

Moral stance in the workplace narratives of novices



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ABSTRACT Recent work on workplace narratives as a site for the discursive construction of professional identities has focused on speakers who can be considered experienced and knowledgeable experts in their fields (e.g. university professors, business managers). The present study, in contrast, explores two types of workplace narratives – reflective and relational narratives – produced by a group of professionals who are non-experts: in this case, novice language teachers. Specifically, the article illustrates how the moral stance that a novice constructs within a narrative may be formulated in uncertain terms, may be destabilized by the primary narrator, or may be subject to revision by other participants. Finally, the study highlights the relationship between the narrative dimensions of moral stance and tellership, and suggests that participant structure, participants' role relationships, and institutional power asymmetry are especially relevant factors to consider in any further analyses of novices' workplace narratives.

KEY WORDS: *identity, institutional discourse, moral stance, narrative, novice teachers, tellership*

The relationship between language and social identity has been highlighted in a great deal of sociolinguistic and discourse analytic research in the last decade, and nowhere is this connection emphasized more than in studies of oral narratives of personal experience. The often-cited studies by Linde (1993), Schiffrin (1996, 2002), and, more recently, de Fina (2003), have demonstrated that a close investigation of the linguistic resources and discursive tools used by individuals as they tell narratives can shed light on how they construe themselves and their experiences, how they 'position' (Davies and Harré, 1991) themselves and other individuals in the storyworlds that they produce (Bamberg, 1997), and how they weave, mold and 'fashion' (Gee et al., 2001) their identities moment-by-moment. Indeed, many scholars of discourse believe that

narrative is the site *par excellence* for examining the dynamic, locally occasioned, and situated process of identity construction¹ as it emerges through talk – as one pair of narrative researchers explains:

In contemporary scholarship it has become commonplace to observe that speakers use the site of narratives to construct particular identities . . . the construction of identity being understood not as a single act, but as a process that is constantly active, each telling of a story offering the narrator a fresh opportunity to create a particular representation of herself . . . speakers make narrative choices in order to display a particular portrait of themselves. The self that the narrators depict is inevitably constructed *for that particular context*. (Keller-Cohen and Dyer, 1997: 150, emphasis added)

Given the important role of context in the local occasioning of identity in narrative, it is not surprising that research on identity in narrative has recently entered the realm of institutional discourse, and has expanded the scope of inquiry by turning attention to the discursive construction of professional selves, in talk produced as individuals engage in their routine work activities.

For example, in their analysis of narratives told by two university professors during academic lectures, Dyer and Keller-Cohen (2000) examined the use of pronouns, referring expressions and evaluative devices and demonstrated how these individuals managed to simultaneously position themselves as both ordinary people as well as experts in their fields. Likewise, in their analyses of narratives from a large corpus of New Zealand workplace talk, Holmes (2005) and Holmes and Marra (2005) examined the ways in which similar discourse features function to construct professional identities. The narrators in these studies have included managers, mentors, supervisors, and university professors; in other words, these studies share a focus on the narrative construction of self of experts, or of individuals with considerable professional expertise and experience. These studies have suggested that the professional selves that emerge through narrative tellings in such contexts are often complex and multifaceted. At the same time, analysts have shown how – within these narratives – speakers are able to successfully unify ‘contradictory aspects’ of their identity (Holmes and Marra, 2005: 205). For instance, the manager discussed in Holmes and Marra (2005) constructs a professional self who is ‘firm, yet funny and good-natured’ and Dyer and Keller-Cohen’s professors position themselves through their narratives as ‘knowledgeable experts, yet “ordinary guys”’. As Holmes and Marra point out, the professionals who produce these narratives are able to adeptly, skillfully, and successfully ‘*manage* contradictory aspects of their self-presentation’ (2005: 205, emphasis mine). Thus, while the professional identities that are produced within these narratives are undoubtedly multifaceted, it is important to point out that they are, nevertheless, well-managed, coherent, and stable.

The present study takes up this line of investigating the discursive construction of identity in the workplace, but instead examines workplace narratives told by non-experts, or novices, within an educational setting. By focusing on the narratives of novices rather than those of experts – and by highlighting the narrative dimensions (Ochs and Capps, 2001) of ‘moral stance’, and, to a

lesser extent, 'tellership' – the present study contributes further to the literature on the construction of self in institutional discourse.

By definition, novices find themselves in a state of transition. Unlike narrators who have achieved some level of expertise in their field, novices, or non-experts, have not had adequate time or sufficient experience to construct cohesive professional 'life stories' (Linde, 1993), and as a result, the moral stance that emerges in their workplace narratives is often – as we will see – an uncertain or unstable one.

IDENTITY AND TEACHER NARRATIVES

Although the term 'narrative' has come to be used widely in educational research, most studies of teacher narratives in educational literature have, by and large, not relied on linguistic, or sociolinguistic, models of narrative (Cortazzi and Jin, 2000). Instead, what is most typically emphasized in studies of teacher narratives from education is giving teachers opportunities to voice their experiences. Consequently, in this body of literature, the term 'narrative' is often used to refer to teachers' autobiographies, written reflections, journal writings, etc.² Nevertheless, there have been a few exceptions to this trend: for example, both Cortazzi (1993) and Richards (1999) have relied on sociolinguistic models in their analysis of teachers' narratives told in work staffrooms. Furthermore, a recent article by Juzwik (2006) offers particularly useful recommendations for educational researchers interested in the potential of applying sociolinguistic models of narrative to investigating identity in educational contexts.³

INSTITUTIONAL SPEECH ACTIVITY: THE POST-OBSERVATION MEETING

In teacher education, the post-observation meeting (sometimes alternatively called 'feedback session' or 'supervisory conference') is a common event that takes place in many educational settings around the world. In these meetings, a teacher meets with an individual who has recently observed the teacher in the classroom – in teacher education programs, this 'observer' is usually a mentor or supervisor, but may also be a peer or some other individual – in order to discuss the class observed. As a special kind of 'talk at work', different authors have made a convincing case for considering the post-observation meeting a type of institutional speech activity (e.g. Phillips, 1999; Vásquez, 2004, 2005).

