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Myths of monoculturalism: narratively claiming the other

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on monocultural education narratives associated with marginalizing newcomer English-as-a-New-Language learners and their families. These narratives emerged through a three-year long critical ethnography in the schools of a Midwest town (Unityville). The collective, social stories emerged as 'story seeds' through interviews and positioned the storytellers as knowledgeable in relation to the newcomer others. The stories reproduced monocultural myths about the school itself and privileged the storytellers and those with whom they identified. The primary analytic tool was reconstructive horizon analysis through which four main stories were articulated. All of them involved a myth of monoculturalism: 'When my grandfather came here ...', 'Latinos are the new blacks', 'Sink or swim', and 'Go home'. The Self/Other relations of the monocultural myths will be articulated and the way the collective stories structure those relations will be examined.

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Introduction

When I arrived at my university office one fall morning in 2003, I found a phone message awaiting a response. That message sparked a years-long relationship with educators in a town I refer to as Unityville.¹ Though much change occurred between the time I received that message and today, the point of the call serves as to illustrate the stories I will report on in this paper. A distance education technician from the high school left the message for me. She said that there had been a surprising number of 'foreign students' enrolling in the Unityville schools in recent years. The school personnel wondered if I (as coordinator of the multicultural education courses in the teacher education program) might be able to help the students know what was expected of them so that they might fit into the school better and succeed. Until this call, I had not heard of Unityville. As the study will show, the (predominantly white middle-class) educators in this town believed in an assimilationist orientation toward newcomers. The American 'Melting Pot' story with its assimilationist ideology gave Unityville educators a sense of purpose with respect to the newcomer students. It was in this context, through a participatory ethnographic study, that I was able to reconstruct some of the key orienting monocultural stories that educators told to justify and explain their approaches to schooling the newcomer students. One of the interesting things about these stories is that they were somewhat vacuous of actual story details. I refer to them as 'story seeds' because the stories were mere skeletal references to whole narratives. These skeletal references carried a lot of justificatory weight without ever having to be fully told. In this paper, I report on several of the story seeds which were reconstructed into narratives of monoculturalism. Even the pseudonym 'Unityville' is, in part, a reflection of those narratives. The educators in Unityville were frustrated because the significant growth in non-native English-speaking student population meant that teachers were encountering challenges they felt ill-equipped to address (Korth, 2009). For example,

several teachers reported in initial interviews that it was unreasonable to expect them to know how to teach children whose first language was not English. The teachers spoke in nostalgic terms, describing their schools as historically 'monocultural' as if those days were better and easier.

Unityville is a suburban town with a long and active history of male involvement in the KKK.² The town had one high school, one middle school, and three elementary schools during the time when the study was conducted (2003–2006). The population of the town was roughly 18,000, with approximately 94.5% white, 2% Hispanic, 1.5% African-American, 1% Asian, and 1% multiracial or other. Similar to the state average, Unityville recorded an 8% poverty rate in the county and 15% of its school students received free or reduced lunch (Brantmeier, 2007). From 1992 to 2002, the Latino population had increased over 300% (Brantmeier, 2007). The demographics have continued to change over the years and the 2015 data reported the student body as 79.5% white, 13.5% Hispanic, about 4% multiracial, about 2% black, and about 1.5% Asian (Indiana Department of Education Compass, 2015). The most recent report of teaching personnel (nearly 250 employed) indicates that over 99% are white (Indiana Department of Education Compass, 2015), as was the case during the years of the ethnography.³

Throughout the ethnographic period and in an attempt to locate themselves in the challenges they were experiencing, teachers narrated a set of monocultural story myths using common story seeds. These story seeds simultaneously contrasted a presumed, collective white/we/educators position with a presumed newcomer, non-white, student position – as if both positions were unified and homogeneous. I used the word 'presumed' because the facticity of the stories was not really at stake. Through these story seeds, educators positioned themselves as people whose families had overcome the challenges of being newcomers by doing things like giving up their native country's language. Yet, people who voiced the story seeds were not able to fill in the factual blanks for their families – they had no idea when their ancestors came to the country, how they experienced the language shift, what schooling was like for them, and so forth. The stories (as indicated through the seeds) served to marginalize the newcomer students and their families in the school community while securing the educator's identity as successful, knowledgeable, and capable.

Typically, narrative researchers engage participants in the telling of their stories. The *reconstructed* narratives told here are different. They did not emerge through the individual storytelling events of the participants. They were not the product of an effort to have participants tell their personal stories or share their experiences. I did not ask for these stories specifically. Instead, *these stories were implicit rationale for perspectives held and decisions taken by the educators in relation to the newcomer students*. For example, when explaining that the 'English only policy' was good for the newcomer students, educators would often invoke a 'sink-or-swim' story seed to say that this approach was a legitimate one and an English-only policy was aligned with such an approach to language learning. The stories were not personal in the typical way we think of that word. They were social with identity positionings provisionally allocated.

Thus, the story seeds were culturally anchored and were presented as 'ours' not just 'mine' even when set into a presupposed personal history. Also, the stories were cultural ways of explaining phenomena or justifying particular educational decisions (like the English-only policy of the schools). The story seeds were quite clearly partial and, yet, they implicated a whole host of relations, values, and identity possibilities which became visible when the stories were reconstructed. My work introduces a reconstructive approach to articulate the stories which were planted into in ordinary conversation. The stories implicate master narratives, but the seeds are pivot points that serve to personalize and thereby legitimate broader cultural metanarratives. By reconstructing these stories, we can find new ways of dialoguing with the storytellers. So long as the stories are left unquestioned, their hegemonic work can proceed unchallenged even by those very people interested in creating change and working toward understanding.

When planting the story seeds, the tellers did not expect to be held accountable for the details of the story. Instead, they anticipated the particular story to be taken for granted as legitimate context and rationale for monoculturalism. As a criticalist, I do not want to rest content with accepting these story seeds as either factual indications of the status quo or as sufficient rationale for educational decisions.

