A Short Story Approach to Analyzing Teacher (Imagined) Identities Over Time

GARY BARKHUIZEN
University of Auckland
Auckland, New Zealand

In this article the researcher reports on a longitudinal study which investigated the imagined identities of a preservice English teacher in New Zealand and compared these with the identities she negotiated in her teacher education and then teaching practice nearly nine years later. The teacher, an immigrant from the Pacific Island of Tonga, imagined herself working amongst members of her immigrant community but ended up teaching English at a privileged high school. The researcher used a short story analytical approach to analyze her narratives. Short stories are excerpts of data extracted from a larger set of data such as conversations, interviews, written narratives, and multimodal digital stories. In this case, short stories from a series of interviews were analyzed for both their content and the varying scales of context in which the short stories were constructed and interpreted. The analysis is informed theoretically by recent developments of the concept of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). The researcher includes reflexive personal commentary on his own positioning throughout the article, which concludes with suggestions for the use of short story analysis in teacher reflection and research.

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In this article I catch up with Sela, a high school teacher of English as a second language (ESL) who lives and works in New Zealand. Originally from the Pacific Island of Tonga, she immigrated to New Zealand as a young adult and shortly afterwards entered university with the intention of preparing to become an English teacher. We first met in 2006 when she was a preservice teacher enrolled in a graduate program in language teaching, and it was during this time that I embarked on a narrative inquiry project with her to explore her developing language teacher identity, particularly her imagined identity as a future teacher practicing in a multilingual immigrant community in the city of Auckland. My positioning analysis (Bamberg, 2011) of a
small story interview excerpt (Georgakopoulou, 2015) revealed a number of identities Sela imagined for herself in her future work as an English teacher, and the outcome of this investigation was published (Barkhuizen, 2010).

Nearly nine years later Sela and I met up again. A lot had gone on in our professional lives during this time. She had studied further and thereby gained accreditation to become a high school English teacher, which she did in a very good school in Auckland, and I had worked hard at honing my narrative research knowledge and skills (Barkhuizen, 2008, 2013, 2014). I had also become further interested in the concept and practice of language teacher identities, particularly how those identities are constructed *in* and *through* narrative. When Sela and I got together again in 2015 we had much to share about what we had been up to. I was intrigued to know how her previously imagined identities compared with those she currently negotiated in her working life. In other words, did things turn out the way she had imagined they would nine years earlier? I aim to answer this question in this article, and in doing so emphasize the benefits that longitudinal, sociohistorical studies of language teacher identity have for providing insights into identity change and professional development. I first revisit some of the earlier small story data, and then continue by analyzing a series of what I call *short stories* extracted from a lengthy narrative interview we co-constructed during our most recent meeting. Short stories are storied extracts from a larger data set analyzed for both content and context. A further purpose of this article is to describe what short stories are and to demonstrate an approach to their analysis. The conclusion of the article suggests ways in which short story analysis could be incorporated into teacher education programs and teacher inquiry more generally.

**SELA AND ME**

Sela was born in Tonga. Early in her life she befriended English-speaking children in her community, and by the time she reached secondary school her level of English proficiency was high. She immigrated to New Zealand as a young adult and lived in a lower socioeconomic suburb of Auckland with a high density of Tongan and other Pacific Island immigrants. She soon entered university to study to become an English teacher. Sela completed her first degree and then entered a graduate program in language teaching and learning. This is when I met Sela, in 2006. She enrolled in two of my courses, and then when she reached the research dissertation stage of her MA, I became her adviser. At the time Sela was in her mid-twenties; she
definitely wanted to be an English teacher within her own community in Auckland, and definitely did not want to be a high school teacher.

The idea for this study emerged during our discussions on the topic of Sela’s dissertation, in which she investigated the post-immigration English learning experiences of three women in New Zealand. Many of the issues raised in their stories were similar to those Sela experienced in her own life; stories of settlement, language learning, education, and employment. In one of the courses she studied with me, Sela was required to write a series of four personal reflective narratives, which she then analyzed for the purposes of a class assignment. I decided, with Sela’s consent, to examine these further, and also to conduct a series of three narrative interviews (Chase, 2003) with her over a period of eight months. The aim of the study was to investigate Sela’s emerging teacher identity as a preservice English teacher imagining her future working life.

During this time I was developing as a narrative researcher. I had recently realized that much of the research I had done in the past was in some way narrative (see Barkhuizen, 2011). Further exploration of all things narrative convinced me to approach even more explicitly my future research narratively. Working with Sela provided me with such an opportunity. At the time I was reading sociolinguistic narrative work on small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2006) and positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997; Watson, 2007) and decided it would be appropriate to apply and extend those approaches to the analysis of Sela’s narratives. Nine years later, when I re-connected with Sela, I was developing the concept of short stories in my research and using a short story analytical approach to investigate a range of different topics, including teacher identity, teacher professional development, and study abroad. In examining Sela’s shifting teacher identities in this article I analyze a number of short stories, one from the early interviews and three from the more recent 2015 interview. By this time, Sela had a full-time teaching job at a school in Auckland. She initially taught mainstream English (i.e., similar to language arts, not ESL), and very recently moved to teach on and head the ESL program.

INVESTING IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Theoretically, the analysis of Sela’s teacher identities is informed by Norton’s (2013) concept of investment, or what I prefer to call investing because of the continuous, fluid nature of the process. A more recent comprehensive account of the concept (Darvin & Norton, 2015) considers investment as occurring at the nexus of identity, ideology, and capital. This resonates with Sela’s story, which is ultimately about her
investing in her teacher education and later teaching practice, and thus in her identity as an English teacher. The rewards she desires—that is, the yields of this investing—are not only her own financial security, but the accumulation of economic, social, and cultural capital for her immediate and extended family, and also for the wider immigrant community to which she belongs. Investing and harvesting the yields are seldom uncontested, however, as numerous studies have shown.