Because they normally entail some type of evaluation of an individual's teaching performance, the face-threatening (Brown and Levinson, 1987) potential of these encounters has captured the interest of several authors (e.g. Arcario, 1994; Roberts, 1992; Vásquez, 2004, 2005; Waite, 1992, 1993; Wajnryb, 1994, 1998). Consequently, discourse analytic studies of post-observation meetings often concentrate on the interactions between teacher and supervisor and on the different strategies used by both participants to mitigate threats to face. However, the post-observation meeting is also an ideal source for examining the construction of professional identity of novices, because it is very often the case that the teachers being observed are newcomers to the profession,⁴ and also because participants' professional identities are situationally

relevant in these interactions. Therefore, the present analysis examines how novice teachers perform their emerging professional identities and construct a moral stance in the narratives they tell, as well as how – as will be discussed later – the role of the (supervisor) interlocutor is not inconsequential in this process.

DEFINING AND DESCRIBING NARRATIVES

Structural definitions of narrative are indispensable in identifying and extracting narrative units of discourse from larger stretches of talk. Although a number of such models exist, the most widely-used structural model of narrative is that of Labov (1972; Labov and Waletzky, 1967).⁵ According to this model, the core of a narrative is a minimum of two temporally and sequentially linked *narrative clauses*, which denote some type of problem or *complicating action* (and its *resolution*). In addition to the past-oriented narrative clauses, which serve as the structural scaffold of the narrative, Labov (1972) and others (e.g. Cortazzi and Jin, 2000; Linde, 1993; Polanyi, 1989) emphasize that a narrative must include some type of *evaluation*. Evaluation can take many forms (i.e. it can be expressed grammatically, lexically, prosodically, etc.), can be explicit or implicit, and can occur at any place within the story. In essence, the function of evaluation is to encode point(s) of view: that is, the narrator's own, or those of other individuals in the narrative. In addition to the required narrative clauses and evaluation, a narrative may also include other, optional, structural moves, such as: an *abstract* (a pre-summary of what the narrative will be about), an *orientation*, which provides a description of the setting, characters and background for the story, and a *coda*, which occurs after the resolution and functions as a bridge from the past of the storyworld back into the present interaction.

Ochs and Capps's (2001) dimensional perspective on narrative provides an additional analytic vocabulary for describing narratives. As recent work has demonstrated (Georgakopoulou, 2006; Johnson and Paoletti, 2004) a dimensional approach can serve as a useful conceptual framework for the analysis of narratives. According to this dimensional model, all narratives can be described in terms of five narrative dimensions (summarized in Table 1), each of which is presented as a continuum between a set of poles. Briefly, the dimension of 1) *tellership* refers to whether there is one primary teller of the narrative or whether there are multiple active co-tellers; 2) *tellability* refers to both 'the significance of the narrated experience and the rhetorical style in which it was related' (Ochs, 2004: 82); 3) *embeddedness* refers to how detached or embedded the narrative is in relation to the discourse which surrounds it; 4) *linearity* refers to the way in which the sequence of events in the narrative is organized (i.e. the events related in a narrative may be presented in a more or less linear fashion); and finally, 5) *moral stance* refers to the perspective or framework for interpreting the moral meanings associated with events in the narrative.

Of these five dimensions, moral stance is most relevant to identity, and the construction of a professional self. Every story 'involves piecing together the moral meaning of events' (Ochs and Capps, 2001: 51), and as Table 1 shows, moral stance can range from certain or uncertain, and from more to less stable, in any

TABLE 1. *Narrative dimensions and possibilities (from Ochs and Capps, 2001: 20)*

<i>Dimensions</i>		<i>Possibilities</i>		
Tellership	One active teller	←	→	Mutiple active tellers
Tellability	High	←	→	Low
Embeddedness	Detached	←	→	Embedded
Linearity	Closed temporal and causal order	←	→	Open temporal and causal order
Moral stance	Certain, constant	←	→	Uncertain, fluid

given narrative. Furthermore, because moral frameworks help individuals to interpret or make sense of incidents or experience, the moral stance expressed in a narrative can shift during the telling, as the teller – or listener – makes revisions to earlier interpretations.⁶ Moreover, the narrative dimension of moral stance, the structural component of evaluation, and the speaker's identity are all closely intertwined. The narrator's moral stance is implied by the actions (performed by the narrator or some other individual) reported within the narrative, and the way in which those actions are evaluated. Evaluation is the discursive resource which further brings into focus 'what kinds of people' are performing those actions. In other words, participants' identities and moral stances toward events (as well as actions carried out by themselves and others) are revealed through evaluation (Poveda, 2004). Finally, in the analysis that follows, the narrative dimension of tellership is also shown to interact significantly with that of moral stance.

NARRATIVE FUNCTIONS

Over the past decades, much sociolinguistic research on narrative has concentrated on narrative structure. Recently, however, discourse analysts (e.g. Marra and Holmes, 2004; Ochs and Capps, 2001; Schiffrin, 1996; Thornborrow and Coates, 2005) have begun to concern themselves with narrative function, and they have proposed that many different functions may be realized in the telling of narratives. These include the following social, as well as personal, functions: to entertain, to express solidarity, to establish social relationships, to highlight and resolve tensions, to justify or explain one's actions (or those of others), to construct a particular social, cultural (or professional) identity, to instruct, to establish social norms, to demystify and/or make sense of life events, to explore alternatives and options, to establish coherence across past experiences. Marra and Holmes (2004) point out that any single narrative can – and most often does – serve many of these functions at the same time.⁷

Methodology

The data analyzed here were collected as part of larger project, in which a variety of work meetings (i.e. post-observation meetings, weekly staff meetings, pre-semester planning meetings, and orientation meetings) held in a small

university intensive ESL program (IEP) were audio-recorded over a two-year period. The present study examines only oral narratives produced by teachers during post-observation meetings.

As part of the process of teaching supervision, all IEP teachers were observed by supervisors at least one time per semester in each of the classes they taught. These observations were then followed by feedback sessions, or post-observation meetings. (Like the observations themselves, post-observation meetings are routine events that take place in the IEP every semester.)

During the period in which data were collected, there were a total of nine teachers who participated in the study (exact numbers varied by semester). All were graduate students in an MA-TESL program, all but one were female, and all were in their mid-20s to mid-30s. The teachers' educational backgrounds varied, but the majority had undergraduate degrees in either English or Education. Most teachers had from zero to two years of prior teaching experience. Even though not all were 'novice' teachers in the strictest sense of the world, none of them had ever previously taught university-level English for Academic Purposes in the USA. (Those with prior teaching experience had taught either radically different populations or in radically different settings: for example, teaching basic English literacy to adults in Namibia, or teaching beginning English to Japanese primary school children, etc.) In my follow-up conversations with those participants who had some prior teaching experience, it was evident that even they found their current teaching responsibilities to be challenging and unlike others they had previously encountered, and that they considered themselves to be novices rather than experts.

