



Situating Narrative-Minded Research: A Commentary on Anna Sfard and Anna Prusak's "Telling Identities"

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In their "Telling Identities: In Search of an Analytic Tool for Investigating Learning as a Culturally Shaped Activity" (*Educational Researcher*, May 2005), Anna Sfard and Anna Prusak articulate the promise of story or narrative in defining identity as an analytic tool in sociocultural research on learning. The article, as I read it, strives toward a process-rich notion of identity that responds to prior sociocultural articulations of identity as an analytic construct (e.g., Gee, 2001; Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Noting the dangers of treating identity as a product or an essential core that remains static over a lifetime—or that boils down to "is-statements" about "being a certain kind of person" (p. 16)—Sfard and Prusak theorize identity as a relational and dynamic process. That is, identity changes across time (cf. Lemke, 2000) and space (cf. Gee, 2001), and thus is always in motion. These changes depend, at least in part, on social and contextual interactions, rather than on inner or individual processes alone.

Theorizing identity as a process, the authors propose narrative, or story, as a definition that can allow the term *identity* to serve as a "missing link" (p. 15) for understanding individual learning in sociocultural contexts. The authors propose to "equate identities with stories about persons" (p. 14), which I shall refer to as the identity-as-narrative construct. Narratives provide a mechanism for capturing the always-in-motion process of identifying, because they are "*discursive counterparts* of one's lived experiences" (p. 17, emphasis in original). The authors build a theory of learning using this narrativized definition of identity. Sfard and Prusak distinguish between two sets of possible narratives about persons: "actual identities" and "designated identities" (p. 18). Whereas actual identities consist of "stories about the actual state of affairs" (p. 18), designated identities consist of "narratives presenting a state of affairs which, for one reason or another, is *expected* to be the case, if not now then in the future" (p. 18, emphasis in original). The authors define learning, finally, as closing the gap between actual and designated identity.¹ Illustrating this argument, an empirical example compares native and immigrant Israeli mathematics students (and a representative individual within each collective). Sfard and Prusak conclude with a call for "narrative-minded researchers" to shed new light on learning as cultural activity (p. 21).

Sharing Sfard and Prusak's goals for increasing narrative-minded research, I aim to clarify the term *narrative*, which is not defined in their article. Specifically, I elaborate two central issues. Sfard and Prusak locate the identity-as-narrative construct within a sociocultural tradition. Because the term *sociocultural* has been widely and divergently used in educational research, I clarify this term in relation to the identity-as-narrative construct. I identify

two genealogies of sociocultural work on narrative. Situating the identity-as-narrative construct in the American sociolinguistic tradition affords a useful definition of narrative as a unit of discourse that is distinct from non-narrative discourse. Further elaborating this affordance, the second section addresses the identity-as-narrative construct from a methodological standpoint. By conceptualizing narrative-minded research work as a series of rhetorical processes and choices, this discussion untangles some of the complexities of narrative definition, identification, translation, and transcription.

This response, in further fleshing out Sfard and Prusak's argument about narrative, should contribute to the project of rendering the identity-as-narrative construct explicit enough for use in the practice of research. I hope, too, that these clarifying remarks will bolster the likelihood of this construct being used credibly and generatively in educational research.

Situating Sociocultural Research on Identity-as-Narrative

In situating their argument, Sfard and Prusak note that identity has become an increasingly popular construct in educational research. They cite the emergence of a new "discourse of identity" in education (p. 14). Although the term identity proliferates in (indeed, defines) this discourse, they argue that it has not been defined carefully and operationalized. The defining and operationalizing task is even more complicated than Sfard and Prusak explicitly acknowledge, because the term identity has been commandeered by educational researchers drawing from and situating themselves within a wide range of disciplinary and methodological traditions. Consider, for example, that research on identity appears across such disparate areas of research as anthropology, educational psychology, literacy, mathematics, philosophy, political science, situated cognition, and sociology, to name just a few. Because of this diversity, it is probably more accurate to discuss a proliferation of discourses of identity in education. Somewhere within this plural field of educational research practices lies sociocultural research on identity in education, where the authors situate their argument.

Whereas Sfard and Prusak do not locate the identity-as-narrative construct explicitly within the landscape of possibility signified by a sociocultural approach to identity in education, the article does offer some signposts. At several points, the authors seem to be locating their usage of sociocultural within the broad territory of sociology, cultural theory, and education (pp. 14–15). Yet none of the primary theorists to whom they respond (e.g., Gee, a linguist; Holland, an anthropologist; Lave, a social anthropologist; and Wenger, a social learning theorist) could be described primarily as sociologist or cultural theorist or even educationist. Thus the article raises several important questions for narrative-

minded researchers to consider further: From where, in a vast landscape of theoretical and methodological possibilities, does any given sociocultural understanding of identity emerge? For example, when the authors refer to a “sociocultural turn in the human sciences” (p. 15), to what body(ies) of theory and research do they refer? Which traditions are relevant to the current argument about identity-as-narrative? And what do researchers-in-training need to learn about to study identity in education from a sociocultural perspective?