Simon-Maeda (2004), for example, conducted life history interviews with female teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) working in higher education contexts in Japan. She was interested in how the participants constructed their identities and contested oppressive forces within the sociocultural and ideological contexts of their workplaces. Her analysis exposes the interface of gender and various salient themes that “contributed to narrativized perceptions of becoming and being a female teacher in a sometimes hostile traditional environment” (p. 411), including ways of dealing with conflicts in the workplace. She concludes that, despite considerable investments in teacher education, women educators in Japanese higher education remain in disadvantaged positions associated with inequitable social and cultural capital.

Other studies have reported cases where investing does lead to increases in cultural capital and social power. Tsui (2007) draws on social theories of identity formation in her narrative inquiry of the lived experience of a college English teacher in China. Tsui explored the construction of the teacher’s multiple identities, particularly an expert communicative language teaching (CLT) teacher identity, within the contexts of his institutional and personal lived experiences. Through integrating traditional language teaching methods in CLT-related methods he was able to “claim ownership on meanings” (p. 676) in his professional life. His investing in English learning, teacher education, and ongoing professional development finally paid off. The research of Bonny Norton and colleagues in Uganda (cited in Darvin & Norton, 2015; see particularly Norton & Early, 2011) has shown that teachers who invested in digital literacy practices developed new and valued literacy skills. These skills enabled the teachers to connect to communities, some imagined, far from their own.

Darvin and Norton’s (2015, p. 39) claim, therefore, that “investment indexes issues of identity and imagined futures” is relevant. Investing, in other words, means imagining the future and imagining our identity in relation to that future world. Of course, we do not know for sure exactly what that world will be like and how our identities will be constructed in that imagined time and space. Polkinghorne (1988), for instance, says:
We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing or a substance, but a configuring of personal events into an historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also in anticipation of what one will be. (p. 150)

The “anticipation of what one will be” is the focus of this article (see also Ollerhead, 2012; Park, 2012; Pavlenko, 2003; Reeves, 2009; Xu, 2012). At the start of the study, Sela imagines herself and her students teaching and learning in a community “not immediately tangible and accessible” (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241), but by the end of the study we see how she has revised the “plot” over the years because of further professional development, the circumstances in her personal life, and actually beginning to teach. A longitudinal, sociohistorical approach to examining identity, over a period of nearly nine years in the case of Sela, allows us to see the identity changes that take place over an extended period of time. At the start of this period, Sela looks ahead to her imagined life as a teacher, and at the end of the period looks back and reflects on her lived identity experiences. In referencing identity in this article, I draw on Norton’s (2013) now classic definition of identity, which resonates loudly with the spatiotemporal dimensions of narrative, that is, “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 45). Applying this definition to language teachers, I theorize language teacher identities as cognitive, sociohistorical, and ideological. In other words, they are constructed both inside the teacher and outside in the social and material (Toohey et al., 2015) world. They are also imagined in future worlds. Language teacher identities are multiple, and they change, short-term and over time—discursively in social interaction with teacher educators, learners, other teachers, administrators, and the broader community, and in material interaction with spaces, places, and objects in classrooms and institutions. This theoretical stance on language teacher identities informs my understanding of Sela’s experiences and identity shifts over time, enabled by the approach I advocate for the analysis of short stories.

SHORT STORY ANALYSIS

Epistemologically and methodologically the research processes in this study are narrative. I firmly believe that storytelling contributes to our making sense of the world and our place within it (Bruner, 2006;
Polkinghorne, 1995), including our experiences, our social practices, our identities, and our imaginings of the future, despite arguments which question such assumptions (Freeman, 2006; Sartwell, 2006). Kramp (2004, p. 107), for example, says that “stories assist humans to make life experiences meaningful. Stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us to our past and present, and assist us to envision our future.” Applied to research, I use the term narrative knowledging, which is “the meaning making, learning, or knowledge construction that takes place during the narrative research activities of (co)constructing narratives, analyzing narratives, reporting the findings, and reading/watching/listening to research reports” (Barkhuizen 2011, p. 395). Different participants therefore engage in narrative knowledging at various mutually informing stages of the research process, including (co)narrators, researchers, and consumers of research reports. In the case of this study, and the short stories constructed and analyzed, the interviews were co-constructed by Sela in her role as (student) teacher and by me in my researcher role. I was responsible for analyzing the short story data and for reporting the finding to you, the readers of the research report—all of us narrative knowledging in the process. Narrative knowledging on the part of Sela included telling about, reflecting on, and making sense of her teacher education and teaching experiences in the process of constructing short stories during our interviews. During the same short story construction process and then later during the analysis of the stories my narrative knowledging included primarily focusing on the thematically relevant aspects of the stories that relate to Sela’s imagined and shifting teacher identities and particularly her investing in these identities, as detailed in what follows.

Short stories are excerpts of data extracted from a larger set of data such as conversations, interviews, written narratives (such as teacher journals), and multimodal digital stories. They can be identified as stories in that they narrate experiences, from the past or the imagined future, and include reflective or evaluative (Labov, 1997) commentary on those experiences. And they look like stories; they typically have a temporal dimension, a common characteristic of story, and they embody action (Bruner, 1986). The experience of the there-and-then storyworld is (re)shaped in the telling of the here-and-now discourse, and —important for this study—storytelling includes the performance of identities, or identification (Baynham, 2015; Higgins & Sandhu, 2014; Rugen, 2013). Short stories are analyzed thematically in detail by systematically focusing attention on both content and context. The fact that short stories can be extracts from lengthy, reflective journal entry data, for instance, or research interview data, and that their analysis focuses on their content rather than primarily on performance and linguistic
or formal aspects of narrative, distinguishes them from small stories (Georgakopoulou, 2015). A focus on content and context in short story analysis, of course, is not particularly innovative in narrative inquiry (Bell, 2002; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Pavlenko, 2007). What I am arguing for in short story analysis is that it serves as a heuristic for the systematic thematic analysis of the content and context of narrative data (in the form of short stories). The heuristic explicitly directs analysts to focus on specific content dimensions and scales of context during the process of analysis. Its value, therefore, is in providing structure and rigor to the thematic analysis of this particular form of narrative data (i.e., short stories).

