and resolved by Ellie concluding that there was no problem, talking to her teaching partner, or by seeing the article with many representations of Jesus. More important, there was an increasing amount of evaluation across the narratives.

Extending the analysis to include examination of the discourse

Noting the structural changes such as the similarities in main events and increase in evaluation is important because it reveals the dynamic nature of narrative. The interplay of events and evaluation seems to indicate that Ellie was re-employing her story as she wrestled with self-understanding. Although this appears to be the case given these structural changes, several questions must be answered before we assume that the increase in various categories does, in fact, indicate re-employment. In addition to a more detailed analysis of what changed and what remained the same, it is critical to consider how the narratives changed. This requires extending the analysis beyond the preliminary quantitative comparisons mentioned above to explore qualitative changes in Ellie’s narratives.

Evidence of re-employment: Repetition across resolutions and repetition across questions

**Repetition across resolutions.** One of the most striking changes across the narratives was the increase in evaluation. In Ellie’s case, examples of evaluative comments ranged from the relatively mundane statements: “That’s all I knew that it [the school] was in northern Finley” to more provocative self-directed questions: “What if I did have a problem with race?” In addition to these statements and questions, Ellie also used the resolution of her stories as a form of interpretation. Resolution statements are usually found at the end of the story and function to provide a result for the story; they answer the question: “And then what happened?” Resolution also state or imply an interpretation of the story’s events. Ellie essentially offered three overarching resolutions to her story. At various points she suggested that the final result of her being white and her students’ being black or that Jesus’s being black (a) seemed problematic until she talked with her teaching partner or read the magazine article (b) could have been a problem but it was not, or (c) remained a dilemma. Table 4 provides an overview of the types of resolutions offered in each narrative.

The interpretations that Ellie placed on her narratives were both conflicting and in concert. For example, Narratives #1, 2, 3 had similar in concert interpretations. In each case Ellie mentioned talking with her teaching partner and reading the magazine article that depicted many representations of Jesus. However, the interpretation placed on the first three narratives was in conflict with Narratives #4 and #5. Ellie resolved Narrative #4 and #5 with the statement: “They were my kids. I was their teacher” thus indicating that race was not a problem. All five narratives differed from the resolution of the final narrative; in Narrative #6 rather than seeing an easy resolution, Ellie portrayed the issue of race as an open-ended dilemma.

As noted earlier, the events in a narrative are shaped not only by interpretation, but also by the language used throughout a narrative (Bamberg, 1991). Although Ellie’s stories implied race-related tensions from the first narrative, her interpretations indicated that racial aspects of these events were not important to her initially. In avoiding the hot-lava topic of race, Ellie readily solved her dilemma by adopting the stance of a “colorblind” teacher — what Polk-
Table 4. Overview of the Resolutions Offered in Ellie's Six Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Resolutions Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could have been a problem but wasn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1 (written)</td>
<td>I talked to my teaching partner about the picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>journal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 (oral)</td>
<td>I talked to my teaching partner about the picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large group</td>
<td>I saw a Life magazine article with many representations of Jesus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 (oral)</td>
<td>My teaching partner talked about the picture. I saw a Life magazine article with many representations of Jesus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 (written)</td>
<td>They were my kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first vignette</td>
<td>I was their teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 (written)</td>
<td>They were my kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>revised vignette</td>
<td>I was their teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 (oral)</td>
<td>What if...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final retelling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

inghorne might call a “working convention” that Ellie fell back on to express her idea. As I explain below, this simplistic view of remaining colorblind was not a common resolution across the narratives. Several of the narratives, particularly the last retelling, introduced and sustained the issue of race as a dilemma and revealed the complexity of Ellie’s evaluative sequences.

It is important to consider how the form of Narratives #4 and #5 may have affected the way that Ellie shaped her story and the interpretation she placed on it. In the first three oral retellings Ellie implied but avoided using the word “race.” This contrasts with Ellie’s written narratives where there are direct references to race. I believe that the form of the narrative (a brief written narrative) and the context (an assignment for class and to be shared with others) contributed to the way that Ellie introduced race as a possible problem but then resolved it. One possibility is that Ellie knew she had to share her story with others and whether or not she was conscious of her strategy, she attempted to mitigate opportunities for argument or disagreement by concluding that race was not a problem, making it a non-issue. It is also likely that the written form contributed to the structure of the evaluation and resolution. All the written vignettes crafted by students for their assignment shared a common form, in that all could easily be coded using Labov’s structure of Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, and Resolution; all followed a fairly linear pattern of beginning, middle, and end, typical of mainstream American stories. In some respects, this linear form can be more constraining than other narrative forms which allow narrators more options to raise questions and dilemmas and to present themselves as multi-voiced individuals (Zuss, 1997).

