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# Narrative as resource for the display of self and identity: The narrative construction of an oppositional identity\*

## La narrativa como recurso de representación de si mismo: La construcción narrativa de una identidad en contraposición

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### Abstract

Narrative is a system of understanding that we use to construct and express meaning in our daily lives. The stories we narrate are not just resources for the development and presentation of the individual self; they allow us to see how identity is constructed within social and cultural worlds (Bruner, 1990). Schools and communities play a powerful role in shaping students identities; the ways in which stories are told and the identities they create are influenced by the environment in which they take place. In this paper, by using excerpts from a conversation I had with a High School student in an urban school in Bogotá, I will discuss how narrative analysis can be used to understand the way students construct their identities within their schools and communities. First, I will present the theoretical contexts linking narrative with self-construction. Next, I will discuss the methodological implications in the process of collecting and representing experiences highlighting the possibilities of narrative to make visible the construction of identities. Then pieces of a narrative told in a research interview will be analyzed illustrating different approaches of narrative analysis. The paper will conclude with a section that outlines the implications of using narrative in educational research.

**Keywords:** Narrative inquiry, Identity construction, Positioning

### Resumen

La narrativa es un sistema de comprensión de que usamos para construir y expresar el sentido de nuestra vida cotidiana. Las historias que narramos no son sólo los recursos para el desarrollo y presentación del yo individual, sino que nos permiten ver cómo la identidad se construye dentro de los mundos sociales y culturales (Bruner, 1990). Las escuelas y las comunidades juegan un papel importante en la conformación de las identidades de los estudiantes, las formas en que se cuentan historias y las identidades que crean son influenciados por el entorno en el que tienen lugar. En este trabajo, utilizando extractos de una conversación con un estudiante de bachillerato en un colegio urbano en Bogotá, se discute cómo el análisis de la narrativa se puede utilizar para comprender la manera los alumnos construyen sus identidades dentro de sus escuelas y comunidades. En primer lugar, se presentan perspectivas teóricas que abordan la relación entre la narrativa y la construcción de identidades. A continuación, se discute las implicaciones metodológicas en el proceso de recolección y representación de experiencias. A continuación, fragmentos del relato de un estudiante son analizados para ilustran los diferentes enfoques de análisis narrativo. El documento concluye con una sección que describe las implicaciones del uso de la narrativa en la investigación educativa. Palabras clave: Investigación narrativa, construcción de identidad, posicionamiento



## Introduction: Locating Narrative

The study of narrative does not fit within the boundaries of any single discipline. For the past two decades, many disciplines in the social sciences and humanities have incorporated the study of narrative as the organizing principle for human action. This interest in narrative has entered history (White, 1981), folklore (Behar, 1993), psychology (Bruner, 1990; Davies & Harré, 1990; Mishler, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988; Schiffrin, 1996; Wortham, 2000), sociology and sociolinguistic (Labov and Waletzky, 1997; Gee, 1986; Linde, 1993; Ochs & Capps, 1996) as well as anthropology (Tannen, 1997).

Narrative is a system of understanding that we use to construct and express meaning in our daily lives. White (1981) argues that narrative is an innate human ability; he emphasizes the naturalness of narrativity through which people endow experience with meaning. Similarly, Bruner (1990) asserts that narrative is “a system by which people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world” (p.35). Polkinghorne (1988) adds that narrative is “the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful” (p.11), he adds “we live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meanings of our past actions, anticipating the outcomes of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed”. Similarly, Ochs & Capps (1996) claim, “Narrative activity provides tellers with an opportunity to impose order on otherwise disconnected events, and to create continuity between past, present, and imagined worlds” (p. 19). Shortly, it is through narrative that we represent and restructure our world in our daily lives.

Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself (Riesman, 1993), it can be seen as an opening window of the

mind and the culture of the teller (Cortazzi, 1993). In this paper, by using excerpts from a conversation I had with a High School student in an urban school in Bogotá, I will discuss how narrative analysis can be used to understand the way students construct their identities within their schools and communities. My intention is to provide an analytic case on the way in which a student positions himself in ways unexpected and paradoxical in relation with the dominant institutional and social discourses. First, I will present the theoretical contexts linking narrative with self-construction. Next, I will discuss the methodological implications in the process of collecting and representing experiences. Then pieces of a narrative told in a research interview will be analyzed. The paper will conclude with a section that outlines the implications of using narrative in educational research.