In terms of content, attention is systematically paid in the analysis to three intersecting dimensions of narrative: who, or the characters in the story, their relationships and their positions vis-à-vis each other; where, or the places and sequences of places in which the story action takes place; and when, or the time in which the action unfolds, past, present, and future. It could be asked why what questions are also not asked in the analysis of content, especially considering recent turns to theories of the material, which incorporate nonhuman elements in descriptions and analyses of experience (Toohey et al., 2015). One reason is that when one starts asking further questions (why, how), the analysis becomes too unwieldy. Of course, these questions have to be asked, but my preference is to attach why, how, and what questions, and others, onto each of the three key who, where, and when dimensions since they do relate to all three. Another reason is that the who, where, and when dimensions are familiar—in literature they are referred to as characters, setting, and plot. In narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) encourage researchers to explore three dimensions or commonplaces relating to temporality, place, and sociality.

The aim in the analysis is to work systematically through the short story text, line by line, and to identify all references, explicit and implicit, to each of the dimensions, focusing on one dimension at a time. On each occasion the following relevant questions are asked: Who, and what happened/will happen together? Where, and what happened/will happen there? When, and what happened/will happen then? This process forces the analyst to undertake a detailed examination of the story text and thus prevents a cursory scanning of the story in search of (often vague) themes, what Kasper and Prior (2015) refer to as “commonsensical glossing and the strategy of taking isolated bits of what tellers say as evidence of theoretical concepts” (p. 231). During this process, connections among the who, where, and when dimensions are made and become meaningful in relation to the topical content of the inquiry.
A focus (only) on content, or the traditional content analysis, has been critiqued by Pavlenko (2007), who argues that a content analysis is hardly an analysis at all, and that attention really (also) needs to be paid to the context in which narratives are constructed and the form that they take. It is absolutely appropriate to suggest that context is crucial to an understanding of narratives. Riessman (2008), for example, says, “Stories don’t fall from the sky...; they are composed and received in contexts—interactional, historical, institutional, and discursive—to name a few” (p. 105). Atkinson (1997) makes the same point when arguing that too many narrative analyses lack a thorough scrutiny of social action and organization, saying “the narratives seem to float in a social vacuum. The voices echo in an otherwise empty world. There is an extraordinary absence of social context, social action, and social interaction” (p. 166). This is why the second main emphasis in short story analysis is on context.

Before I turn to how short story context analysis takes place, I should comment that during the process of short story content and context analysis, it is inevitable that a focus on the form of the narrative also occurs, and not by accident. Some clauses explicitly index time, for example, as do modals and other verb forms; names and pronouns index characters in the story; and cohesive devices and turns at talk show sequences of related content. Analysis, therefore, should also pay attention to the “forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers” (Riessman, 1993, p. 2). However, in short story analysis the focus is primarily on the content of the story and the contexts in which that content is produced and interpreted. In this article, the short stories I analyze are excerpts from research interviews. Storytelling in these excerpts (short stories) is accomplished interactively—the stories are co-constructed. Kasper and Prior (2015) make a distinction between analytical approaches to interviews which emphasize stories in interaction and stories as interaction, the latter prompting emic, conversation-analytical methods which bring to light “the important role of storytelling as doing social actions such as ... constructing identities and social relationships in the here-and-now of the ongoing talk” (p. 230). These two emphases could perhaps be seen as lying along a continuum, and, if so, short story analysis would fall toward the stories-in-interaction end but also be associated to some extent with aspects of stories-as-interaction.

In terms of context, I have proposed (Barkhuizen, 2008) three interconnected levels of story (or contextual spaces) which not only help guide analysis but also encourage the researcher to look beyond the immediate contexts of teachers in their classrooms. These levels are not distinct, of course, but represent an expanding or moving outward of interpretive activity away from a too narrow focus only on the
experiences of the individual storytelling teacher, to include a consider-
eration of institutional and then macro-level social structures, discourses, and ideologies. The Douglas Fir Group’s (2016) transdisciplinary perspective on learning and identity calls for the con-
sideration of three dimensions of social activity—classroom interaction (micro), the school (meso), and society (macro). These more or less reflect my three contextual levels of story, or what I prefer to call scales of context (Blommaert, 2010; Canagarajah & De Costa, 2015).

The first level of story (all small letters) is personal and embodies the inner thoughts, emotions, ideas, and theories of teachers. It includes the social interactions in teachers’ immediate contexts; for example, during classroom lessons, conversations with students, and in Facebook group discussions. Time (when) scales are therefore shorter, place (where) scales are smaller, and interactions and relationships (who) scales are more intimate and personal. In these contexts teachers have more agency and power (Darvin & Norton, 2015) to manipulate and possibly change the social structures they engage with.

The second level of Story (with a capital S) spreads beyond the immediate psychological and interpersonal context of teachers. Included here are wider scale interactions with institutional members outside the classroom; consequences of decisions made by others in the work environment; and their attitudes, expectations, and prescrip-
tions; for instance, a school’s language-in-education policies and assessment practices, and a community’s socioeconomic and cultural demographics. On this scale of Story, teachers usually have less agency to construct their practice, their identities, and their stories. Social structures are more rigid and difficult to penetrate and therefore change is less likely to be achieved.

Last, STORY (in capital letters) refers to the broader sociopolitical contexts in which teaching and learning takes place. Here teachers have even less power to make decisions about conditions which influence their practice. Examples of STORIES include national language policies and testing regimes, curriculums imposed on schools by Ministries of Education; teacher education standards; and discourses of race, gender, and immigration. The use of capital letters to refer to this level of STORY merely signifies a wider, macro scale and the power often associated with it, and in no way diminishes the integrity or worth of the narrating teachers’ STORY. STORIES, like Stories, are not separate from the experiences of teachers. They are meaningfully connected to what teachers think, do, and feel, and to how teachers enact and negotiate their identities.

The three scales of context (story, Story, STORY) and the intercon-
necting dimensions of the story content (who, where, when) interact together to generate a narrative space within which teachers imagine
and live their teaching experiences and construct their identities. Short story analysis investigates this space (see Figure 1) from two interrelated perspectives: (1) the experience of the narrator—what happens in the story (the narrative action) and the narrator’s evaluations of or reflections on that action; and (2) the researcher’s interpretations of what is told. For example, a teacher may tell about a particular classroom event without any direct reference to wider scale influences or implications. It is up to the researcher to make those often abstract connections.