Instead, I want to reconstruct the master narratives, the mythologies, and in so doing create a new conversation with the storytellers. Lyotard (1979) famously declared 'postmodernism is an incredulity toward metanarratives' (p. 71). Giroux and Aronowitz (1991) argued that: 'postmodernism rejects ... [g]eneral abstractions that deny the specificity and particularity of everyday life, that generalize out of existence the particular and the local, that smother difference under the banner of universalizing categories' (p. 463). According to Pynchon (1990), cultural and personal myths ARE master narratives because they are stories that locate truth in unexplainable phenomena. When myths are accepted and proliferated, they become mechanisms of control. For McAdams (1993), personal myths are stories people tell about themselves to create for themselves and others a coherent whole. '[W]orking with people's consciously told stories, recognizing that these rest on deeper stories of which people are often unaware' (Bell, 2002, p. 209), I used the story seeds to connect the consciously told stories with the deeper ones. The story seeds functioned as a switching plate for indicating a truncated, presumed personal story to back up a cultural metanarrative. Such monocultural metanarratives must be undone to create schooling communities which are multicultural. The purpose of this paper is to explore the methodological merits of reconstructing story seeds to articulate working myths and metanarratives in communities in consort with the postmodern needs of educational critique. The goal of such work would be to facilitate an expanded dialog rather than a truncated one and to notice how such seeds deny the complexities and diversity that rich narratives invite. Those invitations broaden the identity positionings of members of the community ostensibly participating in the conversation.

Thinking of narrative

Throughout the ethnographic process, but particularly in interview opportunities, participants used narratives to explain, locate, and substantiate their various experiences. Narrative inquirers suggest that

We select those elements of experience to which we will attend, and we pattern those chosen elements in ways that reflect stories available to us. Narrative is not an objective reconstruction of life – it is a rendition of how life is perceived. (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 3)

In line with critical endeavors more generally, narrative inquiry provides an opportunity for introspection and reflection when in the course of ordinary experience, this might not happen (Korth, 2002; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

[Gough] argues that the ways we give meaning to ourselves and others and the world at large sometimes happens through stories, of which we are largely unaware or which are taken for granted. Reflecting critically on the stories that we read, hear, live and tell may help us to understand how we can use them more responsibly and creatively and free ourselves from their constraints. (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 7)

This potential of narrative approaches resonates with what ended up happening when I closely examined the story seeds. In this section, I want to (1) clarify the metatheoretical context I draw on to make sense of the stories themselves and (2) set the framework for grasping the connection between narratives and identity. It is from within this theoretical milieu that the findings will be animated.

Metatheoretical context: narrative as reconstruction rather than representation

A tension between representational and referential modes of interpretation is uncomfortably dealt with in narrative inquiry. On the one hand, it is clear that the stories one collects in the field have some intended relation to a presupposed reality. On the other hand, the meaning of the story is best not thought of as an account of facts, but rather as a performative moment whose meaning has to first be understood within the context of the storytelling itself. Most stories, and this is specifically the case with the stories reported here, must be reconstructed from the pieces participants share with us. The reconstructions themselves can be validated, but should never be thought of as whole. *They are indicative and referential rather than representational.* They are partial indicators of something that can be reconstructed *as if* whole, all the while recognizing that the whole that is being referred to requires filling in. A reconstruction is not a representation. It has some similar elements, but it differs in important

ways. When we reconstruct, we put into discourse that which has been implicit. We articulate the validity claims that are implicit in the truth claims that one is making. A representation can invoke the same validity claims and in some cases, this is the best way to share the meaning of an experience, but it is the implicit reconstruction inherent in a representation that makes it a better or worse invocation for what it represents.⁴ Thus, we can think of the roots of representation as reconstructive. For example, Magritte's famous painting of a pipe with the statement 'This is not a pipe' (written in French) illustrates this point. The picture of the pipe gives the appearance of a pipe and can be thought of as representing a pipe, but only within the context where the idea of painting a picture of a pipe is clearly not the same thing as a pipe. The reconstructive aspect would include thinking of the appearance of a pipe as something called to mind, but it would also include the context of the painting, the words juxtaposed with the image, and so forth. Even the visual representation of the pipe defers to a person being able to reconstruct (at least tacitly) the intersubjective references that others are likely to, also, grasp in interpreting or making sense of the painting.

In the same manner, we will interpret the story seeds and the implicated stories as intersubjective references rather than realist tales representing some 'actual' sets of experiences. In the stories that are reconstructed here, the actual objective claims that are implicit were vacuous in their specificity, but the identity claims and moral claims were not. The intersubjective references do carry claims about the actuality or reality of experiences and events and these certainly must be reconstructed; but in addition, we can reconstruct the values, norms, and identities that are entailed in the stories. These are not just represented by the story, but invoked and enacted in the storytelling itself. These values and norms, more than the objective assumptions, served to justify and rationalize educational decisions and identity claims among the storytellers.

Narrative and identity

The partialness of stories speaks to our inability to fully capture a coherent complete sense of self and the incapacity of any metanarrative to compensate for this. According to an empirical study conducted by Baerger and McAdams (1999), psychological well-being was statistically significantly correlated with being able to tell a coherent life story. Andersen (2002) conducted a study looking at illness and attachment-to-stories as a way of explaining medically unexplainable symptoms and experiences. He found that narratives served therapeutic effects for the storytellers. He, also, reported that people attached themselves to narratives of individuals, families, and lifestyles and internalized those narratives as a way of connecting meaningfully with others, particularly through change and trauma.

This paper extends that idea. Participants present socially acceptable story seeds, locating themselves in the stories through a claimed 'we/us.' The acceptable story seeds are generative in the sense that they imply a certain set of relations and serve particular functions that are presumably shared (that these are not totally shared is important, as well). Storytellers do not expect to have to explicate the whole story for me because they expect that I can recognize the story from its seed. They take me (a white, middle-aged educator) to be an insider to the positions these stories establish. Narratives give us access to the deep structures of social life: 'private constructions of identity must mesh with a community of life stories, or "deep structures" about the nature of life itself in a particular culture' making it possible to connect biography with society' (Riessman, 2008, p. 10). The stories reported here foreground social narratives through which identities were claimed – for example, stories about immigrating and learning English that position the storytellers as successful immigrants.

There is an interesting link between the partialness of all stories and the partialness of identity claiming. For example, when I act in a way that claims my identity as a researcher, I recognize (and expect others to also recognize) that I am not *only* a researcher. Being a researcher involves certain recognizable actions that social others have an opportunity to acknowledge and validate. Mead (1934) referred to these aspects of the self as the 'me.' According to Mead, there is also an aspect of the self, the 'I,' which is not tangible – it is linked to the awareness that 'I' am always other-than, beyond, more-than any 'me' claim; that 'I am' the storyteller, the claimer, unable to be known completely. The partialness of all 'me'

claims and their reference to an 'I' is analogous to the way stories are social 'mes' with hidden and incomplete elements. By acknowledging this necessary incompleteness, we create a space for new dialogs.