As IEP program coordinator at the time, I was one of the two supervisor participants. During the two year period when data were collected, my primary focus was not on narratives, and actual analysis reported here did not take place until data collection had ended. In other words, there was no attempt made by myself, or by the other supervisor, to elicit narratives from teachers in our meetings with them. Prior to the beginning of data collection, all participants provided their consent to be recorded and to allow those recordings to be transcribed and used in subsequent analysis. In the analysis that follows, I refer to myself by name, and all other participants are referred to by pseudonyms.

DESCRIPTION OF DATA

A total of 19 post-observation meetings from four academic semesters were transcribed. Following Labov's (1972) structural definition of narrative, a close reading of the transcripts yielded a total of 15 narratives. The relative infrequency of narratives in these data is not surprising, given the prominent goal orientation of such meetings: that is, to discuss the class observed. Thus, the post-observation meeting, as a type of institutional speech activity, can be characterized as primarily non-narrative, consisting mostly of general reporting, discussion, and evaluation of classroom activities (e.g. Arcario, 1994; Phillips, 1999; Vásquez, 2005).

Where narratives are concerned, individuals' conversational styles (Tannen, 1984), relationships between co-workers, and perhaps other factors, appeared

to be related to the narrativization of experience: that is, not all teachers told stories, some teachers happened to tell narratives in some of their meetings but not in others, while some teachers told multiple narratives in a single meeting. As examples of narratives produced by novices in a particular institutional setting, these narratives represent a rich and previously untapped data source, and one in which we can locate and begin to examine the construction of a professional identity of non-experts.

Some of these teachers' narratives are rather minimal or compressed. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that they are not merely 'reports' (Marra and Holmes, 2004), or dry, factual recounts of events that happened. Rather, they include 'performances' of what the teacher said or thought at a particular moment, as well as evaluations of those actions. (Because the activity of teaching involves a great deal of thinking and talking, the verbs that occur in teachers' narratives are predominantly mental verbs and speech act verbs.) In keeping with the goals and objectives of the post-observation meeting as a site of evaluation and reflection, most of the narratives in these data have minimal action or plots, and consist of a great deal of evaluation (supplied by teacher, or in some cases, by their supervisor interlocutor).

After considering the 15 narratives in this dataset, two broad categories of narratives emerged: what I will call *reflective* narratives and *relational* narratives. In terms of their content, reflective narratives depict a speaker's internal states or cognitive processes, and often consist of a series of mental, rather than physical, actions. The primary focus of these narratives is on the teacher and her own thoughts or actions during the class observed. In contrast, relational narratives highlight some interaction that took place between two (or more) individuals. These labels also allude to some of the functions associated with these types of narratives. As discussed earlier, any single narrative can – and usually does – serve multiple functions simultaneously (Marra and Holmes, 2004), however, reflective narratives often seemed to serve a more personal, 'making sense of reality' function for the speaker, whereas relational narratives appeared to serve a number of more interpersonal, or social functions (i.e. to entertain, to justify one's actions, to complain, etc.). It is important to point out that these descriptive labels are not intended to be categorical or dichotomous (i.e. any given narrative may have some aspect of both types), rather they serve as a heuristic to characterize the narratives found in these data.

The analysis below focuses on the discussion of three narratives, which were selected for the following reasons: they require minimal contextualization (i.e. as most of the narratives in this corpus are quite embedded in surrounding discourse, other narratives would likely be less easily understood out of context); they illustrate the full range of tellership possibilities represented in the total set of 15 narratives (i.e. from one primary teller, to some listener involvement, to a very active co-teller); finally, they not only exemplify both types of narratives (i.e. reflective and relational), but they are also, in many respects, typical of the type of narrative they represent, in ways which are discussed further in the analysis.

Of the total 15 narratives that were identified in the dataset, four narratives were classified as reflective, and eleven as relational. The discussion which

follows focuses on two reflective narratives (told by two different teachers); like the two other reflective narratives, the two examples discussed below are quite short, or ‘compressed’, and their content consists of the isolation of a particular aspect of a lesson, further reflection on that moment or segment, and an assessment or evaluation of an outcome. In contrast, only one relational narrative was selected for analysis. Of the 11 relational narratives, Narrative 3 is a prototypical relational narrative, in which the teacher reports on a past interaction with a student who posed a particular challenge. Indeed, the majority of the relational narratives told by teachers center around this type of theme; other relational narratives may be concerned with different students, or different issues, nevertheless, the topic of each relational narrative is essentially the same: the teacher’s interaction with a student or group of students who pose a particular problem, and the eventual resolution of the problem, or lack thereof. Finally, all three narratives analyzed below are representative of the majority of narratives in the corpus, in that the moral stances of the teacher narrators can be characterized as uncertain, unstable, or inconsistent.

Analysis

REFLECTIVE NARRATIVES

The human condition is such that we not only act in and on the world, we also reflect on our actions [. . .] In narrating we do not replay an intact experience so much as bring experience into social and psychological focus. (Ochs, 2004: 276)

The following two narratives are what I call reflective narratives, in which the primary focus is on the teachers’ own thoughts and actions. In both cases, the actions and events reported occurred during the lesson observed, and thus, the content of the narratives is highly relevant to the meetings in which they are being told.

Narrative 1 is an example of a narrative told by Sara, a teacher who indicated that, in spite of her prior teaching experience, she sometimes felt ‘overwhelmed’⁸ by trying to meet the dual objectives (i.e. content and language) of the course she was currently teaching. Sara’s narrative immediately follows her discussion of an activity that both she and the supervisor agreed was a successful one. What Sara refers to as *that* in line 1 of the narrative is the final part of the activity, which involved students delivering a short oral summary (following the completion of a short reading and a small group discussion).

Narrative 1

[immediately follows discussion of an activity characterized as “effective”]

- 1 Sara: . . . um I probably would do that different again with this group
 2 Camilla: ok
 3 Sara: because I think- I don’t know if I rushed them too much maybe or I think they
 4 weren’t clear on what they were supposed to do because I kind of said
 5 “paraphrase this” and then I said “but include this”
 6 Camilla: {uhhuh
 7 Sara: and they’re like “well,
 8 should we do a summary?”