These questions warrant further consideration for several reasons. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of identity-focused educational research, it is important for researchers using the identity-as-narrative construct to situate their understanding of it within some tradition(s) of inquiry. By genealogical situating, I refer to tracing the disciplinary lineage(s), the intellectual lineage(s), or both, from which the use of central terms come (cf. Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). Using the term genealogy (rather than history, for example), highlights how any given contribution stands on the backs of others, becoming possible and imaginable through prior work. Furthermore, an important source of credibility in interpretive research is a deep working knowledge, and appropriate and coherent citation, of that tradition or those traditions from which one’s work emerges. Most researchers would agree that jumping aboard the bandwagon of sociocultural narrative study is to be discouraged, without a thorough understanding of the oftentimes interdisciplinary traditions from which one’s work stems.

Furthermore, situating research within—or in relation to—existing sociocultural traditions encourages epistemological and definitional clarity. For example, when James Gee uses the term “narrativization” (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16), Gee refers to a somewhat different precedent literature than does Wertsch (2002) when Wertsch uses the term “narrative.” Nevertheless, the narrative work of both researchers legitimately can be labeled as sociocultural. Working toward clarity can increase the generative potential of a work for future researchers. Such clarifying can do more than simply carve out clear future pathways for research (e.g., disciples following lockstep research agendas in the footsteps of their teachers). Ideally, it can inspire new pathways for future work, as researchers articulate the strengths and limitations of the traditions in which they and their mentors are working. Through so doing, it becomes possible consciously to develop new theory and research that builds on—and, in the best cases, becomes more than—these prior traditions and trajectories. These issues become especially critical when one contemplates programs of study for researchers-in-training. If narrative or story is to be the unit of discourse used by researchers (or researchers-in-training) studying (or learning to study) identity in sociocultural contexts, then each of these terms (sociocultural, discourse, narrative, identity) must be defined. Sfard and Prusak have usefully defined *identity*. I support and qualify their theory-building by clarifying three terms—sociocultural, discourse, and narrative—upon which their argument is built.

Whereas I will provide some definitions in this article, I do not hold my definitions to be the only, True, and correct definitions of these terms. Rather, I aim to show that terms and definitions such as narrative or sociocultural, come to be used in particular ways in different scholarly traditions. Therefore, narrative-minded researchers who label their work sociocultural should clarify what

they mean by this. Similarly, narrative-minded researchers should be able to define what they mean by narrative. By doing so, the strengths and limitations of the approach—and of the claims about narrative, identity, and learning that follow—should become more visible.

Situating the Sociocultural

The identity-as-narrative proposal can be situated in relation to at least two possible trajectories of sociocultural inquiry: the American sociolinguistic tradition following Hymes and the cultural psychological tradition following Vygotsky. Arguing that the former tradition is particularly useful for addressing methodological questions in narrative analysis, I situate the remainder of my argument within that tradition. Because discourse is an important term in my argument, I also clarify what I mean in using this term.

What, then, does the term sociocultural mean, and from where does its use in education come?² The term was used more than 30 years ago by Hymes (1972a), in a challenge for linguistic anthropologists to develop an ethnography of speaking that focuses on the role of language and communication in cultural practice. Hymes (1972b) critiqued Chomskian linguistics, reframing the linguistic notions of performance and competence toward the task of understanding language as an integral part of cultural processes. Perhaps most salient for educational researchers, Hymes took a particular interest in schooling and language acquisition; indeed, he articulated educational exigency for his theoretical work in anthropology (Hymes, 1972b). Sociocultural research in this tradition of linguistic anthropology has tended to focus attention on how persons creatively appropriate language, both as individual performers and as competent members of a cultural group (e.g., Collins, 1996; Dyson, 1993, 2003; Heath, 1983; Wortham & Rymes, 2002). Thus, this work might be called multidirectional insofar as it draws attention to various interactions among individuals, communities, and social practices. For example, work in the linguistic anthropology of education takes an interest in how individuals shape emerging local practices, how local practices shape more durable social structures, and how available cultural resources shape individual practices or performances. With respect to identity-as-narrative, this sociocultural tradition has developed narrative as a link between individual and community practice, with a considerable body of research focusing explicitly or peripherally on identity (e.g., Gee, 1985, 1989a; Heath, 1982, 1983; Hymes, 1981, 1996; Mishler, 1999; Wortham, 2001, 2004).