An answer to the question 'Who am I?' cannot be directly or entirely known. Narrative theorists have argued that stories are the best way to narrate that incompleteness into a coherent whole. However, stories, regardless of whether they appear whole or not, will have unarticulated, incomplete, and incongruous aspects. The partiality can be filled in reconstructively, but only in ways that push the horizon of meaning further into the background leaving the references open rather than closed.⁵ Master narratives and dominant discourses might constrain and enable our personal stories/myths without restraining or determining them. Personal myths can stand as affirmation or resistance to dominant discourses or master narratives, but master narratives will always, upon reflection, fail the person. It is in this failure that an analysis of story seeds, whereby the personal is juxtaposed with the metanarratives, can render a critique of master narratives.

Thinking of methodology

I, along with a group of collaborating graduate students, engaged with the Unityville school community in a critical participatory ethnography (drawing on Carspecken, 1996). The ethnography, as indicated earlier, focused on the integration of newcomer, new language learners into positive schooling experiences. Through the critical ethnographic process, we heard many narrative descriptions of experiences, but this particular paper attempts to understand references to stories that were not expressions of the storyteller's individual experiences per se. The story seeds were similar across white educators, taking the form of archetypes, and coming up in the conversations as justifications, rationales, and explanations for school-based decisions as described above with the sink or swim justification for the English-only policy. The educators offered a vague reference to personal stories as if validating the effectiveness of the sink or swim story in order to argue that they were doing the students a favor to have this policy. These stories were never told in full. After repeatedly hearing the seeds, we began following up with questions only to discover that personal details were seldom available. In this example, I followed up with 'So are you seeing the students swim or sink?' and the teachers would only shrug a response, not having really thought through the seed they were invoking. The stories reflected a shared set of beliefs and knowledge and thereby emphasized the normative-evaluative and identity aspects presumed through the hinted-at narratives. With an unquestioned facticity, the most important part of the meaning of the stories for the storytellers seemed to be the way it positioned them in relation to the newcomer, transnational others, not the actual status of the 'facts.' Self/other dichotomizing is a common byproduct of narratives, but perhaps the relation is more stark when the factual information of the stories is so noticeably impoverished. In the case of the 'sink or swim' story seed, the teachers could initially assume that they were acting in the best interest of the student by enforcing an English-only policy without reflecting on what it would mean to let students 'sink' or, even more deeply, on the problems of monoculturalism.

What stories?

Reconstructing the stories involved using the seed to write out the referenced story in very bare terms. This was followed with an articulation of identity claims as we/self/other configurations. The configurations indicated an historical 'we' that acted as validator for the current perspective. Storytellers identified themselves with the 'we,' but did not precisely locate themselves within it (Figure 1).

The above diagram will be used to present the findings in each section. The charts depict an inferential movement toward an increasingly internal reconstruction. It's like this: 'Story seeds' are recognized in the talk and then reconstructed in terms of purpose context, stories, and counter stories. From those reconstructions, a 'story to self-relation' relationship is recognized and then reconstructed in terms of timestamp verification, identity claims, posited others, and the posited relation of self to other. From this, a Positioning Self to Shadow relationship is recognized which is reconstructed in terms of Shadow

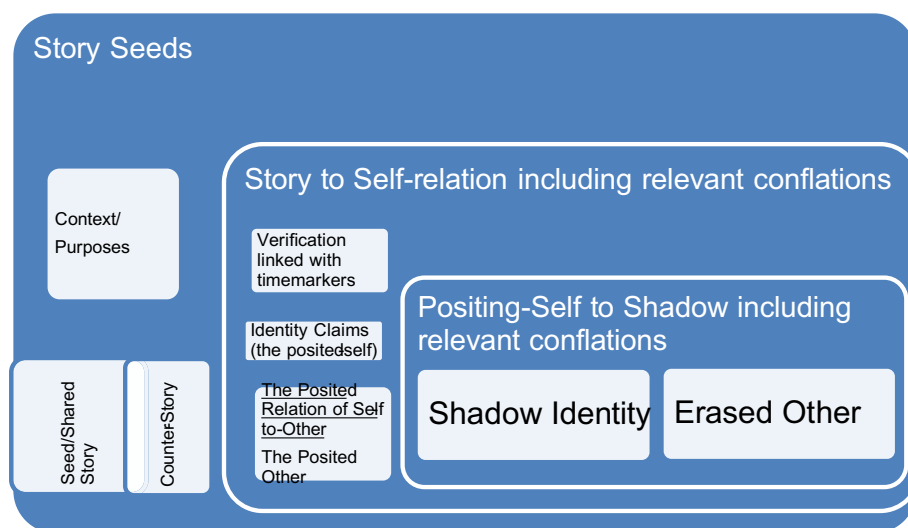


Figure 1. Story seed form.

Identities and Erased Others. I am using the word shadow to mean that which one would want to keep hidden because they compromise the primary identity assertions. A water background is used to indicate foregrounding and underlining is used to indicate a posited relationship.

I write about four monoculturalistic story seeds that were repeatedly voiced by the (white) educators. As the study demonstrates, the monocultural myth is something that educators in the district believed about their own district. These story seeds promoted that myth and simultaneously provided an opportunity to argue against the myth. The four story seeds are: (1) 'When my grandfather came here ...,' (2) 'Latinos are the new blacks,' (3) 'Go home,' and (4) 'Speak English if you're gonna come here.'

What newcomers?

Students from different language groups were treated differently by school personnel. The Latino/a students comprised the largest number of 'foreign' students in the district. Also, teachers tended to talk more negatively about them than they did other student groups. Japanese speakers comprised the next highest number of students. The Japanese students were in Unityville because their fathers were executives in a Japanese car manufacturing company. As such, they came to the town for about three years with their families and then returned to Japan. It was a quick turn-over group. The wives did not work outside the home and, also, by and large, did not speak English. When talking about behavioral issues at the elementary school, the principal reported that the Japanese students are quite docile (which he considered positive) unless they become 'too Americanized' at which point they might be more difficult in the classroom. Too 'Americanized' was exemplified by talking 'too much' and 'asking too many questions.' Most of the Japanese youth stayed in contact with friends in Japan via the Internet and we never heard any speculation about the legality of their statuses or the quality of their families. The town hosts a special dinner when new Japanese families come to town. The other language groups are much smaller and are talked about in idiosyncratic terms. For example, there is a family from Taiwan who started a Chinese food restaurant and the Taiwanese students were connected to this family.

By contrast, Spanish speakers were the most disparagingly talked about and were clearly the least welcomed by the community. There was lots of speculation about why the Spanish speakers had migrated to Unityville, whether or not they were 'legal,' and what goes on in their homes. Educators and longtimers in the town expressed feelings about how the presence of Latinos was changing the

community. For example, people commented on the 'garish' and 'bold' colors 'they' used to paint their buildings and the way 'they' increased crime in the community. The class differences between the Japanese newcomers and the Spanish-speaking newcomers was clearly influencing the way the newcomer groups were being welcomed into the community, though this was never explicitly articulated by educators as rationale for their differing accounts of the students.