- 9 Camilla: {{laugh}}
- 10 Sara: and so I think it wasn't exactly clear what they were
- 11 supposed to do
- 12 Camilla: mhm
- 13 Sara: but most of them did pretty good with it anyway so

The few narrative clauses in this 'compressed' narrative (Marra and Holmes, 2004) consist of Sara's verbal actions (lines 4–5: *I kind of said "paraphrase this" and then I said "but include this"*) followed by her students' collective response to her instructions (lines 7–8: *and they're like "well, should we do a summary?"*). As far as other structural components of narrative are concerned, Sara's narrative does not include an abstract – most likely because it emerges spontaneously from the ongoing flow of discourse. Also, no orientation is needed, presumably because both participants are not only very familiar with the context, but both were also co-present during the events being narrated. Line 13 functions as both evaluation and resolution.

Narrative 1 is highly evaluative, which is not at all surprising, given that the evaluation of a teacher's performance is one of the functions of these kinds of meetings. In this instance, Sara's narrative serves to evaluate her own performance in the classroom as well as the performance of her students. Sara's attenuation of her overtly evaluative comments (line 10: *wasn't exactly clear*; line 13: *did pretty good*), and even her actions (line 4: *I kind of said*), suggest a hesitation to commit firmly to a strong position. Furthermore, the use of multiple epistemic devices (McEnery and Kifle, 2002) such as *probably*, *maybe*, and *I don't know* underscore Sara's overall uncertainty as a teacher. The same, or similar, markers of hesitation, tentativeness, or uncertainty are found in the majority of the 15 narratives.

In this particular case, such expressions of uncertainty may be related to Sara's lack of clarity about what to do in her classroom, however, the overall moral stance she constructs is also an uncertain one. For one thing, Sara does not explicitly locate the source of the problem (i.e. the students' lack of clarity about what they were supposed to do in the activity). Although she concedes somewhat that the source of the problem may have originated with her (line 3: *I don't know if I rushed them too much maybe*, and her contradictory instructions, which are presented as reported speech in lines 4 and 5), she also uses an impersonal construction in lines 10 and 11 (*it wasn't exactly clear what they were supposed to do*), which shifts the attribution of responsibility from her to some unstated source. Moreover, the outcome itself remains ambiguous and somewhat contradictory: that is, in spite of the lack of clarity of instructions: . . . *most of the [students] did pretty good with [the activity] anyway*. Although this larger evaluation of the activity itself (in line 13) does bring closure to this particular narrative, it does not necessarily end the topic, as illustrated later in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1 appears four turns after line 13, the end of Narrative 1. In this excerpt,⁹ Sara revisits the topic of the activity discussed in Narrative 1. In the middle of this excerpt, Sara reiterates the opening evaluation of her narrative

(i.e. *So maybe I would do it a little differently to try to elicit that more. So I would probably make it simpler . . .*).

Excerpt 1: Sara's talk following Narrative 1

I really want them to get more used to speaking in front of a group and interacting and not being so worried about reading the perfect paper. And so I kinda wanted that to be an activity where they wouldn't be so tied to what the paper says and saying it correctly. So maybe I would do it a little differently to try to elicit that more. So I would probably make it simpler and not say- I think saying "OK, paraphrase this" I think that kinda puts the pressure on like [whispering] "oh I have to paraphrase." So I was- I'm not really sure how to do that, like how do you have them write something to help them with their oral skills, so that it's like a note-taking thing, but it's not, you know? How do you get students to understand . . . Maybe I don't have them write at all. They just have to remember . . .

In spite of Sara's overall assessment in the concluding line of her narrative (i.e. that *most of them did pretty good with it anyway*), her later comments in this excerpt indicate that she remains less than satisfied, as she explores alternative ways of implementing the activity. In addition to exploring alternative courses of action, Sara re-examines the goals and objectives of the activity, and she reflects on her actions, bringing them into psychological focus. This example demonstrates that within the context of this meeting, Narrative 1 serves as a springboard for Sara's further future-oriented reflection (i.e. Excerpt 1), and I believe, that it is the articulation of her uncertainty within the narrative that provides Sara the past-oriented foundation for brainstorming future alternatives (Urzúa and Vásquez, 2005). Therefore, such reflective narratives told by novices not only provide a 'window' onto their cognition (Chafe, 1990) for themselves, as well as for their mentors or supervisors, but also – and perhaps more importantly – such reflective narratives can serve as an entry point for the discussion of possible future practices.

Narratives are not told in a social vacuum – and the critical roles of all participants are implied by Ochs and Capps's narrative dimension of teller-ship. In Narrative 1 it is the teacher, Sara, who is unambiguously the primary teller of the narrative. The supervisor produces only a few signals of active listenership (Farr, 2003): minimal responses such as *mhm, yeah, etc.*, and occasional sympathetic laughter. In Narrative 1, the supervisor does *not* become a co-teller of the teacher's narrative, and other than her minimal responses (which might be interpreted by some as signs of agreement or solidarity), the supervisor offers no explicit commentary on, or evaluation of, Sara's narrative, or of the events that it portrays. This lack of direct intervention by the supervisor into the teacher's narrative might be related to the further working out of the problem by the teacher herself (i.e. Excerpt 1).

Narrative 2 is from a meeting between another supervisor/teacher pair: supervisor Rachel and teacher Lauren. As in the preceding narrative, the narrative reports on a series of actions and events that occurred during the class that was observed.

Lauren's talk in line 1 immediately follows this praise given to her by Rachel, the supervisor: 'I thought the idea of giving them a template, and saying "what's a template and why?" matched really well with the pattern stuff that you had been looking at before . . .' Thus, Lauren begins this narrative as the pair are discussing an activity in her Pronunciation class.