FINDINGS

I have selected four short stories to analyze in this article. The first short story (People on My Street), from the second of the three early interviews, is a section of the story I previously analyzed and published in Barkhuizen (2010). The story thus links the current article to the earlier one, and to a degree summarizes the findings of the previously published analysis. In this short story Sela tells of her aspirations to be an English teacher amongst members of her own Tongan immigrant community. She imagines herself constructing and teaching a curriculum that meets their specific (Tongan immigrant) needs, rather than being one more appropriate to a general class of adult learners. I selected the next three stories because they trace Sela’s sociohistorical identity development at three temporally different moments in her professional development, each exemplifying a change in how Sela sees herself and how she is perceived by others. The second short story

FIGURE 1. A three-dimensional, multiscalar narrative space.
(In the Kitchen) is narrated in our 2015 interview nearly nine years later. In this story Sela recalls an incident which occurred in a school kitchen during her teaching practicum, a requirement of the post-MA teaching diploma she completed. The next story (It Was So White) tells of Sela’s first day teaching at high school, or rather, the car ride to school and the changing socioeconomic demographics she observed along the way. In the final short story (That Ripple Effect) Sela reflects back on her 2006 interview statements about her then imagined identity and compares these with how things have turned out after all. The analysis of the three stories reveals Sela’s identities construction over time and space; one told in the past about an imagined future, and the others told in the present about remembered past experiences—all the while, for both me and Sela, narrative knowledging along the way.

Short Story: People on My Street

1. S: um the one thing that keeps coming up in my mind is
2. I had originally thought about having a little like night class
3. in our garage with whoever
4. people on my street
5. or my aunties or my cousins who want to improve their Eng-
   lish
6. that’s what I really want to do
7. but if I wanted to teach in terms of like an institution
8. I would most likely like to teach Tongan adults
9. I would ideally want to teach
10. want to do things like constructing curriculum or syllabus
    specifically for Tongan adult immigrants
11. and that’s just coming from conversations I’ve had with people
    who’ve taken any English courses
12. and I mean the activities and everything is interesting
13. and they’ve really enjoyed the classes
14. but sometimes the content and materials used they did not
    quite understand
15. and they’re not quite in sync with their purpose of why they
    were learning English

Who. Sela is the main character in this story. Line 1 tells us that a
story is about to be told, one that “keeps coming up” in her mind.
Sela has thought before about the upcoming story, habitually; it
involves her neighbors and members of her community, “people on my street,” which include her “aunties” and her “cousins” (line 5). The scale of relationship is thus fairly intimate (story) but it soon becomes clear that these people represent a much wider community—Tongan immigrants, and not only the “Tongan adults” (lines 8 and 10) who have taken English courses (Story) (line 11). Sela is referencing Tongan immigrants more generally and possibly other Pacific Island immigrant communities as well (STORY). These are the people she ultimately wants to help when she becomes an English teacher. She has observed from conversations with adult English learners (line 11) that the syllabus they encounter is not appropriate for their needs. Consequently, as Sela reports elsewhere in the interview, they do not learn much English and many drop out of their courses altogether because they do not value the content and materials in their classes.

Even at this early stage of the analysis with its focus on who is in the story and their relationships, it is becoming evident that Sela’s imagined identity as a future teacher working within her Tongan immigrant community signals her investing in teacher education. She does so not only to increase her own cultural, social, and economic capital (qualified teacher, financial security for her and her family), but also to invest in the English learning of members of her community, with the capital rewards that that entails for them; for example, as Sela says later in the interview, “it’s just to help you improve your life . . . this will be good for you living here in New Zealand.” Darvin and Norton (2015) say that “learners invest because there is something that they want for themselves” (p. 46). In Sela’s case, she is investing because she also wants something for her learners.

Where. The story references a number of places, those imagined (“in our garage,” “on my street,” “an institution”) and those real from the past (“English courses,” “the classes”). These two spaces, where teaching action takes place, set up a contrast which generates the conflict in the story; the imagined “ideal” classroom situation embedded in Sela’s neighborhood, and the institutional generic adult classes that she does not desire for members of the Tongan immigrant community, including her family. Sela positions herself and sees herself investing in the former space (“I would ideally want to teach,” line 9) rather than the latter. Making further sense of this story requires moving beyond these two spaces in the storyworld to consider ideologies of immigration and the related provision of English learning for immigrants in New Zealand. Macro, national spaces (STORY) now come into the picture. Sela, like the people she desires to teach, are immigrants from Tonga (and other Pacific Islands). New Zealand has a very large Pacific Island population. Over 60,000 people identified themselves as Tongan, for example, in the 2013 census (Statistics New
Zealand), and about 40% of these were born outside New Zealand. One hundred and forty-four thousand identified as Samoan, with about 53,000 of these being immigrants. Between 60% and 80% of the Pacific Island population reside in the Auckland area, particularly south Auckland, which is socioeconomically less well-resourced than other parts of the city. Many immigrants in this area, particularly newly arrived adults, have very limited English proficiency or none at all, and the learning resources available to them are limited (Ho, Cheung, Bedford, & Leung, 2000). Sela imagines her future teacher identity as a practitioner who addresses these deficiencies, thereby investing in her learners’ futures. Place (where) in her short story is not simply a garage or an institution, even one that does meet the needs of Tongan immigrants, but an ideological space where decisions are made about curriculum, English learning provision and settlement for immigrants, and national language policies. It is a very complex arrangement of places moving back and forth between Tonga and New Zealand, governmental ministries and communities, and schools and classrooms. The places may be imagined in Sela’s story, but they are very real in the lives of the people the story characters represent.

When. At the time of the telling Sela is a preservice teacher imagining her future work and identities as a practicing teacher. Investing in her teacher education now is investing in her teaching in the future, leading ultimately to the transformation of her English learners’ lives. In time, Sela desires to make a difference (Motha & Lin, 2014) in her own life and the lives of those in her immigrant community (“that’s what I really want to do,” line 6). These desires are for both short-term gains (completing the teacher qualification) and long-term outcomes (the success of her learners). She bases her desires and investing on past experiences (“from conversations I’ve had,” line 11) in order to envision her trajectory in becoming a practicing teacher.

