

# **A Narrative Exploration of an EFL Teacher's Practicing Professional Identity in a Japanese Socio-Educational Context**

Submitted by Keith Graham Ford to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education in TESOL, March 2012.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KGF', is centered within a light purple rectangular box.

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## Abstract

This study explores an EFL practitioner's *teaching life story*, with a focus on the development of personal and professional identities, and on the rationale for teaching principles and practices within a Japanese socio-educational context. The study is grounded firmly in the belief that "in understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical we know about the person the teacher is" (Goodson, 1992, p. 234). As a single participant study this thesis places particular emphasis on the importance of subjective and interpretive insights and understandings as opposed to the generalizability and objectivity of knowledge claims embodied in more traditional approaches to research in the field of TESOL.

To elicit the participant's teaching life story I used a *taped monologue* technique, whereby the speaker, without the presence of an interviewer, is in complete control of topic selection and has the freedom to determine the temporal and sequential course of their narrative. The resulting two-hour monologue is the primary data for the study, and working within a narrative research framework I analyzed the story for critical incidents and teaching perspectives that can be interpreted as having informed the participant's *practicing professional identity*, which can be defined as a set of values, principles and practices which guide an individual's present teaching philosophy and future directions.

Through the lens of the Japanese socio-educational context I focus on the unifying themes of teacher development and education, critical cultural knowledge, humanism, and second language (L2) only classroom policy. Furthermore, I explore the *narrative thread* that runs through the participant's story, connecting past and present

experiences with future teaching life directions and goals as the narrator takes the opportunity to articulate the rationale behind her main principles and practices, and in so doing underscores her practicing professional identity in a way that demonstrates a strong sense of the narrator's purpose, values, efficacy and self-worth. As such, this process engages the narrator not only in a meaningful and coherent narrative account of professional development, but also in the process itself of professional development as it demonstrates potentialities for self-revelation, affirmation, and even transformation.

This thesis offers a distinctive contribution to the field of TESOL educational research in three particular ways. First, in exploring the sources of a teacher's beliefs and practicing professional identity, it offers an exemplar of how to undertake interpretive research as reflective practice and professional development. Secondly, it widens our understanding of conducting single participant case studies in TESOL education. This thesis also points the way forward to possible research using an innovative taped monologue technique with other individual teacher case studies that can then contribute to building a body of knowledge in the field.

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## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to Rachael, the sole participant of this piece of research. It is her personal and professional commitment that has made this kind of single case study possible. As colleague and friend, our discussions during this project have been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement, both in my research and teaching.

I thank my supervisors, Wendy Robinson and Yongcan Liu, whose comments and guidance have been invaluable. I also thank my initial supervisors, Malcolm MacDonald and Martin Levinson, for their early input prior to my change in research methodology.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of my family, particularly my wife, Mayumi, and daughter, Maya, who have allowed me the time and space to carry out and write up this research.

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