The term sociocultural was used later, but perhaps popularized more widely among educational researchers, by Wertsch (1991), who was involved in the translation and application of Vygotskian ideas in Western contexts (cf. Wertsch, 1985). The Vygotskian tradition in educational research has been interested primarily in *mind* and in how language and, more recently, other semiotic resources mediate higher order thinking. In this way, cognition and learning are conceptualized as culturally shaped (e.g., Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). The neo-Vygotskian tradition of sociocultural work in education—for example, in cultural psychology (Cole, 1996)—attends to language within the context of a more unidirectional inquiry into the social and cultural forces that shape individual cognition and learning. If a key focus in the Hymesian tradition is on how individuals creatively appropriate discursive

and cultural resources, then a key focus of the Vygotskian tradition might be on how individuals internalize such resources (Cazden, 2001). Although the Vygotskian tradition does not feature narrative analysis as prominently as the linguistic anthropology tradition, Wertsch (2002) articulated a neo-Vygotskian theory of how narratives mediate processes of collective remembering. Wertsch focuses in particular on how oral narratives and textbook narratives in history classrooms transmit (often unconsciously) significant collective storylines about nationalistic memories, for example about the Second World War.

It is not trivial to note the difference between how the term sociocultural has developed in linguistic anthropology following Hymes and in cultural psychology and practice theory following Vygotsky.³ The distinction is worth making when using constructs such as identity, discourse, and narrative in the service of credibility and generativity. Further, these two disciplinary traditions of sociocultural work support different methodological procedures and different sorts of research questions. I am not trying to suggest that these two traditions of sociocultural research on identity could not be, or should not be, brought together in educational research. In fact, I believe that is a worthwhile project, perhaps an important pathway for providing a complete account of identity. I am suggesting that researchers situating their work as sociocultural need to define clearly what they mean by that term, and to articulate where in the landscape of possibilities they are located when they use the term. My use of the term sociocultural in what follows will be rooted in the first tradition, the linguistic anthropology of education (Wortham & Rhymes, 2002).

Situating Discourse

A second term that warrants clarification in defining the identity-as-narrative construct is discourse.⁴ Sfard and Prusak are clear that the identity-as-narrative construct assumes identity to be “human-made” rather than “God-given” (p. 17) or “extra-discursive” in any other way (p. 16). They assert that narrative is not a window onto identity;⁵ rather narrative *is* identity (p. 14). Thus, they suggest, identity is a discursive construct. Yet the terms *discursive* and *discourse* prove to be slippery within the landscape of educational research, even within sociocultural research. For example, when Sfard and Prusak use the term *discourse* as they do throughout the article, are they referring to the use of that term by Cazden (2001), Nystrand (1997), and others who study the everyday, moment-by-moment unfolding of classroom discourse in relation to learning and instruction? Or do they draw from the widely used (in education) discourse/Discourse distinction suggested by Gee (1996), which treats Discourses (big D) as durable, structuring cultural collectives into which persons are affiliated through a variety of discursive and extra-discursive means? Are they inspired by systemic functional linguistic understandings of discourse as language above the level of the sentence (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1976)? Might they even be relying on Foucauldian or other critical senses of the term discourse as used in education (e.g., Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999; Rogers, 2004), which focus more explicitly on relations among language, social structures, and power?

It is not clear how Sfard and Prusak are defining discourse: in places, the terms appears to be used in an everyday sense as *talk* (e.g., p. 15); in others it is treated more as Gee’s Discourse (e.g., p. 16); and in others it appears to be used interchangeably

with the very general term *language* (p. 21). Yet this definition crucially undergirds any effort to define identity as discursively constructed, for how discourse is defined constrains the arguments that may be made about narrative-as-identity. For example, when Sfard and Prusak state that identities are “*discursive* counterparts to lived experience” (p. 17, emphasis added), they could be limiting their definition to *linguistic* signs that index or represent a person’s lived experience. Following this definition, only linguistic data about one’s personal experience would count as admissible evidence in constructing an account of identity. Because the notion of “identities as extra-discursive entities” (p. 16) is rejected by Sfard and Prusak, it becomes particularly important to know how the distinction between discursive and extra-discursive is drawn.

For clarity in what follows, I will adapt Silverstein & Urban’s (1996) use of the term, designating discourse to refer to “ongoing social [semiotic] action” involving language (p. 1). A central question following from this definition explores how *texts*, such as narratives, come to be pulled out and bounded as separate from the heteroglossic sea of discourse that is human communication (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist, 1990). This question suggests a cluster of issues: How do sociocultural researchers define narratives? In the words of Silverstein and Urban (1996), how do researchers “extract a portion of [discourse] . . . from its infinitely rich, exquisitely detailed context, and draw a boundary around it” (p. 1)? How, then, is narrative distinguished from non-narrative discourse? How and when are narratives transcribed and translated? How are narrative data presented in research articles? These questions are addressed in the following section.

Defining and Operationalizing Identity-as-Narrative: Some Help from Sociolinguistics

Because Sfard and Prusak equate “collections of stories about persons” that are “reifying, endorsable, and significant” with identities (p. 16),⁶ it follows that defining stories or narratives is critical to operationalizing this construct. Given the proliferation of research focused on story and narrative in education (e.g., Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Florio-Ruane, 2001; Gee, 1985, 1989a, 1989b, 1991; Gomez, Walker, & Page, 2000; Hicks, 1994; Huber & Whelan, 1999; Hymes, 1996; Johnson, 2005; Juzwik, 2004b, 2006; Mishler, 1999; Rex et al., 2002; Vasquez, 2005) and more specifically in research on the relationship between narrative and learning (e.g., Cazden, 2001; Juzwik, Nystrand, Kelly, & Sherry, 2006; Kerschbaum, 2005; Michaels, 1981; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Poveda, 2002, 2003; Wortham, 2001), this is no small task for researchers seeking to understand identity and learning through narrative.