Sela’s identities—young woman, family member and neighbor, Tongan immigrant (and thus an “insider” member of the community in which she lives and desires to work), preservice teacher, imagined English teacher—even within this one short story—are revealed as complex and changing across time and space and in the real and imagined social interactions in which she engages. Following is how Sela responded to my analysis of this short story.

I’ve just finished reading your analysis of the first story and I must say that this excerpt alone delves deeply into the heart of Tongans and their beliefs. Being Tongan means you are always a part of something bigger; your immediate family, your extended family, village, church, etc. A Tongan never exists as an individual, so the way you are, your behaviour, successes and failures are always representative of the wider
society where you are placed. You succeed in life, your family, village, community should benefit too. If you fail or cause embarrassment, you bring shame upon your family, village, and so forth. I knew that getting an education is not only to increase my cultural/economic capital, but ultimately to “build up my family.” This is a sentiment that will resonate with every Tongan, and “study hard to help build up your family” (meaning your village/community) is something that every Tongan child has heard their parents and grandparents say.

Short Story: *In the Kitchen*

1. S: I felt very lucky
2. I had really really good associates you know
3. they really really looked after me
4. [name of school] was I mean I live in [name of suburb] you know
5. and [name of school] was quite it was just different
6. I mean just you know there were Islanders there
7. but very white sort of culture
8. it was actually quite funny
9. because I was in the kitchen
10. and I went to after the break and I went to take my cup you know return my cup to put in the dishwasher
11. and I was just standing there
12. and everybody smiled and all of a sudden thanked me
13. G: [laughs]
14. S: they thanked me [laughs in voice]
15. G: oh oh that’s funny
16. A: [laughs]
17. G for doing the dishes
18. A: yes [laughs in voice]
19. oh yeah it was quite a joke you know it lasted for quite a while
20. G: yeah oh my goodness
21. A: yeah yeah
22. G: very different kind of school
23. A: yeah not a single not a single Pasifika teacher when I was there
24. G: mmmm
In this short story, Sela tells of an incident which occurred during her teaching practicum, a component of the graduate education diploma she enrolled in a couple years after completing her MA. The diploma qualification leads to accreditation as a high school teacher, something she categorically stated in her earlier interviews she would never become. So, with her decision to teach at high school we already see a deviation from the path she imagined for her professional self. Sela’s personal situation and ongoing life events (not reported here for ethical reasons) meant quite simply she needed to get a job—it was time for her investing in teacher education to yield the economic capital it promised.

One day at the school she was mistaken for a cleaner in the kitchen because of her Pacific Island (Tongan) appearance. She had not exchanged any words with the other characters in the story (other teachers at the school) and since they did not know her they assumed she was a cleaner operating the dishwasher, a significant spatially situated object in this story. Standing next to the dishwasher (line 11), together with her Tongan, “non-white” appearance and the association of Pacific Islanders with lower status jobs meant that the teachers in the school misinterpreted Sela’s role and her student-teacher identity. Unfortunately, this incident is what she remembers most about her practicum experience.

Who. Sela, as narrator, is a preservice student teacher completing her practicum. The other characters in the storyworld include her “associates” (line 2), the teachers who mentored her during the practicum, and who play no significant part in the story except that Sela says they did a good job of looking after her. The “white sort of culture” (line 7) refers to the demographic make-up of the school community, and reflects the socioeconomic status of the school and the suburb in which it is located. “Islanders” (line 6) refers to students who come from or whose heritage is linked to the Pacific Islands. Sela strongly associates with this community and notes that there were only a few Islander students within the overwhelmingly white school community. This contrasts conspicuously with the kind of imagined student population she desired to teach in the People on My Street short story. In addition, there was “not a single Pasifika teacher” (line 23) in the school; they appear as absent but significant characters in the story. “Everybody” (line 12) references the other teachers in the
school, those whom Sela confronts in the kitchen at the dishwasher, and the characters in the story who are central to the critical incident which confronts Sela’s sense of self.

By considering who the characters are and their relationships—how they relate to and position themselves vis-à-vis each other—Sela’s identities begin to emerge in the narrative, particularly those ascribed to her by others. Sela’s story makes it clear that she rejects those identities, however: she laughs (lines 14, 16, 18, 25) when she thinks back to the experience, calling the teachers’ act of “mistaken identity” “quite a joke” (line 19), saying it was “quite funny” (line 8). Sela, in the telling of the short story, positions the various characters and their identities, including her own, according to a set of contrasting power relationships, at the same time as the teachers in the storyworld position Sela outside of their dominant white, middle-class schoolworld, assigning her the identity cleaner and thanking her “for doing the dishes” (line 17). On the one side, then, we have Sela and the communities she identifies with: Tongan, living in a lower socioeconomic suburb, and a student teacher. And on the other we have members of the socioculturally different, more powerful white school community.

Where. The central action of the story unfolds in the kitchen (story) of the high socioeconomic school. Sela mentions the lower socioeconomic suburb in which she lives (line 4) to establish a contrast between her social and cultural capital and that of the members of the school community (line 5). On a larger scale (STORY), beyond the school and suburb, Sela establishes a connection with the Pacific Island countries by referencing the few students and no teachers at the (New Zealand) school who are identified as “Islanders.” Again, this contrast foregrounds Sela’s perceived (or reflexive) identities; student teacher (not cleaner), Pacific Islander (not white), immigrant (not born New Zealander), and living in a lower not high status socioeconomic suburb where the school is located.

When. The critical incident described in the story takes place over a very short period of time—a few smiles and thank yous offered at the dishwasher in the kitchen. However, Sela says that the “joke” lasted “quite a while” (line 19), a joke she probably shared with family and friends, and years later Sela still remembers the incident when she shared her feelings about it with me in an interview. In fact, it’s what she remembers most about her practicum to this day (line 25). The story thus covers a fairly long time scale, and will continue in Sela’s memory and probably be retold in the future as well. Historically, as well, the story of Pacific Islander immigration to New Zealand and white New Zealander and Pacific Islander interaction is a long one. Sela’s story is one small moment embedded in that continuing longer
term story involving the two groups, each constituted and defined in diverse ways.