Narrative 2

- 1 Lauren: Yeah I got all nervous then, just because we were- and this is probably- I don't
 2 really notice when I'm being observed that much until something's kind of not
 3 going exactly right, and then I was like "I'm not gonna be able to finish this!"
 4 and then [laughs]
 5 Rachel: {[laughing]
 6 Lauren: and suddenly I'm just like "I can't think of any names that
 7 rhyme with anything"
 8 Rachel: {[laughing]
 9 Lauren: and I had the 'Beijing' example written down but then I
 10 was like "I don't just wanna- that's right there"
 11 Rachel: {What rhymes with 'Beijing' I was
 12 trying to think
 13 Lauren: {'king' I mean-
 14 Rachel: {OH, gosh
 15 Lauren: {I did say it could be the second syllable
 16 Rachel: {yeah
 17 Lauren: {so like
 18 Rachel: {ok
 19 Lauren: {you
 20 know, 'king' and 'bring' or whatever and so [unclear]
 21 Rachel: {and then you tried to get 'fork'
 22 out of them for 'New York' and THAT didn't work
 23 Lauren: {yeah yeah yeah
 24 Rachel: {"What do you eat with?" and it
 25 was like
 26 Lauren: yeah
 27 Rachel: {"chopsticks!"
 28 Lauren: {yeah, yeah, I know
 29 Rachel: {yeah, yeah
 30 Lauren: So at that point in time I finally- I realized this isn't- this isn't
 31 Rachel: {but I thought that
 32 Lauren: {gonna
 33 wrap up that well, I don't think.
 34 Rachel: {No it did because then you went to the 'Quito' thing
 35 which was 'mosquito'
 36 Lauren: {mhm
 37 Rachel: and then went off with the things, and which lines rhyme
 38 an- Yeah, and you actually- I thought what was really nice was you said you
 39 know "Hey check out getting rhyming words, and ask each other, like 'Hey
 40 Rani'" you know
 41 Lauren: {yeah
 42 Rachel: your examples were you know "Hey Rani, does this
 43 rhyme?" ...

Lauren begins the narrative by locating and bringing into focus the precise moment within the lesson when she became self-conscious about being observed (line 1). Her metacommentary in lines 1–4 (*I don't really notice when I'm being*

observed that much until something's kind of not going exactly right) functions as the narrative's orientation, by 'setting up' the narrative clauses. For the first 10 lines, the narrative clauses consist exclusively of representations of Lauren's mental processes (line 3: *and then I was like . . .*; line 6: *suddenly I'm just like . . .*; lines 9–10: *but then I was just like . . .*). After a brief digression (lines 11–20), Lauren's narrative is then resumed in line 21, not by Lauren but rather by Rachel, who, in her continuation of Lauren's narrated sequence of events, provides the next example which failed to elicit the intended response from the students in the class (i.e. *'fork' rhymes with 'New York'*). This interpretation of events is affirmed by Lauren. Considering these past events from the perspective of the present, Lauren begins her coda in line 30 (*So at that point in time . . .*) but in the middle of the coda, she is again interrupted by Rachel, who supplies an alternative assessment of the outcome of the activity. Contrary to Lauren's own negative assessment, Rachel asserts that the activity in question was effective because it involved students interacting with one another as well as testing their hypotheses about pronunciations of certain words.

Although the teacher-narrators in both Narratives 1 and 2 are reflecting on their own actions or thoughts during the lesson, this narrative appears immediately different from Narrative 1 in that it is highly co-narrated. Ochs and Capps (2001) argue that co-narration is a sign of listener involvement. In institutional narratives more specifically, co-narration has been interpreted as a sign of a 'lively' workplace (Marra and Holmes, 2004). In Narrative 2, the supervisor, Rachel, is a highly active co-teller: she shows her appreciation of the narrative by laughing and she further demonstrates her engagement with Lauren's narrative by supplying narrative clauses (i.e. lines 21–2; 24–5; 27). Rachel is able to contribute to the reconstruction of events in Lauren's narrative because she was co-present during 'narrative time'. Perhaps the most striking aspect of Rachel's involvement in Lauren's narrative is that she re-constructs the resolution of the story. In other words, the supervisor actually reformulates the teacher's evaluation. Thus, the interpretation of experience becomes the domain not only of the primary teller (i.e. the teacher), but rather of both participants.

Clearly, the boundaries of who is 'teller' and who is 'listener' are fluid in any interaction. However, what is interesting about this particular example is that it illustrates how a co-narrator's contribution may 'destabilize' (Ochs and Capps, 2001: 51) the moral stance that is presented in the narrative. In comparison with Sara's uncertain and inconsistent moral stance in Narrative 1, Lauren's moral position and interpretation of events remains consistent: she maintains from the beginning of the narrative, until lines 32–3, that the activity did not finish well. In other words, the moral stance that Lauren constructs is – to some extent – one of personal failure: the end of the activity was less than perfect, largely as a result of her own actions. However, her perspective on and evaluation of the same events are revised, or 're-authored' by Rachel, who, by doing so, indirectly challenges Lauren's stance, or position. Rachel's reasons for doing this are likely well-intentioned, and motivated by a desire to be supportive, helpful, and nurturing in helping Lauren construct a positive self-image about her teaching practice.¹⁰

What emerges from these narrativizations of experience is the construction of a reflective self: a teacher who isolates a particular series of moments in her experience, brings them into psychological focus, and links that to an evaluation of her practice. I have further shown that evaluation and identity intersect with moral stance, and that a novice teacher's moral stance may be uncertain throughout a narrative, or it can be relatively stable but remain open to revision and may be ultimately destabilized by a co-teller's contributions. I now turn from reflective narratives to a discussion of another type of narrative: relational narratives.

'RELATIONAL' NARRATIVES

. . . tellers who initially appear certain may find their moral stance unravel as the telling proceeds. In some cases, certainty dissolves into uncertainty through emergent self-doubt . . . (Ochs and Capps, 2001: 51)

Like reflective narratives (and indeed, *all* institutional narratives) relational narratives serve as a means by which the speaker can present herself as a certain type of professional. In terms of their social functions, relational narratives can be a resource through which the speaker can entertain, justify, complain, or 'explore the moral implications of personal experience' (Ochs, 2004: 294) – and, in many cases, realize all of these functions (and possibly even others) simultaneously. Although relational narratives may also include some elements of reflection, their primary emphasis is on an interpersonal relationship. Most often, they bring into sharp relief the teacher's interactions and relationship with a particular student or group of students, and it is typically the case that the student(s) in question pose some type of problem for the teacher. It appears that the more problematic the student(s), the more remarkable, and therefore, more 'tellable', the story (Norrick, 2005; Ochs and Capps, 2001). Ten of the 11¹¹ relational narratives in these data center on some aspect of the teacher's interaction with a 'problem student', or with a group of difficult students.