The need for this task is illustrated in Sfard and Prusak’s article. To elaborate their narrative theory of identity as also a theory about learning, Sfard and Prusak introduce two subsets of reifying, significant narratives: “*actual identity*, consisting of stories about the actual state of affairs, and *designated identity*, consisting of narratives presenting a state of affairs which . . . is *expected* to be the case, if not now then in the future” (p. 18). However, the authors go on to give examples that do not seem intuitively to be narratives; rather, the examples appear to be statements. The statement “I am a good driver” serves as an example of actual identity, the first subset of narratives about persons. The statement “I want to be a doctor” is offered as an example of design-

nated identity, the second subset of narratives about persons (p. 18). In the paragraph following these definitions and examples, moreover, the authors refer to these bits of discourse as “scenarios” (p. 18). These examples of actual and designated identities lead one to wonder how statements come to count as narratives or stories and whether scenarios are the same as narratives.

The sociolinguistic study of narrative provides one logical and promising direction to turn for definitions of narrative and story, because it comprises one important body of knowledge about human communication in cultural contexts (cf. Sford & Prusak, p. 18). This trajectory of narrative study was developed by sociologist Labov in the 1960s and has been followed by numerous narrative scholars and researchers since.⁷ In particular, sociolinguistic approaches have insisted on attention to structure and to social interaction, as well as to content, when studying narratives (cf. Johnson, 2005; Johnstone, 2001). These further two layers of analysis (structure, social interaction) are particularly relevant in extending and applying Sford and Prusak’s argument to educational research, because if narrative is not to be treated as a window onto identity, then it is necessary to pay closer attention to the language itself through which narrative is constructed. Thus, my discussion should provide methodological guidance for analyzing identity as a discursive construct.

Identifying and Defining Narrative: A Structural Approach

A structural understanding of narrative, as provided by Labov (1972) and Labov and Waletzky (1967), offers one useful strategy for determining what is narrative and what is not narrative within a data set. A minimal narrative, according to Labov (1972) is a series of at least two temporally sequenced clauses that are linked causally. This basic criterion provides sociolinguists with a mechanism to distinguish narrative from non-narrative discourse. Labov (1972) gives the following example of a minimal narrative uttered during a research interview:

- a. I know a boy named Harry
- b. Another boy threw a bottle at him right in the head
- c. And he had to get seven stitches. (p. 361)

This example contains only two narrative (temporally sequenced) clauses, lines b and c, and these two clauses are linked causally (i.e., the stitches were needed on Harry’s head *because* an intentionally thrown and well-aimed bottle cut his head). Although this narrative may or may not be “reifying, endorsable, and significant” (Sford & Prusak, p. 16), it could become part of an emerging or ongoing storied identification of Harry or the cut boy, which could be relevant for how either is identified (by teachers or by fellow students) as a participant in school (e.g., one is always getting bullied, the other is a dangerous bully). This structural definition of narrative should allow researchers to discern what discourse is narrative, and what discourse is not, within a body of discourse data.⁸

In addition to defining narrative as a detachable unit of discourse, sociolinguists established a precedent for linking identity and story. More specifically, this research suggested a useful distinction between story and narrative with regard to studies of identity. Linde’s (1993) linguistic treatment of the *life story* is especially relevant, for it takes up the question of how persons craft coherent identities through the telling of life stories. In Linde’s (1993) textual analyses, life stories are a broader unit than narra-

tive. This sense of the term *story* is captured by the idiomatic question, “What’s your story?” used to mean something like “Who are you?” A narrative can be a subunit of a person’s life story, one part that contributes to a bigger whole (i.e., the story). Linde asserts that there are other discourse genres beyond narrative (i.e., recount, explanation) that contribute to the construction of one’s life story. This means that one’s life story could be in the form of narrative (i.e., a kind of meta-narrative) or it could be a generic hybrid that includes narratives and other genres such as explanation. The narrative–story distinction also can be conceptualized in terms of time scales (Lemke, 2000): narrative usually occurs on a smaller time scale than life story. Because life stories are constructed over long periods of time (i.e., lifetimes), any research effort to capture life story through systematic study of language will arrive only at a partial life story.⁹

I emphasize that I am not trying to define narrative and story once and for all, as distinct from one another; rather, I am trying to point out the difference in degree and scale between a minimal narrative, such as the narrative of Harry’s cut head (which may, in fact, be trivial to Harry’s identity), and the more enduring stories that constitute one’s identity. This difference matters for operationalizing narrative as an analytic for research on identity and learning.