Because of the disparity in perception, I will focus on the Latino/a students as targeted in the stories. From the perspectives of educators, some of the stories were only relevant to Latino/a youth, but even in the situations where the stories applied to other newcomer students, the stories were still told most often in reference to Latino/a youth.

Thinking of findings

Without prompting, the school administrator started talking, 'Mexican-American, African-American – that doesn't matter. We're all Americans' (with hand gesture and emotion behind words). The administrator continued on to say that when African-Americans use 'the African,' they are separating themselves from us. 'We're all Americans, that's *it* [stresses 'it', pauses briefly]. Don't tack that on' [said with emotion, meaning don't tack 'African' on to 'American'].⁶

Many of the educators had somewhat nebulous advice for the newcomers in their schools. This advice established a couple of points in the foreground. First of all, these Unityville longtimers established themselves as experts on what newcomers should do to succeed. Even in reaching out to me, it was as if 'we' white, educated people all knew what they, the disparaged newcomers, needed. Secondly, the educators operated off of a deep, largely unquestioned assumption that everyone in the school was, or should be, like them – that the school was a place of and for monocultural assimilation. Through each of the story seeds, a 'we/us' is referenced. The 'we' was always inclusive of the speaker and listener and was primarily a white 'American' person 'we,' though this was left under-articulated. As mentioned earlier, the stories served as rationale for education decisions and practices regarding the newcomer students. However, the deeper identity-securing function and the response to longing for stability and self-certainty that was served by the narratives have not been made explicit until now. By telling a story that is more social than personal, personal identity gets secured through the social we.

As Mishler (2004) pointed out, the interactive context within which the stories are being told and developed is not a neutral element of the story itself. In this case, the stories consistently emerged through various dialogs over time about having newcomer English Language Learners (ELLs) in the school. As participants in a long-term critical ethnography, the educators were interviewed, observed in a variety of contexts, shadowed, conversed with informally, and so on. The educators knew we (the researchers) were in their schools in order to help facilitate a process of improving the schooling situation. In our early interviews with school personnel, we rarely found any amount of empathy expressed toward the newcomer students. The educators were by and large, but not totally, frustrated with the students' inability to participate in class in English. Educators primarily thought of the Spanish-speaking newcomer students in terms of their presumed deficits in English language ability. Actually, a student of Mexican decent moved to Unityville from California with English as his first language and Spanish as a second language and he was just automatically placed in the ENL class. It took more than a semester to get him transferred out of that class. Spanish-speaking students were distinguished from other ELLs and were talked about in deficit terms that carried morally 'bad' connotations. With each story seed, there is a reactive counter story among educators. (Of course, there are also counter stories indicative of different perspectives, e.g. the student perspectives – but these stories are not being told here.) Each implied narrative (the story seed and the counter story) foregrounds an aspect of the same story. The counter stories are tethered to the story seed as response to it. When these are taken together, identity configurations can be reconstructed. In other words, the stories/counter stories work together. For each of the story seeds articulated below, identity configurations will also be articulated. You will also notice that the stories work together as part of a larger monocultural narrative with which most of the educators strongly identified. The story seeds articulated at the beginning of each section are composites of

many seeds, using the words of participants, but in a conglomerated, truncated form. What I present is a reconstruction of the stories, given the partial bits and pieces people used to reference this story.

I have organized the stories below into two categories based on what seems to be the logic associated with how the stories legitimate the storytellers' positions – one category refers to the historical legitimization of the storytellers' superiority and the other refers to the moral legitimization of the storytellers' superiority.

Historical legitimization

'When my grandfather came here ...'

When my grandfather came here from Germany he gave up speaking German and insisted that everyone learn English. They wanted us to be part of America.

This was a very common story. With primarily sincere inquisitiveness, I would ask for the storyteller to fill me in, tell me the whole story of her family's immigration. I asked questions like: 'Who in your family immigrated? When did this happen? How did they go about learning English? Were there struggles involved?' Not one person who started this story could fill it in. On the level of fact, (1) someone had immigrated, possibly from a non-English-speaking country, and, (2) the family descendants now speak English only.

The storytellers planted this seed into the conversation when offering support for the district's 'English Only' policy. The point of telling the story was to suggest that the imperative to learn English had applied to 'MY FAMILY' and should also apply to 'THEIR FAMILIES.' The implication was that 'WE DID IT THIS WAY' and clearly it worked, therefore 'THIS IS WHAT THEY (the newcomers) SHOULD DO – they should do it our way.' Doing it 'our' way assumes a monocultural privileging – as if there is ONE ACCEPTABLE BEST WAY. This particular story seed was the most barren in terms of the story it indicated while linking most directly to a common assimilation theme in American education. The lack of precise detail to the story also made it difficult for the educators to relate to the newcomers. So though the 'we' is an immigrant story, it functioned to distinguish rather than unite the educators from the newcomer students and their experiences.

The 'WE' identified was a 'we' of outcomes (we all now speak English) rather than experience. The seeds did not implicate any empathetic content. In other words, the storytellers were identifying with the outcome, but not the struggles or challenges or the details of the process. One of the most notable tendencies of our early days at Unityville was the absence of empathy in the teachers' talk about newcomer students. This identification with a 'we' who obtained outcomes (speaking English only) through some supposedly personal agency placed the burden of the imperative on 'the other' and raises 'the self' up as exemplar. The implication is that 'I am only holding you accountable for what my family was able to do.' In the reasoning process, this historical 'we' gives the storyteller the credentials to hold newcomers to the same outcomes. This is what 'I am an English-speaker' means in this story. 'I am the result of an assimilation process and therefore I have the right to speak on the reasonableness of this expectation for newcomers.

The line between US and THEM in this narrative is one of TIME, OPPORTUNITY, and OUTCOME.