Stories of a 'problem student', or of a problematic group of students, are found in studies of narratives from a wide variety of educational contexts (e.g. Cortazzi, 1993; Kainan, 1992; Richards, 1999; Vásquez, 2005). In fact, such stories appear to be an archetypal genre of teacher narratives.¹² There is universal appeal in such stories; although the specifics may vary, the underlying themes are ones that most, if not all, teachers have experienced. Moreover, one of the social functions of such stories told by one teacher to other teachers is to reinforce group norms and values, as Richards (1999), and Ochs and Capps (2001) suggest:

Personal narratives generally concern life incidents in which a protagonist has violated social expectations. Recounting the violation and taking a moral stance towards it provides a discursive forum for human beings to clarify, reinforce, or revise what they believe and value. (p. 46)

Thus, the sharing of such stories helps to affirm, reinforce, and legitimize the narrator's own moral position. In this particular context, relational narratives

feature teachers' 'problems' with students who are not prepared for class, with students who consistently do not turn in assignments, or with a particular student who misbehaves in class, to name a few examples.

In Narrative 3, the relational narrative that follows, the focus is on a series of dialogic exchanges between the teacher and one student. Unlike the two reflective narratives discussed earlier, this narrative reports on events that occurred prior to the class observed – thus, the teacher extends the temporal frame of the meeting beyond the recapitulation of the events that transpired during the observation itself, to encompass other issues more generally related to teaching. In fact, this focus on an event which occurred prior to the class observed is characteristic of nearly all of the relational narratives.¹³

A prototypical relational narrative, Narrative 3, is told by one teacher, Kaitlin, to both supervisors, who had each observed a different portion of Kaitlin's two-hour class and who, therefore, both participated in the post-observation meeting. This narrative occurs toward the end of the meeting, and follows the discussion of a different student, who had an attendance problem. (Apparently, the discussion of one 'problem student' touched off this narrative about a different 'problem student'.)

Narrative 3

- 1 Kaitlin: I have to tell you a funny story though. Adam- so today- I read their drafts over
 2 the weekend and I gave them back with comments and I said "I'm gonna have
 3 individual meetings with you today and tomorrow, while the other people are
 4 working on their presentations
 5 Camilla: {mhm
 6 Kaitlin: for Thursday, so don't ask me any questions
 7 right now, you can wait and ask me in the meeting"
 8 Rachel: {mhm
 9 Kaitlin: and I don't know how many
 10 times Adam asked me in one class as I walked by his desk. "What does this
 11 mean?" and I said "Wait, I'll tell you in the meeting." So then at ten o'clock, I-
 12 it was time for his meeting, and I said
 13 Rachel: {and he's not there
 14 Kaitlin: {and well- I had- I said um "Do you
 15 wanna, you know, meet now? I ha- I have to go tell Marie something and then
 16 I'll be right back" and he said "Well I have an appointment with the Writing
 17 Center" and I said "Right- now? W- It's- we have class"
 18 Camilla: {class?
 19 Kaitlin: And he- he goes
 20 "yeah, but you know, I thought you said we were gonna be working on research
 21 papers all week" which is NEXT week, he was confused, anyway
 22 Rachel: {ohhh
 23 Kaitlin: So he left,
 24 and he comes back at ten twenty, "Kait, I'm ready now" and I said "I thought
 25 you were in the Writing Center." "Well she couldn't [laughing] understand my
 26 paper." This is the one that I was trying to make sense of
 27 Camilla: {the
 28 Kaitlin: that day, where I kept
 29 like looking at it
 30 Camilla: {'nanta', what is it
 31 Kaitlin: {'nanta', yes

- 32 Camilla: {[[laugh]]
 33 Kaitlin: and I kept thinking "I don't know what
 34 I'm gonna-, what kind of feedback I'm gonna give," because it was all over the
 35 place. So he comes back twenty minutes later from the Writing Center and he's
 36 in my office and he goes "My tutor said [laughing] she can't understand my
 37 paper" [laughing] and I said "Well, Adam, to be honest, I can't understand it
 38 either. Like you really need some definitions going here," and we- I walked
 39 him all the way through each part. He got SO excited
 40 Rachel: {oh good
 41 Kaitlin: He went back to the
 42 Writing Center- I don't know WHAT he was gonna do there-
 43 Rachel: {[laugh]]
 44 Kaitlin: But he took the
 45 draft, he went b- he bolted up the stairs, so I don't know what's going on with
 46 him, I don't know if he's really interested in nanta
 [26 turns in which "nanta" is discussed and R expresses her concerns that the writing tutor may
 be writing the paper for the student]
 73 Kaitlin: {I know! Is that bad? That I
 74 just said "Adam, I can't-
 75 Rachel: {NO!
 76 Kaitlin: I can't understand it either"
 77 Camilla: {No you gave him
 78 Rachel: {No, I think you need to
 79 say that...

Kaitlin launches the narrative with a story preface in line 1 (*I have to tell you a funny story*). The following lines consist of several orientation clauses (e.g. lines 2–4, 6–7), in which Kaitlin sets the scene, and relates the instructions she had given to her students. The narrative is then moved along through a series of reporting clauses, that is, the narrative clauses (lines 9–12, in which the student, Adam, disregards Kaitlin's instructions; lines 14–17, in which Adam has scheduled a meeting with a writing tutor during class time; and in lines 35–9, which present the outcome of that meeting).

Kaitlin, the teacher narrator, uses many different evaluative devices to convey her growing frustration with Adam's erratic behavior (though whether this behavior results from the student's lack of understanding or his deliberate lack of compliance remains unclear). She expresses her frustration syntactically (e.g. lines 9–10: *I don't know how many times*), prosodically (line 42: *I don't know WHAT he was gonna do there*), and paralinguistically (e.g. the false starts in line 17 also hint at her increasing exasperation). The identities that are constructed as a result of these and other evaluative devices are those of a reasonable teacher whose patience is being tested, and a student whose irrational and inconsistent behavior is the source of the teacher's growing frustration. This oppositional positioning, underscored by the 'I said–he said' structure of the narrative itself, allows Kaitlin to construct a stable and certain moral stance throughout most of her narrative.