### Narrative and Identity

*An important challenge to humanity is to recognize that lives are the pasts we tell ourselves*

Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps

*“Narrating the self”*

Educators, therapists, social scientists, literary theorists, and others broadly interested in the human condition are in general agreement that there is a special affinity between narrative and self, such that narrative play a privileged role in the process of self-construction (Bruner, 1990; Davies & Harré, 1990; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998; Linde, 1993; Mishler, 1991; Ochs & Capps, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1988; Schiffrin, 1996; Wortham, 2000). Individuals tend to construct personal stories and accounts of their lives, in which they position themselves as protagonists (Gergen & Gergen, 1983). As a text structure, narratives formalize the sequence of



actions, events, feelings, and thoughts of unique characters in specific situations. Narrative forms may thus represent a more congenial framework for understanding identity than the expository structures derived from decontextualized, abstract or logical thought (Polkinghorne, 1991). In talking about narrative as a self-portrait, Schiffrin (1996) asserts “the ability of narrative to verbalize and situate experience as text (both locally and globally) provides a resource for the display of self and identity” (p.167).

Bruner claims that narrative is a form, not only of representing but of constituting reality as well: “we eventually *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about our lives” (Bruner, 1987, p.15). We not only plot our lives retrospectively when we pour it or its episodes into narrative format, but we also seem to construct what we call ‘our memories’ in narrative configurations (Bamberg, 1997). Based on this assumption, narrative and identity are not separable entities but, instead, serve to mutually constitute one another. This rejects the possibility of a “pure” narrative form, a structure that somehow stands apart from the identities that populate it. Equally, it rejects the notion of an identity existing in isolation from the narratives by which it is rendered intelligible.

From this perspective, narrative mediates between experience and meaning and it tells us less about *events* than about their *meanings*. Ochs & Capps (1996) remind us that narratives are versions of reality, “they are embodiments of one or more points of view rather than objective, omniscient accounts” (p. 21). Therefore, there is no such thing as “true story” but a conventionalized and culturally acceptable representation of reality. We describe an experience through narrative from a certain standpoint giving our own input and interpretations about it. In short, narrative is a *version* of reality that allows an understanding of

the meaning of the events and a powerful tool in the construction and display of our sense of who we are (Schiffrin, 1996). On this assumption, Patai (1993) claims, “the act of telling one’s life story involves a rationalization of the past as it is projected and leads into an inevitable present. And, indeed, a particular version of one’s life story may become an essential component in one’s sense of identity at a given time” (p. 9).

As narrators, we evaluate events of our lives in terms of the cultural norms and expectations of our particular community. In this way, we affiliate with other members of society; as Ochs and Capps stated, “the development of self-awareness in all human beings is inextricably tied to an awareness of other people and things” (1996, p. 30). From a sociocultural perspective, most of the authors agree that the construction of self cannot be reduced to fixed cognitive or cultural factors. It is needed to search for origins beyond self to social, cultural, and historical dimensions. A principle route through which this might be accomplished is through the study of language practices. According to Harré (1989), “if conversation is the primary human reality and individual ‘minds’ are not substances but privatized conversation, linguistic studies must begin to play a very important role” (p. 449). The way language is used in a narrative creates a story world in which agentive and epistemic displays of self, position a storyteller toward a set of actions and beliefs that together reflect a social identity (Schiffrin, 1996). The transformation of our experience into stories, and the way we carry it out, is thus a way to show our interlocutors the salience of particular aspects of our identities. In the next section, I focus on a conversation I had with a Colombian high school student. I will discuss the processes of listening, transcribing, and analyzing his narrative.



## The Narrative Construction of an oppositional Identity

### *The setting for the interview*

It was a windy day of August when I was going back to the neighborhoods I had not visited for three years. As I was driven from downtown to the top of one of the southeastern mountains that surround Bogotá, where San Cristobal School is located, the landscape and the weather were changing into a colder and to an impoverish surrounding. After a 30 minutes drive, the modern school building appeared, contrasting with the dusty road, and the small houses made of brick, plastic, metal, and cardboard. In a view from the neighborhood, the downtown's skyscrapers of Bogotá were clearly visible on the valley, but for the people who lived there, that opulence and opportunity suggested by the vision of this modern and developed city seemed distant and irrelevant to their lives.