The changing resolutions are yet another indication that Ellie engaged in the process of revisiting and re-employing her narrative in both her structuring of events and the interpretation of those events. The changing resolutions imply that her cognitive stance has changed or at least that there is some part of the story that resists being interpreted in the way that she had originally attempted, that is, where race was not a problem. The lack of consistency across resolutions is, in fact, representative of the resistance that individuals encounter in trying to fit events into a particular temporal and interpretive frame (Polkinghorne, 1991). These assertions – that Ellie is re-employing her narrative and thus changing her position – can be supported further by considering the types of questions Ellie asked across her narratives and by exploring how these questions functioned.

Repetition across questions

Table 5 presents a summary of the questions asked by Ellie across her narratives. Looking across the questions, one of the most striking details is the dramatic recurrence and increase in “what if” questions – a question form that allows speakers to express possibilities. In the first four narratives, Ellie asked only two direct “what if” questions. In Narratives #2 and #4, she asked: “What if it bothers me?” “What if I did have a problem with race?” raising the possibility that she perhaps did have or could have a problem with race. She also raised the possibility that she was a racist by asking the question: “What would that mean I was?” This was an indirect way of asking, what if I am a racist? These questions reflected Ellie’s sudden recognition of having crossed a cultural boundary where the tables were now turned and where she, as the white teacher, was the minority. The “what if” form of the questions holds forth the potential to explore what Rosaldo (1993) calls “the mundane disturbances that so often erupt during border crossings” (p. 29).
Table 5. Summary of the Questions Ellie Asked Across Narratives #1 Through #6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 (written) sketch book</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 (oral) large group</td>
<td>What if it bothers me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 (oral) small group</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 (written) assignment</td>
<td>What if I have a problem with race?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 (written) revised</td>
<td>What is that so hard to understand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 (oral) final retelling</td>
<td>What do you know about northern Finley?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ellie increased the potential for this exploration in Narrative #5 by raising an additional set of questions when she asked: “What if the children did not want to listen to me?” and, “Would the principal see something in me I never thought was there that I did have a problem with race?” These two questions represented a subtle but important shift in Ellie’s position. The questions imply consideration of how the principal and students will “see” her. Interestingly, the word “see” connotes both her physical self – the principal and children will see that she is white. “See” also indicates how she will be perceived – the principal might perceive that she is a racist or the children might perceive that she is not a teacher to whom they should listen because she is white. By introducing how others might perceive her, Ellie injected into the narrative the potential to demonstrate that “Life stories need not be simply self-centered and narcissistic. Our individual stories can, and perhaps need to, expand the protagonist from an I to a we. The I in the ‘Who am I?’ can be extended to include other individuals and communities” (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 146). Thus as Ellie questioned herself, she also began to introduce the perspective of the other by asking: “How do others see me?” This is a dramatic shift in position and one that is seldom undertaken by white teachers exploring issues of race.

Although the potential exists to “extend the protagonist from an I to a we,” for Ellie to explore her position as a white teacher and to consider how her race positions her within the school setting and within the society, Ellie did not push this reflection any further. This was exemplified in the way that Ellie responded to the questions she had introduced. Her questions, though self-directed and introspective, were also rhetorical, and it would have gone against the written and oral convention of discourse for Ellie to respond to them directly, for example, by stating, “I am not a racist,” or “The principal could see I wasn’t prejudiced.” However, Ellie did respond to these questions in the way she resolved her stories. As explained in the previous section on resolutions, Ellie used two resolutions in concluding Narratives #1 through #5. One was that she talked with her teacher and read a magazine article, and as a result, the issue of race (particularly portraying Christ as black) was no longer a problem. In the second interpretation, Ellie concluded: “I was their teacher. They were my kids.” Both interpretations of her narrative offered a response to the self-directed questions she posed. For example, she responded to the questions: “What if I have a problem with race?” and “What if I was uncomfortable here?” with the reply, given in her resolution, that race was not an issue; it didn’t matter if Ellie was white and the students were black.