Following Linde’s sociolinguistic usage, narrative (as distinct from story) is a discourse unit defined as temporally sequenced clauses, causally linked (Labov, 1972). However, Linde (1993) enriches Labov’s minimal definition of narrative by adding the proviso that a narrative must include *evaluation*, the teller’s point of view on recounted events. In Linde’s (1993) words, “narrative is a presentation of the self, and the evaluative component in particular establishes the kind of self that is presented” (p. 81). Even the minimal narrative example above displays evaluation. The phrase “right in the head” emphasizes that being hit in the head by a bottle is much worse than just having a bottle thrown at another body part, such as one’s hand or foot. The auxiliary verb *had* in “had to get” may suggest the hassle of a trip to the hospital and that seven (rather than one or two) is a lot of stitches. Thus, for Linde, narrative must suggest a point of view in relation to recounted events.¹⁰

More recently, Ochs and Capps (2001) reframe evaluation as *moral stance-taking*, which they show to be a central dimension of conversational narrative practice. Not only useful for defining narrative, taking a moral stance is an important identity-constituting aspect of everyday narratives about persons:

Moral stance is a disposition towards what is good or valuable and how one ought to live in the world. Human beings judge themselves and others in relation to standards of goodness: they praise, blame, or otherwise hold people morally accountable for their comportment. While moral understandings are transmitted through a variety of cultural forms such as proverbs, laws, maxims, advice, songs, and visual representations, everyday narratives of personal experience elaborately encode and perpetuate moral worldviews . . . personal narrative is akin to prayer in that both imbue experience with moral direction . . . personal narrative provides a secular interactive means of building a moral philosophy of how one ought to live. (pp. 45–46)

For Ochs and Capps, storied identities are accomplished interactionally, often through open-ended and permeable narratives (the sorts of narratives often co-told among intimates) in which

moral stances are donned, developed, explored, and sometimes abandoned. Moral stances are not just encoded in narrative; they are socially enacted through narrative tellings and co-tellings.

In this way, Ochs and Capps extend the structural approach of Labov and Linde, showing how the criteria of evaluation or moral stance may become a relevant analytic for studying the identity-as-narrative construct. Even in minimal narratives, moral stances saturate narrators' accounts of themselves and others and of human actions in the world. For example, in Labov's minimal narrative example presented above, the way one believes things ought to be (e.g., boys should not throw bottles at other boys' heads) may be violated in the narrative, thus making it reportable. If so, this implicitly affirms the normative status of boys not throwing bottles at other boys' heads. How and what moral stances are enacted in narrative may prove to be the most relevant dimension of narrative study for researchers interested in actual and designated identity.

Without evaluation or moral stance, the discourse is considered a *recount* (more like a list or a timeline) and not a narrative (Linde, 1993). The accumulation of narratives over time and across contexts adds up to what Linde calls a person's life story. To determine which narratives form parts of a life story, and which do not, Sfard and Prusak's criteria of "reifying, endorsable, and significant" stories is useful (p. 16). Linde (1993) also provides useful criteria for determining which narratives are part of a developing life story: those that "have *extended reportability*; that is, they are tellable and are told and retold over the course of a long period of time" (p. 21, emphasis added). This construct could be one useful way of further specifying Sfard and Prusak's "significance" criterion.

Thus Linde's notion of life story mostly seems to fit the sense in which Sfard and Prusak interchangeably use the terms story and narrative as the appropriate unit for analyzing identity. The term life story, as used in Linde (1993), may have more agent-centered resonances than the usage by Sfard and Prusak, who are more interested in community stories that impinge upon individual learning. Linde's life story is also narrower than Sfard and Prusak's story, because Linde only focuses on self-told life stories in research interview contexts (${}_A A_C$), rather than on those stories told by significant narrators (${}_B A_A$ or ${}_B A_C$), which are important to Sfard and Prusak's treatment of narrative, particularly the idea of significant narrators. However, Linde's definition might be broadened (beyond life story to story) to accommodate Sfard and Prusak's broader sense.

The central point here is that educational researchers using the construct of story will need to define and operationalize criteria—such as "reifying, endorsable, and significant" (Sfard and Prusak) or "extended reportability" (Linde)—for what counts as a person's story or life story. In the remainder of this response, I follow Linde's distinction between narrative and story. In this revision, it is a life story, rather than a narrative, that can be equated with identity. Thus I shall revise the proposed construct to identity-as-story.

I have thus far elaborated a structural orientation to narrative, a perspective particularly useful for defining what is narrative and what is not and for examining how narratives accumulate over time to form a life story. In summary, narrative is a unit of discourse that can be operationalized in narrative analysis. Life story is a broader unit constituted by narratives, as well as by other

forms of discourse. Life story, operationalized through the linguistic unit of narrative, provides a usable construct for treating identity as multidirectional link or pivot between individuals and sociocultural contexts. I also introduced evaluation, or moral stance, as a further criterion for defining narrative, a dimension particularly relevant for researchers interested in identity. The next section turns to the analytical pathways through which researchers approach identity-as-story.