The neighborhood was a borderland area that mixed rural and urban landscapes which was also reflected in the lifestyle of their inhabitants. Most of the residents of this neighborhood came from areas of the countryside in Colombia, left while looking for better opportunities, or running away from the social and political violence that has pervaded most of the rural areas of Colombia. In this context, the San Cristobal Concession School appeared as a promising alternative for young men and women from such a neighborhood.

The Public School Concession Model was designed in response to the objectives of the Development Plan of the Capital District of Bogotá, which aimed to bring quality education to low socioeconomic groups in marginal areas of Bogotá by drawing on the experiences of successful private schools. Through Corpoeducación, an organization dedicated to educational research and development where I used to work, I was able to arrange a visit to San Cristobal School.

My visit was kindly accepted, and during the day I spent there, I found easy to interact with different members of the school community.

The first time I saw Mario (a pseudonym) was at the principal's office. He was waiting outside of the office to fill out a form because he had enrolled in the school just few weeks ago. The principal mentioned that he was older than the average students of high school, nineteen years old, and refer to him as "the typical dropout student." After I expressed my interest in talking with him, the principal called him to the office and asked if he would talk to me, to which he answered "Do I have to?" then I said "you don't have to talk to me, but I'd appreciate if you do" he smiled and said "then, I'm sorry but I won't".

The next time I saw Mario was at the end of the school day. Mario approached to me asking if I still wanted to talk to him. We sat in the main square of the school and started talking. I later came to understand that for Mario, to place himself in opposition to the expected was a coherent way to support his oppositional narrative. Bruner (1990) claims that narratives are about people acting in a setting and the happening that befall them must be relevant to their intentional states while so engaged – to their beliefs, desires, theories, values, and so on. Referring to the context of the interview, Kvale (1996) states, "The interviewee's statements are not collected – they are coauthored by the interviewer" (p. 183). Mario was positioning himself and creating the context for the interview.

The interview lasted about 90 minutes. I employed life story interview techniques through open-ended questions where Mario was encouraged to recall personal experiences about his life, home, community, interest, and schools. Before discussing some pieces of this interview will I will mention how the data was transcribed.



### *Transcribing the Narrative*

Spoken language is not analyzed directly. The goal of a transcription is to produce a permanent, written record of communicative events allowing for analysis. Thus, the goals of the research are critical in determining the appropriate level and scope of transcription (Ochs, 1979). Endorsing this assumption, Green, Franquiz & Dixon (1997) argue that analysis starts with transcription and that transcripts are interpretative constructions. Although there is not standard form or code for transcription of research interviews, Kvale (1996) claims “every stage in an interview project involves decisions that offer both possibilities and constraints in later stages of the project”.

The interview was conducted in Spanish and during the process of transcription, Mario’s interview was “cleaned up” dismissing nonverbal cues such as pitch, stress, intonation, pause, juncture, proxemics, eye gaze, and kinesics (Gee & Green, 1998, p.120). Thus, the transcription I have access for this analysis preserve information just at the level of the word. While I am aware that an adequate account of narrative self-construction must attend both to the representations of self and to the positioning of self in autobiographical discourse (Wortham, 2000), in the following discussion pieces of this edited transcript will be used in order to illustrate some strategies for analyzing narratives. It must be mentioned that the analysis of the interview as a whole was based on the Spanish transcript. However, some pieces have been translated to make visible for my English readers the way in which Mario portrays him self through the narrative.

### *Analyzing Narrative*

There is a considerable variation in the methodological assumptions and the strategies that investigators chose when analyzing narratives, which are often tied to the researcher disciplinary background. Halliday distinguishes three macro functions of language to classify different approaches to narrative within interviewing: textual, ideational, and interpersonal (cited in Mishler, 1991). However the field of narrative analysis has grown rapidly in the last few years; I cannot represent all the different models developed on the field of narrative study, but I will apply some strategies that come from different approaches in order to illustrate the possibilities of narrative analysis in the study of self and identity. Therefore, the interpretations proposed here have a tentative character that may become the starting point of my future research.