The changing questions are further evidence that Ellie was re-empploting her narratives and reflecting on the tensions surrounding race. However, as noted above, this change was limited. Although she raised the opportunity to
explore issues (e.g., her position as a white teacher), she did not always fully engage these opportunities. In raising questions that potentially problematized her position as a white teacher and then in replying to these questions that race was a non-issue, Ellie demonstrates how difficult it can be to both raise and sustain exploration of hot-lava topics through narrative. Her resistance to shifting her position, of almost stepping into the place of the Other and then backing away, represents both the potential power of narrative to explore how others see us and thereby to reposition ourselves and others, but also the resistance to re-emploting our life stories.

Although the process of repositioning ourselves is difficult and although Ellie may encounter resistance from within herself, I wish to point out that context (e.g., written assignment, oral story) can contribute to the form of the narrative and potentially constrain narrative exploration (Duranti & Goodwin, 1992; Schegloff, 1992). For example, in the written narratives, Ellie knew that she was supposed to write at least a half a page and that the narrative would be shared with her peers. This may have decreased the opportunities for Ellie to pose and respond to difficult questions. However, it is worth noting that even in comparing the two written forms, Ellie made some important changes in relation to the questions she posed. In Narrative #4, the first written vignette assignment, Ellie posed only two questions: “What if I have a problem with race?” and “What would that mean I was?” But in rewriting the narrative (Narrative #5), she included six questions. Five of those questions are questions which are essentially self-directed. These questions embody possibilities (e.g., “What if I did have a problem?”). In two of these questions Ellie begins to consider others and how they perceive her (e.g., “What if the children did not want to listen to me?”). This indicates that although re-emploting may be constrained by context, important changes can still occur.

Re-emploting the self: Questions, flash sequences, and repetition within Ellie's final oral retelling

Thus far I have looked at repetition of resolutions and questions. These begin to provide evidence of re-emploting and shifts in position over the first five narratives. However, it is in Ellie’s final narrative that the greatest changes occurred. As Table 5 showed, Ellie used thirteen questions in this final oral narrative. Because these final questions are part of a long oral retelling, one in which several other participants play a part in shaping the narrative, it is important to consider the questions in the context of the extended retelling. In the following section I present Ellie’s final narrative with analysis that focuses on interpretation of events through the use of questions, flash sequences involving other participants, and repetition within the narrative. I also consider how Ellie positions herself through questions, comments, and interaction with other participants.

Ellie’s final oral retelling took place eleven weeks into a fifteen-week course. Before coming to class on that night she had re-written her vignette assignment (Narrative #4). She retold her story in a small group with Regan and Marsha, and this retelling lasted for about five minutes. In this final version of her story, Ellie used several different types of questions. The first question was reported speech from the principal who had interviewed her. This reported speech introduced a flashback sequence:

Ellie: I honestly did not know anything about northern Finley. I mean, he, he [the principal] asked me on the phone, you know: “What do you know about northern Finley?” I'm like

Regan: It's in northern Finley.

Ellie: It's in northern Finley [laughter]. That's all I knew I didn't know anything about, you know, the socioeconomic area, I didn't know anything about the population, nothing.

This flashback was a humorous exchange that engaged other participants, but it also functioned as a way for Ellie to evaluate this event, to indicate her limited knowledge about Finley. Regan’s response: “It’s in northern Finley” and Ellie’s overlapping speech and repetition, along with Ellie’s repetition of the idea that she “didn’t know anything” or knew “nothing” amplified Ellie’s position as a naive actor in the story. Other participants knew from hearing or reading previous versions of the story that Ellie grew up in a fairly prosperous suburb not far from Finley. In previous versions of the story, Ellie indicated she was unaware that Finley, and especially northern Finley, was known as a predominantly black community. At the time of Ellie’s interview, the community was particularly troubled by crime and unemployment due to a shutdown at a General Motors assembly plant. When Ellie walked into the school and saw the pictures of a black Christ, disciples, and Madonna, it was truly a shock to her.