In this narrative, Kaitlin's expressions of uncertainty (i.e. her various *I don't know*s) appear to have less to do with her own lack of knowledge, and more to do with her reaction to the student's behavior, which she finds puzzling. For example, the expression of uncertainty in her metacommentary about the

student's paper (lines 26–34: *this is the one I was trying to make sense of . . . I don't know what kind of feedback I'm going to give*) seems to be a reasonable response to a paper that was, as she describes it, *all over the place* (lines 34–5). Furthermore, her own assessment of Adam's paper is reinforced by the writing tutor, who could not understand it either (lines 25–6, 36–7).

In fact, Kaitlin portrays herself as a patient, reasonable, and skilled teacher. She does this, for example in lines 26–34, where her repeated use of progressive aspect (*I was trying to make sense of it . . . I kept looking at it . . . and I kept thinking*) shows that she makes a concerted effort in multiple attempts to understand the student's writing. Later in the same turn, Kaitlin shows the successful outcome of her actions (i.e. lines 38–9: *I walked him through each part. He got SO excited . . .*). Although the cause/effect structure is not marked grammatically here, it is implied by the sequentiality of the two clauses. Furthermore, her care, effort, and attention to detail is communicated by the image of *walking him through each part* of the paper. Thus, through her linguistic choices, Kaitlin performs a professional identity as a teacher who is skilled, competent, and caring.

However, a shift in moral stance occurs at the end of the narrative. After a brief digression, which might have resulted in a shift of topic (i.e. several turns that follow line 46, in which one of the supervisors expresses her concern over the possibility of the writing tutor writing the paper for the student), Kaitlin directs the talk back to the topic of her narrative. And instead of formulating the coda to her narrative as a statement (as Sara did in Narrative 1, for example), she formulates it as a question, leaving the final evaluation of her actions up to her interlocutors. It is at this point, then, that Kaitlin's hitherto certain moral stance unravels and slowly starts to dissolve, as she begins to doubt her own actions and asks for the approval of others. Kaitlin's question, the narrative coda, brings the speakers back from the events of the narrative to the immediate present of the meeting (e.g. Kaitlin's use of present tense in line 73 *is that bad?* instead of the past-tense alternative of *was that bad?*). To summarize, whereas Kaitlin's moral stance remains consistent in the story world, it becomes more tentative and less certain as she ends the narrative and brings the focus back to the real time of the meeting.

Throughout her narrative, Kaitlin's interlocutors signal their involvement, not only by their minimal responses and appreciative laughter, but also by, for example, trying to predict events (e.g. line 13)¹⁴ based on their shared knowledge of the student being discussed. When she invites the supervisors to evaluate her actions (in lines 73–4), they respond without hesitating, emphatically overlapping Kaitlin's talk – as well as each other's – in order to reassure her that she was perfectly correct in her actions.

So what exactly is Kaitlin's purpose in telling this story? Although it impossible to know what her intentions were, this narrative clearly serves multiple functions. As discussed earlier, narrative is a resource for the construction of a particular type of professional identity: although a beginner, Kaitlin positions herself as a patient, reasonable, and skilled teacher. Next, Kaitlin's story preface in line 1 seems to indicate that one purpose for her story is to entertain her supervisors (i.e. relating a *funny story*). And it may be that this was, in fact, her primary purpose

at the onset, but it is also possible that Kaitlin's purpose for telling the narrative begins to shift – as does her moral stance – as the narrative unfolds. Ochs (2004) has suggested that sometimes speakers are motivated to tell a narrative 'precisely because they are unsure of how to morally evaluate a life event' (p. 284), and that it is at narrative edges, or boundaries, that speakers 'can raise and respond to doubts, questions, speculations, challenges, and other evaluative stances' (p. 279). Ultimately, Kaitlin was also able to use the narrative to elicit approval from her supervisor interlocutors.

Discussion

Many stories, including those told in casual (e.g. Eggins and Slade, 1997) as well as professional settings, are about our relationships with others. The present context is no exception: the majority of narratives told during post-observation meetings were – like Narrative 3 – 'relational' narratives. Consistent with the institutional setting in which they were told, these relational narratives tended to focus on the teacher's interactions with a student or group of students which posed some type of problem or challenge. Interestingly, the events reported in most relational narratives did not take place during the class observed. Instead – just as in Kaitlin's narrative – these relational narratives depicted situations, actions, and events that took place outside of (and usually prior to) the observation. Thus, one of the situationally specific functions of relational narratives in this particular setting is to provide supervisors with 'extra-observational' information about the teacher. Such relational narratives provide teachers an opportunity to construct and perform a particular type of professional self – beyond that which the observer has witnessed in the classroom.

In contrast, those narratives which I have presented and described here as 'reflective' narratives may be less prototypical, and perhaps less immediately recognizable as, narratives. Reflective narratives tend to be more compressed than relational narratives. Moreover, they might be considered by some to be less 'tellable' than their relational counterparts. Reflective narratives also differ from relational narratives in terms of their temporal frame: as in Narrative 1 and 2, the events depicted in reflective narratives take place during the observation itself, as the speaker situates herself within the class that was observed, and brings into psychological focus a particular moment.

Although they occurred less frequently than relational narratives, the educative potential of reflective narratives should not be overlooked. In other words, the value of these narratives – particularly for teacher educators – resides in the fact that they may serve as '. . . windows to both the content of the mind and its ongoing operation' (Chafe, 1990: 79). Indeed, as Cortazzi and Jin (2000) argue, teacher narratives 'can be a key part of our understanding of teacher cognition in professional decision-making, classroom events, and interpretations of the teaching-learning process [. . . and can be used . . .] to ascertain their needs for continuing professional development' (p. 114). Finally, not unlike relational narratives, reflective narratives also provide novice teachers an

opportunity to perform a particular type of professional identity: a 'reflective practitioner' (Schön, 1983). Such identity work is particularly important in a context where reflective practice is expected and valued.

Conclusion

This study has focused on two broad types of teacher narratives: reflective and relational. As discussed, stories about our interactions and relationships with other people (i.e. 'relational' narratives) are not exclusive to this setting. However, particular institutions may have more specific genres within these broader categories. For example, I have pointed out that narratives about 'a problem student' have been documented in a wide range of educational settings. It is likely that other types of institutions have their own context-specific narrative genres. Further work on institutional narratives could help determine whether or not 'reflective' narratives are similarly context-specific. In other words, are 'reflective' narratives (similar to the ones discussed in this article) found in other professional contexts, or are such narratives told only by those novices who are involved in similar 'apprenticeship/mentoring' professional situations?