#### **Textual Function - Narrative Structure**

Personal narratives depend on certain structures to hold them together. Labov and Waletzky (1997) proposed an influential model, directed to the description of the internal structure of spoken narrative. They argue that narrative has formal properties and each has a particular function. Each narrative has six common elements: abstract (summary of the substance of the narrative), orientation (time, place, situation, participants), complicating action (sequence of events), evaluation (significance and meaning of the action, attitude of the narrator), resolution (what finally happened), and coda (returns the perspective to the present). In the next table, Labov’s structural model is applied to a piece of my original transcript.





ORIGINAL SPANISH TRANSCRIPT	LABOV'S METHOD OF TRANSCRIPTION
<p>En el colegio era talentoso pero indisciplinado, cuando yo estudiaba en ese colegio había una cosa, que siempre ha estado conmigo y es el sarcasmo, por ejemplo, el profesor siempre estaba explicando una cosa, y a mí siempre se me venía otra, entonces todo el mundo creía que yo estaba haciendo una broma, y no, yo estaba diciendo otra cosa, un poco en serio y un poco en broma, pero siempre me echaron el baldado, que yo era una plaga, entonces, de todas partes me echaban... hasta octavo hice en el colegio, después entré a validar y me salí en décimo y decidí dedicarme a la banda, me salí, deserté de esa vaina y ahora volví, vamos a ver que pasa esta vez.</p>	<p>Abstract 01 I was talented but undisciplined,</p> <p>Orientation 02 when I was at that school 03 there was a thing, 04 that has been with me always and is sarcasm 05 for example,</p> <p>Complication Action 06 The teacher always was explaining something, 07 And I came up with another, 08 then everybody though I was joking, 09 And not, 10 I was telling something, 11 part seriously, part joking,</p> <p>Evaluation 12 But they always blamed me, 13 They believed I was a plague,</p> <p>Resolution 14 then, I was expelled from everywhere... 15 I studied up to eight grade in that school, 16 then I started a validation 17 and dropped in tenth grade 18 and decided to devote my self to the band, 19 I left,</p> <p>Coda 20 now I'm here 21 we'll see what happens this time</p>

In the above example it is visible the textual coherence of the narrative. In the first line (abstract), Mario introduces his main point by portraying himself in a dual standpoint “I was talented but undisciplined”. In the next four lines (orientation), he presents the time and the place where the event occurred “when I was at that school” and he also describes his attitude toward the event as a context for the upcoming story about the teacher. Following the orientation, he proceeds to explain the sequence of events (complicating action) that support the dual

standpoint assumed in the abstract “seriously... joking”, “The teacher ...explaining something and I came up with another”. Lines 12 and 13 (evaluation) show the meaning that the previous event, in terms of what others think about him “they believed”, “they ...blamed me”. The next six lines resolution shows the consequences of the event “I was expelled...”, “I devote my self to the band”, and “I left”. Finally, in the last two lines (coda) he returns to the present time. Each structure is connected to the others forming a coherent narrative with a particular evaluative



point. Mario presents himself - projecting a sense of who he is onto the others. This segment of the interview is just one of the situations in which Mario presents himself in relational opposition to the others (adults – institutions).

Labov's method of transcription offers a useful depiction of the interdependence of Mario's clauses. Mario not just constructs stories from primary experience, but he also interprets the significance of the events in clauses and evaluation. According to Labov and Waletzky (1997), the evaluation highlights the point of the narrative. Contrasting the abstract and evaluations of Mario in different segments of his narrative enlightens in Mario's main point of the interview as a whole, yet I found that the events become more meaningful when keeping their placement in the narrative. In addition, Labov and Waletzky's structures make visible the chronological dimension of the narrative, which offers the narrator a vehicle for imposing order on otherwise disconnected experiences (Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Transforming the original transcript to Labov's structure was effective to see the formal properties of the narrative and their particular functions. Labov's framework evidence how narrative is organized and, in this particular interview, it was a good point of departure for organizing my rough data. The above example illustrates the way by which Mario creates textual coherence in his narrative. By having each structure doing a specific function, he produces an integrated narrative that expresses not just a past event but also his personal position about what happened (Ochs and Capps, 1996). However, it must be said that not all the narratives of the interview fit Labov's model. I found that the ordering of the clauses was restricting the possibilities for analyzing some pieces of the interview and the content of it as a whole. In the next section, I will focus on the content coherence of the text.