Transcription and Translation

In introducing Prusak's empirical study of native and immigrant Israeli mathematics students, Sfard and Prusak raise at least two intriguing sets of questions about the rhetorical processes involved in narrative research. The first set of issues, implicitly raised by the paper, relates to the analytical processes, choices, and strategies that go into transcription. The second relates to the presentation of data, what Sfard and Prusak explicitly discuss as a researcher's "story about stories" (p. 20).¹¹ Because their piece does not present a discussion of the first set of issues, I highlight the significance and the complexity of transcription practices in narrative-minded research. To their discussion of storied data presentation, I also add a comment about translation.

From a procedural standpoint, sociolinguistic narrative research typically involves careful analysis of recorded and systematically transcribed language. As already discussed, researchers must identify the criteria for determining what is, and what is not, a narrative within a large collection of discourse data (e.g., classroom recordings and observations, interviews, meetings, public documents, etc.). The structural definition of narrative discussed above provides one criterion for other narrative researchers to use or adapt. This process is only a beginning, however. Once a narrative is identified as detachable from a stream of oral discourse data, a process Silverstein and Urban (1996) refer to as decontextualization, researchers must then entextualize the spoken discourse, that is, render it into written form. The relationship between spoken and written word is not straightforward (e.g., Besnier, 1995; Biber, 1988; Tannen, 1982); therefore, this can be a complicated task.

Narrative researchers have for some time argued—and more recently assumed—that transcription is theoretical work (Haviland, 1996; Mishler, 1991; Ochs, 1979). For this reason, transcription should be understood as an analytical step in narrative discourse analysis. Further, because the question of how to transcribe oral narratives has been the subject of intense debates in sociolinguistic narrative studies (e.g., Gee, 1991; Hymes, 1981, 1996; Mishler, 1991; Tedlock, 1983), researchers using oral narrative data should be aware of some of the key issues in these debates. Some researchers (e.g., Hymes, 1981) advocate dividing narratives into lines and stanzas in order to convey the spoken performance. This allows narrative-minded researchers to foreground the expressive (in addition to the referential or interactional) aspects of narrative, a potentially important facet of narrative in interpreting identity-as-story. For example, in a recent classroom study, I transcribed an oral teacher narrative (told during a Holocaust unit) that began like this:

1. The whole forced immigration,
2. I think it was John who
3. Pretty early in the,
4. In the unit,

5. Said,
6. Well why didn't he [Hitler] just have them [Jews] all leave?
7. Why didn't he just kick 'em all out?
8. Why did he have to kill all of 'em?
9. Well in 1938,
10. After this event,
11. He couldn't (Juzwik, 2004a).

Because I was interested in understanding teaching as performative and rhetorical practice, I chose to break down the narrative into relatively small discursive chunks (lines), in which each line included everything said between a pause (Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Other researchers choose to transcribe narratives into prose paragraphs. For example, Rex et al. (2002) present a teacher narrative that began: "I want to tell you a little story. About twenty years ago—I can't believe it—actually, no, probably seventeen, only seventeen. It was when you guys were born, about. I was teaching at LC Junior High and I had a student who was in my English class and also was my aide" (p. 779). Because the researchers were primarily interested in the content and pedagogical function, rather than the structure or performance of the narrative, this decision to transcribe the narrative as prose was logical.

These examples (especially the more unfamiliar line numbers and breaks in the first narrative) demonstrate that, in narrative research, transcription choices and procedures must be theorized, defended, and systematized by a researcher or among members of a research team (Ochs, 1979). These transcription choices matter because they shape the subsequent analytical possibilities in the process of research. Often, however, the choices and processes that go into transcription remain invisible in articles and final reports of the research. To increase credibility in presenting discourse-oriented research (e.g., in a book or in an article), narrative-minded researchers should explain and make visible these rhetorical transcription processes that form the *underlife* of narrative research.

The presentation of narrative data in research articles, books, reports, and so on offers another area of complexity, one that is explicitly addressed by Sfard and Prusak (p. 20). Some researchers, if quoting the words of participants, use a key indicating transcription conventions to translate potentially unfamiliar conventions used to re-present spoken language as written text (e.g., using a colon to represent the elongation of a vowel sound).¹² Because of space limitations, however, Sfard and Prusak choose to summarize their informants' stories. Imagine the chain of rhetorical processes required for producing their summarizing stories about OldTimer Leah and NewComer Sonya in *Educational Researcher*: the researchers identified narratives in the data set, transcribed them, analyzed them, and transformed them into the stories presented in the article. This process, already rhetorically complex, also involved translation. Prusak's dissertation was written in Hebrew, and presumably the oral narratives Sfard and Prusak studied were spoken in Hebrew (Sfard & Prusak, p. 22), whereas the article published in *Educational Researcher* was written in English. This example raises further questions about the rhetorical processes of transcription, analysis, and presentation: At what point are the narrative data to be translated? Who does the translating? What, if anything, is "lost" in translation? What, if anything is "found" in translation. How is translation systematized?¹³

The sociolinguistic tradition of narrative study helps clarify those rhetorical processes or circulating networks of practice

(Latour, 1999) through which a researcher needs to move to arrive at credible interpretation. Because they are interpretive, sociolinguistic approaches to narrative admittedly do not claim to establish certainty. To be credible, however, studies of learning using the identity-as-story construct—through a narrativized definition and operationalization—should follow careful interpretive procedures and clarify those procedures such that the conclusions reached are at least traceable (to and from data) by others attempting to replicate their work or to do related work.