The analysis of this short story narrative space created by the intersecting who-where-when dimensions and the varying scales of context has shown us a lot about Sela’s continuing identity experiences of becoming a teacher. Through her interactions with the teachers in the kitchen she is positioned as cleaner (and the social capital that goes with that role), immigrant, and non-white. Sela is not recognized as a student teacher on her practicum even though this is the identity that she reflexively assigns to herself while at the school. Student teacher is already a less powerful position vis-à-vis full-time, experienced, employed teacher, the type of teacher Sela encounters in the kitchen, but cleaner is arguably even more marginalized within the school context (and probably beyond). So, in this short story we see non-compatibility between conceptions of self and identities recognized or ascribed by others, and we also see identities shifting over the course of the narrative. Sela provides an update with her response to my analysis.

I will remember this story forever! We Islanders love a good laugh and we’re always laughing at ourselves, so when this incident happened it was genuinely funny. I never took offense and of course have shared it over the years with friends and family, much to everybody’s amusement. Yet, I’ve asked myself many times over, how is it that people just look at a person and “know,” not even stop to doubt their assumptions, but in their mind, they “know” that because that person is brown or black or yellow then they must be this or that? Those teachers didn’t even stop to think that maybe I was a visitor or a new teacher or a parent—no they already “knew” that I was the cleaner. Imagine the shame/guilt they felt when they realised that they “didn’t know.” To be fair though, we’re all guilty of it. I would never walk into a space full of Islanders and expect the only white face there to be the cleaner. Can you imagine how refreshing it is to teach at a school like this? We have a white lady working my assumed “job” (staffroom cleaner), and all the cleaners are Chinese:-) The incident was funny then, but I don’t find such incidents funny anymore. Once or twice is ok, but more than that I begin to think, there are some seriously thick [stupid] people in this world!

**Short Story: It Was So White**

1. G: tell me a little bit more about the school when you first got there
2. about your life when you first got to the school
S: Oh wow, oh my God
I remember the first day at school when I was driving into school
it was a totally different world [laughs in voice]
you know we on our way to school
we drove past many local high schools
we’d like pass [name of school] and [name of school]
and so you’d see all these kids walking to school
and eating pies and you know the fizzy (soda drinks)
this is in the morning you know pies and fizzy
it was just so common
and as soon as you get into the area [name of suburb]
kids are walking to school with like bottle of water or coffee you know from a café
and like the contrast you know just in terms of socioeconomic
and just you know everything
and it was so white [whispers in voice]
I remember going home and saying to my mum after that
like “I’m in I feel like I’m in New Zealand you know” [laughs in voice]
feels like I live in a different place
and then I go to work in New Zealand you know
cause that’s what I originally had imagined New Zealand to be
lots and lots of white people you know
so people do laugh about it now you know
like “where you going”
“T’m going to work”
“where”
“in New Zealand” [laughs in voice]
yeah but um it was terrifying
especially it was terrifying when I was hired
I was the only Pacific I was the only Pacific
now there’s three of us now
but I was the only one
and I was the only one for about three years yeah
I mean you know and teaching English mainstream as well
it was like oh gosh I stuck out like a sore thumb you know
stood out
but it’s a very nice community

In this short story Sela tells of the car ride to school on her first day as a teacher. As she drives from her own (self-identified) lower socioeconomic suburb to the higher socioeconomic suburb in which her school is located she observes along the way schoolchildren walking to school. Their contrasting behaviors are perhaps symbolic of the many other contrasts Sela sets up in the telling of this story; for example, between the socioeconomic status of the suburbs she passes through, between her experiences of New Zealand and the New Zealand she imagined in the past (pre-immigration), and between herself and the teachers she meets when she gets to school.

Who. After investing in her teacher education, including becoming qualified as a high school teacher, Sela is finally on her way to school and her anticipated symbolic and economic capital is about to be realized. The characters in this story, those she observes from a distance and those with whom she interacts, alert her to the fact that the road ahead is not going to be without its challenges and surprises. Sela is driving to school with a member of her family and sees “all these kids walking to school” (line 9). In the suburb nearest to her home the kids are “eating pies” and drinking “fizzy” (line 10)—“in the morning,” she exclaims (line 11). These food and drink choices are (stereo)typical amongst the youth who live in these suburbs, in contrast to those living and attending school in socioeconomically more prosperous suburbs, like the one where Sela’s school is located, who drink “like bottle of water or coffee you know from a café” (line 14). When she gets to school she encounters a similar demographic (“it was so white,” line 17), which she whispers to me in the interview, aware of the racial undertones of her comment. Sela was “the only Pacific” teacher at the school (line 31) when she started teaching there. After “about three years” (line 34) two other Pasifika teachers had joined the school.

Embedded in the short story is another story (lines 18–28) which tells of Sela’s previous perceptions of New Zealand (“what I originally had imagined for New Zealand,” line 22), that is, “lots and lots of white people” (line 23), and how these expectations appear to have become fulfilled in the context of her first full-time job. She told this story to her mother (line 18) but it has become an ongoing joke amongst her friends and family: “so people do laugh about it now you know” (line 24). She presents the gist of this story in a brief reported speech dialogue (lines 25–28) which says that when she goes to school she is “going to work ... in New Zealand.” Sela’s identities, as a “non-white,” Tongan immigrant and a newly qualified teacher, are not quite in sync with those she will encounter in her new workplace. Furthermore, Sela will be “teaching English mainstream” (line 35), which
means that her students will be mainly native English speakers, and being a second language English speaker herself Sela has always felt insecure about her own English proficiency. In this complex arrangement of evidently unequal power relationships Sela declared that she “stuck out like a sore thumb” (line 36).