### *Ideational Function – Narrative content*

This kind of analysis focuses on narrator's intentions and the narrative strategies used to produce a coherent story (Mishler, 1991). The central goal of this analysis approach is to look at how the referential meaning of the text is related to the linguistic part of the text (Mishler, 1991). Agar and Hobbs (1982) elaborated a systematic model for analyzing life-history interviews supported in the central idea of "coherence". According to Linde, "coherence derives from the relations that the parts of a text bear to one another and to the whole text" (1993; p. 12). Agar and Hobbs' model specify three general types of coherence: global coherence (the relation of a particular utterance with the speaker's overall plan), local coherence (the relations between the parts of the text), and themal coherence (how the utterances express the speaker's belief system).

To identify the coherence of Mario's narrative in terms of identity, I draw from Dorothy Holland and collaborators' (1998) theory of positional or relational identities in which the individual assume figurative identities in social relationship with others "it is a person's apprehension of her social position in a lived world" (p. 127). In the narrative under analysis, Mario's relational identities were not easy to categorize. However, by looking for thematic patterns in the transcribed data it emerged that through the different positions he assumes in his lived worlds school, family, friends and so on, he creates coherence to support his main point: an oppositional stance against the ideologies that "ruled" the worlds in which Mario lives.

The following narrative illustrates how Mario's story creates an opposition between he and his family and the formal system of education. He relates how during six years he has been engaged in a struggle against his parents' expectations. He describes his parents as traditional and his family





as a “common one” that does not understand that he is “different”. Similarly, when talking about school he highlights the “castrating” character of education in contradiction with his “creative”

and “artistic” self. The themes developed in the following narrative also support the previous claim (above excerpt) where he describes himself as “talented but undisciplined”.

<b>Mario:</b>	The most horrible depression when I showed up with the earring, my dad believed that I was homosexual, that I was deviated, always a lot of aggression from them, they started matching things, matching long-hair friends and rock to drug addiction, alcoholism and other things, it was tough, and I had any “souvenir”, necklaces, bands’ t-shirts and so on It was hard because, I make clear that at school I was lazy, it was terrible because I was a rocker so I was not going to be somebody...
<b>AL</b>	How is the relationship with your father?
<b>Mario:</b>	There are many differences of opinion regarding thoughts and ideologies, the man is a common worker that would like to have a common family then when he realized that I’m different... he is one of those who thinks his son should go to army and study at school, go to college and I’m not interested, I enjoy other things
<b>AL:</b>	Like what?
<b>Mario:</b>	Music, art, actually, I think college may be a resource, but I think that more things can be learned out of school I think that in some sense, college education is castrating for example, a talented plastic art student get into college molding him is the only thing that they do then you graduate painting beautiful still life and beautiful landscapes but if you happen to have a different idea from the professor then they tell you no that’s not the way I think that in some sense, college education is castrating.

Mario uses different discourse strategies such as interpretive lexical devices and moral

and evaluative statements (Tannen, 1997) to create coherence in the narrative, supporting his



positional identities as rebel, artist, intellectual and different, all of them in contradiction with the conventionalism, he attributes to his lived worlds (family and home in this particular excerpt). In the same way, in other segments of the interview he uses the same standpoint when talking

about marriage, church, and the media. In the next segment of the interview, Mario seems to accommodate into the patterns of “conventional lifestyle” but in the last clause, he turns to mitigate this instance by introducing the “alternative lifestyle” again: “and I don’t know with how many bottles of alcohol inside my body too”.

<b>AL:</b>	How do you picture yourself 5 years from now?
<b>Mario:</b>	I don't know, I get up and I don't know what will happen to me, sometimes I lock myself away in depressing stages that one see the life without direction and I say “oh no I don't know, I'll have to do something different”, Get out of all this and do something different, Become productive, be a workman or I don't know what, But I'd rather see myself intellectually more mature, I'd like to see myself with a good income capacity, it is not that I want to be a millionaire, but with a good life in five years I see myself in love and I don't know with how many bottles of alcohol inside my body too.

