

## Chapter 3

# Research Methodology

In his contentious 1975 book, *Against Method*, Paul Feyerabend writes:

Scientific education as we know it today ... simplifies 'science' by simplifying its participants: first, a domain of research is defined. The domain is separated from the rest of history (physics, for example, is separated from metaphysics and from theology) and given a 'logic' of its own. A thorough training in such a 'logic' then conditions those working in the domain; it makes *their actions* more uniform and it freezes large parts of the *historical process* as well. Stable 'facts' arise and persevere despite the vicissitudes of history. An essential part of the training that makes such facts appear consists in the attempt to inhibit intuitions that might lead to a blurring of boundaries. A person's religion, for example, or his metaphysics, or his sense of humour (his *natural* sense of humour and not the inbred and always rather nasty kind of jocularly one finds in specialized professions) must not have the slightest connection with his scientific activity. His imagination is restrained, and even his language ceases to be his own. This is again reflected in the nature of scientific 'facts' which are experienced as being independent of opinion, belief, and cultural background. (1975, p. 11)

Because of the overarching theoretical critical perspectives informing my research, and because of the stated goals of my research too which are to seek rich and complex understandings of subjectivities and behaviors firmly contextualized by broader social processes, I require a methodology which permits complex, dynamic and emergent exploration. This would furthermore be commensurate with the critical position I have taken on the mainstream discourses of the production and dissemination of knowledge which inform social sciences including TESOL (for example, Kincheloe's FIDUROD). In short, to deconstruct TESOL using mainstream TESOL methodologies, would be using the "master's tools" to dismantle the master's house, i.e. impossible. Rather than employing the traditional instruments and tools of

positivistic research paradigms (as discussed in chapter 2) I therefore turn to narrative inquiry and auto-ethnography, which will be explicated upon in this section.

### 3.1 A Narrative Inquiry approach to understanding TESOL experiences

Ushioda (2009; 2011) argues for “a focus on real persons, rather than on learners as theoretical abstractions; a focus on the agency of the individual person as a thinking, feeling human being, with an identity, a personality, a unique history and background, with goals, motives and intentions; a focus on the interaction between this self-reflective agent, and the fluid and complex web of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts in which the person is embedded, moves and is inherently part of” (2011, p. 12-13). This is a weighty charge but advances in ethnographical and qualitative research are trending in both general educational and TESOL research. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) wrote about their efforts working with teachers by sharing stories, letters, diary entries, and biographies in order to investigate how teachers personally experienced the planning of their curriculums. Drawing on such a number of sources is similar to Kincheloe’s postmodern and critical challenge to the processes of FIDUROD through *bricolage*. A narrative approach to the exploration of teachers and students and their interactions and relationships also encourages the sort of critical reflection called on by Freire’s critical pedagogy, and necessary to achieve a *critical awareness*. “Storying an experience [...] can be a way for teachers to construct meaning and preserve what it is they know and how they think, and rethink their craft, capturing those illuminations discovered in the midst of classroom life and tested and refined over time. It is a way of making teachers’ knowledge conscious and public, and open to scrutiny” (Lyons and LaBoskey, 2002, p. 12).

I mostly rely on a “critical events approach to narrative,” as advocated by Webster and Mertova, because “a critical event as told in a story reveals a change of understanding or worldview by the storyteller,” (2007, p. 73) and my interest is in identity and transformation. The narrative will compile data from over eight-years of teaching and knowing Mayumi. This time span will encompass, significantly, the three years I taught her in Japan, the years since during which I have occasionally taught her online and regularly corresponded with her as a confidant and friend, and the past few years during which she completed her TESOL graduate studies and procured a professional occupation teaching at a university. As is typical of a case study, the research data will be extensive and draw on multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). The data analyzed will include interviews with her, her

friends, her other teachers (both my peers from the years I spent teaching her in Japan and teachers who I have discussed her case with since), excerpts from essays, emails, transcripts and observations.

On the other hand, undertaking narrative inquiry with a postmodern or poststructural theoretical perspective requires not only data-collection and restorying, but a deconstruction (Creswell, 2007, p. 56). Mayumi does not have much interest in the theories discussed in this research and has confessed presently to distrust methodology even as progressive as communicative language teaching (CLT), so while the narrative aspects of this research will lean toward her perspective as much as possible, this deconstructive analysis and contextualization of the narrative requires my own perspective and voice. Mayumi is nevertheless very reflective, able and willing to discuss her feelings and beliefs, and has agreed to help the proposed research in any way possible.

### 3.2 Participants

“I am always scared readers will think I am too self-absorbed,” says Laura. “How do you respond to that issue?”