In the preceding analysis of reflective and relational narratives, I have concentrated primarily on moral stance, the narrative dimension (Ochs and Capps, 2001) most clearly relevant to speakers' social and professional identities. However, the analysis also highlighted the relationship between moral stance and tellership: in Narrative 1, the teacher was the primary teller, while in Narratives 2 and 3, all of the participants showed their involvement by offering narrative reconstructions of events, as well as in interpreting and evaluating the significance of these events. In their analysis of workplace narratives, Marra and Holmes (2004) characterized co-narration as a sign of a 'lively workplace' (p. 74). While this may certainly be true in some cases, it is also important to remember that participants' discursive rights and obligations are often constrained by their social roles within institutions. So, for example, in novice/expert interactions, experts may have additional reasons for diving into, helping to evaluate, and even re-authoring the narratives of novices – besides just their active involvement. In these asymmetrical status relationships, novices may be viewed (by their more experienced interlocutors) as in need of 'rescuing' from either the professional positions they construct, or from the doubts that they express. Whether novices have the same possibilities for participating in experts' narratives in the workplace remains a question that could be explored in the future. Thus, tellership is not only affected by the participation structure of the overarching speech event in which the narrative is told, but it may also be constrained in various ways as a result of participants' institutional roles and relationships. Consequently, in workplace narratives – and particularly those told by novices, or individuals with less expertise or power than their interlocutors – tellership clearly represents a narrative dimension that is worthy of closer scrutiny.

The previous analysis has also demonstrated how the dimension of tellership may, in some cases, interact with that of moral stance. For example, I have examined the different ways in which moral stances shift in different types of

teacher narratives from these meetings. In the three narratives discussed, three different types of uncertain/unstable moral stances were illustrated: in Narrative 1, the teacher (Sara) maintained an uncertain stance throughout her narrative; in Narrative 2, the teacher (Lauren) maintained a fairly consistent moral stance – however, her moral stance was ultimately destabilized by her supervisor interlocutor; and in Narrative 3, the teacher (Kaitlin) maintained a stable moral stance until she reached the coda, when her stable moral stance dissolved as a result of self-doubt. Different types of evaluative devices served as important indices of moral stance in all of the narratives.

Ultimately, what I have tried to suggest as a result of this analysis is that moral stance and identity may be constructed in different ways in novices' narratives than they are in experts' narratives – or, more specifically: the professional selves that emerge in novices' workplace narratives are perhaps not as skillfully managed as those of experts. Whereas prior studies of workplace narratives have highlighted the multifaceted, yet ultimately coherent, professional identities that emerge in narratives told by experts, this study has shown that the moral stance in narratives told by novices tends to be considerably less stable, less certain or less consistent. While the finding that, in workplace narratives, novices' moral stances tend to be uncertain or unstable may not be surprising – especially given that the state of being a novice, or a 'professional in the making', is a transitory state, often characterized by uncertainty and self-doubt – it is nevertheless important, in that it draws analytic attention to the relationship between discourse and the professional identities of novices in institutional settings. I have suggested a number of directions for further research where novices' workplace narratives are concerned, and the final direction I raise is a developmental one: longitudinal studies that follow an individual's narrative production in the workplace over time could shed light not only on differences between novice and expert identities, but might also provide insights into the processes of professional development. The path from less-experienced novice to more-experienced expert is very likely not a linear one. Longitudinal studies of narratives could shed light on this process and, in turn, enable us to better understand the development of a professional identity.

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NOTES

1. Threadgold (2005) claims that such a view of identity as socially performed and culturally constructed – rather than essential or biologically determined – has its origins in Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

2. Cortazzi (1993) provides a clear and concise overview of general trends in this type of research.
3. Just as identity is 'currently centre stage' in sociolinguistic research (Thornborrow and Coates, 2005: 14), so it is also a topic of current interest in educational research.
4. In a sense, then, the teachers may be 'pre-positioned' (Taylor, 2005) as novices in these institutional encounters.
5. The Labovian model of narrative is not without critics – especially those who argue that the model assumes an interviewer–respondent participation structure (see, for example, the collection of articles included in Bamberg, 1997; and, more recently, Georgakopoulou, 2006). While an in-depth discussion of these critiques is beyond the scope of this article, my own position is that many are quite valid. Nevertheless, I believe that a structural model offers the analyst a useful tool in the identification and extraction of narratives from their surrounding discourse. Once identified, I agree with Georgakopoulou (2006) that, in many cases – especially in those narratives which have *not* been elicited by a researcher – Ochs and Capps's framework offers more potential (than does a structural model) for their subsequent description and analysis.
6. 'While all narratives of personal experience are laced with moral stance, in some narratives the moral stance is presented as relatively certain and remains constant throughout the telling, while in other narratives it is uncertain and fluid as the narrative progresses' (Ochs and Capps, 2001: 50).
7. Marra and Holmes (2004) have also observed that in comparison with the vast amount of scholarship concerned with the structure of narratives, very few studies have been concerned with the functions of narratives. As researchers continue to examine narratives produced during naturally occurring encounters (as opposed to narratives produced in response to a researcher's interview question), such as narratives told in workplace settings, we will, no doubt, continue to learn more about the social and personal functions of narrative.
8. Sara used the words *overwhelmed/overwhelming* five times during one 20-minute interview focusing on her feelings about her teaching in the IEP. Interviews were conducted as part of secondary data collection for the larger project (Vásquez, 2005), in which interview data were used to provide further contextual information with respect to the post-observation meeting transcripts.
9. Although this talk occurred during a conversation, I have deleted the supervisor's minimal responses and backchannels in order to keep the focus on the brainstorming of the teacher.
10. Rachel's stated mentoring philosophy was to 'highlight what teachers do well' (interview data).
11. A teacher's problem with another teacher is the topic of the only remaining narrative: a rather anomalous situation in these data.
12. By 'problem student(s)', I refer to both deliberate actions caused by students who misbehave, or students who seem to have difficulty learning a new concept (and to whom the teacher must devote particular attention). Such 'problem student' narratives are discussed by Cortazzi (1993), Kainan (1992), and Richards (1999).
13. Only one of the 11 relational narratives relates an event that occurred *during* the class observed.
14. Interestingly, Rachel's attempt to predict 'what happened next' in the events of Kaitlin's narrative doesn't work because – unlike the events in Narrative 2 – Rachel was not present during the time that is being narrated in Narrative 3.

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