As Ellie recounted her story, her discourse revealed not only how she was positioning herself, but how she was positioning others. Even though in the first 30 lines, she described talking with the principal, going to Finley, en-
tering the school, and seeing the pictures of the black Christ, she never referred directly to the black students or black community. She mentioned the "black and white faces" of students and teachers, "the student body," and the "population" but it was not until lines 35–38 that she directly talked about the school as an African American school. She says: "I had actually never thought about a school that could be 100% black. It, you, to always to me it was there, there were some of them in your classroom. It was just really hard to think of it being, you know, a 100%." At this point Ellie’s language clearly indicated how she was positioning herself and her students. Her depersonalization of the students as "them" ("there were always some of them in your classroom") and her inclusion of Regan and Marsha, the others in her discussion group as "your" ("there were always some of them in your classroom") indicated separation along racial lines and indexed a sense of shared agency and a shared past (O’Connor, 1994).

Although some white readers may find nothing unusual about Ellie’s reference to these students as "them," African Americans who have read and listened to Ellie’s narrative have all commented on her depersonalization of the students, a discourse move that reflects white depersonalization of black Americans. Ellie’s positioning of herself and other participants in the group and the black students and community as us-them reflects the balkanization along racial lines within U.S. society (van Dijk, 1993b). This separation was also reflected in Ellie’s comment in line 52 when she described the photograph of the students, as "this sea of [black] people," and she added: "I’m gonna be outnumbered here." Ellie’s positioning of herself as a naive and passive character and Ellie’s discourse, which relied on an us-them dichotomy, reflected a conversational strategy that McIntyre (1997) calls “white talk” – talk that serves to insulate white people from examining their/our individual and collective role(s) in the perpetuation of racism” (p. 45).

Yet what is striking about Ellie’s point of view was how she also joined this depersonalization of the Other with reflection on her own position. She began this reflection by noting that the picture of the black Jesus really bothered her and that she was shocked to be faced with her own “feelings.” However, she did not express what those feelings were. In line 42 she continued reflecting on her views, at first using vague references and abstract pronouns (italicized in the excerpt below), and she continued to position the black students and the black community as the Other (in bold italics in the excerpt):

42. What if everything I’ve always thought of myself is not true? What if I find that I’m in this interview and they see something in me that I’ve always said wasn’t there? You know, what, what if it’s there? And I didn’t, I didn’t even know I didn’t even realize what I was doing. Oh my gosh there’s no way I could do this, but I was afraid that there actually was something in me that was, that would be prejudiced or biased against this or something because my first initial reaction was about the black Jesus was like “Come on, no way”
43. But then I was faced with looking at this sea of people and it was almost like I’m gonna be outnumbered here. What if they make me teach this? What if they make me stand up there working here and I have to start teaching this things I don’t believe in. You know, And the whole thing with the black Jesus was like “Well, if it makes them feel better to see him look like them, well great, you know...

The types of questions that Ellie began to ask in the excerpt above reflect how difficult it is to explore racism and identity. Ellie stated that her own reaction to the black Jesus challenged her and raised doubts about whether she was racist and about whether she knew herself. Her repeated references to “something in me,” and questions of “what if it’s there” and “what if everything I’ve thought is not true?” indicated how difficult it was to directly voice the issue of racism. Ellie finally introduced the issue of prejudice and bias in lines 45–46 when she stated: “I was afraid that there actually was something in me that was, that would be prejudiced or biased against this.” Ellie’s speaking the words “prejudice” and “bias” was significant because she identified, for the first time, what the “it” was that might be inside her. But, even as she has raised this issue, she was still vague about what the object of her prejudice was: “that I would be prejudiced or biased against this.” “This” could be interpreted as both the black students and black community or the black Jesus.