“I respond by saying that it’s self-absorbed to pretend that you are somehow outside of what you study and not impacted by the same forces as others.”

(Ellis, 2004: 34)

Though my original intent was to present only Mayumi’s story, and to do so as objectively as possible, I found my own story, as a first-time teacher lacking training and attempting to do my best with a student who meaningfully impacted my views on education, to be inextricable from Mayumi’s story. And so the two major participants are myself, and Mayumi. The shift in my own attitudes and beliefs about language and learning since I began teaching Mayumi feel profound to me, and as Webster and Mertova assert: “storytelling is a natural and common form of human communication, and [...] storytelling is used to communicate those elements of experience that have had a profound impact on an individual” (2007, p. 103). Therefore, concurrent to Mayumi’s progress, I narrate my own subjective progress, in order to explore meaningful intersections as two different TESOL practitioners explore the field, to provide meaningful context as our teacher/student relationship undergoes a dynamic

shift, and most significantly, because to hide my own presence would be disingenuous.

Although Mayumi will be further contextualized by the actual narrative in Chapter 4, I provide a superficial summary of Mayumi here.

When I first met Mayumi, she was about forty, a housewife, a mother of two, and had studied English in high school (mandatory) and university (voluntarily) and now did so recreationally, in order to get out of the house and meet new people. She was known at our school for being extremely enthusiastic, talkative, and quick to share seemingly genuine feelings – all characteristics which stood out in Japanese classrooms. Many of the teachers at our school were happy to see her name on the daily roster because we knew that, whatever else went wrong, these lessons would not be filled with awkward silences. Her stated purpose for learning English, on file in her folder, was “to help make new friends, visit new countries and understand other cultures.” As we became closer, she confided in me that she wished to learn English in order to get a job so that she could fund a divorce with her husband, a practice that is not common in Japan.

### **3.3 Contextualizing the narrative study: English in Japan**

Japan’s government annually spends large sums on learning English and importing ESOL teachers from abroad, but there is also a great deal of frustration over the perceived lack of progress being made and “Japan remains a country where the majority of people are beginner-level communicators in English (Kobayashi, 2007, p. 63). The NS/NNS distinction, along with special privilege for native-speakers who have no other qualifications, is not only institutionalized widespread in Japan, it is subsidized. Oda and Takada find that English is not necessary for daily life in Japan, and that learners are mostly motivated to study English in order to score highly on exams and obtain good jobs. However, the government-sponsored Japanese Exchange Teachers (JET) program, among a plethora of other commercial language schools, mandates only that a newly hired teacher “be a native speaker of the language involved and hold a bachelor’s degree in any discipline” (Oda and Takada, 2005, p. 97). Japanese law is vague on this point, but a degree or else work experience seems to be necessary for the work visa alone (Ordinance of Ministry of Justice, 1990/2009), effectively making many teachers’ only additional requirement to be a NES. Meanwhile the Prime Minister’s Commission on Japan’s Goals in the Twenty-first Century states that “all Japanese acquire a working knowledge of English [because it is] a prerequisite for obtaining global information, expressing intentions, and sharing

values” (as reported by Kobayashi, 2007, p. 63). The governmental bureaucracy responsible for managing education law, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MECSST), has decided to “[u]rge corporations to attach importance to individuals with English skills”, which has resulted in widespread utilization of tests such as TOEIC prior to corporate recruitment (p. 63). Oda and Takada argue that there is a gap between policymakers’ emphasis on learning English for communication reasons and their finding that “evidence strongly suggests that English will remain a language used mainly for examination purposes within Japan” (Oda and Takada, 2005, p. 101). This gap could be detrimental to local English learners and teachers, both in terms of securing work opportunities, and, as Jenkins’ cited earlier, in terms of wreaking havoc with perceptions and confidence (Jenkins, 2000).

Further information about the effects that discourses of globalization and English have on Japan and especially on Japanese women will also be further contextualized within the narrative, and will mostly be discussed there in order to underline my own realizations and understandings of Japan as I actually made them.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

In order to humanize the experience and participants’ experiences and lives, in order to explore issues of identity, transformation, and social justice and how these issues are interrelated with the discourses of TESOL (as discussed within chapter 2), the following chapter will present a richly qualitative narrative analysis of the experiences of actual TESOL practitioners: Mayumi and myself. By presenting such experiences as narrative and exploring the phenomena of TESOL practitioners’ development, firmly contextualized in their environments and desires, I hope to explore how such interaction can impact the participants and how, in turn, the participants may impact TESOL.