Mario’s narrative agrees with Agar and Hobbs’ model of interview analysis, based on three levels of coherence: global, local, and themal (Mishler, 1991). The global coherence (overall plan or goal of the speaker) is created with Mario’s convincing account of his oppositional self-representation in the different worlds he lives. Similarly, the texts exhibit local coherence in the way he connects the different themes of his narrative, which at the same time are a justification of his main point. Themal coherence, which refers to how the utterances express the speaker’s belief system, is evident in the different utterances in which he portrays himself in an antagonist relationship with others: “I’m different”, “I enjoy other things”, “I was a rocker”, and “school ... I’m not interested”. In sum, all this discursive positions provide an opportunity for discovering how Mario’s story allows him to create a self-representation in

relation to social and cultural expectations (Schiffrin, 1996). From this perspective, narrative itself can serve indexically as a kind of evidence of the ideologies and values that drive it and, by extension, of the self-presentation or identity work being accomplished by the narrating subject.

#### *Interpersonal Function – Narrative Context*

Traditional research has neglected to take into account how interviews may function as modes of discourse. This approach focuses on how narrative self-construction happens over the course of interviews. As Bamberg (1997) points out, narrative talk is situated in interactive settings and tailored for a particular audience; it is always designed in terms of particular interactive purposes. Endorsing this assumption, Worthman (2000) claims:

“While the representational account of



narrative self-construction may be plausible, it is also incomplete. Autobiographical narratives have interactional as well as representational functions. That is, autobiographical narrators act like particular types of people while they tell their stories, and they relate to their audiences in characteristic ways as they tell those stories... While telling their stories autobiographical narrators often enact a characteristic type of self, and through such performances they can become that type of self. " (p.158).

To analyze Mario's narrative from this perspective, it would be necessary to have a detailed transcript of the interview excerpts, including turning points and pauses. During the interview, people make sense of their experiences together with the listener and, to analyze this process it is essential a transcription that includes paralinguistic utterances, false starts, interruptions, and other features of interaction (Riesman, 1993). Since my transcript was "cleaned up" the interactions between the narrator and the interviewer are invisible, thus, the interactional analysis of this interview is not brought into view in this paper. However, to understand that the interview situation itself may affect the construction of narratives is an important consideration that eventually will be addressed in my future research.

## Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

As I have briefly illustrated in this paper, narrative analysis offers an array of analytic possibilities for working with interview responses. Although it is not possible to cover all the existent approaches to narrative in a single review, the preceding discussion has illustrated the value of narrative as a tool for the discursive construction and for the display of identity as emergent from actions and experiences (Schiffrin, 1996). From

the analysis of Mario's interview, I conclude that the structure, the content, and the context of the narrative, are all resources that provide, in varying degrees, ways to understand students personal selves and their social and cultural identities. Despite the differences in these approaches, narrative appears as a suited means in understanding how students construct what they do, according to which ideologies and values, which historical trajectories, as well as what kind of self-presentation or identity work they are currently engaged in.

The stories are not just resources for the development and presentation of the individual self; they allow us to see how this identity is constructed within a social and cultural world (Bruner, 1990; Guerrero & Tinkler, 2010). Schools as institutions play a powerful role in shaping students identities; the ways in which stories are told and the identities they create are influenced by the environment in which they take place. According to Rymes (2001) "adolescent identity and attitudes toward school are not only created by individuals, but are also facilitated, coauthored by society, policymakers, institutions, peers, and teachers, through interaction" (p.162).

In this paper I have provided an analytic case on the way in which the social discourses influence a student reflection and construction of who he is. Studies of this kind allow to investigate how locally expressed identities and more global socially shared identities emerge in discourse constructing new social realities (De Finna, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006). In times of transition and change in education social and cultural discourses position students in ways unexpected and paradoxical. In analyzing the intersection of stable social positions such as gender and social class with local constructs such as "good" or "bad" student, this kind of studies can contribute to understand the different identities and the "degrees of agency" (Lewis, Enciso and Wet,



2007) allowed for students on cultural models and available positions within individual school cultures.

The study of narratives in educational contexts allows to delve into the lives of students to assert their identities and the role of school processes in nurturing, resisting, or shaping the meanings students bring with them to school. Therefore, the study of students' narrative may open new paths for better understanding how the context created by institutional discourses shape the kinds of interactions that occur in the school. Similarly, it would reveal the preexisting ideologies that students bring to school that structure their interactions within this environment. In short, students' ideologies and school contexts exercise a reciprocal influence, and the study of students' narratives would illuminate the human effect of school reform.

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