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هوية المعلم المهنية

ESOL teachers' identities in flux: identity transformations throughout a career

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Abstract

This study investigates how experiences of ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) teachers informed and transformed their professional identities over the course of their careers. This is important because to improve education we need to understand how teachers experience their work. The study uses narrative inquiry to enable an understanding of participants' perspectives on their lived experience and construction of identities. Research participants were four ESOL teachers who have worked in various cultural and institutional contexts. In interviews teachers were asked simply to talk about their TESOL career, revealing what the important issues were for them. Short narrative excerpts were identified from individual interviews for analysis.

Findings revealed that the teachers drew on various sources, from both individual and social realms, to construct their professional identities. Professional learning was found to emerge from everyday practice on the job and from dealing with the challenges of being involved in diverse contexts. The need for autonomy was another important factor shaping how teachers felt about their work. Teachers also held particular beliefs about good practice, which could lead to positive or negative outcomes depending on whether they were able to operationalize these beliefs. Social sources identified in the data were teachers' connections with their students and with other teachers, cross-cultural dimensions in TESOL settings, and issues to do with the low status of TESOL. The teachers' professional identities were found to change according to varying influences over the course of their career trajectories.

The study concludes with implications and recommendations for teachers and institutions to increase the level of professionalism and to raise the status of the field of TESOL.

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