Ellie reified her ideas by positioning “the black Other” as “they” or “them” throughout this segment. Although Ellie repeatedly mentioned the “black Jesus,” she did not mention the “white teacher,” and her own race remained transparent, the unmarked form that was not introduced as a topic on the conversational floor. However, immediately after the above excerpt Regan, who, unlike her peers, often raised issues of race for discussion, attempted to introduce “whiteness” as a topic:

53. Regan: And they have white Jesuses everywhere too.
54. Ellie: Oh, yeah,
55. Regan: White Mary’s.
56. Ellie: Yeah [.
57. Regan: When I went to Catholic school everybody was white.
58. Ellie: Yeah it was. It was a Catholic school in Finley.
59. Marsha: All black. That’s interesting.
The juxtaposition of Regan’s comment: “And they have white Jesus everywhere too” and “white Mary’s” and “When I went to Catholic school everybody was white” was striking because Ellie had spent a great deal of time describing the black Jesus. But she had not indicated that the school contained many other representations of Christ or Mary as white. Although Regan did not directly challenge Ellie’s description, she indirectly raised the issue that there were all-white Catholic schools just as this school happened to be all black. Yet, there was no uptake on the idea of “whiteness,” and Marsha assisted the group in avoiding engagement with the issue of “whiteness” by her observation, “All black. That’s interesting.” This segment was particularly important because it indicated how even in conversational narratives, which were less constrained than the narrative vignette assignments, it was difficult to raise and sustain discussions where individuals explored their own whiteness and how it positioned them.

Although the group did not directly delve into the topic of whiteness, Ellie continued to skirt the edges of this topic through more “what if” questions. She concluded her retelling with this set of evaluations (in italics):

71 Ellie: But that kind of helped me too work through you know dealing with that one issue cause that was the one thing that really bothered me. But mostly my concern was what if I get this job and I’m in this room and all of the sudden it’s a problem, and it’s something that I never thought would be a problem and it really is. And that’s mostly what my narrative was, kind of waking up to who I really who I really was and what if there was a person in me I never knew was there – someone I didn’t really like.
72 Regan: Hmm, That’s interesting.

73 Ellie: Do you know what I mean? Does that make sense? That was mostly what the issue was, was just kind of being faced with: What if I am something I’ve always said I wasn’t? And I’ve always said I wasn’t?
74 Regan: Like if it just comes out one day when you’re talking.
75 Ellie: Yeah, or like. I mean, I was thinking about what if you’re in this interview and this man is asking me all these questions I can’t answer. You know, things I’ve never thought about or.

Ellie began this excerpt by indicating that the “one thing” that really bothered her was the picture of the black Jesus. Yet she immediately followed this statement with the phrase in lines 72–73, “But mostly my concern was what if I get this job and I’m in this room and all of the sudden it’s a problem…” These two conflicting interpretations of what “the problem” was reflected Ellie’s stance at this moment. We have seen over earlier iterations how Ellie had concluded that “there was not a problem with race” or “there could have been a problem with race but in the end, there wasn’t.” In this final narrative, she ended her story not with one of these resolutions but with a set of questions (e.g., “What if there was a person in me I never knew was there – someone I didn’t really like?” “What if I am something I’ve always said I wasn’t?”) that repeated a common theme of: What if I am prejudiced? What if I am a racist? This “resolution” rather than being the “result” of the narrative, presented both the narrator and the listeners with a dilemma (Florio-Ruane & de Tar, 1996) and problematized Ellie’s position as white teacher.

The post-course interview: Ellie revisits her narrative once again

Approximately one year after our course concluded, I conducted a follow-up interview with Ellie. I had two purposes: first, to ask her to revisit her stories again to reflect upon the events she had narrated and, second, to share my findings with her. Using a semi-structured protocol, I pre-planned some activities and questions. For example, I brought copies of Ellie’s written narrative and transcriptions and audiotapes of the oral narratives. As Ellie read through the narratives and listened to the tapes, I occasionally asked her to stop and reflect on what she was thinking. During this part of the interview, Ellie retold many sections of the story. In these instances, I let her initiate the topics she wanted to discuss and then occasionally asked follow-up or prompting questions. Ellie commented on multiple aspects of the narrative, including the length, the types of questions she had asked, and the number of times that she shared the story. She did not comment on her own discourse patterns, for example, grammar or word choice or on what such patterns might have revealed about her social class or ethnicity. Two themes, in particular, stood out during the interview. One was that she emphasized her entrance to the school as “important,” “something that made a difference,” “a real turning point,” “a jolt,” and “a shock.” Clearly, the experience of entering the school for the first time was a critical one for Ellie in her consideration of herself as a white teacher when she had authored the narrative in the course, and the event remained important to her a year later.