Where. The places in the story, on story and Story scales, transition from her home, through neighborhoods as she is “driving to school” (line 4)—which turns out to be “a totally different world” (line 5). She mentions the names of two local high schools in her suburb (line 8) and associates the “pie eating” and “fizzy” drinking children with those schools. The “so white” (line 17) kids in the area where her school is located remind her of the New Zealand (STORY) she once imagined pre-immigration. And this is the space in which she finds herself as a mainstream English teacher. Sela’s Tongan immigrant and novice teacher identities mesh with her subjectivity as a nonnative English teacher identity. In the In the Kitchen story we have already seen how nonnativeness is aligned with hidden ideologies of racism (Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009), and now as Sela begins her job at the school issues related to nonnative English teacher efficacy (Mahboob, 2010) are very much on her mind.

When. In spite of these reservations, when Sela reflects on her past (“When I was hired,” line 30) and present teaching experiences in the school, she feels that she is part of “a very nice community” (line 38). Things, in short, appear to have turned out rather well, which we’ll hear about later. But for now it is worth noting the varying time scales this story spans (shorter ones, moving back and forth, embedded in longer scales, also moving back and forth) and how Sela’s narrative indexes time to convey her meanings, thereby constructing her identities. The story is told in 2015, and Sela begins by going back in time to a few years ago when she started teaching (“I remember the first day,” line 4). On this day, “in the morning” (line 11), Sela observes the children walking to school. These observations lead to a story going even further back in time describing how she “originally had imagined New Zealand” (line 22), a story repeated habitually to this day (“people do laugh about it now,” line 24) including being told to me in this interview. This embedded story reinforces the contrast between her imagined teacher identity and the context in which she now practices as a teacher. For three years she was the only “Pacific” teacher (line 31), so for a period she continued to “stick out like a sore thumb” (line 36). In her response to my analysis, Sela outlines what this contrast meant to her when she first started teaching and what it means to her now.

I really like this story because although the story is still fresh in my mind, I feel that I have come a long way finding my feet within the
professional sphere where I work. It must be mentioned that although the school was very white (it still is but it has become more diverse culturally), I feel that this school even right from the beginning has a much more accepting and less patronising “white” environment than the one I had encountered during my practicum. My colleagues have always been helpful and willing to share resources whereas at the other school teachers in the department were reluctant to share. And as far as insecurity about me being a nonnative speaker of English goes, I have never once felt discriminated against or made to feel inferior both by my peers or students. I always think about stereotypes and why it is that kids from my area eat pies and drink fizzy on the way to school, while their richer counterparts carry water and coffee ... that’s a very telling picture of home, parenting, socioeconomic status, the education level of parents and so forth. How does one change that? I don’t know!

CONCLUSION

This section serves as the conclusion to both Sela’s imagined identity narrative and this article. In the short story that follows Sela reflects back to her initial statements about her desire to teach English to people in her immediate immigrant community (“so I that’s what I wanted to do I wanted to help them,” line 1), and she still wishes to be able to do that (line 2). The story tells how her work and identities in this imagined community have turned out years later as she revised the plot of her lived experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Short Story: That Ripple Effect

1. so I that’s what I wanted to do I wanted to help them
2. and I still wish I can do that
3. but I think what has been really good for me
4. was a lot of my family seeing that I just moved here [to New Zealand]
5. and I you know I went to uni and now I have a decent job and so forth
6. so there’s that sort of like that ripple effect
7. so now they’re really really encouraging the kids to go to school
8. and aim higher and aim to go to university
9. and aim to get a decent
10. I’ve had so many cousins who you know who went on to do um went on to study
11. you know just because they think “my gosh you can do it”
12. you know and I think that’s what’s been really nice about the whole thing
13. so even though I haven’t really you know given back in the way I initially had I don’t think
14. it’s just I suppose that it’s people just need to be surrounded by kind of like role models that they know

Who. “Them” in line 1 refers to other immigrants who arrived from Tonga at about the same time that Sela did. Many were skilled or professional workers in Tonga, but, according to Sela, because of their lack of English proficiency (including not being able to achieve the required scores on the powerful gatekeeping IELTS test) experienced difficulty finding (appropriate) work or continuing with education. In the story sequence that follows Sela first implies how her own experiences, particularly her successes, have influenced others in the story when she says “what has been really good for me” (line 3). She then addresses the matter more directly, “I went to uni and now I have a decent job” (line 5), and because of this there’s “like that ripple effect” (line 6). By this she means that her success has spread to “my family” (line 4), who are “really really encouraging the kids to go to school” (line 7) and even to “aim higher and aim to go to university” (line 8). In fact, there already is concrete evidence of success for her “many cousins” who “went on to do um went on to study” (line 10). Sela concludes the story with a general summary statement observing that “people just need to be surrounded by kind of like role models that they know” (line 14). Although she says this in the third person she is clearly referencing her own position as role model for all the other interconnected people she has mentioned in the story, on widening scales (“that ripple effect”)—from her immediate family, to her cousins, and their kids, to the immigrant community, to people in general.

Where. This story does not unfold in any particular physical place. But associated with the people in the story are institutions (schools and universities) which are symbolic of, and generate for those who attend them, powerful social and cultural capital. Like Sela, the people arrived as immigrants in New Zealand from Tonga and subsequently found themselves in circumstances where education and employment were challenging to acquire. It is these same people whom Sela “wanted to help” (line 1) in her imagined role as a teacher, and whom she is now helping—as a role model—in her current, “decent” (line
5), high school teaching job, a place where she did not desire or expect to teach but where she is extremely happy and successful.

**When.** Time is important for making sense of both this short story and the bigger story of Sela’s identities which I have told in this article. The first line of the story ("that’s what I wanted to do") makes reference to her teaching English in an imagined community of Tongan adult immigrants in order to help them achieve a “better life” while living in New Zealand (see the *People on My Street* short story, and Barkhuizen, 2010, for a detailed analysis of this story). After reading the stories of her teaching practicum (*In the Kitchen*) and her first day of school (*It Was So White*), we arrive at a story told nearly nine years later which reports on how her imagined identities have played out. Well, she is not teaching English in her garage to her family and Tongan people on her street or in an institution with classes consisting of only Tongan adult immigrants. Instead she is teaching English and ESL to mainly white and international students in a privileged school in a high socioeconomic suburb of Auckland.