At present, this implicated story frees the educators from responsibility in facing what they perceived as the biggest challenge of having newcomer students in the schools – the language difference. The story is that 'my ancestors DID THIS' – they accomplished this and therefore this is something the newcomers MUST DO for themselves. The historical nature of the story provided a particular kind of legitimacy to the identity claim. This historical story is not defended on factual details other than the bare outcomes. Thus, even though the storytellers cannot fill in those details, the basic fact of their outcomes (we all now speak English) legitimizes the whole history. Imagine what happens to the identity claim if the basic legitimacy of the story is called into question. If we call the story into question, not based on the particular vacuous facts, but on different grounds, we can see what happens to the legitimacy

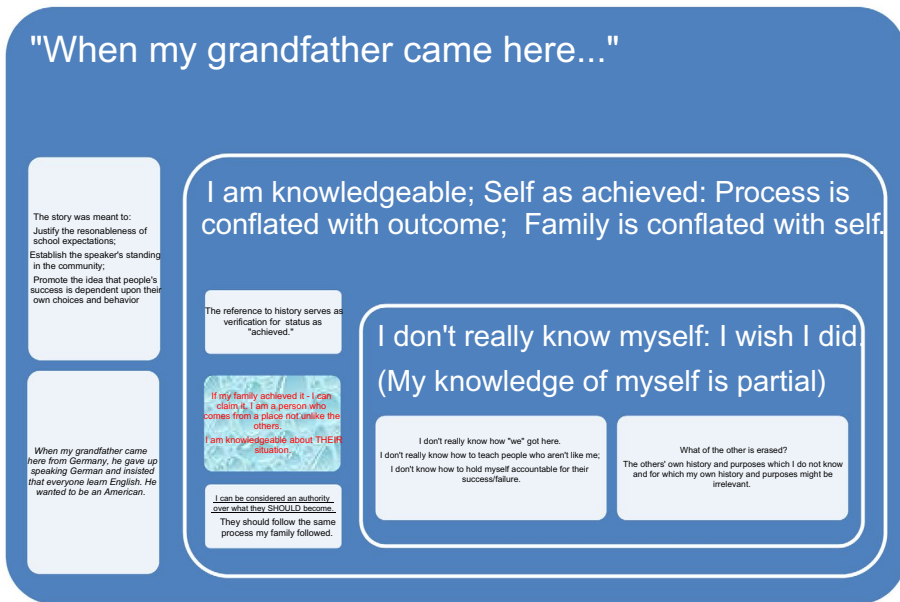


Figure 2. When my Grandfather came here.

structures for the implicit identity claims. Instead of asking the story planter to tell us the story of her ancestors' immigration, we could ask something like this:

'What kind of a person does that make you?'

The implied answer to such a question is something like this:

- 'I am a good American because I have become a full member of this American society.'
- 'I am, of course, an English speaker.'
- 'I am right because my ancestors did something right.'
- 'I AM KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT what newcomers should do because of my status as an immigrated American who now is fluent in English and American culture.'

The tellers seem to reinforce a sense of certainty about their European heritage identifying completely as AMERICANS through some nebulous immigration process. The real message has both to do with this outcome (becoming an American, English speaker in the US) being an appropriate goal for all newcomers AND through some presumed, but not actually known-about, process. This is consistent with the rich theoretical work done on white racial identity, but helps nuance some of the mechanisms that have been well noted in that literature (Helms, 1990; McIntosh, 1992, Figure 2).

'Hispanics are the new blacks'

Hispanics, they are like the new blacks. Once upon a time there were only white people in Unityville. Then some blacks moved here. And it was hard, at first. No one really knew how to interact with them. They were not really part of the community. It was hard. But now, when you look at the school, there's no black, there's no white. There's just kids. Someday it will be like that with the Hispanics. At first the blacks were a lot of trouble, but now you don't even notice them.

Teachers reported that Hispanics are the new group for 'Traditional'/'American' [more precisely, white] students to put down. One said, 'We don't have a large African-American population; and before the Hispanics, there was a bit of prejudice [toward those African-American students], but now it has truly shifted – there is a lot of prejudice toward Hispanics.' Many teachers and administrators would talk about the current situation with Latino newcomers by saying, 'Hispanics are the new blacks.' I would follow that with a question like 'What do you mean?' and then, inevitably, I would be told a story like

the one above. One teacher said, 'Well, we used to have problems. The black kids didn't fit in, but now you can't even tell they are here.' This sentiment was shared by many teachers and was, also, expressed by administrators. This kind of 'colorblindness' points directly to the monocultural idealism strongly held by many of Unityville's educators. Scholars like Gallagher (2003) and Lewis (2004) and popular press writers (e.g. Scruggs, 2009) have linked the notion of colorblindness and monocultural idealism with white privilege.

The other thing that is particularly compelling about this narrative is its obvious racialness in light of claiming racial blindness (Gallagher, 2003; Lewis, 2004). The story is about newcomers becoming more like 'us' white people at the school. There is an indication that 'not being a problem' means being more assimilated into 'our' ways and the use of the signifier 'our' persistently meant white. 'White' and 'American' and 'us' were synonyms. One of the school counselors, MJ, reported her own bi-racial status in a way that illustrates the persistent privilege of being white. She told an interviewer,

Recently, I've been put in charge of all the minority students ... Um, I'm actually minority myself. I'm, ummm half Mexican ... so this is kind of a neat thing for me, because the Mexican portion of my background is something that I never really got to know much about ... and you know when it comes to it, most people don't know I'm minority.

Let's look at one of the counter stories. MJ, also, said in the same interview,

Um, well one thing that I know the African American students were upset about last year, unfortunately it wasn't an issue this year, but like Martin Luther King Jr. day is a holiday for us, but it's also a snow day. So if it snows and we have to miss school one day, then we make it up on Martin Luther King Jr. day and that right there shows that you don't really – you sort of value that holiday, but not necessarily cuz if we need to – to come to school that day, we will. You know what I mean, so that kind of bothers them.

In this counter story, the counselor is specifically talking about the African-American students having a status in the school that is different from the white kids. Her view shows the level of inclusion she envisions for the school and, yet, also shows the limitations in terms of assimilation – showing that Martin Luther King Jr. Day SHOULD be more important for African-American students than for other students as if this celebration is FOR African-Americans and not for Americans. This is where the contradiction appears. Assimilation only goes one way – toward the practices and values of the white majority. It is not assumed that perhaps the Euro-American culture could assimilate *toward* African-American culture, for example. It is not assumed that white people benefitted from the civil rights movement in the country would also have things to learn from and reasons to appreciate a day honoring Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.

These two stories taken together suggest that the idea of assimilating has to do with how the majority white people think of 'others.' Thinking of 'Hispanics' as the 'new Blacks' sets up a trajectory for the Latino newcomers according to how white people in the schools have experienced cultural others. Others are homogenized according to this experience. Said differently, the diversity reflected in the Latino/a population is homogenized into one and is even compared to African-Americans as if they are the same in their otherness. The counter story helps reveal this by at least acknowledging group-level differences.