Conclusion

I have argued that defining the terms narrative and story is critical to operationalizing Sfard and Prusak's identity-as-story construct in research. I traced traditions of sociocultural inquiry from which narrative inquiry might emerge, and I presented how the identity-as-story construct can be defined and put to use within one such tradition, American sociolinguistics. I emphatically am not trying to suggest that there is one right way to define narrative in sociocultural research on learning; claiming to fix eternally the meaning of either narrative or identity would be an error. I do, however, intend to show that the tradition through which one approaches, defines, and analyzes narrative (and story) will affect what can be understood about identity and, consequently, about learning. Toward the goal of clarity, sociocultural researchers who use Sfard and Prusak's identity-as-story framework ought to identify the particular tradition(s) of narrative study inspiring and informing their work. This clarifying should increase the likelihood that the research will be generative for other researchers.

One consequence of such situating is that the identity-as-story construct likely will need to be qualified. For example, if one defines discourse from a sociolinguistic perspective, a person's identity is not wholly discursively constructed (e.g., via discourse, or story), nor is it a wholly extra-discursive entity (e.g., to which language provides a window). Identity is both discursively and extra-discursively forged. This does not diminish the promise of examining identifying processes through the analytic lens of narrative; rather, it qualifies the relationship between story and identity. Thus narrative is treated as constitutive of identity, and story is treated as a "discursive counterpart of lived experience" (Sfard & Prusak, p. 17), but a person's identity is never perfectly coincident to one's life story.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, then, it would be inaccurate to reject that there are extra-discursive dimensions of identity, as Sfard and Prusak seem to do (e.g., p. 16). Consider, for example paralinguistic semiotic forms, such as gesture, tone of voice, apparel, hairstyle, and so on that accomplish identifying without necessarily including language. Even if one were to include some or all of these semiotic resources as discourse (e.g., following Gee's usage of Discourse), that inclusion does not negate what is biologically and culturally given to a child at birth (e.g., sex, family membership). Individuals come into this world with a number of identifying features extra-discursively given. Some of these features will give rise to or limit possibilities for identity. I readily concede, however, that other definitions of discourse (beyond sociolinguistics) could lead to other claims about the discursive and extra-discursive aspects of identity.

When identifying the traditions from which narrative and identity are being conceptualized, it becomes possible to assess the

strengths and weaknesses of the approach and of the argument a researcher is making. For example, Sfard and Prusak situate their proposal of identity-as-story as an extension and an implicit critique of Gee's (2001) definition and discussion of identity. As it turns out, however, Gee's work can be placed legitimately within this American sociolinguistic tradition.¹⁴ In numerous articles (e.g., 1985; 1989a, b; 1991), Gee has, through structural narrative analysis, enacted a narrativized approach to identity in education, particularly literacy education. In following Gee's work through his methodological sources, it becomes evident that, despite the interdisciplinary range of his scholarship, Gee's method of discourse analysis emerged from and contributed to a well-established tradition of sociolinguistic study. And the work derives much of its credibility from these shoulders on which it stands.

The limitations of Gee's treatment of identity are better understood through an appreciation of Gee's location within this American sociolinguistic tradition.¹⁵ As more critical or sociological researchers are likely to notice in the sociolinguistic approach to narrative analysis I have articulated, this approach does not start at the level of culture *writ large*. Rather, analysis starts more locally with culture or discourse in emergent, linguistically and interactionally structured communicative practices (e.g., Hanks, 1996). Sociolinguistic researchers of narrative in education (cf. Wortham, 2001) have understood narrative as a multidirectional link among individuals and various layered aspects of sociocultural contexts. Narrative tellings and life stories dialogically interact with one another and with cultural processes and various levels of group identification on the one hand,¹⁶ and with individual and situational particularities on the other. The sociolinguistic tradition has not, as I understand it, sought primarily to understand processes through which "the wider community, with its distinct cultural-discursive traditions, impinges on its members' learning" (Sfard & Prusak, p. 19). This is an important limitation of a sociolinguistic understanding of identity-as-story.