However, as Sela says, “even though I haven’t really you know given back in the way I initially had [imagined]” (line 13), she has given back to exactly the same people in her imagined community by being a role model “that they know” (line 14). Sela has done very well indeed, accumulating the economic and social capital that is desired by her family and members of her community, to the extent that they say “my gosh you can do it” (line 11) and then strive to follow in her footsteps. Sela says elsewhere in the interview, and this sums up the story rather nicely, “This is not what I imagined at all but I feel like I’m in the right place at this point in time.”

I have not asked Sela to comment on this story since in Tongan culture it is not appropriate to speak publicly about one’s individual successes, as her response to the *People on My Street* story indicates, “being Tongan means you are always a part of something bigger.”

**Investing in Imagined Teacher Identities**

Kramsch (2013, p. 195) comments that investment “accentuates the role of human agency and identity in engaging with the task at hand, in accumulating economic and symbolic capital, in having stakes in the endeavour and in persevering in that endeavour.” She could have been writing about Sela. In this article I have shown, by taking a longitudinal approach to investigating teacher identity changes and development, how Sela’s actions and identity negotiations over time—her continuous revision of the plot of her story—have demonstrated what Simon (1992) calls a “purposeful vision” (p. 14). Sela invested in a
university education and teacher training with a vision of a dream of the future for herself, her learners, and her family and community. She wanted to teach Tongan adult immigrants and she wanted to create a curriculum that met their specific needs. It didn’t end up that way, but it does not matter that the path eventually taken (or the story eventually told) was not exactly the same as the one originally imagined. Her “desired version of a future community” (Simon, 1992, p. 15)—to help them succeed—remained firm in her imagination and in her lived practice, and still does. The decisions she made about her teacher training, place of work, and now her pedagogical practices and ongoing professional development, were all driven by this vision. Investing in her teacher education and multiple identities (English teacher, mother in an extended family, member of the Tongan immigrant community) has meant that she has become a role model in her community—the community she imagined at the start of this narrative.

Sela’s identity trajectory may suggest that she has positioned herself as complicit with a dominant TESOL ideology, expressed as an economic metaphor of investing, capital gains, and a “better life” (Motha, 2014; Pennycook, 1998). On the contrary, she is very aware of her socioeconomic circumstances and the goals she has for herself and her family, and she knows what those goals mean—what they mean ideologically. She is not trying to distance herself from her community because of her success, or to be someone that that community might not recognize over time. In fact, she is doing the opposite, as her stories in this article have shown. She has taken responsibility to agentially position herself in a social–local world that provides her with the capital that she and her community need. Ethical reasons prevent me from delving into Sela’s personal social history, but I am sure she would see her (and now her family’s) success as a moving away from an environment where crime, gangs, and unemployment are prevalent, rather than a moving toward some imagined TESOL world where she does not have power to be who she wants to be as a person and a teacher.

The narrative thus ends optimistically; possibilities for the future, for Sela and her community. Simon (1992) reminds us, however, that schools “are places where a sense of what may be possible and desirable for oneself and others is informed and contested” (p. 18, emphasis added). We saw in the kitchen encounter during Sela’s practicum that others’ ascribed or recognized identities clashed with her reflexive student teacher identity, and the ethnically white world of her new school was a space where she “stuck out like a sore thumb.” Darvin and Norton (2015) note that these places and spaces are ideologically defined. As Sela continues to negotiate her multiple identities at school and
within her community, and in her imagined future teaching life, she will continue to encounter “ideological processes of dominance and contestation” (p. 43). The analysis of the short stories in this article has shown how Sela invests in practices and multiple identities that engender “agency and capacity for resistance” (p. 44) and thus increases the value of the symbolic and economic capital she has earned. Within the ideological space of her lived story, Story, and STORY, Sela will continue to negotiate a teacher identity that is constructed by and constructs the ideas and social relations of power with which she will engage.

**Short Story Analysis**

I have demonstrated in this article, as researcher in my relationship with Sela, an approach to narrative knowledging: short story analysis, with its systematic examination of content and context. The longitudinal nature of the study has generated insights to identity construction and changes that are not always possible in snapshot analyses at a particular moment in time, or even over the duration of a preservice course, or an in-service semester. I believe this approach has generated a good understanding of Sela’s (imagined) identities. I hope that my interpretations of the stories I have included here, and of the extended narrative of Sela’s professional life so far, have convinced readers of both the rigor and feasibility of this analytical approach.

Sela, as teacher participant in our relationship, commented on how useful our collaboration has been. At the conclusion of our most recent interview, and then again after she had read and responded to my analysis of her short stories, she indicated that our interaction had prompted reflection, the effect of which she described as interesting and energizing. She said it made her think about how far she had come and about her current practice, and even got her thinking about studying further one day in the future. Teacher reflection has long been accepted as integral to teacher professional development, both for preservice teachers in preparation programs and for in-service reflective practitioners (Farrell, 2015). More recently, various forms of teacher research have been encouraged or required by teachers at all levels (Borg, 2013). Constructing and analyzing short stories have the potential to make a valuable addition to the reflective and inquiry options available to teachers. Short stories could be generated during the process of teacher journal or blog writing, a common practice in teacher education programs (Johnson & Golombek, 2011). Teachers could collaboratively co-construct interviews or schedule time for
conversations about their past, current, or imagined practices. Digital storytelling software is readily available for constructing stories of experience and many opportunities now exist online, especially in social media platforms, for sharing, commenting on, and archiving stories. And the methods of short story analysis, which in their basic form target the three who-where-when content dimensions and the three story-Story-STORY scales of context, are reasonably straightforward—they do not require specialist skills in discourse or conversation analysis, for example. For teachers in teacher education programs and also for in-service teachers, sharing short stories and particularly sharing the analysis of the stories are potentially powerful ways of inquiring about and reflecting on their teaching practice and professional development, especially as they relate to the construction of lived and imagined teacher identities, as I hope I have shown in this article.

THE AUTHOR

Gary Barkhuizen is professor and head of the School of Cultures, Languages and Linguistics at the University of Auckland. His teaching and research interests are in the areas of teacher education, teacher and learner identity, and narrative inquiry. His books include Narrative Research in Applied Linguistics (2013) and Reflections on Language Teacher Identity Research (2016).

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