In these stories, the line between US and THEM is the ability to just take for granted the norms of the white people in the school. This story also served to justify a 'just wait and it will get better' attitude. The story implied a natural passivity on the part of the people who (according to the story) do not need to change. I consider this a historical legitimization story because it links past experience with anticipations for the future. The identity being claimed is from the position of the one who knows the past, locates the present in the past, and anticipates the future. It is the identity of the person positioned as omnipotent and, thus, who can claim a particular kind of objective perspective and locate one's identity claim as that third-person observer (Figure 3).

Moral legitimization

'Go home'

They ['Hispanics'] have invaded and infiltrated our town. They [those Hispanics] have taken local jobs away from us, from our people. They ['Hispanics'] have changed the face of the community – going so far as to paint a downtown building in bright, garish colors. My family has lived here since forever and I can tell you that things are not the same

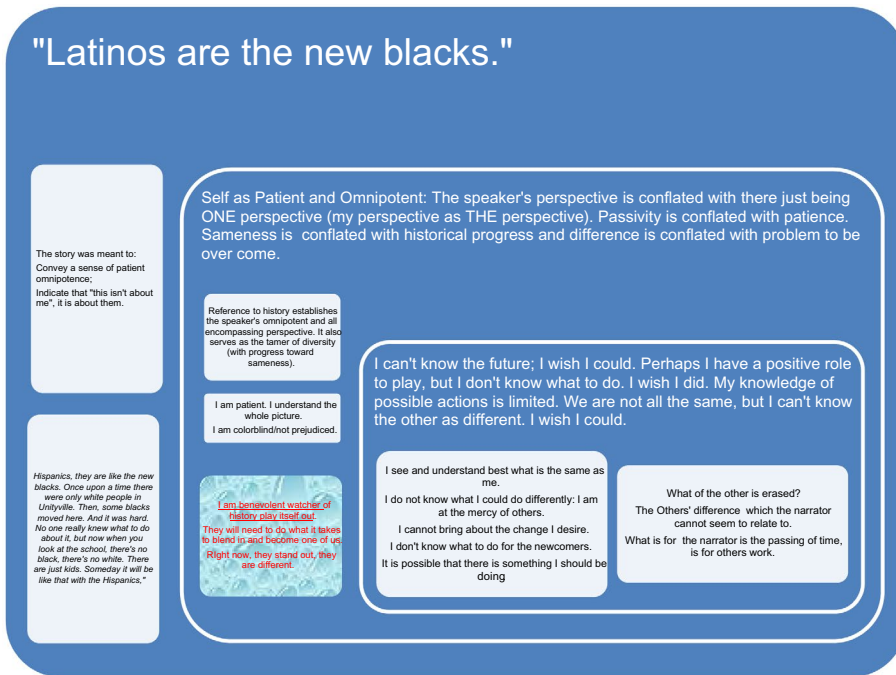


Figure 3. Latinos are the new blacks.

with them here. They should go back to where they belong. They live with way too many people in small apartments. They drink a lot of beer. They don't fit in. If they really want to be here, they should become like us. Unityville is not one for change. We don't take kindly to a lot of change. We like the status quo. Most of us don't want them here.

This is a story of 'You don't belong here. This isn't your home. Go back to where you came from.' In our early interviews, we heard this common story seed across differing groups of interviewees – high school students, parents, educators, support staff such as on-duty police, and community members. Even the newcomer students knew this story. They would tell us in interviews, *They don't want us here* and *They say to us, Beano, go home*. Several community members independently described the recent history of immigration into the community using the word 'infiltration.' The idea that Unityville had been invaded by those unwelcomed was pervasively referenced. In a focus group of high school students, the kids said that they thought the 'Hispanics' should 'go home.' One student said, '*They* [referring to Latino students] *don't belong here*. We [referring to white people] *made this country*.' Similarly, Newcomer Latino/a students often reported to us that their high school classmates would tell them to *Go back to Mexico* (not knowing what country the student really came from). I asked the white people, 'Why do you think they [the Latino/a newcomers] came here?' and the two most common responses were 'To take our jobs' and 'I hear there's a sign at the border that says GO TO UNITYVILLE.' A sophomore, affirmed by her classmates, told us that working people with more seniority are fired and Hispanics are hired for less pay. And this 'problem' is blamed on the newcomers. In the early days of our ethnography, Latino/a students were often verbally bullied, being called 'wetback' and told 'to go home.' Ed Brantmeier, a researcher on our team, was talking with a district administrator. Ed explained to the administrator that Latino high school students tend to sit together in the cafeteria. I've been told that they do so because if they try sitting elsewhere, other Euro-American students tell them to 'go back to Mexico' and 'speak English.' Brantmeier reported to the administrator that in conducting the ethnography, he had observed some threats to Latino kids. Ed noted that the administrator's facial expression didn't change. The administrator went on to say that he, himself, is prejudiced and that he thinks the students should assimilate or

go home. These bits and pieces reference a consistent story that the [Latino/a] newcomers have come into a place the longtimers consider their own home.

The idea of the place (Unityville) as 'home' was a central part of this story. Sometimes, specifics were offered that involved things like, 'my mom grew up here and then my parents raised us here.' There was definitely a prevalence of the idea among the town folk that you had to have been born in Unityville to really 'belong' in Unityville. Moreover, the town has a reputation among outsiders as being unwelcoming. Here, the stories of 'we,' 'us/them,' and 'our' reflect a possessiveness and a sense of stability. The newcomers are interpreted as a threat to that possession and stability. Words like 'infiltrate' and 'invade' suggest a lack of control over the influx with a desire to protect oneself. These story seeds positioned the narrators as passive victims of this infiltration. Dini (another member of the team) was interviewing one of the teachers from the math and science department, who said, *[P]eople can't ignore the change in the population that's in this school, you can't ignore it, it's not going away. ((D: mm hmm)) Some of them would like to think that it will go away ((D: mm hmm)).* This particular teacher was talking of people in general, but, as if she were different, however, the idea of being a passive victim of the change is still strong in what she is saying.

In the counter story, narrators emphasized the idea that the newcomers brought change to the community. According to these not-quite-Unityville-insiders, change was not wanted by most of the longtimers. Again, MJ, a guidance counselor at the high school, was asked about teacher's classroom accommodations for ENL students: *I think you're always going to have people who are, um, who just don't want to change. Um, aren't willing to change. They don't really want to change. They don't like the idea that the town could be different somehow. These new people threaten their way of doing things. They are so comfortable with how things are that they just do not want to change.*

Here, you can see that the 'they' are people in the town who are not open to change, but the narrators are people who are open to change and who do not resist the newcomers. Another educator said,

Well, I think for me, it's helped give me a passion to work with these students. Um, because I feel like it's almost two ways, because I'm not just trying to help them, but they're teaching me too. They're teaching me different things.