However, one important strength of the sociolinguistic understanding of identity-as-story is missing from Sfard and Prusak's articulation and empirical example of that construct: a robust treatment of how individuals appropriate language as "active agents who play decisive roles in determining the dynamics of social life and in shaping individual activities" (Sfard & Prusak, p. 15). The problem of agency and communicative practice in sociocultural research on learning deserves more elaboration and consideration; however, I would like to make a concluding comment in this direction. Human agency would seem to arise from the complex interplay between (a) the semiotic forms, of which narrative is but one, that individuals choose to use in making and negotiating identities; and (b) those discursive and extra-discursive semiotic resources that are made available to, or even given to, persons from without and that provide constraints on possible identities. Because they seem concerned primarily with the latter part of this duality, Sfard and Prusak's empirical demonstration and account of identity-as-story present a partial treatment of identity. Unlike work on narrative and identity in the American sociolinguistic tradition, Sfard and Prusak background the particularity and ineluctable creativity of agents in communicative practices. Only such an enrichment of Sfard and Prusak's sociocultural theory of identity and their operationalization of identity-as-story will allow successful pursuit of one of their leading (and

closing) questions: Why do different individuals act differently in the same situations? (p. 14, p. 21).

NOTES

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¹In my reading, this definition resonates with Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) theory of learning in the Zone of Proximal Development.

²Personal conversations and correspondences with Anne Haas Dyson, Martin Nystrand, and Charles Bazerman assisted my effort to disentangle the uses of the term sociocultural.

³One could probably trace other traditions in which this term has developed, e.g., post-structuralism.

⁴Sawyer (2002) provides a helpful archaeology of the term discourse, dealing with the term more comprehensively and historically than space allows here.

⁵Some readers may wonder, what would *narrative not being a window onto identity* amount to if stated without a metaphor? On my reading, when Sfard and Prusak assert that narrative is not a window onto identity, they are implicitly critiquing a significant body of research that focuses on teachers' or students' stories about their practices, preparation, learning, and so on. Rather than treating these stories as active, dynamic processes of identification, much of the research treats these stories as signals or signifiers of a stable, already-existing identity. In this way, the research to which Sfard and Prusak respond assumes stories to be mere windows onto an inner essence or state of being that is prior to the story and thus relatively stable. As I understand their argument, Sfard and Prusak are taking issue with this general approach to narrative and story in educational research (p. 16).

⁶The endorsability criterion of this definition deserves further comment, because this term, as used in everyday language (and in some philosophical discussions, e.g., Copp, 2002) carries a positive valence. In this usage, the definition of endorsability would be something like wholehearted affirmation or support, for example, "I endorse this candidate for political office." Sfard and Prusak offer a broader definition of "endorsability": "a story about a person counts as endorsable if the identity-builder, when asked, would say that it faithfully reflects the state of affairs in the world" (p. 16). In this broader sense of endorsability, one's identity can include aspects of oneself that one regrets, is ashamed of, and so on.

⁷For a broad overview of work in this research trajectory, see articles in Bamberg, 1997.

⁸A fully formed narrative, as opposed to a minimal narrative, includes six additional features: orientation, abstract, complicating action, resolution, evaluation, and coda (Labov, 1972; Labov & Waletzky, 1967). Because it is not crucial to the identification of narrative as opposed to non-narrative, language, I do not go into detail about fully formed narratives here.

⁹See Mishler's (1999) study of craftartists' life stories.

¹⁰In face-to-face interaction, point of view in narrative is also accomplished through paralinguistic means, such as gesture and tone of voice.

¹¹Sfard and Prusak elaborate:

Because of the limitation of space, we will talk about what students said rather than reproducing their exact words. Aware of the limitations of such an approach, we urge the reader to remember that what follows is a story about stories: It is our story of the NewComers' and OldTimers' own narratives, and not authorless assertions about 'who these students really were.' In other words, ours are stories of the type $\text{researchers}_{[AA]} \text{readers}$ and $\text{researchers}_{[AA]} \text{readers}$ rather than of the type $\text{researchers}_{A} \text{readers}$. (p. 20)

¹²For example, Wortham, 2001, p. 26

¹³Benjamin (1968) argues that these matters of translation are not novel; rather, they are fundamental to the act and nature of writing.

¹⁴It is probably also the case that Gee's work can be placed within other traditions of research and scholarship, for example psycholinguistics and

neo-Marxist theory. This being true should not diminish the significance of Gee's work within and contributions to the sociolinguistic tradition of narrative study.

¹⁵Here I am referring specifically to Gee's narrative analyses (e.g., 1985, 1989, 1991) and not to his discussion of the discourse/Discourse binary (e.g., Gee, 1996), which I believe to be less grounded in the American sociolinguistic tradition and more indebted to neo-Marxist theory (e.g., Althusser, 1971).

¹⁶I prefer the term *dialogic* to conceptualize these interactions (following Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), to the term *dialectic* that is used by Sford and Prusak, which is freighted with a great deal of philosophical usage that needs to be clarified. As well, the term dialectic generally implies that synthesis is forthcoming, whereas the dialogic (at least, in Bakhtin's sense) implies more of an ongoing chain of communication (Bakhtin, 1986).

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