A second important theme arose as I shared my analysis with Ellie. As I pointed out the increase in evaluation, the types of questions asked, and the positions Ellie took up, we talked about what meaning Ellie ascribed to the narrative. Ellie described the narrative as a story about “self-awareness” and observed that it was difficult to think about such a situation where “your per-
sonal beliefs about yourself would be challenged," but she felt that having been through the experience and having reflected on it she could "breathe easier" about issues of race in her current classroom. Without prompting, she illustrated this point with a story about a black parent who had directly asked her how she felt as a white teacher working with black children. Having reflected on her experiences in Finnley and on her role as a white teacher, Ellie felt comfortable describing her prior experiences to the parent. The parent, Ellie said, was visibly relieved after their conversation. Ellie had provided yet another interpretation of her narrative.

When I suggested that the final narrative shared during the course was unresolved, Ellie did not say that she disagreed with me. Instead, she once again revisited her narrative and provided yet another interpretation. After Ellie read and listened to the final narrative, she said that she had made peace with the inner-conflicts she had at the time the event took place. Ellie commented that even though racial concerns were more prominent in her current school than they had been in Finnley, she felt that the “race concern was not an issue.” In saying this, she did not mean that people did not care about race or racism or that it did not exist. She again referred to the specific example of the parent who raised a concern about Ellie’s being white. Rather than adopting a stance of colorblindness, Ellie indicated that she was no longer afraid of conversations around race and felt comfortable addressing the parent’s concern.

From a structural aspect, a convincing case can be made that Ellie did not resolve the conflict present in her story within the final narrative she presented in the class. Yet it is interesting that as we revisited her story one last time, Ellie seemed inclined to bring closure. There are several plausible explanations for this. It could be that once the course was over Ellie did not care what I thought and no longer maintained the stance of a student asking self-reflective questions. It may be that given the proclivity toward resolution and a positive portrayal of self, what Labov and Waletzky call “self-aggrandizement” (1967, p. 38), Ellie supplied a resolution because she has been culturally conditioned to do so. Or it could be that revisiting the narrative and other cultural experiences within the course provided a platform for Ellie to use when confronted by the topic of race in her school setting. Although there is no definitive piece of evidence to prove that this last, and, admittedly, most positive stance is the most accurate, I am confident in saying that across the course in her writing and discussion, Ellie demonstrated that she was a reflective teacher who could engage with explorations of hot-lava topics. Like any of us, she was, and continues to be, limited in her explorations by the discourses she inhabits. When

the data are viewed as a whole, a clear pattern emerges. Ellie continually reflected on her position and chose to ask herself hard questions thus raising the opportunity and increasing the likelihood for her to re-interpret her narrative. A year later she still maintained the same reflective stance.

Conclusion

In analyzing Ellie’s narratives I have argued that the changes across the narratives reveal re-employment. In this analysis I have considered what changed (e.g., evaluative sequences, flash sequences, resolutions, self-directed questions) and how these changed by reconfiguring the relationship between events and their plot, through evaluation and interpretation of narratives, and ultimately, through the shift in how Ellie positions herself. This shift is evident in Ellie’s narrative as she moves from a point where her own whiteness is of no consequence to a point where she begins to ask: How do others see me? This is where Ellie takes a critical first step toward confronting her own ethnicity and what that means for her as a teacher working with African American students.

Ellie’s case demonstrates that the process of re-employment is a dialectic between events and interpretation. This non-linear process of revisiting her own story reveals the multi-voicedness of the Self (Bamberg, 1991) and demonstrates that we are not just one story but many stories, often conflicting, sometimes in concert. Ellie is at once the naive, white teacher who chooses to be colorblind and the more experienced teacher exploring what it means to be color conscious. At the same time that Ellie asks numerous self-directed questions where she begins to explore the position and prejudices that she has internalized, she positions her students and their community through references that mask her own whiteness by drawing attention to the blackness of the Other. The language Ellie uses and the resulting dissonance created by conflicting evaluations, resolutions, and positions, demonstrates how difficult it is to re-employ a narrative.

Implied throughout the analysis of Ellie’s narrative is the notion that individuals may sometimes fail in their efforts to re-employ a narrative, that their attempts at recreating stories may not result in changes between events and interpretation or changes in positioning. It suggests that some narratives may reify previous positions and interpretations held by a narrator. Bamberg suggests such re-interpretations fail, in part, due to the “communicative aspects [of interaction] that are constituted by language and discourse in their spe-
cific cultural/institutional settings” (Bamberg, 1991, p. 157). In other words, as narrators, we interpret life events in our primary discourse, which includes not only language, but beliefs and values (Gee, 1989). It is here that narrative retellings hold forth the possibility of helping teachers and others rethink their beliefs.