Together, the counter story and the 'Go Home' story seed indicate the possibility that being 'the passive victims' of this unwelcomed change bespeaks the way change can be experienced as threatening. The idea of not wanting things to change being equated with one 'having to change' is an aspect brought out more by the counter story. In the story seed, the thrust is on change being forced onto one as passive and in the counter story, the idea is that one does not want to change ... to have to behave differently. One's resistance to the change process is active not passive, according to the counter story, while one's openness to change is also active.

The moral injunction has to do with the immorality of invading one's home and the right of the homeowner to protect her home from invasion (Figure 4).

'Speak English if you're gonna come here'

When people immigrate to a place, they need to learn to speak the language of the place and fit in. It doesn't really make sense to move somewhere if you don't want to try to fit in and live the life that is available to you in that new place. I don't think people should move to Unityville if they are not going to learn English. They need to be speaking English in the home and doing their best to be sure that their kids learn English. You can't just come here and then separate yourself out and not speak English. In school, the kids are supposed to only speak English. When I hear them speaking Spanish, I reprimand them. They could be cheating or talking badly about me or who knows what else. They need to be speaking in English.

This story seed was the most frequently articulated, but possessed the least structure. It was voiced as a moral imperative. Again, Ed Brantmeier was talking with the top district administrator, and that administrator told Ed, in an informal interview, *I have a prejudiced view there. (pauses) I think they need to learn to speak English. If you come to a country, learn English.* He added, *That's important.* In the flow of this conversation, he mentioned, *'I don't say it (stresses say it) like some of the kids though.'*

Dini asked MJ about teachers' classroom accommodations for ENL students:

I mean it's sad to state, but some people still have that mindset that if you're in America you should speak English and I mean, you just have to be careful around them and let them know that they have to do these accommodations, um, but realizing their inflexibility.

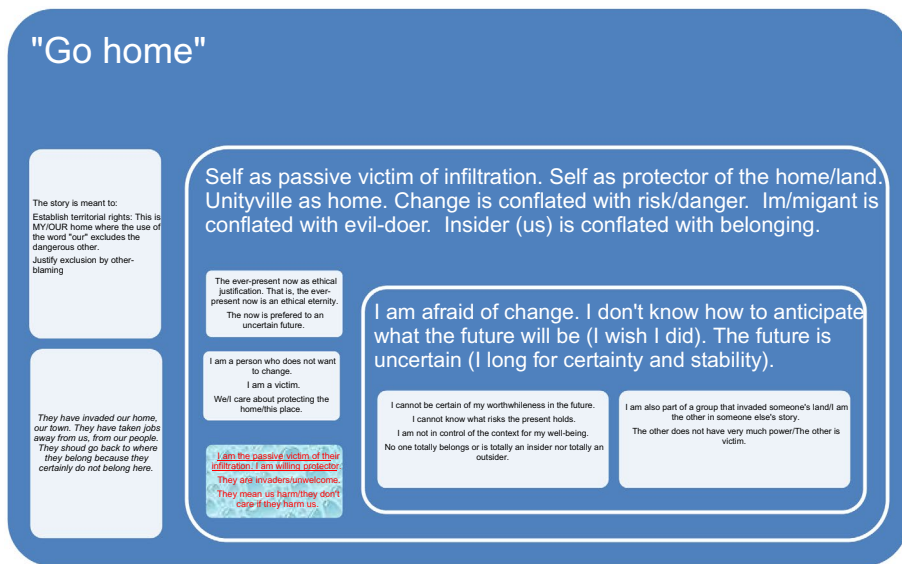


Figure 4. Go home.

MJ, herself, thinks that the home language should be used when needed. She said, *You don't want to penalize a student who doesn't know English when they still have thoughts and ideas and opinions, you know. You don't want to say 'unless it's in English we're not going to validate you.'* MJ had an experience at a conference that helped her see the students' experience:

But it was neat for me, because, I mean I speak some Spanish, but I'm not by any means fluent. And for me being there with all these Hispanic students, they were just going on and on in Spanish and I'm thinking oh my goodness, you know I can't understand half of what they're saying and then when I would try to communicate with them in Spanish I would feel silly, thinking am I saying the right thing, do I sound really stupid? You know, so it was kind of a neat experience.

Unfortunately, for the newcomer students, MJ's attitude was not widely held among the educators. Most of the educators believed that the families should be speaking English at home (despite that fact that there were few fluent speakers in the families) and that students should be expected to sink or swim.

This common narrative seed was a way of expressing the point that the newcomer students had to be responsible for learning English. To not learn English would be considered a bad attitude on the part of the newcomer students and would risk their success in the schools. In a focus group of white high school students, I was told that they don't like it when newcomer students have a bad attitude. When I asked what indicated a bad attitude, they all agreed that the single best indicator of a bad attitude was when a newcomer student 'refused' to speak English. Thus, the story provided rationale for assuming that the students were responsible for learning English (rather than educators being responsible for teaching) and that the failure/'refusal' to learn English was a moral one. The story seed is connected with the first story articulated 'When my grandfather came here ...' since one of the main outcomes of the historical story is the monolingual use of English among European immigrants of earlier times. Both stories are also used to indicate the newcomers' 'refusal' to become 'one of us' in the community. However, this story is articulated separately because it involved a different kind of rationale. The link between 'bad attitude' and 'refusal to speak English' produces a more strident, oppositional kind of story, legitimized on moral terms, which involves interpreting the newcomer students as belligerent and untrustworthy. Teachers identified this as the number one problem. The school had an 'English-only' policy and some teachers bragged about the fact that they didn't 'allow students to speak Spanish in the class.' Zero tolerance. When I asked teachers to talk about this rule, they would say that kids might cheat or talk about them in Spanish if they are allowed to use Spanish in the class. Another teacher was talking about how the



Figure 5. Speak English.

ENL students were allowed to go to the ESL teacher when taking tests if they needed language support. She questioned this practice by questioning the integrity of the students (Figure 5).

But then again, sometimes I wonder if their English (spoken more slowly) is really better than what I perceive. I wonder if they are putting up a front and using the language as their excuse for ignorance. And, ah, because sometimes I'll talk with Ms. Brian and say 'What about so and so?' 'What?' 'What?' You know, and she'll say 'Oh, he or she knows more than what they are saying.' Their English is pretty good. You know, blah, blah. So they are kind of pullin' your leg from time to time, to think that they don't understand what I'm saying but they really truly do understand what I'm saying so.

Thinking about conversation points

I want to draw out two main categories of conversation points. The first has to do with the work of stories and meta-stories in preserving the status quo, particularly in reference to an assimilationist monoculturalism. The second conversation point has to do with insights relevant to multicultural education. It is my hope that these conversation points give us starting places, rather than ending ones, for continuing the important work of world desegregation, integration, and diversified school communities.

The telling of monocultural stories

The four stories presented in this paper mutually and interdependently co-produce a monocultural, assimilationist narrative that privileges whiteness in ways that looked invisible to white storytellers. If we look across the stories, we have to ask:

What presumed 'right' or 'authority' does the narrator have to justify her/his stance?

'When my grandfather ...'
'Hispanics are the new blacks'

My achieved status
My omnipotent perspective

The results of history as time
History as beyond time and the present

'Go home'
'Speak English if you're gonna come here'

My belongingness to the community
The knower/speaker of western adage of wisdom

Moral/ethical ever-present now
Moral/ethical ever-present now

It is important to remember that these were collective social story seeds in that they were commonly shared by individuals, nearly word for word, in making reference to the larger community's metanarratives. Each of these story seeds could be told in such truncated form, in part, because those of us on the research team who were working with the white people were considered one of 'US'. Perhaps one reason why narrative details are fairly nonexistent is because the storytellers are not telling of their own

experiences. Also, in each story, the story seed planters position themselves as passive in the story. In the historical story seeds, the passivity is located as the person identifying with the outcomes, but not the process. Historicity of the claims was a fundamental part of the legitimacy of the claims from the storyteller's perspective. In the story suggesting that the newcomers should speak English, the passive aspect has to do with the invisibility of the storytellers as part of the story itself. It is as if all the action should be engaged by the others. In the story seed telling newcomers to go home, the story seed planter establishes her validity in the storied relationship as one who is from HERE with an emphasis on ownership of the place, our home. The other is not welcome. There is a normative imperative that the owner of the home should have the right to turn away unwelcomed intruders for the good and safety of those in the home. This story seed has the potential of invoking a more active identity, though in the way the story seeds were planted, the passive aspect of having a lot of invaders show up at the door was emphasized. The story was told as if the newcomer others should just leave.

The two historical story seeds establish legitimacy of the self/other identity constructions through historical outcomes as proof, with the idea that what has happened is fact. That is, to point toward the historical nature of things is to establish their facticity. This is done in quite a vacuous way in these story seeds such that evidence for the historical fact relies entirely with the outcomes. In this kind of story, it seems historical time is used to legitimize the identity and meet identity-securing needs. When one identifies with an outcome that has already been achieved, the facticity of the historical process can stand in for the legitimacy of the self which is the product of that process. And in the case of the story seed 'When my ancestors', the historical outcome as a self is connected, but in a way that can be absent in any practical detail. The storyteller is legitimating her own identity through a presumed history.

In the story seed that asks the students to speak English, the storyteller's role in the telling situation is made invisible. This story was told from a position of all-knowing. The identity-securing structure is just implicitly invoked in a moral voice. Those who failed to comply with the 'reasonable' moral imperative were thought to have a bad attitude. In the story seed telling newcomers to go home, the identity aspects are linked to place and the desire for (presumed-homogeneous) stability.

In general, it seems that the passivity contributed to presenting identities that could be recognized among themselves and by us as reasonable, right-minded folks while masking the possibility of negatively interpreting them as people. The reasonability had to do with thinking that we (the researchers) would recognize the validity of their identity claims. The straw facts were only necessary to imply the story. The real truth of the story had to do with the US/THEM identity claims.

Underneath the passive identity claims in relation to the other, the 'I' stands as judge of the other. In reconstructions, this shows as 'I KNOW THAT THEY SHOULD ...' And 'I AM EXPERT HERE.'

These identity claims belie an incompleteness and uncertainty that is evidenced through the factual emptiness of the stories. It isn't just that the story seeds lacked factual detail, but that this lack of detail was totally acceptable. Also, these stories were being told to us as if we (members of the research team) were in the 'US' group. They hoped to rely on normative recognition in lieu of factual establishment of the claims. The normative identity legitimacy looks different when anchored to historical stories or moral injunctive stories. With historical stories, the identity legitimacy has to do with the historical outcome while backgrounding the facticity of the process. With the moral injunctive stories, again the facticity is nearly irrelevant to the legitimation of the identity claims. The legitimation has more to do with recognizing the moral right of the speaker to expect things of others. The function of the stories to legitimate the authority of one group to 'tell' the story of the school and the community maintains in deed the authority it both draws on and reconstitutes.

Relevance for multicultural education

While the paper is fundamentally a methodological one, it holds relevance for multicultural education. The approach to working with the stories offers some insights about how to push critically past the maintenance of the status quo. It is these insights with which I would like to close the paper.

Educators could listen for the common story seeds in their own schools, attentive also to counter stories. There will be a lot of useful understanding in these stories that one can locally harvest for critical reflection. First of all, educators should listen for the We/Them constructions implicit in the stories so that the specific content of those constructions can be queried and perhaps challenged. Secondly, the stories themselves should be questioned using the counter stories and the logic of the stories themselves. For example, for stories that imply a moral legitimization, moral questions should be levied. What makes that right? Why would one have to do it like that? The questions should provoke thinking outside our common parlance. Thirdly, educators should look closely at the identity-securing aspects of the story – on what grounds do the WEs of the stories come out looking good? These identity-securing aspects can be identified in order to nurture teachers and students where they feel most vulnerable. Caring for teachers in terms of their skills and vulnerabilities could go a long way toward helping them take up critical perspectives toward the status quo. Helping teachers reflect on their own stories in safe ways and spaces could help them take up critical perspectives.

One of the most important points for multiculturalism is not a new one: the monocultural talk glosses over the diversity that is lived within the school walls. To truly honor and benefit from the diversity of the community, we need to invest in tales that are inclusive of the diversity, reflect multiple storytellers, and can be richly evidenced in the details. In the undoing of story seeds, there will be an undoing of their identity-securing/locating functions. There is then emotional and empowering work – for everyone. As Freire (2000) noted, all of us bound up in an oppressive relation are not free.

Notes

1. A pseudonym.
2. Ku Klux Klan – a white separatist, protectionist movement whose history includes significant violence toward African-decent peoples in the US in order to maintain what they perceive as their deserved culturally dominate position.
3. These reports are drawn from the state Department of Education Website, but the details are not provided in order to protect the confidentiality of the district.
4. The methodological aspects of these are ideas are drawn from Carspecken's (1996) approach to critical ethnography.
5. For a good theoretical exploration of these ideas, see Carspecken (2003).
6. Taken from Ed Brantmeier's fieldnotes, 2 September 2005.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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