Narrative can act as a mediational tool (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), which helps us to re-employ events from another perspective so that we might begin to radically re-employ our life events and counter the reifying effects of narrative. Such re-employment or revisiting of narratives involves seeing the Self as both a process and an object, as Zuss (1997) observes: "Life-writings manifest an increasing, if at first an often tentative and delicate, engagement with the Self as both a process and an object crisscrossed by the powers and play of multiple actors, discourses, and positioning influences" (p. 174). As Ellie shows, this can involve reifying beliefs even as an individual begins to raise questions about them. In undertaking this “tentative and delicate engagement” of the Self, Ellie carries out a complicated and courageous task. Her multiple renditions of narrative demonstrate the power of stories to change and grow over time if opportunity is provided to revisit and reinterpret events.

In my experience as researcher and teacher educator, this tension of narrative as a catalyst and as a barrier is a contentious area. Often other educators with whom I have shared Ellie’s stories have sought to frame Ellie as either a resistant white teacher or an enlightened white teacher, thus implying a definition of narrative as both linear and static (Miller, 1998). To me, Ellie is neither enlightened white teacher nor resistant white teacher. Like all of us, Ellie’s identity is comprised of multiple dimensions and sometimes contradictory positions. To say that in a 15-week course, she confronted and resolved issues around race and culture that had been imparted to her across a lifetime would certainly be folly. Yet at the same time, Ellie demonstrates that revisiting a story can lead to new insights and reflections. Such narrative constructions are complex and defy easy categorization and assessment by teacher educators and researchers.

It is here that Ellie’s retellings point to the need for further research. Most prior research on retellings has been on spontaneous retellings, but when teacher educators propose narrative as an educational tool, it follows that we should then examine precisely if and how stories of race and culture might change as teachers revisit them. This is particularly important in light of van Dijk’s (1984) work, which posits that stories of racial stereotyping and prejudice are governed not only by social factors, but also by cognitive schemata. Van Dijk suggests that stories constructed about and around race are structured and schematized, in part, by the public discourses around racism (1993b). For this reason, educators and researchers must go beyond mere storytelling and representation through narrative to examine how topics are interactively constructed (Wortham, 2001).

In order to carry out such studies, researchers who examine discourse must also address methodological issues surrounding how narrative retellings can or should be analyzed. As Norrick (1998) noted, and I have also found in examining Ellie’s retellings, distilling only the kernel narratives masks differences across narratives. It is essential to examine other elements such as evaluation. Analysis of how a narrator changes evaluation of events is critical in thinking about the construction and transformation of Self, particularly around issues such as race where discourse may reflect deeply sedimented beliefs. In Ellie’s case, in drawing upon studies of whiteness and from various narrative methodologies developed from Labov and Waletzky (1967) and from Polanyi (1985), I was able to identify a method for examining narrative retellings in an educational setting to analyze what changes and what remains the same. This is but a small step, for as Bloome (2003) has noted, different forms of analysis can lead to different interpretations.

To date, there is a very limited body of studies examining teacher narratives as they are typically constructed within conversational discourse in teacher education settings. Additionally, studies of teacher narrative are needed that “map forward” by following teachers within teacher education settings and out into school contexts to examine how they enact the practices, positions, and beliefs they have narrated in their coursework (Cochran-Smith, Davies, & Fries, 2004, p. 966). Such investigations will allow for comparisons of how teachers position themselves though stories in teacher education settings and for how they enact those beliefs (or fail to enact them) in school settings.

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Appendix

Transcription key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventions</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Overlapping talk</td>
<td>Mary: That's when you were doing your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>() Non-verbal communication</td>
<td>&quot;I was talking to my partner that I ended up teaching with, and this is us right here and one of my classes (pointing to picture in note book).&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[] Words or phrases added</td>
<td>&quot;That was all I knew about it [the school].&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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...Talk tapers off: "And I didn't know... I didn't ever stand there and say "Oh my gosh, there's no way I could do this."

References


